

A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles

By

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INTRODUCTION:

This commentary is based upon my personal devotional notes and reflections on the *Book of Acts*. It is intended to help you better understand some of the background and issues in Luke's second volume. It is not a technical commentary designed for academic projects. This material is intended for use by members and friends of Southside Christian Church, especially our small group leaders to help you lead your group in a verse by verse study of *Acts*. However, I do not include discussion questions in the commentary. That I leave up to you as a group leader.

A few things need to be noted. There are occasional references to the original Greek words Luke used in a particular passage. Those Greek words are always quoted in italics and are transliterated into English from the Greek. I go chapter by chapter in the commentary and sometimes individual verses are commented upon, sometimes it is several sentences and sometimes a whole paragraph. This commentary is based on the New International Version and all Scripture quotations are taken from that version of the Bible. Books of the Bible, Scripture references and quotes are also italicized.

I hope and pray you will find this resource useful for your own study and also for your small group. I also hope that it will help grow your love and respect for God's Word, the Bible and help motivate you to study it more so that you may come to know its author, our Lord Jesus Christ!

Pastor Galen Doughty

Brief Outline of Acts:

Jesus' Post-Resurrection Ministry and Ascension – *1:1-11*

Waiting for the Holy Spirit – *1:12-26*

The Day of Pentecost – *2:1-47*

The Early Ministry of Peter & John – *3:1-6:7*

Stephen's Arrest & Martyrdom – *6:8-7:60*

The Ministry of Philip the Deacon & the Gospel to the Samaritans – *8:1-40*

The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus – *9:1-31*

Peter's Ministry and the Conversion of the Gentiles – *9:32-11:18*

The Gospel Spreads to Antioch – *11:19-30*

The Persecution of Herod Agrippa I – *12:1-25*

Paul's 1st Missionary Journey – *13:1-14:28*

The Jerusalem Council – *15:1-35*

Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey – *15:36-18:22*

Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey – *18:32-21:16*

Paul's Arrest & Imprisonment in Caesarea – *21:17 – 26:32*

Paul's Journey to Rome and the Shipwreck – *27:1-28:15*

Paul under House Arrest in Rome – *28:16-31*

Chapter 1:

1:1-3 - The *Book of Acts* is Luke's second volume of a two volume work to Theophilus which details all that Jesus did and taught. The first volume, the *Gospel of Luke*, shows as Luke says, all that Jesus began to do and teach. Now the second volume, *Acts*, will detail Jesus' continuing work through his apostles that he had chosen and the work of the Holy Spirit who would be given to all of his disciples.

Acts ends with Paul preaching the gospel unhindered in Rome. He has not yet been martyred under Nero nor released from prison because of his appeal to Caesar. I find it impossible to believe that Luke would not have written of Paul's or Peter's deaths if they had occurred before he wrote *Acts* and his gospel. He did not hesitate to write about Stephen's martyrdom or the Apostle James' death. Plus, James, Jesus' brother, was also martyred sometime in the 60's before 70, during the Jewish revolt. The evidence of the *Book of Acts* plus the later *Pastoral Epistles* of Paul suggests that Luke wrote *Luke-Acts* before Paul was executed. That puts its writing sometime before 64. We know from Paul's prison letters that Mark was with Paul in Rome along with Luke. Mark is undoubtedly at least one of the "*many who have undertaken*" sources that Luke used to write his own gospel. They must have met in Rome when the two great apostles were there and they were with them.

Here at the beginning of *Acts* Luke picks up his narrative where the gospel leaves off. He backtracks slightly to give more detail about Jesus' teaching of the disciples during the 40 days after the resurrection before the ascension. He says Jesus showed himself to his disciples with many convincing proofs that demonstrated that he was alive and not a ghost. In addition Jesus' teaching centered on the Kingdom of God, which continued the teaching of his ministry in Galilee. The emphasis here in *Acts* is on an already-not yet eschatology of the Kingdom. My guess is Jesus was preparing them for the coming of the Holy Spirit, which would be already, and the delay in his Second Coming, so the gospel could be preached to the world, which would be not yet.

The traditional title of *Acts* is the *Acts of the Apostles*. However, after mentioning the Eleven in *chapter 1*, and a brief mention of James the brother of John, plus some mention of James, the brother of Jesus, the apostles Luke focuses on are Peter and Paul. The rest of the apostles drop out of sight and are only mentioned in a corporate way. We never hear from them again. The title Acts of the Holy Spirit has been suggested and is more accurate. But, Luke gives Theophilus and us a clue as to what *Acts* is all about. He says he wrote all that Jesus began to do and teach in his gospel. That means that *Acts* is a continuation of the Lord Jesus' work through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in and through his church.

1:4-5 - Luke says on one occasion during the 40 days Jesus was with them after the resurrection, Jesus was eating with them. The "*one occasion*" has to be late in the 40 day period because he tells them to wait in Jerusalem and not to leave. We know he had told them to go to Galilee on Easter and there are at least several instances of resurrection appearances in Galilee. *Matthew 28* and the Great Commission is one, and *John 21* with Jesus restoring Peter at Tabgha is another. Plus Paul says he appeared to more than 500 believers at once in *1 Corinthians 15*. That incident most likely took place in Galilee as well. Here they are in Jerusalem and because of that they must have returned with Jesus before his ascension.

He commands them to remain in the city and not leave in order to wait for the promise from the Father that they had heard him speak about. Then Jesus mentions John the Baptist, who had baptized with or in water but in a few days, they will all be baptized in or with the Holy

Spirit. The Holy Spirit had come upon Jesus at his baptism equipping him for his ministry and confirming his identity as God's Son. Now Jesus says the promise of the Father, which the prophets had spoken of is about to be fulfilled. The prophets had said in the last days when Messiah came he would send his Holy Spirit on all God's people. *Joel* and *Ezekiel* had specific prophecies concerning this. It would be in the last days, in the days of the Messiah when God would gather the remnant of his people from all the nations to which they had been scattered. At that time he would pour out his Spirit on all his people, not just a select few. God would pour out his Spirit on men and women, young and old, on everyone who called upon the name of the Lord. Jesus is saying that day is approaching.

Notice as well that the entire Trinity is involved in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, the Son, commands them to wait to receive the promise of the Father which is the Holy Spirit. This is the next and the essential step in the fulfillment of the gospel and the ratifying of the New Covenant of God with his people. The Holy Spirit will be *THE* mark and sign of the Christ-follower. He will change the character of the individual disciple, equip them for ministry, guide the church and be the presence of Jesus among them all. The next step in the plan of God for the salvation of the human race was about to take place. The Son had accomplished the redemption and justification of his people through his cross and resurrection. The Spirit will accomplish their sanctification and mission and someday when Jesus returns God the Father will finish their glorification, through the resurrection of all believers in Jesus. One must therefore be very careful in how one interprets the sequence of events here in *Acts* concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This is a once for all never to be repeated event just like Jesus' cross and resurrection.

1:6-8 – *Verse 8* is the theme verse of *Acts*. The disciples meet with Jesus one last time either in Jerusalem or on the Mt. of Olives because of the context of the ascension. Jesus has been teaching the disciples about the Kingdom and the coming of the Holy Spirit which was one of the great signs of the Kingdom. The prophets had said the remnant would be gathered before the Spirit came. For the disciples everything was pointing to Jesus taking up his Davidic reign as King-Messiah. That is why they ask him if he will now restore the Kingdom to Israel. They do not clearly understand the concept of already-not yet when it comes to the Kingdom. Plus the old desires for a military Messiah who will drive out the Romans and save the country are still there in them. It is that very desire that will finally lead the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran to declare Eliazer the captain of the Temple guard as Messiah in 66 at the start of the Jewish Revolt.

Jesus short circuits their faulty understanding of God's plan. He tells them it is not for them to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. Jesus appeals to the Father as the one who is in total control of God's Kingdom plan. He has stated before that no one, not even the Son of Man knows the time or hour of his coming but only the Father in heaven. How Jesus as the risen Son and Messiah does not know is a mystery that we affirm even if we don't understand it. The phrase translated times or dates or times and epochs (NASB) in Greek is *chronous* or *kairous*. *Chronos* usually refers to chronological time like a date on a calendar. *Kairos* can often mean the same thing but usually refers to the timing of an event as it relates to God's plan and Kingdom. By using the two words here in the same sentence Jesus is emphasizing that the precise date of his Second Coming and the timing of that coming according to God's plan only the Father knows. It is not for them to know or to speculate upon. Jesus had already taught them principles to apply to his Second Coming. It will come like a thief in the

night, unexpectedly, yet be on the lookout and be ready. One can discern the seasons of his coming that it is approaching just like you know that spring is coming when you see the trees in bloom.

Jesus then tells them what they are to be doing in the meantime. He gives them their marching orders for his mission. This is Luke's version of the Great Commission and it contains the plan of the *Book of Acts*. The disciples will receive power, *dunamis*, ability, when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. That will happen in ten days at the Feast of Pentecost. They will receive that power in order to be Jesus' witnesses to tell the world about him, who he is and what he did and how people can be saved through him. They will begin in Jerusalem; move on to Judea, then to Samaria, then on to the ends of the earth. That is a Jewish phrase for a long ways away, or far away. Jesus' phrase represents concentric circles of the gospel moving out from Jerusalem. As each circle is breached something significant happens, especially with and through the Holy Spirit. They may be Jesus' witnesses but the Spirit will be in charge of the mission and will be the one who moves them through each successive level. Some have questioned whether this is the theme verse. They have said how can Paul preaching unhindered in Rome be the final fulfillment of the ends of the earth circle when the church had already existed in Rome by the time he got there? That is not the point. The point is all the way back in *Acts 10* and Peter's preaching to Cornelius and he and his family coming to Christ and receiving the Spirit. That is when the final circle is breached. The rest of *Acts* tells the story of how the gospel spreads to the Gentiles. Jesus' statement is about both his mission and the coming of the Holy Spirit to all. In that case *Acts 1:8* is the theme verse of *Acts*. Plus, especially in the last two circles, whenever a new circle is reached something extraordinary happens with people and the coming of the Spirit. The normal sequence of events is modified in order to show the apostles that new people are being added to the church and that the Holy Spirit is in charge. *Acts* is all about the Spirit's work as Jesus' presence in the world and in his church.

1:9-11 - The Ascension: Jesus gives the disciples their mission and the command to wait for the Spirit's coming. After he says this he is taken up right in front of them into heaven. As he is rising a cloud hides him from their sight. Luke doesn't say he was taken up in a cloud but a cloud hid him from their sight. The image reflects the language of Daniel's Son of Man in *Daniel 7:13-14*. The disciples are staring intently up into the sky when two angels or two men dressed in white as Luke says challenge them. They ask why they are looking up into the sky. This same Jesus you saw go into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen him leave. In other words the site of the ascension, namely the Mt. of Olives, will also be the site of Jesus' Second Coming. *Zechariah 14:4-5* says the Lord will come on the Mt. of Olives and split the mountain in two with a great earthquake. The angels tell the disciples that Jesus will return in the clouds like he went and like the heavenly Son of Man.

The ascension is absolutely necessary to fulfill the already-not yet nature of God's Kingdom plan. Jesus now completely belongs to the Age to Come. His resurrection body no longer belongs to this universe or obeys its natural laws. He could not remain here plus he could not send the Holy Spirit which was the next installment in God's plan unless he took up his Messianic authority in heaven. The ascension accomplishes that. It is God's validation that Jesus is now the risen Messiah of Israel and the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It clears the way for the age of the church and the mission of the church which will come with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Now Jesus through the Spirit can be wherever his people are all over the world. He can supervise and direct his church's mission in multiple places at once because the

Spirit can be in multiple places at once and work through many people at the same time. Jesus, even in his resurrected state could not do that. He was still limited to being in one place at one time, even though he could move from place to place at will. Finally the ascension brings a poetic closure to Jesus' life and a prophetic looking forward to his return. Both events happen on the Mt. of Olives and the place of Jesus' ascension will be the place of his return to finally complete his Kingdom plan and defeat all of God's enemies and usher in his complete reign. The angel's comment to the disciples is meant to encourage them and let them know that just as Jesus has gone into heaven and they have seen it, so he will return. It is a certainty. The lightning has struck. Jesus is risen and ascended into heaven as Messiah. The thunder is coming. He will return and take up his rule on earth, even as it has begun in heaven! Now we wait in that brief time between the lightning and the thunder. All church history, even up to and including our present day, is lived out in that tension.

1:12-14 - The disciples go back to probably the Upper Room, the upstairs room that Luke describes. He says the Mt. of Olives is a Sabbath day's walk from the place they were staying. Is it only 3/4 of a mile, which is approximately a Sabbath day's walk? It seems a little longer than that but maybe not. In any case Luke's distance is meant to be descriptive and approximate not absolutely literal.

They return to the Upper Room and Luke describes who was there. He names the Eleven: Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas son of James. His list here agrees with his list in *Luke 6* when Jesus chose the Twelve. The only one left out is of course Judas Iscariot. These joined with the others who were with them, about 120 according to *Acts 1:15*. They include probably people like Cleopas and the other Emmaus disciple, some disciples who might have been part of the 70, the women who supported Jesus and Jesus' family, his mother and brothers. This is the most significant detail Luke provides here. Mary is with them, which makes sense if John had been given charge of her at the cross by Jesus. His brothers being there is a new addition. Previously they had not believed in Jesus as the Messiah. *John 7* reports that his brothers did not believe in him. *Mark 3* says his own family thought he was out of his mind at one point, after he had chosen the twelve and come home to Nazareth. They were prepared to take him away and care for him alone. The point is there was doubt within Jesus' family about who he was, especially by his brothers. However, Paul says in *1 Corinthians 15* that Jesus appeared to James his brother sometime after his resurrection. It is probably that appearance that led to James' conversion and to his other siblings accepting him as the Messiah. That is why they are with the disciples in the Upper Room. What was Mary thinking about all of this? She had seen him crucified and now presumably had seen him risen. Did her son's resurrection help her begin to heal from all the pain she had experienced as Jesus' mother? She obviously had a special place among the disciples yet she was not their leader and neither was James, though after Peter left Jerusalem he took up the role of the leader of the Jerusalem church and became one of the chief elders and apostles. It is significant however that he was not seen as the heir apparent and the successor to Jesus' leadership in the early church. That was Peter, whom Jesus himself had named as the leader. They all understood no one could be a substitute for Jesus because only he was Lord and Messiah. He was a man but so much more than a man. Yet he cared for his family and by appearing to James sealed their acceptance of him and their faith in him. Jesus evangelized his family before his ascension.

They are all together praying and waiting for the Spirit to come. They probably had no idea what that would be like or what they should do, but Jesus had said wait in the city till you are clothed with power from on high and that is what they did. They are waiting and getting ready for whatever God had next.

1:15-20 – Sometime during the ten days they stayed in the Upper Room, praying and waiting Peter stands up and addresses what they all must have felt was a problem; Judas and his betrayal. Peter acknowledges Judas' betrayal was foretold by the prophets and happened just as God had planned. All of this must have been painful for them to remember because Peter states he was one of them and had been a partner with them in their shared ministry. They all must have remembered conversations and experiences when Judas had been right there with them and had shared in their excitement and faith. They are dealing with their grief and with the problem that they see, there are only Eleven apostles and Jesus chose Twelve. That number was important for them because they understood that the number twelve was a significant number and the Twelve Apostles were somehow analogous to the Twelve Tribes. They needed a replacement but Peter felt the need to remind them all of Judas' betrayal and put forward the prophecies to explain it.

Luke includes a sidebar explaining what happened to Judas and what he did with the money he had been given. He includes a tradition that Judas bought a field where he fell headlong and his body burst open and his intestines spilled out. Everyone who heard about it called it the Field of Blood. *Matthew* says Judas hanged himself and the High Priests took the money he returned and bought a field where they buried foreigners and it became known as the Field of Blood. It is difficult to harmonize *Luke's* and *Matthew's* accounts but at least there are some similarities. It is possible that Judas did hang himself and afterwards the tree broke or something similar and he fell headlong and burst open. The fact that both have Field of Blood points to a similar tradition. In the end it is not a very important part of Scripture and is descriptive in nature and not prescriptive.

Peter then gives two proof-texts from *Psalms 69* and *109* to show how Judas' betrayal and death were prophesied. He quotes the *Psalms* and names David the prophet which was a common understanding among many contemporary rabbis and scholars. *Psalms 109* says may another take his place. Peter uses that to build his case that they need to replace Judas with another of the disciples and so fulfill the twelfth place among the apostles.

1:21-26 - Peter says it is necessary to choose someone else to take Judas' place. The interesting part about this is that throughout the rest of the *Book of Acts* Luke never mentions Matthias again and most of the time the apostles are called the Eleven and not the Twelve!

Peter gives the criteria for one of the Twelve. It needs to be someone who has been with them from the beginning, starting from John's baptism to the ascension. Peter therefore confirms that there were other disciples following Jesus who were not part of the Twelve who were with them the whole time. The 70 were undoubtedly pulled from these disciples. Peter says one of them must become with the Eleven a witness to Jesus' resurrection. Peter does not speak here of Jesus' death but focuses on his resurrection. That is true in all the preaching to the Jews in *Acts*. The focus is on the risen Christ which proves Jesus is the Messiah!

The disciples, all 120 of them, put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias. It is interesting to note that once again even with the women present and even after the resurrection where Jesus had appeared to the women, they put forward two men as their candidates. They clearly understood that the role of apostle was a role for men. They pray and

ask God to show them who he chooses to take Judas' place in this apostolic ministry. Their prayer says Judas left them to go where he belongs, presumably hell. After they pray the lot falls to Matthias and they enroll him as one of the Twelve.

This is the one and only time in *Acts* we see lots cast to determine God's will. Once the Holy Spirit comes they are all prompted and guided personally by him and have no more need for lots. The Old Covenant is done. The age of the Spirit has come. Yet even as they cast lots they are doing it in a new way. Only a priest was to cast the sacred lots to determine God's will. None of them are priests yet they perceive through Jesus' death, resurrection and now ascension everything is different. So even though they appeal to an Old Covenant way of determining God's will it is already altered in light of Jesus.

It is no accident that Peter is the one who steps forward to lead the disciples through this dilemma of what to do about Judas. Even though they resort to casting lots according to the old ways yet there is no hint here by Luke that this was sinful or wrong or that Luke is ridiculing their actions. The point is they did the best they could and the contrast with their decisions after the Spirit comes is remarkable. In many respects Luke is showing us this is the end of an era. A new age is about to dawn. The Kingdom is about to become present in the person and work of God the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2:

2:1-4 - Pentecost was the Jewish feast that celebrated the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Now God would put his Law - his will - in people's hearts in fulfillment of *Jeremiah 31* and *Ezekiel 36*. It was also the festival of first fruits, signaling the beginning of the harvest. The Holy Spirit is the first fruits of the Kingdom and its life available to us right now.

Pentecost was the second of the great pilgrim festivals for the Jews. It was fifty days after Passover. The Law in *Deuteronomy 16*, *Exodus 23*, *Leviticus 23*, and *Numbers 28* spoke of the Feast of Weeks or Firstfruits. That is why the pilgrims from all over the Roman world were in Jerusalem for the feast and were able to hear the gospel.

The 120 were all together in one place, presumably the Upper Room where they had been meeting. The Upper Room is on Mt. Zion. I don't know whether that is significant or not but it seems unlikely that it is simply coincidental. When they are all together suddenly a sound comes from heaven. The sound is of wind, a violent wind like a tornado or hurricane. Modern people describe such wind as sounding like a freight train moving through. The Jews gathered in Jerusalem would have nothing to compare it with so it was a unique sound that was both curious and frightening. The whole house where they were gathered was filled with this wind. In the Old Testament wind was often associated with God and his presence. Think of Elijah on Mt. Sinai. More importantly wind in Greek, *pneuma*, is the same word as spirit in Greek, just like *ruach* is the same word for both in Hebrew. The wind had come because the Spirit had come. Jesus had described the working of the Holy Spirit to Nicodemus as the wind blowing where it wills. Was Nicodemus there that Pentecost morning? We do not know.

The 120 men and women saw tongues of fire that came to rest on each of them. The fire is also a symbol in the Old Testament for the Holy Spirit. The fire was distributed or separated into sections or tongues of fire that came to rest on each one of them. The verb is a present passive participle. Luke's language suggests that there was one flame that came down and then separated into 120 tongues or pieces that then rested over each one of them and this was happening in a continuous manner. The imagery is of the one Spirit who is coming on them all and each one receives all of the one Spirit. Further this is a passive verb meaning that they did

not do anything they merely received the Spirit. There were no conditions that had to be met. The Spirit came and filled them all because each one believed in Jesus as Lord and Messiah!

They were all filled, aorist passive indicative here indicating once for all, with the Holy Spirit. Luke's language is precise. The Spirit filled them they did nothing to cause it. Further the aorist tense means once and for all. The Spirit is coming in a new way on his people not like in the Old Covenant where he could come and go. Now he is coming and staying permanently because they have been made holy through Jesus' work on the cross and in the resurrection! They were all filled, men and women alike because there is no more sexual distinction in God's people! Further they all begin to speak in other languages, *glossais* in Greek, tongues or languages. It is clear from the verses following that all the tongues spoken that day were known languages and that furthermore they were the languages spoken by the Jewish pilgrims that had gathered in Jerusalem. In other words the tongues were not a sign for the 120 disciples that they were filled with the Spirit they were a sign to the pilgrims that caused them to gather to hear the gospel Peter would preach and to hear the praises of God in their own languages. None of them spoke Hebrew even though they were Jews. They spoke the native languages of the lands of their exile. Further it was the Spirit giving them the ability and not any native talent within each disciple. God was doing this through the power of the Holy Spirit moment to moment in a continuous action, an imperfect active indicative in Greek.

The church received the Spirit at a moment God chose related to his plan and to fulfill prophecy. The church had not become more committed, prayerful or spiritual and that is why the Spirit came. The gift of the Spirit was entirely a matter of grace. The Spirit was given to each person in the church. God was moving forward his plan of salvation in a never to be repeated way at a specific moment in history just like Jesus' virgin birth, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Pentecost and the giving of the Holy Spirit to all the church is in the same category of event.

2:5-13 - Pentecost was one of the three pilgrim festivals for the Jews. Being so close to Passover it was not as large as Passover or Tabernacles. Some however might have come for both spring feasts and were devout in seeking God. The pilgrims were from all over the Roman world, everywhere the Jews had been scattered. God gathered his remnant and given them his Holy Spirit because Messiah had come in fulfillment of *Ezekiel 34, 36*, and *Isaiah 43*. The crowd is from Persia, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Arabia, North Africa, Egypt, Crete and Rome.

They hear the noise, the sound of the wind like a tornado or freight train and gather to see what is happening. But once they gather they are confused because they hear the disciples speaking in their own languages. Their confusion comes from the fact that they identify the disciples as Galileans. How they know that Luke does not say. It is possible they are dressed a certain way or there is a distinct accent. Whatever the case the pilgrims are bewildered by the phenomena because not only do they all hear their native languages being spoken but what is spoken is the declaration of the wonders of God. My guess is the disciples were not talking about God's work in creation but they were proclaiming who Jesus was and what he had done. It is even possible they were proclaiming Jesus as risen.

Amazed, or astonished and perplexed they asked one another about what this all meant. This is curious because none of the crowd of pilgrims knew the answer to that question, yet they do not ask the disciples, what's going on.

What they were hearing is Babel reversed, the languages of the world being spoken at the same time yet all proclaiming at once the great things God has done through Jesus. He is the

uniter of the human race because he is the Messiah. Plus the age to come has now dawned because the Holy Spirit has been given to all who follow Jesus. Peter will set out his case for that fact in the verses that follow that summarize what he said to the crowd that day.

The tongues being spoken by the disciples are all given to proclaim the great wonders of God. They are for proclamation to the pilgrims and are for the remnant gathered to draw them to the disciples so they can hear the preaching of the gospel. They are not some sort of private prayer language for each individual disciple that confirms the reception of the Spirit.

There were others in the crowd however who were skeptical and could not understand what was going on or refused to listen so they ridicule the disciples. They have had too much wine or literally sweet wine, Greek *gleukous*. Their only explanation for the disciples speaking in all the various languages is they must be drunk! They see the work of God as something sinful and unnatural. Thus the pilgrims are not all predisposed to faith and Peter will speak to a mixed crowd. That is how it always is when the gospel is proclaimed.

2:14-21 - Peter stands up with the Eleven, notice not the Twelve, Matthias is not included at this point; he addresses the crowd and commands them (imperative mood in Greek) to listen up and let him explain what is happening. Peter here is speaking to the Jews of Jerusalem and the Jewish pilgrims who have gathered in the city for the feast. The first thing he does is lay to rest the theory that the disciples are all drunk on too much sweet wine. He says they are not drunk it's only nine in the morning! Peter says no one gets drunk this early in the morning!

Then he tells them the real explanation. All that they see and hear is in fulfillment of *Joel's* prophecy in *Joel 2* about the Holy Spirit and the last days. Peter directly links *Joel's* prophecy with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost on the disciples. *Joel* prophesied that in the last days, which means also the days of the Messiah, God would pour out his Holy Spirit on all people, men and women, young and old. Other prophets like *Isaiah* state that the Messiah will be specially endowed with the Spirit. *Joel* and *Ezekiel* say that when Messiah comes God will pour out his Spirit on all his people and not just a select few as in the Old Testament. *Ezekiel* specifically says before God sends his Spirit he will gather the remnant of his people back to the land and then pour out his Spirit. That is precisely what Luke reports has happened. The pilgrims who have gathered for Pentecost are the remnant. They represent the Jews who have been scattered to the four winds. God has brought them back to the land and he will save them and give them a new heart through his Spirit by faith in God's Messiah, Jesus. Therefore one of the chief marks of the days of the Messiah is the presence of the Holy Spirit on all God's people. All are filled because all who follow the Messiah and call on the name of the Lord are given the Spirit to live within them. This is the promise of the Father of which Jesus spoke.

Joel's prophecy says the Spirit would come on all people, Jews and Gentiles alike in the last days. That is fulfilled in *Acts 10* and following when the Gentiles become disciples and receive the Holy Spirit. He says men and women would receive the Spirit, and the days of women being second class would be gone. Old and young would prophesy in visions and dreams. Prophecy would return to God's people. It had stopped at *Malachi* around 400 B.C. and begun again at John the Baptist. Now it is extended to all!

Joel 2:19-21 say that the coming of the Spirit will be associated with the Day of the Lord, the day of judgment and wrath on God's enemies and salvation and deliverance for God's people. *Joel* talks of signs in the heavens above and the earth below. He speaks of fire and smoke like a volcano on earth and the moon turning to blood and the sun darkening like solar and lunar eclipses. Some of those signs occurred at the cross of Jesus. Others await the final consummation

of the last days and the second coming of Jesus. Peter emphasizes the already-not yet nature of the last days. Once Jesus had been raised and then ascended into heaven and the Spirit was given the last days have begun! They await their fulfillment at Jesus' Second Coming but they are already here. Therefore the age of the Spirit is the last days. The work of the Holy Spirit in every believer and through the mission of the church is part of the Messianic era. We now are waiting for God to consummate the last days when Jesus returns. The signs of *Joel* will intensify before Jesus' return, but the great sign of the last days has been given; the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all the disciples of Jesus!

Peter ends his quote of *Joel* emphasizing that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. In other words the age of the Spirit before the consummation, the first fruits of the last days, will be an age of salvation for all who call on the Lord. This dovetails with what Jesus told the disciples in *Luke 24* before he ascended into heaven. The Messianic age has begun and before its consummation it will be the age of mission for the church and salvation for everyone who believes and chooses to follow Jesus. Forgiveness has been offered by God through the work of his Messiah and Son, Jesus of Nazareth!

2:22-36 - Luke gives a summary of what Peter preached at Pentecost to the Jewish pilgrims and remnant that day. This is the essential outline of his sermon but it is probably not the entire sermon for two very important reasons. First it is too short, and only takes about a minute to read through if that. It is highly unlikely this is all Peter said that morning. Second, it is in a chiasmic form that is very precise with a few quotes added that modify that form. A chiasm is named after the Greek letter *chi*, which is shaped like an X. The structure of a chiasm repeats itself with the main point being in the middle. The outer points reinforce the main point. In symbolic form it can be represented as: A, B, C, C*, B*, A*. The last lines or ideas repeat in reverse order the first lines but in a new way. It was probably put into this form very, very early in order to remember the essential elements of Peter's preaching and argument proving Jesus is the Messiah. Since this sermon is given to Jews from all over the Diaspora it is safe to assume that Peter's sermon gives the essential outline of the apostolic preaching to the Jews. Plus, Peter focused on the Jews even though God used him to preach to Cornelius and his family who were Gentiles. Acts identifies Peter as a special apostle to the Jews.

The entire sermon focuses on Jesus as resurrected and crucified Messiah. However, the emphasis is on God raising him from the dead as proof that the crucified Jesus is in fact Lord and Messiah. The cross is spoken of but as a tragedy in which the Jews had a hand and that was carried out by sinful men, namely Pontius Pilate and the Romans. David is quoted several times as a prophet, mostly in support of God not allowing his Holy One, or Messiah, to be defeated by death and the grave. David is also invoked as a prophetic witness in the first half of the chiasm while the disciples are invoked as eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection in the second half. Peter says God swore an oath to David that one of his descendants would always sit on his throne, quoting *2 Samuel 7*. Now God has kept his promise by raising Jesus from the dead and by sending the promise of the Father, namely the Holy Spirit on all who will believe. The center of the chiasm is *verses 31-32*. David looked ahead and prophesied that God would not abandon his Messiah to death and the grave. God raised Jesus to life and the disciples are witnesses of all of this. Now God has highly exalted him to his right hand and he has sent the promised Holy Spirit. David himself did not ascend to heaven but prophesied that the Messiah would sit at God's right hand until he made his enemies a footstool for his feet. The final phrase in Greek is incredibly

powerful. *"Therefore let all the house of Israel assuredly know this: God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified!"*

The resurrection is the key idea. It is in the middle of the chiasm and is anchored at the ends. The end statements are you crucified Jesus and God has raised him from the dead. A prophetic quote from David is sighted to reinforce God raising Jesus. Then Peter states the fact they all know that David died and was buried but he spoke of an oath God would make with his descendants to place one of them on his throne. He prophesied of the resurrection of the Messiah. This is now the center and everything turns at this point and repeats itself back out to the beginning but with a new twist. God raised Jesus from the dead and the disciples are living eyewitnesses of this fact. He has exalted Jesus to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, which he has now poured out. David who died said the Messiah would sit at God's right hand until he makes his enemies a footstool for his feet. Therefore let all Israel know that God has made him both Lord, that is God, and Christ, meaning Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified!

It is a brilliant piece of Hebrew argument that goes right to the heart of the dilemma the Jews still have with Jesus to this day: How can Jesus be Messiah when he was crucified and therefore cursed of God according to the Law? This was Paul's problem with Jesus until he met him on the Damascus Road as the risen Lord and Messiah. Notice as well that though Peter mentions the crucifixion he does not focus on it except as a matter of fact and a sinful act towards God's Messiah. He gives no mention of the crucifixion as Jesus' sacrifice for sin. In the altar call he talks about being baptized in Jesus' Name for the forgiveness of one's sin. Clearly from this sermon and several others to the Jews in Acts Luke helps us understand that the primary focus of apostolic preaching to the Jews was the resurrection. One could argue that when the gospel spread to the Gentiles apostles like Paul focused more on the cross, as he states in *1 Corinthians*. Yet in *Acts* the focus of apostolic preaching to the Gentiles is still on the resurrection. Peter with Cornelius and Paul in Athens identify Jesus as the one God has appointed judge of all, proving it by raising him from the dead. Paul and Barnabas follow a similar tack in Pisidian Antioch in *Acts 13* to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. It is clear from all of these examples that the core concept of apostolic preaching was God raising Jesus from the dead and not Jesus died for our sins on the cross. The crucifixion is there as well as the atonement, but the resurrection is first. Modern evangelical preaching has reversed that order or ignored the resurrection all together. Has that robbed us of the power of the apostolic gospel? Is our preaching really faithful to Scripture and what the apostles proclaimed? That question is up for debate.

2:37-41 - Peter finishes his sermon with a flourish that accuses the Jews of crucifying their own Messiah. Given that he indicts the crowd of pilgrims it is possible that some at least of the Jews who had gathered for Pentecost had been there at Passover. It would have been expensive to stay that long in Jerusalem but if one had the funds to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem from across the Roman Empire presumably one could manage staying in Jerusalem an extra month and half for the second great feast of the Jews. If many of the pilgrims had not been there then Peter is making the point that the Jewish people vicariously crucified their Messiah. Peter makes the case that Jesus was attested to *"you all"* by God through his miracles and that *"you yourselves"* know all this. Further he says Jesus was handed over to *"you all"* and *"you all"* put him to death by the hands of wicked men (2:22-23). The implication in the early part of Peter's sermon is that many of the Jews in the crowd were present when Jesus was handed over to be crucified and more

importantly many of those same Jews were complicit in his execution. Finally the "*you crucified*" of 2:36 is an emphatic plural, with the plural pronoun and the verb in a plural form. Whether the crowds of pilgrims there for Pentecost had been there also at Passover or not, Peter indicts the Jewish people for crucifying God's Messiah, Jesus, whom he raised from the dead! The people are cut or pierced to the heart Luke says. This is similar to the language of *Zechariah 12* where *Zechariah* says God will pour out his Spirit on the Jews and they will look on him whom they have mocked and pierced and mourn for him. The crowd pleads with Peter and the rest of the apostles begging them to tell them what to do.

They are desperate because Peter by the power of the Holy Spirit has brought conviction through the preaching of the gospel. Holy Spirit inspired preaching brings the conviction of sin. See Jesus' words in *John 16:8-11*, that the Spirit when he comes will convict the world of sin. The mechanism, agent, or tool of the Spirit here is Peter's preaching the gospel of Jesus the Christ! When the gospel is preached in the power of the Spirit it convicts people of their sin and as happens here leads them to choose to follow Jesus as Lord and be saved and baptized!

Peter replies with the normal formula and sequence of salvation in *Acts*. Repent, be baptized in Jesus' Name for forgiveness and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Conversion-repentance, baptism and reception of the Spirit were all part of a package and happened very close together without delay. When that normal sequence is interrupted or changed in any significant way Luke reports there was controversy in the church. The Spirit had to lead the disciples to understand he was accepting the Samaritans and the Gentiles as full members of Jesus' body, the church, because they too had the Holy Spirit which is *THE* mark of a disciple of Jesus. Whenever Luke deviates from this normal pattern special circumstances are always involved. See *Acts 8, 10* and *19*. When a person is baptized their sins are forgiven and God the Holy Spirit lives in them.

Peter finally speaks of the forgiveness of sins, the sign of which is baptism in Jesus' Name. This is what Jesus had told them to preach to the entire world beginning in Jerusalem before his ascension in *Luke 24*. Like John's baptism, baptism in Jesus' Name is accompanied by repentance, a turning from sin and a turning to God. Unlike John's baptism which was done in order to prepare for Messiah's coming, Jesus' baptism is a sign of what faith in Jesus and following him imparts, namely forgiveness and the presence of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. The Spirit is a gift. He is received by grace through faith in Jesus the Messiah. One does not earn the Spirit. One does not meet religious or ritual conditions in order to receive him. Faith in Jesus as Lord is the only condition. Baptism in Jesus' Name finalizes that confession of faith. That is why the Spirit was connected with baptism. Only a believer can receive the Spirit and only believers are baptized! Plus the believer receives all of the Spirit upon faith in Jesus and baptism in his Name. We don't receive part of him at conversion and the rest of him at some later date when we meet certain conditions and then are fully baptized in the Spirit and speak in tongues as a sign of that fullness. Luke gives absolutely no hint here of that being the case. In fact if a second blessing were the norm surely Peter would have said something here at Pentecost to the first Jewish converts who were baptized. He does not say anything because there is nothing to say other than repentance, faith in Jesus and baptism in his Name. One cannot divide a person. We receive all of him, all of the Spirit's presence in our lives when we receive Jesus!

The promise is to all those to whom Peter was speaking, and to their children, meaning the next generation, and to all who are far off, which will include even the Gentiles. The fact Peter mentions the people's children here is not a justification for infant baptism but a reference to their families and the next generation. This is for all the Jewish people from here on. The

children of believers will inherit the promise just as their parents did. The only condition is that they too like their parents must receive Jesus as Messiah. The promise is to everyone that God will call to be saved. This is all God's doing and is a major part of the Holy Spirit's work in the world through the followers of Jesus who are his witnesses! God wants to save his people from their sins! In fact he wants to save the whole world through faith in God's Messiah, Jesus Christ!

Luke says Peter spoke many other words to the crowd that day. This lends credibility to the idea that the sermon Luke records here in *Acts 2* was only the highlight. The chiasmic form was used in order to preserve the essential message and core argument that Peter used that day. Luke preserved it and passed it on to Theophilus and his readers. Peter pleaded with the crowd to save themselves from this crooked generation, language that Jesus sometime used to describe the people. See *Luke 11*. They were a crooked generation because they had rejected the Messiah and crucified him. In fact one could make a case that especially in Judea, this crooked generation was finally judged in the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and the Roman armies in 70. Peter exhorted them to be saved from that crooked generation because it was going to be judged. God was holding out the possibility of salvation for all those who would take it, all those God was calling to himself.

Those who accepted Peter's message, believed the gospel and were baptized were about 3000. At 9 in the morning Jesus' church had 120. By the end of the day it had over 3120! That is church growth! Can you imagine the scene where they were baptizing people? If Peter's sermon was given outside the Upper Room somewhere, perhaps they went down to Siloam or some other pool and baptized the new believers. They were not yet at the temple. Luke says that began to happen in the immediate days after Pentecost. What were the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees and the other religious leaders thinking? We know in later chapters they resisted the disciples vehemently. They had no answer for the transformation of the disciples after Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, let alone the thousands of people who were now proclaiming and following Jesus as the Messiah! They had gotten rid of him only to see thousands of Jews flock to his banner! What were they going to do?

2:42-47 - Luke's description of the brand new church in Jerusalem is a picture of their Holy Spirit-inspired fellowship with one another and the Lord through worship, communion, eating together, meeting together in homes, miracles, teaching and prayer. In fact everything they did together manifested the Spirit's presence among them.

The 3120 devoted themselves to four things. Literally the verbs are an imperfect indicative of to be, and a present participle of the verb to be devoted, constant, continue all the time, or persevere in. Luke could not be clearer. The first church focused on these four things in their life together. They were constantly doing them and practicing them. Any new member of the fellowship was immediately drawn into these activities. The four were: the apostles' teaching, the fellowship or *koinonia*, the breaking of bread, which is probably Luke's code phrase for the Lord's Supper and prayer. The NIV says prayer, but literally the words in Greek read the prayers, plural.

The apostles' teaching is almost certainly their teaching about Jesus and recalling what Jesus said and did. In other words they taught things that are similar to what we have in the New Testament, the highlights of Jesus' words and deeds. This was all guided by the Holy Spirit who was now doing what Jesus said he would do in *John 14-16*. Their teaching probably also contained teaching from the Old Testament, the only Scriptures they had at that time, especially as it pertained to Jesus and how he fulfilled it.

The fellowship or *koinonia*, was the gathering of the community in small groups and large groups. They ate together, spent time with one another, shared together and prayed together and for one another. Verses 44-45 speak of a remarkable sharing of their goods and wealth with one another, almost a communal atmosphere. If many of the new believers were pilgrims who had come for the feast, then this sharing became a necessity because many were probably running out of resources. Some were from as far away as Rome. How were they going to continue to eat and drink and find shelter? People shared with them. Some were undoubtedly poor and had very little. Many who had come for the feast probably had plans to go home afterwards and now because of the extraordinary events of Pentecost, those plans had radically changed. The Messiah had come and they had received the Holy Spirit. The Age to Come had dawned! How could they go home and return to their normal lives as if nothing had happened? The whole world had changed. Their fellowship was supernatural. The Spirit created it, they did not. It was also practical in that it took care of needs people had. But it would not last. Persecution would come and the community would be scattered. Famine and poverty would come and overwhelm the ability of people with resources to meet the needs of those who had none. In that sense the *koinonia* of the first church is ideal but it conflicted not only with the circumstances of the 1st century Roman Empire it also conflicted with the mission Jesus and the Spirit had given the church to do. They were not to stay in Jerusalem. They were to begin there and spread the gospel and the fellowship that came with it to the whole world.

The breaking of the bread could be interpreted as eating together, in which case it is a profound sign of the church's fellowship and a remembering of how Jesus ate and drank with them. *Luke 24* and the Emmaus experience lead me to believe that it was also a code word for the Lord's Supper. Luke is telling us that when the community met in homes or in larger gatherings they celebrated the breaking of the bread, they celebrated communion with one another. There is no command here of how often they did it. But clearly this was a normative part of their life together and they did it frequently. Jesus had given them his meal to remember him and what he did for them as well as to reassure them that he was with them and he was coming back for them. The Lord's Supper, this simple meal, became the action they shared together that grounded them in Jesus' Passion for them. It continually focused them on the forgiveness of sins which Jesus had told them to go and proclaim in *Luke 24* and that Peter had offered everyone who believed the gospel in his altar call in *Acts 2:38-39*. There is no hint here about how they celebrated the Supper or what means they used, only that they did it frequently. Paul's instructions to the Corinthians are the earliest written account of how the Supper is to be celebrated. That was written in 55. By that time a fixed tradition had already come about concerning the Lord's Supper. Paul said he had received this tradition from the Lord himself, independent from the other apostles.

Luke says they were devoted to the prayers not just to prayer in general. Certainly they prayed as needs came up but this phrase by Luke suggests that they prayed certain standard prayers that were perhaps part of the synagogue service or the temple services. It could also suggest that they used the Lord's Prayer as a template for their prayers. In any case, prayer was an integral part of their life together. If I am honest that is not true of Southside. We believe in prayer, at least we say we do, but we do not do it very often. If an outsider came to Southside I do not believe he or she would say we are devoted to prayer.

All of this activity and presence of the Holy Spirit among them resulted in a sense of awe because God was directly present with them. They were continually seeing miracles done by the apostles and others. Luke notes that signs and wonders validating the preaching of the gospel

were done by the apostles. Later, others would do them as well, like Stephen, Philip and Paul. Some were apostles and some were not. That means that the miracles were not limited to the apostles and were not given just to prove that they were apostles. The miracles were accompanying signs of the gospel to validate its preaching and were done by anyone the Spirit chose to use at any given moment. The reason the apostles were performing so many signs and wonders at the beginning is because they were the primary preachers of the gospel and the Spirit wanted to highlight their work which Jesus had sent them to do.

The early church met in large groups in the temple because that was undoubtedly the only feasible place in Jerusalem where 3000 plus people could gather and freely assemble. Anything else like a theater they would have had to rent and that would have been too expensive. Plus it might have been a pagan meeting hall and I don't think the apostles wanted to congregate there. They also ate together and met together in homes. Thus the pattern was laid down very early in the church's history of large groups for teaching and worship and small groups for fellowship, meals and prayer as well as learning together.

Luke reports they had a good reputation with outsiders. Their reputation with the Sanhedrin was not going to be a good one, but it appears people in general had a favorable view of them. How could they not? They healed people, took care of needs, were seen as devout Jews worshipping at the temple and they loved one another with a supernatural love the Spirit was giving them. All of that led to them treating other people well, even if they did not follow Jesus. That is what we need to do today; love people whether they believe in Jesus or not. Treat them fairly, lovingly and with grace.

They praised God together and Luke adds the extraordinary comment, the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Their lifestyle coupled with the preaching of the gospel and the signs and wonders done by the apostles and others produced an evangelism that was compelling and unique. The Spirit was given to not only bind them together in fellowship with Jesus and with one another; he was given to fuel their mission and evangelism. Luke shows us that true evangelism is a dependence-diligence relationship because we are totally dependent upon God to change hearts and bring people to repentance. Yet God uses our preaching the gospel and witness to do it. We give our best to God and leave the results to him. If we do we will see people added to the Kingdom. Then with the Spirit's help it is our responsibility to fold them into the community and grow in them a devotion to Jesus, to the teaching of the Scriptures, to our fellowship, the Lord's Table and prayer. That in turn will produce a fruitful disciple who will share their faith so more will come to believe.

Chapter 3:

3:1-5 - Peter and John are going up to the temple at the time of the afternoon sacrifice, 3pm. How many of the other disciples were going with them, since day by day Luke says they were at the temple worshipping God? There is also no way to know how long after Pentecost this incident occurred. Luke gives us no time clues. A man was there, crippled from birth who was being carried to the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg. The Beautiful Gate was the main entrance to the temple proper moving from the Court of the Gentiles to the Court of Women. His friends or someone would carry him every day to that gate so he could beg from the worshippers entering the temple. Luke says he was being carried which means he was not yet in position at the gate. Yet when he sees Peter and John about to enter he asks them for money. His friends are still carrying him at the time. Why did he single out Peter and John? Had he seen them before? Did he know they were disciples of Jesus? Had word spread that these followers of Jesus were

generous and were helping people? Did he even know Peter and John were Christ-followers? These are all good questions to which we don't have answers! In fact, it is possible that Peter and John had seen him and even Jesus had seen the man if he was carried to the temple every day to beg.

The man asks Peter and John for money. They both look straight at him and then Peter says, look at us! The man does, thinking he is going to get something. You can almost see him reach out his bowl or cup, whatever he carried with which to beg. Peter and John aren't going to give him money. They are going to give him something far greater!

3:6-10 - When Peter says, silver and gold I do not have. I imagine the man losing interest almost immediately and even looking away from the two apostles. They weren't going to give him what he wanted, money. They were going to give him what he needed, healing. Peter says, "*What I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ (or Jesus Messiah, Yeshua Messiah in Hebrew) of Nazareth, walk!*" This is the first time Luke tells us the disciples healed people in the name of Jesus. Many healings had already taken place according to *Acts 2:43*, but this is the first healing miracle by the apostles Luke describes in detail. The disciples are under the name and authority of Jesus and they have permission to use that name and authority to do what Jesus did. Plus if their compassion had led them to simply give the man money or take him back with them to the other disciples where he could be cared for he would still be crippled and sentenced to a life of begging and dependence. Peter and John by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit change the course of the man's life and set him free from begging by healing his crippled body. They give him a future of his own choice and give him the chance to be free of not only his disease but his poverty. What are the deepest needs of people who come to us for help and how can we help meet those needs besides the immediate need for help and money?

Peter takes him by the hand and helps him up. Immediately the man's feet and ankles become strong. This suggests some sort of deformity in his feet, or perhaps polio? He is healed and jumps to his feet and begins to walk! His life is instantly transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and he goes into the temple, where he was not allowed to go before because the Law said he was deformed! He goes with Peter and John, walking, and jumping and praising God! People begin to notice and they recognize him as the man who used to sit and beg at the Beautiful Gate. They are filled with wonder and amazement at what has happened. A miracle in Jesus' Name has drawn a crowd just as it did during Jesus' ministry. Peter and John are not going to waste such an opportunity. They do what their master did; preach the gospel!

3:11-16 - The beggar was still with Peter and John, even holding on to them, as the people ran to Solomon's Colonnade or Portico in the temple and began to gather. This would have been the columned area on the southern side of the temple where the court of the Gentiles was located along with all the money-changers. Peter sees the people gathering and uses the healing of the crippled man as an opportunity to preach the gospel.

Peter introduces his talk by asking why the people are surprised the man has been healed. He questions why people are even thinking that Peter or John had any power to heal the crippled man, or that it was the result of any godliness on their part. He then proceeds to say the God of their Fathers has glorified his Servant Jesus, using the language of *Isaiah 53*. He accuses them of handing over Jesus to Pilate even though he wanted to let Jesus go. They disowned God's holy and righteous one. The verb is to deny or refuse. They rejected Jesus as their Messiah. The title holy and righteous one is probably a Messianic title, but it emphasizes Jesus' sinless and

blameless life. Peter accuses the crowd of rejecting their Messiah and asking that a murderer (Barabbas) be released to them. Peter is rehearsing the Passion narrative of the gospels. They killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead! This is the third title Peter has used concerning Jesus. Author of life is related to God who is the author of life. Peter portrays Jesus as God. How could God be killed? Yet God raised Jesus from the dead!

He then says we are witnesses of this. Is he only speaking of him and John or were there other disciples there with him now? I think there are other disciples as well as Peter and John. I don't think they were the only two who went up to the temple that afternoon. Peter says it is by faith in the name of Jesus that this man was healed. Faith comes through Jesus' name. The word for *comes through* in Greek is *didomi*, to give or grant or bestow. Peter links the name of Jesus with the person of Jesus and his ability to give faith to those who choose to follow him. Luke's language here expresses the mystery of faith. Is faith something we do in response to God's action or is faith a gift from God that we receive and believe in response to an invitation by God? Perhaps it is both, but Luke's implication is that faith is also gift from God and the predestinating work of God is more powerful than we want to acknowledge or believe. We want to say our faith is a result of our choice and our decision in response to God. Luke hints here that we believe wholly because of God's work and even faith is a gift of grace to us.

3:17-23 - Peter continues and outlines an already-not yet vision of the Kingdom of God. He explains that Jesus was killed by them and then raised from the dead because that is how God foretold it in the prophets. His Messiah would have to suffer and then be raised in glory. He does not excuse their actions but he outlines an early theme in the apostles' preaching; the people acted in ignorance in crucifying Jesus. They did not know or understand Jesus was their Messiah. Yet God used their ignorance and rejection of Jesus to secure forgiveness of sins for them and for the whole world. It was all part of God's plan he had foretold through his prophets.

Peter does what Jesus did; links the Messiah to the Suffering Servant in the same person, namely Jesus. He calls the crowd to repent so that their sins may be wiped out and forgiven. He says turn to God so that times of refreshing may come and God may send the Messiah, the Christ, even Jesus who has been appointed for you. God has declared Jesus Messiah and has demonstrated him as such by his resurrection. The people don't get to vote on their Messiah, God reveals him to them. Peter is inviting the people to accept God's revelation of Jesus. He says Jesus must remain in heaven until the time God will restore everything even as he promised in the prophets. Peter reiterates what earlier sections of *Acts* have declared, Jesus the Messiah will come again to finally finish his work and completely bring in the Kingdom of God. Peter shows how God's plan involved the suffering of his Messiah to secure the forgiveness of sins and then the second coming of his Messiah to secure the final victory of his Kingdom and reign.

Peter quotes Moses in *Deuteronomy* and talks about the prophet like Moses whom God will send. They must listen to everything that prophet says or be cut off from God's people. Peter is saying Jesus is the prophet like Moses. If they do not listen to him and receive him they will be cut off from the people of God. They will no longer be Israelites!

3:24-26 - Peter summarizes by saying all the prophets from Samuel on have spoken of these days. The people are the heirs of all the prophets have spoken and of the covenant God made with their fathers through Abraham. Through Abraham's offspring or seed, singular, all the peoples of the earth will be blessed. He is recalling God's destiny for his people in *Genesis 12*. Peter finishes by saying God raised up his servant and sent him first to you, the Jews, to bless

you and to turn each of you from your wicked ways. Peter says Jesus is the fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. He is the blessing of Abraham to the whole world. He sent him first to his own people, the people of Abraham, that they may be saved. Paul echoes this language in *Romans 1* that the gospel is for the Jew first and then the Greek.

Peter uses no less than six major prophetic themes in his speech to the crowd gathered at the temple that day. Like in *Acts 2* it is possible that this is a summation of all that he said, a cliff's notes version to capture the main points. Those six prophetic themes that all point to Jesus are: the servant of God from *Isaiah*; the Holy and Righteous One, who was sinless and blameless before God; God himself, the author of life; the Messiah, who first suffers and then will be sent to consummate the Kingdom of God, which fulfills all the prophets said of him; the prophet like Moses whom God will send, the one we must listen to; the seed, singular, of Abraham, through whom God will bless the whole world. Peter in a short talk summarizes the major themes of Old Testament prophecy, draws them together and says they are *ALL* fulfilled in Jesus. The only two that he does not mention are the Son of Man in *Daniel* and the gift of Wisdom in *Proverbs*. It is a remarkable summary of Old Testament teaching and shows how the early church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit tied together many streams of prophetic teaching and united them in Jesus, showing how he fulfilled them all. This was the gospel as preached to the Jews. Jesus is a fulfillment of Scripture. The message would change slightly but not fundamentally as it was adopted for a Gentile audience. Part of that is because most of the first Gentile Christians were God-fearers, Gentiles who believed in the God of Israel and knew at least something of the prophets and the Scriptures.

Chapter 4:

4:1-4 - Peter and John are still preaching to the people when the priests, captain of the temple guards, and Sadducees seize them. These are all people related to the Sanhedrin and the workings of the temple. Notice here Luke does not say the Pharisees were involved but the Sadducees. They were disturbed because Peter and John were proclaiming the resurrection of the dead through Jesus. It was evening. Remember the disciples had come to the temple for the afternoon sacrifice at 3. Now Luke says it is evening, around or just after sunset. That means the incident with the crippled man and Peter and John's preaching must have taken some time, several hours at least. That is a clue that what Luke includes of Peter's preaching to the crowd was just the highlights and a summary of his argument. He spoke a lot longer. The Sadducees put Peter and John in jail until the next day when they can bring them before the full Sanhedrin but the damage has been done. Many hear Peter's message and believe.

Luke says the number of men grew to around 5000. That does not include women and children. The number of 3000 in *Acts 2* is probably men and women because of the context. Here Luke only includes the men, much like at the feeding of the 5000. Is this number a direct result of Peter's preaching after the lame man is healed or is this cumulative result of the day by day addition of new believers so that with those who received Christ after this incident the church grew to over 5000 men and more when you count the women? I think it is the latter.

The miracle had the desired effect. A crowd gathered who was in awe and wondering at what had happened. Peter and John use it as an opportunity to preach the good news of Jesus. Many make a decision to follow Jesus as the Messiah that day and the church continued to grow!

4:5-7 - In the morning the whole Sanhedrin is called together to decide what to do about Peter and John. Annas, Caiaphas and their whole family were there, the leading men among the

Sadducees who held political and economic power in Jerusalem because of their relationship with the temple and their collaboration with the Romans. This was designed to intimidate Peter and John, who after all were just fishermen from Galilee. They were not rabbis, teachers, important men in society or anything else. They should have been cowed in the presence of such a body. These men were the people who had tried and condemned Jesus, their master, and sent him to Pilate to die!

They begin to question Peter and John with a similar question they had used with Jesus. By what power, authority or name did you do this? In other words, how did men such as you perform this miracle right in the temple and cause such a stir? The implication is if they don't get the answer they want bad things will happen to Peter and John!

4:8-12 - Peter filled with the Holy Spirit responds to their question and implied threat. He is now acting as the Rock as Jesus had named him. He is also filled with the Spirit in fulfillment of what Jesus had told the disciples in *Luke 12:11-12*: "*When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.*" That is precisely what happens here and the answer Peter gives totally shocks and dismays the Sanhedrin.

He names them rulers and elders of the people, rightly respecting their titles and position. Then he proceeds to indict their attitudes and actions. It we are being called to account for an act of kindness to a cripple; and what else could they have called it, for they had not healed him on a Sabbath so that charge would not stick. If you ask how he was healed then it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Yeshua Messiah of Nazareth, whom you crucified whom God raised from the dead that this man stands before you healed. The man obviously was also present as Peter is speaking. That is not a name they had wanted to hear because they thought by crucifying Jesus they had gotten rid of him. Now Peter confronts them with the evidence of the healed man and of the resurrection which they could not explain away. What had really happened to the body of Jesus? If it was all a fake why is this fishermen standing here speaking so boldly in the name of his dead master? The Sanhedrin is confronted with the Easter faith of the disciples and the power of the speech through the Holy Spirit.

Peter then quotes *Psalms 118*; the final *Hallel Psalm* sung at Passover that they had all sung the night Jesus had been arrested. Peter however changes the words slightly. He says the stone YOU builders rejected rather than THE builders. That stone has become the capstone of salvation and the Kingdom of God. You by your rejection and murder of the Lord's Messiah have fulfilled what the *Psalms* says. They knew the rest of that verse, "*This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes!*" Then Peter rams his point home with withering effect. Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Jesus the Messiah brings salvation; not Moses, not your precious temple and certainly not you high priests! You killed God's Messiah and now you are answerable only to him for your salvation! They had brought them before the Council to intimidate Peter and John and indict them and Peter turns it all on its head and indicts the high priests, the Sadducees and the whole Sanhedrin!

Peter states what theologians call "*the scandal of particularity.*" There is no other name. Salvation is exclusively through Jesus and no one else because it is God's way to come to him. We cannot get to him so he has provided a way. There is no other. Salvation is inclusive in Jesus because it is open to all who believe regardless of race, creed, sex, wealth or any other condition. It is scandalous because on the surface it seems unfair. How could God reject people who are

trying to find him? But as we look deeper it is totally gracious of God because no human effort can ever reach God. People think God is unfair to restrict salvation to those who believe in Jesus. That premise is predicated on the assumption that many religious ways, efforts, rituals and moral acts can reach God. As long as someone is sincere God will accept many different actions in order to please him. The problem is people don't take into account God's holiness and human sin. All our religious actions, performing of rituals, moral acts, good works, meditations and anything else we think might work are tainted by sin. Sin corrupts anything we do and totally and completely separates us from God so that if God does not move towards us nothing we do can ever reach him. And if God reached down to us through Jesus Christ and the Creator said here is the way you can be acceptable to me and forgiven; I have provided you a way, then there is no other way. All other human means of salvation, including all other religions in the world are futile and vain. They accomplish nothing except to deceive us that we can actually reach God on our own. Peter's statement rather than being narrow and judgmental is actually the greatest statement of grace in human history. God has provided a way of salvation for sinful humanity when we could not reach him!

4:14-17 - The Sanhedrin are shocked and amazed because they can see Peter and John are not schooled and educated like them. They are ordinary men but they took note; they had been with Jesus! What could they do? The man who had been healed was standing with them right before their eyes. They couldn't deny an extraordinary miracle had taken place! How could they punish Peter and John for something that was obviously from God? If they did, what would the people say? There was no way to defend condemning Peter and John for what they had done!

They order the men excused so they can debate the matter amongst themselves. What must Peter and John and the healed man have been thinking at this point? Could they see the confusion and consternation of the Sanhedrin? I think it must have been obvious! Plus what were the Pharisees on the Sanhedrin thinking, including if they were there, Nicodemus and Joseph? Were they secretly glad because the Sadducees and high priests were forced to deal with the whole subject of the resurrection, even though it was the resurrection of Jesus? There must have been a lot of interesting questions going through the minds of the disciples and the Sanhedrin at this moment.

The Council doesn't know what to do. They can't deny the miracle, the news has spread throughout the city and there were too many witnesses who saw the man walking and leaping and praising God in the temple. But they don't want the movement of Jesus as Messiah to spread any further. They thought they had rid themselves of him and his troubling movement and now here it is stronger than ever fueled by this crazy story that God had raised Jesus from the dead. The only problem was they couldn't produce the body and so destroy the foundation of the story. They must have wondered what really happened to Jesus' body? They agree they will warn these men not to speak about Jesus anymore. What were they thinking? This is the height of naiveté! Did they really think that Peter and John, who were obviously and surprisingly not intimidated by the Sanhedrin, were really going to stop their preaching of Jesus as the resurrected Messiah? If you took a poll of the Sanhedrin at that moment, how many of them were convinced this plan was going to work and how many were resigned to this is the best we can do under the circumstances and it has almost zero chance of success? If there were many who thought telling Peter and John to stop preaching Jesus would work when they agreed to the plan, I think most of them changed their minds when they confronted Peter and John with their decision! They are the

ruling council of the Jews; they are the Sanhedrin and have the power to govern Jewish affairs! Yet these fishermen are in control. How did this happen? What is going on?

4:18-22 - They call Peter and John back before them and give them their ruling. The disciples are not to speak about Jesus or to anyone in his name. They are to stop their preaching of Jesus as the Messiah and resurrected!

Peter and John's reply is a model for how to respond when the governing authorities instituted by God are in clear conflict with our mission from Jesus himself. They throw it back on the Sanhedrin. Judge for yourselves whether it is right to obey you rather than God. Of course they know the answer; one must always obey God no matter what, even when it means going against those in authority over you. That is what the prophets did and God rewarded them and was pleased with them! Then Peter and John add; we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. We are Jesus' witnesses, of his life, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension. Nothing you say or do is going to stop us from talking to others about Jesus the Messiah!

They threaten them some more, which were all empty threats because they couldn't agree on how to punish them because the lame man who had been healed was standing before them and the people all knew it! Luke adds the man was over 40 years old! The man had been crippled from birth. He had never walked in all his 40 years until just the day before! Peter and John must have known their threats were empty too. What were they thinking? They had gone before the Sanhedrin, had proclaimed Jesus fearlessly as God's Messiah and the only way of salvation and had walked out of the Council without a scratch! God was truly in charge and guiding their movement. Jesus really was the Christ! At every turn they were seeing confirming evidence. How this must have grown their confidence and the confidence of the church. We'll see that confidence in the next pericope about the prayer meeting the church holds after Peter and John are released.

4:23-26 - After Peter and John are released they return to the other disciples and report everything that the Sanhedrin had said and done. Others who had been there at the temple that afternoon probably had already reported back to the other apostles and the church what had happened with Peter and John, the miracle and the outline of what Peter had been preaching to the crowd at the temple. What they didn't know was what the Sanhedrin had done. Perhaps Joseph and Nicodemus did not have much contact with the church at this time or they did not have any opportunity to get the word out to the disciples as to what was happening with Peter and John. It is also possible that they two men had resigned from the Sanhedrin after Jesus' death and resurrection. We do not know.

When the church hears what happened in the Sanhedrin they gather in prayer and praise. They hold a prayer meeting! That prayer meeting is not filled with panic and wringing of hands over the fact that their two leaders had been arrested and hauled before the Sanhedrin. It is about God doing more miracles and moving in a powerful way!

The church perceives that what has happened with Peter and John is an extension of the fulfilled prophecy that took place when Jesus was arrested and tried. This is the continuing drama of the nations and the Jewish authorities opposing God's Messiah Jesus! They quote in their prayer from *Psalm 2* about the nations gathered in opposition to God's Anointed One, the Messiah. The nations plot in vain against the Messiah because God is in charge and sovereign and everything that happened to Jesus was all according to his prophetic plan. Even what has happened to Peter and John is a continuation of that plan.

Note that the church identifies the Holy Spirit as the revealer of God's will and revelation to his prophets in *verse 25*. The Spirit is behind all prophetic revelation.

4:27-31 - The disciples in their prayer have quoted from *Psalms 2* about the nations opposing God's Messiah. Now they outline how that has been fulfilled in the events of Jesus' Passion. Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles, or other Roman officials and the peoples of Israel. The word "*peoples*" is plural. It is a curious usage by Luke. It is possible that by using *laos*, the Greek word for people, in the plural form he is expressing the different factions within the Jews, like the Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, Essenes and Herodians. The other possibility is he uses it to express the divide between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebrew Jews which will become a much greater factor as the history of the church unfolds in *Acts*. That however is very subtle and one wonders whether Theophilus would have understood that at all.

The bottom line is the political and religious powers in Jerusalem conspired against Jesus and found a way to put him to death. Jesus was and is Israel's Messiah and God's Anointed One. All their intrigue, thinking they were in control, was an illusion because God used even their actions to bring about what he had purposed for our salvation. The cross in their minds was the way to get rid of Jesus. The cross in God's plan was the way to give the sacrifice that would save humanity from sin.

The church prays, asking God to consider the threats of the Sanhedrin and enable the disciples to continue to preach the word. They ask God to give them great boldness and do more signs and wonders in Jesus' name. They ask for more of what got them into trouble in the first place! God's answer is to fill them with the Holy Spirit! Somehow I doubt if Dave and I were arrested for preaching the gospel if the church would gather and pray for more boldness and more miracles. I think we would be afraid and pray for safety and no more persecution. They don't. They pray for more! The Sanhedrin had told them to shut up. So they pray, God let us preach with greater boldness for you! That is faith and courage in the face of opposition!

After they pray, the place where they were meeting is shaken, perhaps with an earthquake, and they are all filled with the Holy Spirit and go out and preach the Word of God boldly. The Holy Spirit answers their prayer! In a sense, a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit *IS* the answer to their prayer. This is not a second blessing but a renewed filling of the Spirit. They had already been filled but are now filled again. There is a renewed commitment to Jesus and a surrendering to the Spirit's power and leading. That results in a fresh filling. The same is true of us. The result will be even more people added to the church! That is the kind of faith and passion we need to have as we face an increasingly hostile culture, government bureaucracy and media.

4:32-34 - After the prayer meeting and the new boldness of the church's preaching, all resulting from a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit, several actions and attitudes began to manifest themselves in the church's life similar to the list in *Acts 2:42-47*. Luke reports there was a remarkable unity among the believers. People were of one heart and mind. There was a sharing of everything they had and a lack of greed and possessiveness when it came to personal property. Literally the Greek reads, "*but they were being all things in common (koina).*" Their fellowship, *koinonia*, was a result of the Spirit's filling. It was supernatural in nature. Further, the apostles were testifying to Jesus and his resurrection with great power, probably referring to miracles that accompanied their preaching. The word for power here is *dunamis*, which is the same word Jesus used in describing the power of the Holy Spirit that would come upon them to witness to him in *Acts 1:8*. Their preaching and witness is fulfilling what Jesus said would happen when the Spirit

came. Luke says great grace was upon them all. This is all a result of the Spirit's work. It wasn't because they were suddenly more committed, or worked harder. They prayed and asked God to move. He filled them with his Holy Spirit and Luke summarizes in these verses what happened!

Luke says one of the things that happened was there was no needy person among them. People who had means sold property and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet in order for it to be distributed to any who had a need. This generosity was a work of the Spirit among them and their lack of needy people was a witness to what the Spirit could accomplish and what God's Kingdom was all about. That witness would not last but it was necessary to help build the foundation of the church and bring many to Christ Jesus. Luke reports their generosity just as he reports the famine and poverty of a decade later in the same Jerusalem church. Circumstances change and now the ones with means to help the Jerusalem poor are their Gentile brothers and sisters. The rich Christians in Jerusalem have either left or been scattered. Times changed. This remarkable community is an ideal that can be celebrated and aspired to, but Luke never hints that this is how it is supposed to be in every church or that the apostles commanded it. Some today make the mistake of taking something that is descriptive by Luke and making it prescriptive for the church today. It was a unique set of circumstances that didn't even last in Jerusalem. The example for us is for those who have means that God has blessed to share with others who have less so that the needs of those in the body are cared for.

4:36-37 - We are first introduced to Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, whose given name is Joseph. He participates in the generosity of the people by selling a field and bringing all the proceeds from the sale and giving it to the apostles to distribute as people had need. This is consistent with his character which the apostles recognize by giving him a nickname: Barnabas, Son of Encouragement. He will show that character throughout the rest of the New Testament. In fact one could make a case for Barnabas being critical for at least half the New Testament writings because of his influence in Paul's and Mark's lives and in an indirect way Luke's. He is truly one of the greatest examples of what an encouraging leader looks like, one who can step forward and lead and be upfront when necessary but who does not mind stepping back and letting others lead and supporting and encouraging those with greater gifts to do so. He is also one of the finest examples of a person who takes someone with great personal flaws like John Mark, his cousin, and through encouragement and personal investment transforms them into someone of great influence and fruitful ministry. In my mind he is one of the giants of the New Testament and one of the three or four most influential people in the New Testament church, after Paul, Peter and John. Praise God for Barnabas!

Chapter 5:

5:1-2 - Ananias and Sapphira are Jewish Christians who are part of the church. There is no evidence to suggest they were anything other than Luke presents them: Christ-followers. Peter accuses Ananias of lying to the Holy Spirit and that statement only makes sense if Ananias had the Holy Spirit in him. Some try and portray the couple as Jews who were part of the church but were not really believers in Jesus in order to justify God's discipline and their deaths. If that were the case then when they both died they would have been lost forever. If they are believers their deaths were for their own sake and for the church. God took them to be with him and to protect his church. Their deaths then are an act of love on God's part for them and for the church.

They sell a piece of property they owned and were going to give the proceeds to the apostles. This was very similar to Barnabas and what he had done and others who had the wealth

to give generously. Ananias and Sapphira have the means to give but they are after something more. They want to appear more spiritual and generous than they really are. As one reads Luke's account there are all sorts of possibilities for the root attitudes that lead them to their deception. They might have been jealous of Barnabas and other generous people whom the apostles singled out for special affirmation. They wanted some of that affirmation for themselves because they were envious. They also appear greedy, wanting to look good to others but also not wanting to give all the money. They want some for their own needs and desires. They are selfish!

It was not sinful for Ananias and Sapphira to sell the property and give part of the proceeds to the church. That would have been loving, generous and noble. What was sinful was the deception of making it look like the entire proceeds of the land sale were being donated. Their actions were all about appearances and looking spiritual. That goes back to the Pharisees and outward appearances through religious acts rather than a relationship with Jesus the Messiah and his Holy Spirit living in us.

The context of the Ananias and Sapphira account is critical for understanding the drastic actions taken against the couple. The church had been filled with the Spirit. The apostles were witnessing to Jesus and preaching with great power and boldness. The church was unified, of one heart and mind. A great spirit of generosity and fellowship had been poured out on the whole church as people like Barnabas were selling possessions and donating the proceeds so that people in need could be cared for. Into this noble, gracious and Spirit-filled atmosphere come Ananias and Sapphira and their plot to look good. It is repulsive given what was happening. If the attitude and actions of the church at that moment could be described as a beautiful, harmonious symphony, Ananias' and Sapphira's actions were a loud dissonant chord amidst the music the Spirit was making with his church.

5:3-6 - Peter confronts Ananias with the truth of God's Spirit. He shows Ananias that there is no hiding our sin from God, even if we are forgiven, especially if that sin is damaging to the Lord's bride, his church.

Peter asks why Satan has so filled Ananias' heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, keeping some of the money and pretending it was all given. Lying is of the devil because he is a liar and the father of lies. God is a God of truth. When we lie we reflect Satan's nature not the God who lives in us through the Holy Spirit. God executed severe discipline against Ananias and Sapphira in order to eliminate any lying tendencies and desire for appearances and pleasing people in the fledgling church.

Peter acknowledges that selling the field and donating even a part of the proceeds was godly and loving. The proceeds of the sale were at their disposal. This suggests there were no tithing rules or any rules about giving in the Jerusalem church. People gave what their hearts led them to give and the apostles managed the results for everyone's benefit. Peter doesn't tell Ananias that he only had to give a tithe. He didn't have to give anything. Giving was entirely motivated by the Spirit in people. Ananias' giving however was not motivated by the Spirit who did live in him. It was motivated by his envy, jealousy and greed, fed by Satan and the lie planted in Ananias' and Sapphira's hearts.

Peter says Ananias has lied to the Holy Spirit in *verse 3*. In *verse 4* he says you have not lied to men but to God. One cannot lie to a force or energy field. One can only lie to a person. Peter's comments to Ananias are proof the Holy Spirit is God and a person. In fact he is the Third Person of the Trinity.

When Ananias hears Peter confront his sin and expose it in all its ugliness he falls down dead, presumably of a heart attack or something similar. Whatever it was, it was quick and lethal. Luke does not specifically say that God killed Ananias but that is the conclusion one reaches as you read the account. It is possible Ananias' guilt and fear caused a fatal heart attack but I think it was the Holy Spirit who took him and removed him from his church to protect him and protect the church. Even if it was his guilt that killed him the result is the same. Great fear seized everyone who heard about his death. The news would have spread like wildfire through the church.

The young men come in, wrap Ananias' body, and take him out and bury him. That matches the custom of the time in Judea. Burial happened the same day because there was no embalming. However, the young men don't even wait to tell his wife, they bury Ananias right away as if to remove the sin from among them. This may also have been the first death the new church experienced after the resurrection which would have shocked them all and perhaps made many rethink their understanding of death and Jesus' return.

5:7-11 - About three hours later Sapphira comes in to speak with Peter. She apparently does not know Ananias is dead nor how he died. Peter quizzes her on the sale of the field. When she participates in the lie and tells Peter a false amount for the sale of the field, Peter confronts her and asks her how they could agree to test the Spirit of the Lord. Then he says the feet of the young men who buried Ananias are at the door. He prophetically tells her they will carry her out also, meaning they will bury Sapphira because she will die too. When she hears this she also falls down and dies, presumably in a similar manner to her husband. The young men come in and finding her dead too carry her out and bury her just as they did Ananias.

Both die because God was not going to allow their deception and envy to go unchallenged. He disciplined them publicly. Peter, guided by the Spirit exposed their sin for all to see. God did not kill them or allow them to die to punish them for their sin because all the punishment their sin deserved was paid for by Jesus on the cross. This was discipline in order to save them and save the church. In this case the discipline was the most extreme, death. Paul hints at God taking some in *1 Corinthians 11* in his discussion of the Corinthians misuse of the Lord's Supper. Severe discipline is sometimes necessary even though we do not want to admit it. The result is that Ananias and Sapphira are with the Lord and kept from allowing their lies and deception to grow in them and they are removed from the church and the cancer of sin, greed and deception is taken out of the church. Great fear seized the whole church when people heard about these events. People feared God and feared the consequences of sin in their lives and in the body.

Why don't we see more of this kind of severe discipline in the church today? Perhaps we do but we don't interpret it as such. Perhaps we do not because we are not all filled with the Holy Spirit as they were and the church is lukewarm and weak. God's discipline is to allow us to be weak and lukewarm and miss out on his blessing and the power and fruit that come from being submitted to him and filled with him. I do not know. Perhaps it is because we lack faith as a vital relationship with Jesus and our faith has become an assent to certain doctrines or a decision point for Jesus divorced from the rest of our lives and behavior. Perhaps it is also because this was the first church and God was trying to lay down the right foundation for his new people. In the Old Testament his discipline was swift and sure with Israel in the wilderness whereas once they came into the land it often was delayed. Perhaps that is the case here as well. I do not know.

5:12-16 - Luke summarizes what is happening in Jerusalem after the incident with Ananias and Sapphira, returning to his description of what the Spirit was doing in and through the church in 4:32-37. The apostles are doing many miraculous signs and wonders, healing people and casting out demons. They are doing what Jesus did and people are being attracted to the movement because of it.

They were meeting together as a church in Solomon's Portico or Colonnade, the large section of the temple near the south gates and the Court of the Gentiles. This area of the temple provided them with enough room for several thousands of people to gather. Luke says they were highly regarded by the people but no one dared join them. Then he turns around and says many believed in the Lord Jesus and joined them. Both were happening. It is probable that when they met in the temple and the apostles were teaching and healing, other Jews hesitated to join in and see what was happening because of the opposition of the Sanhedrin. The temple guards were right there and their presence may have been enough to discourage others from joining the church. Yet, they were over 5000 people and a huge crowd so there were too many to arrest and put into prison. They had to let them meet! Luke has already reported and will reiterate that the believers met not only in the temple but house to house and it is probably there that many new believers come to join the church. It means that the crowds of believers at the temple would keep getting larger because so many new people were joining the church and believing in Jesus as Messiah. No wonder the Sanhedrin had to do something and move against the apostles. Things were getting out of control and worse than they ever were when Jesus was alive!

The power of the Spirit was so strong that people were bringing the sick on mats hoping Peter's shadow might fall on them and so they would be healed as he passed by. Crowds began to gather from the towns around Jerusalem besides just the city. People were bringing their sick and demonized hoping the apostles would heal them. Luke comments that all of them were healed just like Jesus in Capernaum early in his ministry in Galilee. Like in Jesus' ministry, the apostles used the felt need of medical care and the power to heal people's diseases to attract large crowds so they could proclaim the gospel. Peter and the apostles were doing what Jesus did!

Luke keeps singling out Peter and his prominent place not only as leader among the apostles but also as spokesperson for them. He appears to be the primary preacher as well. He is more and more becoming the rock on which Jesus will build his church. He is no longer Simon; he is Peter!

5:17-21 - The High Priest and all the Sadducees arrested the apostles, apparently all 11 and threw them in jail in order to stop their preaching and halt the spread of the gospel. Luke says they were jealous! People were coming to the temple to hear the apostles preach and be healed and not to participate in the temple rituals. That meant fewer people who used the money-changers or bought sacrifices etc. The apostles were starting to affect their bottom line and also climb over them in importance in the people's minds. They could not tolerate that. The High Priest was like a religious king and he didn't like being upstaged!

The only problem was the high priests and Sadducees were not in charge, God was. In the night an angel of the Lord appears, opens the jail and leads them out. He tells them to go back to the temple courts and preach the message of new life again. At daybreak that's what the apostles do. They go back to the temple and begin teaching the people about the Lord Jesus and the Kingdom. God sends angels at several key moments in the early chapters of *Acts*. Twice in Jerusalem God sends an angel to release the apostles or Peter from prison. Often the Holy Spirit is involved directly as well giving instructions of what to do or where to go. Here it took some

kind of physical presence to free them from their prison cells and that may be the reason God sent the angel. The point is God was guiding them and shepherding them through difficulties so that they could preach the gospel. As long as they were centered in Jerusalem the Lord needed to make sure they could preach the gospel unhindered. It wasn't time as yet to move out of Jerusalem but the conflict with the Sanhedrin was about to come to a head.

5:21-26 - The High Priest calls together the whole Sanhedrin and they send for the apostles who are in the jail. But the temple guards don't find them there, so they go back and report this to the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin. The jail is locked; the prisoners should have been there but when they opened up the cells they were empty! Everyone is mystified. At this point the chief priests aren't blaming the officers of the temple guard for allowing their prisoners to escape. Just as they are wondering what is going on someone comes in and reports to them all that the men they had arrested are in the temple teaching the people. This is the very thing they had arrested them for doing in the first place! The captain of the temple guards goes and gets the apostles and brings them before the Sanhedrin. The captain was a man of high standing. In 66, the captain's name was Eliazer and he would be proclaimed Messiah by the Essene Teacher of Righteousness at the beginning of the Jewish Revolt. It was not a small position. The captain brings the apostles carefully before the Sanhedrin avoiding a big show of force or treating the apostles roughly because of the people. If the whole church was gathered or even half, and there were more people who had come to be healed and listen to their teaching the crowd must have numbered in the several thousands. It could have gotten ugly very quickly so the captain and his guards are very careful how they treat the apostles and how they persuade them to come with them to the Sanhedrin. The apostles for their part are not stupid. They know what going with the guards means. Yet they go. They are not to be disrespectful to the given authority of their people. Plus they may have allies in the full Sanhedrin if Joseph and Nicodemus are still there. At the moment it is the Sadducees who are vehemently opposed to their teaching and healing in the temple because they are proclaiming the resurrection. The Pharisees might be more open to them teaching as they were when Paul made his defense before the Council.

5:27-32 - The High Priest questions the apostles before the whole council. He claims they have openly disobeyed their direct orders not to teach in this name. He can't even say the name of Jesus. He says you continue to teach and are even trying to make us, your leaders, guilty of this man's blood! He accuses the apostles of trying to pin Jesus' death on the Sanhedrin, which of course they were!

Peter again functioning as spokesperson says we must obey God and not men. Then he proceeds, or all of them do, as Luke says Peter and all the apostles replied, to share a mini-version of the gospel. God raised Jesus from the dead whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. That would mean according to the Law he was cursed of God. How then in the Sanhedrin's eyes could God raise him from the dead or as Peter now claims exalt him as Prince and Savior of the people? What's more he claims that forgiveness of sins is now available to all of Israel through this cursed man whom God raised who is Messiah! Then the apostles claim they are witnesses of all of this and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him, meaning the apostles and not the Sanhedrin! Peter is saying the Messianic Age has dawned because Jesus the crucified, cursed Messiah has sent the Holy Spirit on all who believe in him. He accuses the Sanhedrin of being unbelievers and void of the Holy Spirit of God. These are the elders of the people and their High Priest!

One can see how the way in which Peter phrases the gospel message would have incensed the Sanhedrin. Jesus was cursed because he had been crucified. Peter doesn't deny this he relishes in it. Their claim of God raising Jesus they must view as false because otherwise Jesus would be the Messiah and the curse would somehow be reversed. You can see the seeds of Saul's vehement opposition to the gospel here. These men had to be stopped!

5:33-39 - When the Sanhedrin hear the apostles' words about Jesus they are furious and want to kill them. The problem is they are in the same trap as they were with Jesus and Pilate. Unless they want to disobey the Roman authorities and stone the apostles themselves they can't put them to death on their own authority. Furthermore things are even more complicated now because of their large following in the city. What would the church do if they tried to execute the apostles? This isn't one man like Jesus, these are twelve or eleven.

It is at this moment that Gamaliel stands up to address the Council. He is a leading Pharisee rabbi and the teacher of Saul of Tarsus. Was Saul there that day? Did he learn what had happened later from his mentor? It is possible that Saul/Paul is Luke's source for Gamaliel's speech. Gamaliel has great gravitas among all the elders even the priests and Sadducees. He cautions them to be careful how they deal with these men. Basically he says do nothing; be patient and see whether this movement is really of God or not. He gives two examples in recent history of false Messiahs who gathered a following but were killed and their followers scattered. Gamaliel says let these men go. If their cause is human in origin; meaning if Jesus is a false Messiah, which all of them present believed (except Nicodemus and Joseph if they were present that day) their cause will fail. If he is not a false Messiah, which no one believed, then we will find ourselves opposing God himself! Gamaliel counsels them to wait patiently. He feeds their sure knowledge that Jesus was not the Messiah and reasons that if their premise is true, which they all knew it to be, then this movement will pass away and we won't have to worry about it in a few months. He tells them to calm down and be patient. They agree and cooler heads prevail.

Theudas and Judas the Galilean we know nothing further about. Gamaliel claims Judas appeared in the days of the census. Is this Augustus' census of *Luke 2*? We don't know. There were other censuses that the emperors took in order to tax the people. There were many false Messiahs who rose up around Herod the Great's death, at a time when Roman authority was in flux and Judea in turmoil. The fact is there would be many more stirred up by the Zealots and hatred of the Romans who would arise right up until the Jewish Revolt in 66. Gamaliel had history on his side and the fact that all these false Messiahs had ended up dead, usually killed by the Romans. He is the model of the patient statesman counseling caution, which in the end would have appealed to the conservative Sadducees who held the majority in the Council. No need to rock the boat and stir up the Romans. Did Saul agree with his teacher? Eventually he parts ways with his mentor and violently opposes the Christians.

5:40-42 - Gamaliel's speech causes cooler heads to prevail in the Council and they have the apostles flogged, order them again not to speak in Jesus' name and release them. The flogging would have been the 39 lashes. It would have been Jewish in style, a leather whip and not the cat of nine tails the Romans used on Jesus that tore his back to shreds. The flogging is a warning to cause the apostles to obey or something worse will happen. They see it as a cause for rejoicing because they were counted worthy of suffering for the name of their master! I don't think that is the response the Sanhedrin was looking for! In fact it did not have the desired effect. Day after

day the apostles were teaching in the temple courts and from house to house. They didn't stop proclaiming the good news of Jesus! What was the Sanhedrin going to do with these men?

The pattern of the apostles' teaching, large groups in the temple courts and small groups in homes, is first seen in *Acts 2:42-47*. It was the pattern of the early church and is a template for how we should preach and teach also.

Chapter 6:

6:1 - As the church grew it began to experience the problems that come with growth. Needs are too great for current structures and procedures to handle so something has to change and be adjusted. In this case the Hellenistic or Grecian Jews, those that were from outside Judea and spoke Greek as their native language began to outnumber the Hebrew or Aramaic Jews of Judea. The Hellenistic widows were not being cared for in the same way as the Judean widows and people began to complain. There was a daily distribution of food for the widows and the Hellenistic Jewish widows were not being fed properly. This distribution must have been one of the programs the apostles and elders instituted from the sharing of property and goods. Something needed to be done as the current system was being overwhelmed.

6:2-4 - The apostles gathered the church together and outlined the problem. Here is a pinch point in the ministry of the apostles just like Jesus had reached a pinch point in Capernaum over healing vs. preaching. It was important for the church to care for its widows. But it was most important for the apostles to preach and teach the Word and be devoted to prayer for the church and their mission. They framed it as neglecting the ministry of the Word in order to wait at tables. The verb wait at tables is *diakoneo*, which literally does mean wait at tables or more generally serve. We get the word deacons from this verb and its noun form. Many have said from this that the Seven who are set aside by the apostles were therefore the first deacons. They are tasked with taking care of the widows but are shown doing evangelistic preaching instead. It is unclear whether some of them preached the gospel and some cared for the widows or whether they all preached and no one cared for the widows. There is no evidence that another controversy arose because the Seven weren't doing their job. The apostles used this pinch point to focus on what was most important rather than an urgent need that would keep them from doing what they needed to do most for the sake of the gospel. They kept the big picture in mind rather than focus on the immediate need and leadership problem. That is a great lesson for us and for me personally in my ministry. What can I do that no one else can do?

The apostles come up with a brilliant plan. They speak to the congregation and ask them to choose seven men from among them all who are known to be full of the Holy Spirit, which is the character side, and of wisdom, which is the practical side. Then they declare that the apostles would delegate the care of the widows and the distribution over to them so that they can devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer. They invite the congregation to be part of the solution. They set out what is to be done but then allow the congregation to choose the people who will do it. They don't hold meetings and try and discern all together what is to be done but they give the congregation a significant part in the decision, namely choosing who will manage the distribution so that it is fair.

6:5-6 – The apostles' proposal pleased the church and they chose seven: Stephen, whom Luke describes as full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte from Antioch. The Seven all have Greek names and were probably chosen by

the majority Hellenistic Jews with support from the Judean Jews. It was a great way to keep the peace. They were given both the responsibility and the authority by the apostles to take care of their own widows and make sure everything was fair. Nicolas was a proselyte from Antioch and may have been one of the people who went north when Saul's persecution started and witnessed to Gentiles in Antioch.

The congregation nominated these seven and the apostles ordained them to their new role. Ordination was the public recognition by those in authority and leadership, namely the apostles, that these seven were set aside for their work and were given responsibility and authority to carry it out. The laying on of hands was a symbol of being set aside to do this work with the blessing of the leaders and the Holy Spirit to do it. As Paul tells Timothy in *1 Timothy* 5:22, it should not be done lightly!

6:7 - Luke reports that the result of the apostles expanding the leadership of the church and delegating important tasks was the Word of God spread and the number of disciples increased rapidly. The needs of the community were taken care of and just as importantly the apostles were now free to devote all their energy and effort to preaching the gospel, teaching the Word and prayer. Luke says that a large number of priests became followers of Jesus the Messiah. These were potentially Sadducees or at least priests who were under Sadduceean authority and direction. This is a remarkable statement because it demonstrates a profound shift in the thinking of at least some of the priestly class. Perhaps it had taken place when the apostles were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin or it may have been their teaching and healing in the temple courts where many priests could not ignore what was happening right before their eyes! Plus as Luke will show in the next several chapters the Seven also evangelize and are used by God to move the church outside of Jerusalem into Judea and beyond to Samaria. The catalyst for that missionary movement is the opposition and persecution of a young rabbi among the Hellenistic Pharisees; Saul of Tarsus. The Holy Spirit is about to move in a new way and take the church out of its comfort zone in Jerusalem.

6:8-10 - Stephen does signs and wonders like the apostles were doing. He is full of grace and the Holy Spirit. Luke describes the natural consequences of Stephen being a man of faith and full of the Spirit. This is what people like Stephen do. The thing to note here however is that signs and wonders were not exclusive to the apostles. They were not exclusively a sign to prove someone's apostleship. If they were Stephen would have been named an apostle but Luke never refers to him as such. He is included into the company of the Seven not the Twelve. This counteracts the John MacArthur argument that miracles were simply to validate the apostles in the early church.

Opposition arises from the Synagogue of the Freedmen. The Greek word is a loan word from Latin, *libertinon*, liberty. Philo says the Synagogue of the Freedmen was founded by a group of prisoners captured by Pompeii when he conquered Jerusalem who were transported to Rome and later freed. They made their home in Rome and organized a synagogue there. The problem here is the Greek words can mean Synagogue of the Freedmen *AND* Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia, or it can mean Synagogue of the Freedmen, made up of Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia. If there is any connection to the Libertine Synagogue in Rome it is possible these were descendants of the original prisoners Pompeii captured who then settled in the eastern Mediterranean and finally Jerusalem. It is more likely that an alternative meaning of *libertinon* needs to be used which would mean these were freed slaves or descendants of freed slaves and this has nothing to do with descendants of the prisoners of

Pompeii. The problem with that is the Latin loan word which seems odd for Luke to use here if he was not referring to a group with which Theophilus as a Roman official might have been familiar.

What is clear is that these Hellenistic Jews opposed Stephen. Some of them were from Cilicia. Was Saul among them? The name Freedmen could imply that these are Jews who had been slaves and had purchased their freedom or been freed. Paul may have known them but there is no evidence that he was ever a slave or his father had been a slave. If Luke is purposefully using *libertinon* as a loan word for the title of the synagogue and Saul was a part of it, the most likely explanation is that the freedmen were descendants of the prisoners of Pompeii and that they had more than one chapter of the Synagogue of the Freedmen around the empire. That however is only supposition. If Saul was part of this synagogue and was arguing with Stephen over Jesus as the Messiah, it makes sense that he was present at his stoning. It also makes sense because he was under the mentorship of Gamaliel, the famous Pharisee rabbi, who was a member of the Sanhedrin and had spoken to them about leaving the followers of Jesus alone, allowing them to die out. Saul, in his zeal, couldn't do that, especially since Luke notes Stephen continually confounded their counter-arguments with his wisdom from the Spirit. It must have incensed Saul!

6:11 - The solution the Freedmen came up with to silence Stephen was to resort to deception. They convinced several men to say they had heard Stephen speak blasphemy against Moses and God. Their hatred and anger towards Stephen led them to violate the very Law of Moses they held so dear. They were willing to bear false witness. It is doubtful that Saul was a part of this plot since in *Philippians* he says he was blameless as to the Law. One could hardly be blameless towards the Law of Moses if one had directly violated the 9th commandment not to bear false witness against someone. The Jews of the Freedmen were falling into the trap of being hypocrites just as Jesus had accused the Pharisees of being. It is possible that Hellenistic Pharisees like Saul were part of this synagogue. The bottom line is the end does not justify the means. They are doing to Stephen what the Sanhedrin did against Jesus in order to get rid of him. They had a good example to follow.

6:12-15 - They stir up the people, the elders and teachers of the Law. This probably means many of the Pharisees and it is representatives of the Pharisees on the Council that bring up charges against Stephen in the Sanhedrin. Notice how their false witnesses testify against Stephen. He never stops speaking against the temple and the Law. He claims this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the temple and change the customs Moses gave us. Those are not necessarily Pharisee arguments but are designed to persuade the Sadducees to join with them in opposition to Stephen. They appeal to things the Sadducees would have been passionate about, the Law of Moses and the temple.

The irony of the false witness is there is some grain of truth in it. Jesus had come to change the way people related to the Law and do away with the temple sacrifices and all the holiness rules surrounding the temple and its rituals. He had come to fulfill the Law not abolish it but in so doing as *Hebrews* argues, many of the things the Jews held dear no longer applied. Jesus will replace the temple built by Herod out of stone with a living temple of his church built from human hearts that follow him. And though Luke does not report it the temple will be destroyed by the Romans and everything that the Sadducees fear will come to pass. The New Testament hints at the fact that the reason God allows the temple to be destroyed and the Jews to

go back into slavery and captivity again is because they have rejected God's Messiah, this same Jesus of Nazareth whom Stephen proclaims!

Everyone in the Sanhedrin looks intently at Stephen and the most prominent thing they notice right away is his demeanor, his look. The Holy Spirit is so powerful in him that even his physical demeanor is angelic. I would take that to mean that he has a sense of holiness, peace and joy on his face that they could not account for. Luke is showing us that there was no moral cause for their killing Stephen. He was holy and blameless before God and is martyred because of their hatred and stubbornness just like many of the prophets were killed. In the end Stephen will fulfill Jesus' last Beatitude, that we are blessed when people persecute us for his name's sake.

Chapter 7:

7:1-8 - The high priest asks Stephen to defend himself. There are many parallels with Jesus and his death in the martyrdom of Stephen with one huge difference. Stephen defends himself before the Sanhedrin and tries to make his case that the Jewish leaders have rejected their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. He does so by recounting their history which they all knew. Stephen will give that history a different twist, especially when he refers to Moses' prophecy of a prophet like him that the people need to hear and obey.

Stephen begins his recounting of Israel's history with Abraham and the patriarchs. In *verse 4* he says, "*God sent him to this land where you are now living.*" The "*you are now living*" implies Judea was not Stephen's native home. As a Hellenistic Jew he was probably born and raised elsewhere. We have no way of knowing where that was. The only connection at all is the Synagogue of the Freedmen, who had Jews from North Africa, Egypt, Cilicia and Asia Province in their synagogue. It is possible since Stephen spent time debating the Hellenistic Jews in that synagogue that he was from one of those countries, but that is only speculation.

7:9-16 - Stephen's summary of Israel's history is undoubtedly shaped by his Hellenistic Jewish roots. That may be the reason why he gives Shechem as the burial site of Joseph and the patriarchs. From the references in *Genesis* and *Joshua 24*, it appears Stephen mixes two traditions together. Abraham buys the cave of Machpelah at Hebron in which he buries Sarah and in which Abraham is later buried by Isaac and Ishmael. Jacob buys a field from the sons of Hamor at Shechem on which to pitch his tent. That is also where Joshua buries Joseph's bones after Israel conquers the land. It is possible that mixing the two traditions was common among Hellenistic Jews. Otherwise the problem becomes Stephen gets his history wrong! However no one on the Sanhedrin interrupts him to correct him or shouts him down because he didn't get his details correct. The mixing of the traditions seems a better explanation to me than Stephen makes a mistake in his story-telling because the Holy Spirit was inspiring him at this moment and if he makes an historical mistake that presents problems with the idea of inspiration. A final more remote possibility for the discrepancy is that Luke reports the tradition wrong, but Luke is such a careful historian and researcher that possibility seems extremely unlikely. No matter what the reason, Stephen's historical mistake before the Sanhedrin presents problems for the interpreter. However, the Spirit inspired Luke to write what he did, and here is a place where Scripture interprets Scripture. The Old Testament accounts are clear. It is Stephen who gets his details wrong or mixes two traditions. In the end it does not change the meaning or result of Stephen's defense before the Sanhedrin. He is not stoned because he made a mistake over where the Cave of Machpelah was. He is stoned because he accuses the Jewish elders of being stiff-necked and rejecting their Messiah, Jesus!

7:17-22 - Stephen now turns to Moses and the need for God to send him to the people of Israel and rescue them from slavery. In verse 22 he states that Moses was educated in all the wisdom of Egypt and was powerful in speech and action. Yet Moses claimed he stuttered in *Exodus 3* and had a speech impediment. He begged God not to send him to Egypt because he did not speak well. Here is another place where Stephen deviates from the record in the Scriptures. Is this one, like the mixing of the traditions of where Abraham was buried in verse 16, a Hellenistic Jewish tradition that Stephen follows that was current at the time or is this something that Stephen himself changes? Is this an acceptable difference when one is reciting community tradition as is the case in the gospels with Jesus' saying or actions? How does one let Scripture interpret Scripture here? When there is a discrepancy we normally default to the New Testament understanding as shedding light on the Old Testament text. We especially do that with Jesus' words. However, here I think it needs to be the other way around. I think we need to give priority to *Genesis* and *Exodus* and see Stephen's speech as interpreting those texts for his own ends here before the Sanhedrin. Stephen is however correct, Moses was given every opportunity for education and training in Egypt and God used that. He became powerful in action and later in speech as well. One possibility here is that Stephen is interpreting the *Exodus* account of Moses' confession of a speech impediment as an excuse by Moses of something that was not entirely true in order to get God to leave him alone. The record of the Torah is that Moses was powerful in speech and that except for one or two times Aaron never really served as Moses' mouthpiece. Moses spoke for God himself without any help. In that sense he was powerful in speech and action. After looking at the passage from the later parts of the Torah one could see how Stephen's interpretation can stand. In that case this verse is not near as problematic as verse 16 and the mixing of the burial traditions of the Patriarchs.

7:23-36 - Stephen tells the story of Moses, probably reflecting the Hellenistic Jewish tradition that he had learned. How different was this from the Judean Jews on the Sanhedrin? How much theological conflict was there between the two traditions? It is difficult to know. Stephen's beliefs mirror those of the Pharisees far more than the Sadducees, especially his belief in angels. That puts his theology in immediate opposition to the majority Sadducee party which controlled the high priesthood. Stephen agrees with later Jewish tradition that so emphasized God's transcendence that God revealing himself to Moses in the burning bush became the angel of the Lord and then an angel rather than God directly. The Law was said to have been given to Moses by angels rather than by direct revelation from God. I don't think the Sadducees agreed with this. Stephen's polemic against the Sanhedrin angered them all but his interpretation of Israel's history was decidedly skewed toward the Pharisees' version because of his Hellenistic background. I wonder whether the anger of the majority of the Sanhedrin was building over the whole of Stephen's speech much greater than I anticipated because Stephen was expounding the Pharisees' position over against the Sadducees'? We see later in *Acts* how Paul exploits that difference and tension which was always lying just below the surface.

7:37-43 - Stephen quotes first from the Pentateuch and *Deuteronomy* about the prophet like Moses God will send to the people. This is a veiled reference to Jesus who is the prophet like Moses. If the Sadducees are looking for the Messiah then the prophet like Moses is the greatest prophecy of the Messiah for them. The apostles through Peter in their preaching have already said Jesus is that prophet in *Acts 3*. If the Sanhedrin have been paying attention to the apostles' preaching they would have known this claim.

Stephen indicts Israel for disobeying Moses in the desert and building the calf idol which became the symbol for the idolatry of the nation, the ultimate reason God sent them into exile in Babylon. Stephen says our fathers refused to obey Moses rather than saying they refused to obey God. It is a curious phrase and may be a way to speak directly to both groups in the Sanhedrin who greatly revered Moses as the ultimate prophet of God. He was the center of their religion. Plus the false witnesses had said Stephen spoke against Moses and his position at the pinnacle of the Jewish faith. Stephen reinforces Moses' position in Israel's history in his speech.

However, Stephen now quotes from *Amos*, one of the prophetic books the Sadducees did not accept as Scripture but the Pharisees did. It is from *Amos 5:27* and speaks of Israel's continual idolatry as the reason God sent Israel into exile. *Amos* says into exile beyond Damascus, but Stephen edits the quote to say beyond Babylon. Hellenistic Jews were not afraid to quote or slightly change Scripture to serve their ends. You see Paul doing the same thing, especially stringing parts of quotes together as proof-texts for his point. Quoting *Amos* would have been acceptable for the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin but would have irritated the Sadducees. It seems Stephen is playing one side off against each other in the Council. Is that by design or by accident? I have to think it is by design in order to divide them as he is guided by the Holy Spirit. Did Stephen know he was dead no matter what he said? Is he trying to push the Council to kill him? I don't think so but it makes one wonder.

7:44-53 - Stephen now moves to the climax of his defense. He talks of the tabernacle which became the temple under Solomon. The design for the tabernacle was received by Moses directly from God. That design Solomon used for the temple. The temple was the center of the Sadducees religion and power. Stephen then quotes from *Isaiah 61*, another prophet, about God not dwelling in a house made by men because heaven is his throne and the earth his footstool.

He then moves to indict the whole Sanhedrin as leaders who are just like their fathers, always resisting the Holy Spirit and persecuting the prophets. They killed the prophets who predicted the coming of the Righteous One, namely the Messiah, and you betrayed and murdered him! You are the ones who received the Law from God through the angels but have not obeyed it! Stephen basically accuses the Sanhedrin, the elders of Israel, of being just like their ancestors, idolatrous and disobedient to God. Their hearts are so far from God they rejected and killed God's Messiah that he sent to them to bring them back to God and save them!

Stephen's speech is one of the longest Luke quotes in *Acts*. Why? Perhaps it is because it summarizes Israel's history and idolatry and was useful for Luke to give to Theophilus and his readers as an overview of the important points in Israel's history. It is also curious in that Stephen's demeanor Luke says is almost angelic in nature, which I take to mean gentle and loving, yet his speech is anything but gentle. It is in your face and almost angry, like one of the prophets of Israel. But at his death Stephen is forgiving and gentle again. He is a curious mix of fiery prophet and gentle saint. One needs to remember as well that Stephen's speech is given to the Sanhedrin, the elders of Israel who had condemned Jesus their Messiah to death. It is not given to the crowds at the temple or the pilgrims who came for Pentecost. That may be one reason Stephen is more pointed in his speech.

7:54-60 - When Stephen finishes the whole Sanhedrin is furious at him, Pharisee and Sadducee alike. But Stephen, filled with the Spirit, has a vision of heaven and God's throne. He says he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God and he says he sees the Son of Man standing at

God's right hand. It is this vision of Jesus that pushes the Sanhedrin over the edge into violence. It is exactly the scene that Jesus had told them during his trial that they would see.

The elders of Israel fly into such a rage that they become a mob bent on violence against Stephen. They yell at the top of their voices, drag Stephen out of the Council chambers, and out of the city where they begin to stone him to death. The gospels report that the Sanhedrin had religious and civil authority to govern the affairs of Judea and the Jews in the region, but not capital authority to execute prisoners. They do not take Stephen before Pilate demanding his execution. Instead they act as a mob and murder him. Other traditions report that because Jerusalem was a temple city in matters of defending the temple they could exercise capital punishment which they did here. In Jesus' case they couldn't get their false witnesses to agree about destroying the temple and so the High Priest gets Jesus to admit to blasphemy and they turn that into a charge of sedition before Pilate. In Stephen's case they are in such a rage they don't even vote on a verdict, they simply grab him, take him out of the city and stone him to death. Tradition says the gate they took him to was the Lion's Gate, whether that is correct or not is debatable.

Luke notes that those who stoned Stephen placed their clothes, meaning outer robes, at the feet of a young man named Saul. This is the first mention Luke gives of his friend. At this point he would have been a disciple of Gamaliel, the leading Pharisee rabbi of the Council. Was he there for the whole proceeding? We can assume that but we don't know. Had he been present when Stephen debated the Hellenistic Jews at the Synagogue of the Freedmen? It is possible but again, we do not know. There are tantalizing hints that Saul was one of those who was opposing Stephen and he was there that day agreeing with his execution because he saw Stephen and the movement he represented as dangerous to the faith of Israel and something to be stamped out. Some liberal scholars have tried to link Saul's complicity in the murder of Stephen and later guilt he felt over that act as reasons for why he turned to the Lord Jesus. That viewpoint totally ignores Paul's own testimony but it is a convenient alternative argument to the clear truth that the risen Jesus met Saul on the Damascus Road and changed him. It allows them to give an explanation other than the resurrection of Jesus, a miracle they cannot believe!

While the elders of Israel are stoning Stephen in anger Stephen echoes Jesus' first and last prayers on the cross. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit is like, Father into your hands I commit my Spirit. Lord, do not hold this sin against them is like, Father forgive them they don't know what they're doing. Stephen even with his last breath holds up Jesus as Lord and Christ. Even in their anger what must the Sanhedrin have been thinking? Whence came this faith and grace to meet death in such a way? Why is this man persisting in this lie that Jesus is the Messiah? Did some in the Sanhedrin later regret their rage and murder or did they continue to justify it? Were there repercussions with Pilate or did they keep their deed hidden? Or did Pilate find out but when he realized it was over a matter of Jewish religion and the temple decide that he didn't want to get involved? How did all this play out in the chief priests allowing Saul to begin a general persecution of the church? The whole incident raises a host of historical questions that don't have easy answers!

Chapter 8:

8:1-3 - Saul approved of Stephen's stoning and held the witnesses' cloaks, but he did not cast a stone. Persecution breaks out in Jerusalem against the church as a result of the stoning of Stephen and his trial before the Sanhedrin. Believers are scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. The Holy Spirit uses the persecution to move the church outside Jerusalem. Luke says many

leave the city but the apostles do not. Why don't the apostles leave? Is it fear or stubbornness, or did the Holy Spirit direct them to stay? We don't know. At this early date it was the Hellenistic Jewish Christians who spread the gospel not the Eleven. Philip is one of the Seven; a second man of the Seven that God uses in a mighty way.

Within Hellenistic Judaism there was a stronger missionary theology than the Judaism that dominated Jerusalem. That was centered in the temple and was much more conservative. But in the wider Hellenistic world Gentile proselytes were present, and while they were not common they were well known. Plus, in many synagogues outside of Jerusalem in the Hellenistic world there were Gentile God-fearers who worshipped and learned about the religion of Israel. Thus the Hellenistic Christian Jews were by nature more open to expanding the gospel beyond Jerusalem to first the Samaritans and later the Gentiles than were the apostles and Judean Jewish Christians. Even though the apostles had Jesus' command to move out and make disciples of all nations it took a general persecution and other people spreading the gospel for them to see that the time had come to move beyond Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.

It is possible that Saul, being a Hellenistic Jew himself, despite being trained by Gamaliel in Jerusalem, saw this missionary undercurrent that was present in the Hellenistic Jewish Christians and knew that the movement had to be stamped out now before it gained momentum beyond Jerusalem and spread. Saul saw the followers of Jesus as a grave threat to his Jewish faith. They were worshipping and proclaiming a false Messiah! So he set out to destroy the church. He arrested many, both men and women and dragged them off to prison. The prison and the authority to arrest them would have been tied to the High Priest and the Sanhedrin. The Romans would not have seen the Christians as a threat as yet but would have left this matter in the hands of the Sanhedrin as a Jewish religious matter. In the case of religious disputes the Romans gave the Sanhedrin wide latitude to govern Jewish affairs; partly because they didn't understand Jewish religion and the Jews' passion about it and partly because in their eyes it didn't matter as long as the Jews obeyed Roman authority. Ideas like blasphemy didn't register with Pilate and other Roman officials. Saul was therefore free to arrest and put people in the Sanhedrin's prison.

8:4-8 - Philip, one of the Seven is among those who are forced to flee Jerusalem. He goes to Samaria on his own and begins to preach the gospel to the Samaritans. Why wouldn't he? Jesus had commanded them to preach to the nations. He had said they would receive power to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. Philip knew the origins of the Samaritans and their syncretistic religion of Yahweh. Yet Philip, as a Hellenistic Jew from somewhere other than Judea, almost certainly did not feel the same visceral prejudice toward the Samaritans that the Judean Jews did. He had not experienced the hatred they felt toward the Samaritans nor the Samaritans toward the Jews. He was a natural candidate for the person the Holy Spirit chose to preach the gospel to the Samaritans. Jesus had ministered to them. The apostles were going to need a nudge to do the same. The Holy Spirit uses Philip to give that nudge.

He starts proclaiming the gospel and also does many signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit working through him. Many believe and are baptized. Great joy spreads through the city, which is a mark of the gospel! People are delivered from evil spirits and many are healed. This is the same kind of ministry that Jesus did among them! Also here is another case where someone other than the apostles is performing signs and wonders. They are present with Philip to validate his preaching of the gospel, just as they were with the apostles.

8:9-13 - Luke introduces Simon the magician or sorcerer. People claimed he had great power and followed him and were amazed at his magic. Simon's power was counterfeit but Philip's power was from the Holy Spirit. Simon could recognize real power when he saw it and followed Philip around just as people had followed Simon around amazed at what Philip could do.

Philip was performing many signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit. These were probably healings and casting out of demons. Was Simon's power demonic or was it entirely fake? It is difficult to tell. What is clear is that Philip's miracles done through the power of God attracted a large following. The Samaritans had enough paganism mixed into their religion of Yahweh that they could easily be led astray by Simon's sorcery or show of power. When Philip came with genuine power from God, they listened to what he had to say and believed. Many believed and were baptized, including Simon! That must have made a great impression on the population because people had followed Simon but now they were following Philip. Luke comments both men and women were baptized. Why does he say this? Perhaps to once again emphasize that faith in Jesus as Lord and Messiah has no sexual barriers. The old Jewish segregation of men and women is gone.

Philip does signs and wonders and preaches the gospel. People believe and are baptized but there is a problem. The Holy Spirit has not come on any of the Samaritans.

8:14-17 - The apostles hear about what is happening with Philip in Samaria and send Peter and John to him. There was a problem because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them and they had believed and been baptized. Luke says "*they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.*" That should have been enough!

Pentecostals argue that this proves the fullness of the Holy Spirit or the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second blessing. They argue the delay in the coming of the Spirit is normative for the church. The Samaritans had only been baptized in water but not in the Holy Spirit. There are a great many problems with this view which ignores the historical and racial context of what was happening in Samaria. If the baptism in the Holy Spirit was a second blessing, why didn't Philip simply lay hands on the new Samaritan believers so they could receive the Spirit? Why was it necessary for Peter and John to come? If the baptism of the Holy Spirit required apostolic laying on of hands then we should all be Catholic and talk about apostolic succession. That is clearly not the case because Gentile converts later in *Acts* don't require apostolic laying on of hands. There were Christians in Rome by the time Paul writes to the church that did not have an apostle to lay hands on them! And if the laying on of hands to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit is normative why does the Holy Spirit come upon Cornelius and his family before Peter can even baptize them in water and lay his hands on them in *Acts 10*? It is the Holy Spirit himself who is changing up the way he comes. Clearly here in Samaria Philip and the apostles expected the Holy Spirit to come when people received Christ and were baptized in his name. Something was wrong which is why Peter and John go to Samaria.

Why then the delay? The most likely explanation is if the Holy Spirit had come with Philip's preaching and the Samaritan's faith the ancient prejudice would not have been broken in the Jerusalem church. The Samaritans would have always been second class Christians. Didn't James and John want to call fire down from heaven on a Samaritan village because they had not offered Jesus and the disciples hospitality? The apostles were not above the ancient hatred. There was much for the Holy Spirit to overcome. Jesus had told them they were to preach the gospel to the Samaritans but these are the first non-Jewish followers of Jesus as the Messiah. The issue here is whether God would accept the Samaritans as full disciples and believers just as he had the

Jews. When Peter and John come to Samaria and lay hands on those who have been baptized in Jesus' name they receive the Holy Spirit. There could be no doubt the Samaritan believers had the Spirit just like the apostles and the Jewish believers. Further the Spirit had used Peter and John, the two lead apostles in Samaria. The Jerusalem church couldn't say it was just Philip, one of the Seven. They had to acknowledge it was Peter and John, two of the Twelve and the Samaritans are full Christians just like the Jews. The Holy Spirit had very specific reasons linked to the historical-racial context to delay coming on the Samaritans. The circle was widening and the Spirit had to convince the apostles to accept the Samaritans. That is why he deviated from the norm of the preaching of the gospel, acceptance of Jesus by faith, and baptism in his name bringing the Holy Spirit. That is the norm in the *Book of Acts*. Whenever the Spirit deviated from that norm he had very good reasons to do so.

The laying on of hands is an action in the Old Testament often linked to the Holy Spirit and endowing someone with blessing. Perhaps Peter and John couldn't think of anything else they could do to help the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit. It is unique to these circumstances and not normative for every circumstance in order to receive the Holy Spirit.

8:18-24 - Simon misinterprets what is happening and thinks the reception of the Holy Spirit comes through the laying on of hands. How did people know they had received the Holy Spirit? Pentecostal theologians say they spoke in tongues. The problem is Luke does not tell us. People could have spoken in tongues, or prophesied, or been filled with joy and praise. We don't know. To say they must have spoken in tongues and Luke doesn't say it because it was obvious is to read into the text what one wants it to say. We simply don't know how Peter, John and Simon knew people had received the Holy Spirit. Paul says the simple confessions of faith that Jesus is Lord and God is *Abba*, Father, are proof that the Spirit lives in us. How do we know people have received the Spirit today? It is a good question and the Bible does not give us a simple answer. The ultimate sign is the fruit of the Spirit growing in us and the character of Christ changing our character but that is a long-term sign not an immediate sign. Tongues certainly can be a sign but it can also be counterfeited, see *1 Corinthians 12:1-2*. We receive the Spirit by faith and perhaps that assurance of faith that the Spirit now lives in us is the best sign of his presence in our lives.

Simon mistakenly believes the Spirit comes through the laying on of hands. He offers Peter and John money for the power so that he can give the Holy Spirit to people. Simon mistook something that was descriptive for something that is prescriptive. Not understanding the Spirit's plan in the context of the Samaritans he jumped to the conclusion the Spirit was given through the laying on of hands. He is a brand new believer and so the Spirit has not had time to change much of his character. He sees this power as a great opportunity for self-promotion and to continue to have a following in Samaria. Why would people follow him now when they have seen the genuine miracles Philip had done and had received the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus and the apostles? Peter rebukes him sharply and tells him he has no part in this ministry. His heart is not right with God. Peter does not say you have no part in the gospel or in this faith but that he has no part in this ministry which I take to mean the apostolic ministry of Peter and John or the ministry of preaching the gospel that Philip had done. Peter rightly shows Simon one has to be called of God to preach the gospel. To preach the gospel for money and power is repulsive to God and sinful. Peter challenges Simon to repent of his wicked attitude and pray for the Lord's forgiveness because he could see that Simon's heart, though he is a believer in Jesus is not yet fully surrendered to him. He is still out for himself. Peter rebukes Simon sharply because he knows Simon has had a following in Samaria and he wants to protect Simon as a baby Christian

and protect the new church in Samaria. They don't need Simon trying to step into leadership in the new church of Samaria with a corrupt and wicked heart trying to preach the gospel for personal gain. Simon for his part sees his sin and begs Peter to pray to the Lord for him so that he will not fall under judgment. The judgment here I believe is the discipline of the Holy Spirit just like with Ananias and Sapphira. Luke indicates in the context that Simon is a believer in Jesus; the Holy Spirit just has much to change in him.

8:25 - Peter and John stay for a while and preach and teach the new Samaritan converts, establishing a church in Samaria. When it is time to return to Jerusalem they take the opportunity to preach to many of the Samaritan villages on the way home. Thus the gospel has now expanded from Jerusalem to Judea and now to Samaria. The church is no longer limited to just Jerusalem. It took a persecution and a unique set of circumstances to get the apostles out of Jerusalem to validate the spread of the gospel beyond the city and to more than just the Jews. The Holy Spirit has pushed them to take the first steps toward making Christianity more than a Jewish sect. The Spirit's plan is to change not only God's ancient people the Jews but to change the world through inviting even the Gentiles to faith in the Lord Jesus. Step by step the Spirit is working towards that goal. He will use even persecution to do so and he will use a persecutor. Saul's time is coming. First, however he will use Philip again, this time to call an Ethiopian proselyte to faith who will take the gospel to Africa.

8:26-29 - An angel of the Lord speaks to Philip, either in a dream or face to face, Luke does not say. He tells him to go south to the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza, which would mean the road that heads southeast out of the Judean Mountains to the coast and what is today the Gaza Strip. The road doesn't really pass through the Negev or the Sinai desert but it is possible that it was called the desert road because that is where it continues after it reaches Gaza. Philip is presumably still in Samaria with Peter and John so this is a long ways to go. Philip doesn't ask why, he simply obeys and starts out for the road.

Along the way he meets an Ethiopian eunuch, the treasurer of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia. The word for eunuch can mean someone who has been castrated and also someone who is a court official. In this context it could mean both. He has been in Jerusalem worshipping the Lord, probably at the temple. If however he was a castrated eunuch, he could not enter the temple courts but would have had to stay in the Court of the Gentiles or even further out. People who had been castrated were forbidden to enter the temple because they were seen as being damaged and unclean. It violated the holiness codes. Was the eunuch a God-fearer or a proselyte? Luke does not say. If he was a proselyte then he was a Gentile convert to Judaism. The problem is why would someone convert to Judaism who couldn't be circumcised and would be forbidden entrance to the temple? It makes more sense to see him as a God-fearer. If that is the case then he is the first Gentile convert to Christianity and not Cornelius and his family!

Traditionally Cornelius is seen as the first Gentile convert. The Ethiopian is probably a God-fearer who has come to the temple to worship as best he can. If he is the first Gentile convert, he is the first African to follow Christ and Cornelius becomes the first Greek or Latin speaking European to follow Jesus.

Philip happens upon the chariot carrying the eunuch as he is traveling toward Gaza. The Spirit prompts him to join the man riding in the chariot. God uses both an angel and the prompting of the Holy Spirit to guide Philip towards sharing the gospel with the Ethiopian. It is curious that even though Philip had the Holy Spirit living in him God still uses an angel. Perhaps

he does this to make sure Philip would not misinterpret the message. Sometimes the Spirit speaks to us in gentle ways in a thought or impression and if we are not listening we can miss what he is saying to us. God had orchestrated that Philip would meet the Ethiopian on the way to Gaza if he set out at a particular time. He was behind the whole incident but uses Philip as his instrument. That is still true today!

8:30-38 - Philip runs up to the chariot as it is going along and asks if the eunuch understands what he is reading. The man was reading out of the scroll of the prophet *Isaiah*. It is curious how he could read a scroll in a bouncing chariot but Luke reports that is what he was doing! How did Philip know it was *Isaiah*? We don't know. Perhaps the Spirit told him; again Luke does not say. Apparently the chariot wasn't going very fast because Philip was able to keep up with it on foot. Perhaps it was going slow so the eunuch could read his *Isaiah* scroll. Also, it is clear that the eunuch is not alone. He has at least a driver because the eunuch gives instructions for the chariot to stop and if he was alone he would have simply stopped it himself. We never learn what happens to the driver. It is possible he becomes the eunuch's first convert after he himself is converted. He would have been a captive audience all the way home to Ethiopia!

The eunuch is reading part of *Isaiah 53* and the prophecy of the Servant of God who dies for our sins. The Ethiopian is confused and asks Philip if *Isaiah* is talking about himself or someone else. The Spirit of God has set up this whole situation because Philip begins with *Isaiah 53* and tells him the good news of Jesus, the one who fulfills the prophet's words. The Old Testament points to Jesus and the early Christians frequently used the Bible as they witnessed, especially to Jews or people who were familiar with the Word of God. In this case the Bible is the one thing the eunuch has unrestricted access to. He can read and steady the Scriptures even if he could not fully enter and worship at the temple. He is rich enough and important enough to have an *Isaiah* scroll in his possession. That is what gives Philip the opening he needs to share the gospel. His conversation doesn't even start with chit chat, although Luke might have eliminated that part for the sake of his narrative.

They are traveling along in the chariot. The eunuch has invited Philip to join him in the chariot by this time. It is possible that though Luke uses the word chariot, this is not a war chariot like a two man chariot but more like a wagon with a palanquin-like cabin on the back. It would have been very crowded in the chariot otherwise. The Greek word can mean carriage or traveling chariot. That makes much more sense.

The gospel has its intended effect and when the Ethiopian sees water he asks if he may be baptized. Later manuscripts add the Ethiopian's confession of faith. Luke leaves the detail out but in this case it is safe to assume the eunuch confessed his faith in Jesus otherwise Philip would never have baptized him. The natural result of believing in Jesus is to be baptized. There was no hesitation or delay.

Think about the implications of this passage. The eunuch is at least a God-fearer, someone who believes in God, reads the Scriptures and is attracted to the religion of Israel. However, that same religion would have forbidden him access to its central shrine, the temple. He would always be considered second-class in Judaism no matter what he did. In some respects he was lower than a woman because even they had greater access to the temple than he did. He is almost certainly a black African and there may have been some prejudice towards him because of that as well. God used Philip to preach the gospel to him and introduce him to Jesus. Jesus will accept him as a full member of God's Kingdom even though the rabbis would not. He will go on his way back to Ethiopia and Africa and the gospel will spread through his efforts to

evangelize others. Even today the Ethiopian Coptic Church claims to be one of the oldest churches in the world and traces their beginnings back to the eunuch. God used Philip to convert the first Gentile just as he used Philip to convert the Samaritans. And just like the Samaritans God will use Peter to confirm that the Gentiles will also have a full share in the Kingdom of God. Peter will get the credit for converting the first Gentiles, namely Cornelius and his family, but Philip is the one who first expands the gospel beyond the Samaritans. It is not as well-known because his convert is an Ethiopian, an African and not a European. Even in Philip's day there was a prejudice against Africa and especially anything beyond Egypt. God however, has no such prejudices.

8:39-40 - Philip comes up out of the water with the Ethiopian and the Spirit suddenly takes him away. The Greek word means to snatch away, or take away forcefully. This is not a word used to describe Philip receiving a prompting from the Spirit, discussing it with the eunuch and taking his leave of him. The word means the Spirit of God took him away as soon as they came up out of the water. One moment Philip was there and the next moment he was not. The Ethiopian for his part goes on his way rejoicing and never sees Philip again! The fact that Philip never had a chance to disciple him may suggest the independent tradition of the Ethiopian Coptic Church. Its doctrines have been historically slightly different from the church in Europe and the Middle East. It also says if we have the Scriptures, even the Old Testament, and the Spirit we can be discipled!

Philip appears again at Azotus a town which must have been on the coast road or the King's Highway that ran from Gaza north to Caesarea and Tyre and Sidon. Philip travels about evangelizing because that is his call from the Spirit. He reaches Caesarea and finally settles there. It is interesting to note that God uses Peter to evangelize Cornelius and his family and not Philip even though Philip lives in Caesarea. The Spirit needed Peter's authority to break through the final circle of prejudice toward the Gentiles if the gospel was to spread to Asia, Greece and Rome.

Chapter 9:

9:1-2 - Luke now shifts his attention back to Saul of Tarsus and his persecution which had been the reason Philip had left Jerusalem and gone to Samaria. Saul is still trying to stamp out the Way which he sees as a direct threat to his Jewish faith. As a Pharisee and a trained rabbi he would have seen the implications of a crucified Messiah, which in his mind was an oxymoron. The stories of Jesus' resurrection and the testimony of the apostles and the martyr Stephen, Saul judged as fabrications because they violated what he knew of Scripture; someone hung on a tree was cursed of God. Therefore Jesus could not be the Messiah and therefore God did not raise him from the dead. From his point of view his logic was inescapable. His mentor and teacher Gamaliel had counseled the Sanhedrin to leave the followers of Jesus alone because if they were not of God the movement would fade away. If they were of God there would be no stopping it. Saul obviously disagreed with his master and did not follow his advice. Did he see a split in Judaism over Jesus if the Christians weren't stopped? It happened anyway!

Saul therefore tried to destroy the church as he says in *Galatians 1*. In the second telling of his testimony in *Acts 22* he says he pursued followers of the Way to their death, throwing men and women in prison. In his third telling of his testimony in *Acts 26* he says he voted against many Christians when they were on trial for their lives and voted for their execution. That implies Stephen was not the only Christian martyr Saul had a hand in killing. He testifies that he did everything he could to destroy the church, even going into various synagogues to punish

followers of Jesus and trying to force them to blaspheme and deny Christ. He was like a Gestapo agent and must have struck fear into any Christ-follower if he came to their synagogue. He says in *Acts 26* before Festus that he went to many foreign cities to try and arrest Christians. Damascus was simply one of those cities. We do not know the others but Tyre and Sidon, Phoenician cities where there would be Jews, would be candidates.

Saul had obtained letters from the High Priest in Jerusalem to the synagogues in Damascus to arrest followers of Jesus and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. This must have been under the authority of the High Priest to govern Jewish affairs and matters of religion. It appears that the Romans were convinced to look the other way as Saul arrested people outside Judea and brought them back to Jerusalem. As long as this didn't interrupt commerce or Roman order they probably didn't care. Plus the High Priest could always play the card that Pilate had ordered the leader of this sect, Jesus of Nazareth, crucified for sedition and treason. Saul's mission in Damascus was designed to stop the spread of the Way before it spread too far. Yet it was Saul's persecution that had already scattered the church into Judea and Samaria and at least as far as Damascus as evidenced by Ananias. Plus the Ethiopian's conversion shows the gospel moving into Africa, probably completely independent of Saul's knowledge. Paul was not taking his master Gamaliel's advice and despite his best efforts causing the movement to spread more rapidly than he had intended!

9:3-9 - As Saul is nearing Damascus he sees a light flash from heaven and he falls to the ground. The road to Damascus went up the Golan Heights near Mt. Hermon and then crossed over the pass down into Damascus. I am guessing they had already crossed the pass and were descending into Damascus when the Lord Jesus appears to Saul. The light throws Saul to the ground and is so bright he closes his eyes. It isn't until he tries to stand up that he realizes he can't see anything. Saul then hears a voice from heaven asking, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" Saul responds naturally with who are you Lord? I am not sure the *kurios* in his answer is you are my Lord, but more a show of respect. When a bright light knocks you down and you hear a voice from heaven you call it Lord until you can figure out what is going on! Did Saul think he was being confronted by an angel? I don't think in his wildest imagination he thought it was the Lord Jesus, but it was. Jesus answers his question; I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. In that phrase are the seeds of the church as the body of Christ on earth. Saul wasn't literally persecuting Jesus. As far as we know he never met him or saw him. He was persecuting Jesus' followers. Jesus so identifies with his disciples that he tells Saul when he persecutes his disciples he is persecuting him. In his telling of his testimony in *Acts 22* before the crowd in the temple courts Saul adds a question before Jesus' instructions to him as to what to do next. He asks, Lord what shall I do? Now his use of *kurios*, lord, is one of submission and devotion. It is in that moment that Saul submits his life to Jesus as Messiah. I don't think as yet he knew the implications of his decision or had yet truly figured out the theology of what was happening but the die was cast and from that moment on, Lord what do you want me to do, would be the singular question of his life.

The Lord Jesus tells him to get up and go into the city and you will be told what to do. Saul gets up but when he opens his eyes he realizes he is blind. The men, who were with him, hear the sound, meaning they hear the voice of the Lord and Saul speaking to him but they could see nothing. They didn't see the light. Jesus appears to Saul's eyes as a blinding light, in all his risen glory. He reveals himself to the other men with Saul by allowing them to hear his voice from heaven. What must they have been thinking? Were they fellow Pharisees with Saul?

Certainly they were his lieutenants. Some may have been from the priesthood, though it is more likely they were all Pharisees because of their theology. Priests were mostly Sadducees and would not have mixed well with Saul no matter how passionate they opposed followers of Jesus. Did they also have a conversion experience on the Damascus Road? When Saul is blinded what is going through their minds? Are they wondering what are we going to do? What about our mission? Who is Jesus? What is going to happen to Saul our leader? All of that and more must have been running through their thoughts as they helped Saul into Damascus. When they arrived at the city did they stay with officials or friends of the high priests or other people they knew in Damascus? We don't know, but it is fascinating to speculate about.

Saul is blind and for three days he doesn't eat or drink anything. My guess is he is praying because the Spirit tells Ananias he has seen a vision in his prayers. Is he waiting patiently? At this point I don't think so because Saul is not a patient man. The transformation of his character took some time! I think he is praying and asking God what do I do? I think he is thinking about Jesus' appearance to him and considering the implications. Jesus must be the Messiah because he is not dead but alive. I have seen him and he spoke to me. The blinding light was the risen, glorified Jesus and for the rest of his life Saul will claim to be the last of the apostles to have seen the risen Jesus. He is now a witness to Jesus' resurrection just like the Twelve and the other disciples at Pentecost. Further if God raised Jesus from the dead, which it is obvious he did, then Jesus' death was also part of God's plan. Jesus was cursed on the cross because Saul knew the Law was not wrong. God raised him up which must mean that his curse was a curse for us. In that logical sequence are the seeds of Paul's theology of justification by faith and the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the world.

Saul is used to being in charge or in control. Blind and waiting for something to happen in Damascus he has never been more out of control in his life. What happens next I don't think Saul could have guessed.

9:10-16 - Jesus speaks to Ananias, a disciple in Damascus. He calls to him in a vision. He tells him to go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for Saul of Tarsus. Jesus knows Saul's address! He tells Ananias that Saul is praying and has had a vision of a man named Ananias come and lay hands on him and restore his sight. Ananias knows about Saul's mission and doesn't want anything to do with this man! I go there and he will arrest me and haul me off to Jerusalem! He has harmed your saints in Jerusalem! No way Lord! Ananias knows about his authority from the chief priests in Jerusalem to arrest Christ-followers. He is wondering if he will be safe if he goes to this man. Jesus tells Ananias to go because he has chosen Saul to preach his name to the Gentiles, their kings and the people of Israel. What must Ananias have thought at that moment? Gentiles, what is God doing? Then the Lord Jesus adds, I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. Was there any sense of justice in Ananias' mind at that moment? We don't know. I think Ananias is a godly man and he accepts the Lord's assignment and goes to Saul. The Lord doesn't send an angel to heal Saul; he sends a disciple. He sends an ordinary man who is now his brother in the Lord. It is one more piece to the puzzle of Paul's theology of the body of Christ. There would be many, many more in the years ahead.

9:17-19 - Ananias finds the address and goes into Judas' home. When he finds Saul, he places his hands on him and says, "*Brother Saul.*" That word must have shaken Saul to his core. Three days before if Saul had met Ananias he would have arrested him and maybe even killed him because

he saw him as his enemy and that God opposed him. In his zeal he thought he was doing God's work. Now that same man lays hands on him and calls him brother!

Saul had been fasting and praying for three days when Ananias comes to him. Saul had come to Damascus for the express purpose of arresting and maybe killing Ananias and other Christians which is why Ananias is reluctant to go to Straight Street! Now because of Jesus he is his brother. This was confirmation of the church as Christ's body and family. Those three days of praying must have given Saul growing insight into what had happened to him. It must have also been a time of great mourning and repentance for his sins of persecuting Jesus' body and church. That too the Lord is about to heal.

Ananias confirms it was the Lord Jesus who appeared to Saul on the road. Did that also confirm for the men with Saul what had happened and whom they had heard? Ananias says Jesus has sent me to you that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. At that moment something like scales falls from Saul's eyes and his eyesight is restored. What the scales were we don't know. Symbolically they are Saul's spiritual blindness to Jesus as Messiah being removed. Saul gets up and is baptized in the name of Jesus. He is forgiven and filled with the Holy Spirit! That also would have been a huge confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah because only the Messiah could give the Holy Spirit. In fact when the Spirit came upon him it must have been another huge shock to this zealous Pharisee. Prophecy and signs of the Kingdom were happening to him! Stephen's sermon was wringing true. All his life he had striven to be good enough and righteous enough through meticulously following the Law to be acceptable to God. Now in an instant all that is swept away and his sins are forgiven in the waters of his baptism. Jesus is Lord and Messiah and he brings forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals want to say Saul obviously spoke in tongues here. That is possible but I think the sign of the Spirit's presence in him that day was what he testifies to in *Romans 5. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* The transformation of Saul of Tarsus, Pharisee and persecutor of Christians, to Paul apostle to the Gentiles had begun.

9:19-22 - Saul spends time in Damascus recovering and also preaching in their synagogues that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus had told him he would preach the gospel and that is what he immediately sets out to do. Even though he has only been a believer just a few days Saul already has mustered formidable arguments as to why Jesus is the Messiah. The resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit are probably part of the signs Saul speaks about. I don't think he ignored the cross either. Saul's Pharisee schooling now was brought to bear upon the very position he had championed before, that Jesus couldn't be the Messiah because he was cursed of God. Now his powerful intellect and zeal was baffling the Jews in Damascus. They had no arguments in response to his case that Jesus was the Christ. Luke says he grew more and more powerful, which I take to mean more powerful in his preaching, teaching and apologetic arguments proving Jesus as the Son of God.

The most astonishing thing about him however was his transformation. The Jews of Damascus knew about his mission from the High Priest. It was not a secret. They could not understand how the man who had been a persecutor of people who followed Jesus could now be one of them! This is the greatest evidence of Jesus as Messiah, Saul's transformed life. Many scholars believe after the resurrection, the greatest proof that Jesus is alive is the transformation of Saul of Tarsus. The only thing that makes sense to explain what happened to him is exactly what Luke reports. The risen Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and changed his life.

9:23-25 - Saul spends many days in Damascus preaching and proving that Jesus is the Son of God and Messiah. Then Luke says, after many days had gone by the Jews conspired to kill him. We know from *Galatians 1:17-18* that Saul went into Arabia for around three years, probably to reflect and pray and try to figure out what God wanted him to do next. Arabia does not have to mean what we know today as Saudi Arabia. In Luke's time it simply means the Arabian Desert to the east of Damascus and Syria, and then all of the Arabian Peninsula. Where he went in Arabia Paul does not tell us. Undoubtedly it had to be some oasis because otherwise there is very little water. In a sense he went incognito, because for those several years he disappears off the map. Did he know of a place he could go or did the Spirit simply drive him out into the desert steppes among the nomads of the Arabian Desert? We don't know. What was he doing? We don't know either although it is reasonable to assume he was thinking and searching the Scriptures and trying to understand the implications of Jesus as Messiah and what it meant. It is possible that during this time he had some of the visions he speaks about in *2 Corinthians 11-12* although those could have come later when he was in Tarsus away from the disciples. We don't know. This could have been the time he received his revelation about the Lord's Supper which he speaks about in *1 Corinthians 11*. He says in *Galatians 1* that he received the gospel he preached directly by revelation from the Lord Jesus and not from any man. He says this to show that he did not speak to the apostles or learn from them until after he had spent the three years in Arabia.

After those three years he came back to Damascus. When he returned he started to gather followers. Did he found a Messianic Jewish synagogue, or begin to lead one that already existed? It is unclear but one or the other seems likely. Other Jews tried to kill him because they could not silence him any other way. Saul learned of their plan. These were people whom three years before would have been Saul's allies in his attempts to stamp out the Way of Jesus. Now they are his enemies. They keep watch on the city gates day and night to prevent Saul's escape. But his followers took him by night and lowered him through an opening in the wall down to the ground. Saul had escaped the trap. At that point he decides to go to Jerusalem and see the apostles.

9:26-27 - Saul comes to Jerusalem on his first visit which he also reports in *Galatians 1:18-24*. He tries to join the disciples but they are all afraid of him, not believing his story. This is three years after his persecution of the disciples and going to Damascus. Yet, who can blame them? Think of how much lifechange the Holy Spirit had to work in Saul. Here was a man whose zeal and intellect had led him to violence and even complicity in murder. He had been someone who through force tried to get Christ-followers to blaspheme and renounce Jesus as Messiah. He was so convinced of the rightness of his cause that he thought nothing of dragging people out of their homes and taking them to prison. The force of his personality was so great he had even convinced the High Priest to give him the letters to Damascus granting him authority to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem. These were people whose only crime was to proclaim Jesus as Messiah. They did not advocate violence, in fact they advocated the exact opposite; love. He had been trained under the greatest Pharisee rabbi of his day, Gamaliel, a man greatly respected in the Sanhedrin. A man whose direct counsel to the Sanhedrin Saul ignored, which put him at odds with his mentor. Furthermore his sharp mind and debating ability was difficult to match. Later years would prove he was one of the most brilliant minds among the Jewish people, born and raised in a Greek university city and educated by the greatest rabbi of his day in Jerusalem. Saul was a formidable adversary. No wonder the church still feared him!

"But Barnabas": those two little words speak volumes about the man. He is not always in the lead but is one of the great influencers in the entire New Testament. It is even doubtful

whether the New Testament as we know it would have been written without his leadership and influence. He truly is the Son of Encouragement! His great heart for the Lord leads him to listen to Saul's story. Barnabas is someone who is always ready to give a person a second chance or an opportunity to be heard. He must have heard Saul's story at some point or talked directly to him. He brings him before the apostles and tells them about Saul, how he had seen the risen Lord Jesus and that the Lord had spoken to him and what had happened in Damascus. He speaks for Saul and invites the apostles to listen to him. When they do they realize he truly has seen the risen Christ and is now one of them!

Saul stays with the disciples in Jerusalem and begins to talk to and debate the Greek Jews in the city. Was this the Synagogue of the Freedmen to which he had belonged before? Did some of those Hellenistic Jews know him? Luke doesn't tell us but that is certainly a possibility. Saul's arguments and skill in debating with the Hellenistic Jews are so great he quickly creates enemies among them. It is likely that what he had done in Damascus, prove that Jesus was Messiah and Son of God from the Scriptures; he now does in Jerusalem among the Hellenistic Jews. They are so incensed over him they try and kill him. Saul may be a changed man but his terrier personality still lacks wisdom. Luke implies that he doesn't know when to back off in a debate. He is not a subtle man and that leads often to his enemies losing face which creates shame which leads to retaliation.

9:28-29 - The apostles learn of the hatred and opposition against Saul. You can almost hear their debates about what to do with this guy! They know they have to get him out of town but where to send him. They settle on Tarsus, his home. That is a curious destination. They get him out of Judea all together. They don't send him to Galilee where he could learn from followers of Jesus who live there. They don't send him to Caesarea, the Roman capital, where Philip is. They can't send him back to Damascus because people have already tried to kill him there. It does not appear that the church in Antioch has begun as yet and there are no Gentile converts either. Sending him back to Tarsus means they were getting rid of him. What was he to do there? There is no evidence in Paul's letters or in *Acts* that he did anything! It is possible that the visions of *2 Corinthians 11-12* took place during Saul's time in Tarsus but we don't know. There might not have been any disciples of the Lord Jesus in Tarsus. Did Saul start a Messianic synagogue in his hometown? The Bible doesn't tell us. The apostle to the Gentiles was sent home to cool his heels and wait by the apostles. He had stirred up enough trouble and they got rid of him! He would wait another eight years until once again Barnabas stepped into his life. The Holy Spirit had much more work of transformation to do in him. He wasn't ready for what lay ahead. How frustrating it must have been, and how alone he must have felt. The most likely thing Saul did in his time in Tarsus is make tents and study the Scriptures. It is probably in Tarsus where his theology of Jesus as Lord comes to fruition. It is at home during those eight years of waiting that the Pharisee rabbi from the Greek university city bridges the gap in his thinking between the Jewish Messiah and the larger Greco-Roman world. I think it is in Tarsus where Saul will finalize his theology of justification by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ and the world would never be the same.

9:31 - The persecution that Saul had started against the church wanes. The believers enjoy a time of peace. During this time the church is strengthened throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. The gospel has spread among the Jews through the first three circles of *Acts 1:8*. The stage is set for the final circle, the Gentiles, to be breached. Luke's statement is ironic, in that as soon as the

disciples sent Saul to Tarsus things settled down. You can hear the collective "Whew!" from the whole church when Saul is out of the picture.

Even though Saul is the apostle to the Gentiles, if he had started Gentile churches they would never have been accepted as full Christians. It had to be Peter. Just as he and John had gone to Samaria and demonstrated that the Samaritans were full Christians with the Jews, so God will have Peter take the lead with the Gentiles. Plus Saul was not yet ready. Antioch had not been founded and Saul needed time to mature his theology and mature in Christ. Luke will now return to Peter and his mission among the Jews that will pave the way for him to be God's instrument to open the door for the Gentiles to come to Christ.

9:32-35 - Luke now turns to Peter's mission to the Jews. Later at the Apostolic Council in *Acts 15* it would be agreed that Peter would focus on preaching to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. They both preached to both groups but the focus of their apostolic ministry was different. Here Peter carries out his mission. The Holy Spirit would need to intervene again to expand the circle of the gospel to the Gentiles. Once again Peter as the Rock will be God's chosen instrument in spreading the gospel, this time even to the Gentiles.

Peter comes to the town of Lydda which is about ten miles to the southeast of Joppa, modern day Tel-Aviv. It was probably on the road between Jerusalem and Joppa, the ancient port of Israel. Peter goes to visit the saints there, meaning there was already a community of Christ-followers in Lydda. He meets a paralyzed man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years, perhaps from polio. Peter tells him that Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat. Aeneas does exactly that. Peter using Jesus' name and Jesus' language heals Aeneas through the power of the Holy Spirit. The result is that many who lived in Lydda and Sharon turn to Jesus as Messiah. Sharon here is probably the Plain of Sharon which is the coastal plain that runs from Gaza in the south up to Mt. Carmel in the north. I think in this passage Luke uses Sharon to refer to the area in the plain around Lydda. Peter does the same thing Jesus did in using a healing miracle to spread the word, attract a crowd and then preach the gospel.

9:36-39 - In Joppa there was a disciple, a woman named Tabitha (Aramaic) or Dorcas (Greek), which means gazelle. It is important to note that Luke uses the title disciple for Tabitha. Men and women are Jesus' disciples. There is not one class for women and one for men, all are his disciples. She was a woman who helped the poor and did many acts of charity, including sewing clothes for the poor. She was much loved. She grew sick and died and her friends, many of whom were widows prepared her body for burial. When the disciples in Joppa heard Peter was in Lydda they begged him to come. Peter arrives and is taken to where her body lies in an upstairs room. Did the disciples in Joppa think Peter would raise Tabitha from the dead? It appears as if they did, otherwise why send for Peter after she has died. Peter is doing what Jesus did and it is quite possible that in their grief over Tabitha's death the disciples grasp at the possibility that Peter can raise her. In any case they bring Peter to Tabitha's body.

9:40-42 - Peter sends everyone out of the room; gets down on his knees and prays. Why does Peter pray here? Is he seeking guidance for what to do? Is he asking the Lord to do a miracle and raise Tabitha? Is he centering himself in Jesus' presence and power or all of the above? It is probably all of the above. Peter knows he has no power to raise the dead. Only God can do that and yet Jesus gave them the power through the Holy Spirit and by his name to do mighty works for the spread of the gospel. The church had prayed for these mighty works as a testimony to

Jesus. Now God is about to do something extraordinary through Peter. Aeneas was extraordinary but Peter and John had healed the crippled man in the temple. Tabitha is another level of miracle. She is already dead. Luke does not report that Peter prays when he heals Aeneas, he simply states that Jesus heals you. Here he prays. Prayer is not always present when a miracle occurs, yet it is vital for the right attitude and perception of God's will in a certain situation. It is only after Peter prays that he tells Tabitha to get up. I think he becomes certain of what God wants him to do in prayer. Why does he tell everyone to leave? Perhaps because he doesn't want any distractions since the grieving widows would have been wailing and weeping as was the custom of the Jews when someone died. It could also be because Peter needs to seek what God wants in prayer and not what Tabitha's friends want. His prayer is to let God guide him and be in charge without any pressure from other people.

Peter goes down on his knees to pray, the one whom Jesus said had little faith. Peter humbles himself before the Lord, seeks his will and then with confidence when he understands it from his prayer, turns to Tabitha and simply tells her to get up. She opens her eyes, sees Peter and gets up. She is alive again! Did she know Peter? Probably not, but she must have recognized the Spirit's presence in him. When she gets up he calls the widows and her friends and presents her to them alive. They are overwhelmed and overjoyed. Their mourning now turns to joy and celebration! This incident becomes known throughout Joppa and many Jews turn to Jesus just like they did in Lydda with Aeneas' healing.

9:43 - Peter stays in Joppa for some time as a guest of Simon a tanner. Simon would have been considered unclean by regular Jewish standards because he dealt with dead animals. The Pharisees put tanners on their list of despised trades, people who could not repent and therefore could not enter the Kingdom of God. Simon is a disciple of Jesus and has been accepted by Jesus as clean. This was a sign that the old holiness codes were being broken down by the gospel and whoever accepted Jesus as Messiah was now clean in God's eyes. It was only one more step to include Gentiles as clean. Tanners, tax collectors, widows, Pharisees, priests, fishermen, prostitutes, whoever came to Jesus as Lord and Messiah was his disciple. Faith and following him were the only conditions for salvation. The old barriers were breaking down. The Age to Come was breaking into the world with the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, and his Holy Spirit.

Peter's mission to the Jews on the Plain of Sharon and the coast consisted of signs and wonders followed by preaching the gospel and then teaching the new disciples the way of Jesus. In other words Peter does what Jesus did. By staying with Simon the Tanner God is showing Peter the old barriers to God are disappearing. Simon is a Jew. The stage is now set for God to make his next move, Cornelius and the Gentiles. God is going to show Peter that the final barriers to the gospel are going to come down. All can have salvation who come to Jesus as Lord whether Jew or Gentile. God has Peter right where he wants him!

Chapter 10:

10:1-8 - God sends an angel to speak to a man in Caesarea named Cornelius. He is a centurion in the Italian Regiment stationed at Caesarea. His regiment is probably assigned to the governor of Judea for security or to enforce his decrees and keep the peace. Literally the word for regiment means cohort or band. In legions of regular troops a cohort was 600 men. In auxiliary troops it was 500-1000. The title Italian Regiment means these were regular troops of the Roman army and not auxiliary troops. Regular legions were drawn from Italy and were Roman citizens. Auxiliary troops were drawn from the provinces and made up of soldiers who were not

necessarily citizens of Rome. A centurion would have had command over 100 troops and would have been like our captain or lieutenant. They earned their position coming up through the ranks and were promoted by experience and performance on the battlefield or in their duties, unlike tribunes who gained their rank by family ties or patronage. The New Testament never says anything negative about a centurion, so they must have been very well-respected across the Roman world.

Cornelius is a God-fearer, meaning a Gentile who is attracted to the religion of Israel. In the Hellenistic Jewish world many attended the synagogue, albeit at the fringes because they were not Jewish. Luke gives no hint that Cornelius or his family attended a synagogue in Caesarea. They do however pray to God and give alms to the poor. He is wealthy enough to have his family with him in Caesarea as well as several servants. Had he married a Jewish woman or was his family all from Italy? We don't know.

Cornelius is praying at the hour of the afternoon sacrifice in the temple, 3 pm. Had he been to the temple to worship God in the Court of the Gentiles? It is possible. During his prayer he sees a vision of an angel who addresses him by name. The angel commends him for his charity and prayers. Then he commands him to send men to Joppa and bring back Simon Peter who is staying at Simon the tanner's house by the sea. After the angel leaves, Cornelius calls two of his servants and a soldier who is his attendant and sends them to Joppa to find Peter.

The traditional site of Simon the Tanner's house is by the sea in Joppa. I am guessing it was by the ocean to pick up the sea breeze which would have helped dissipate the smell of the tanning process. God knows where Peter is staying and a tanner's house by the sea would not have been impossible to find, especially for a Roman soldier. Furthermore they are looking for Simon who is called Peter, Rock. Many Jewish men were named Simon. Very few were named Peter/Rock. They must search Joppa to find him but they have decent clues as to where to start. Joppa is about 30 miles down the King's Highway, the Coastal Highway running from Caesarea down the coast through Joppa and on to Egypt. It was one of the main highways of Judea. Since the servants arrive at noon the following day they must have walked all night or ridden on horseback to Joppa.

10:9-16 - Around noon the next day the servants and soldier from Cornelius are nearing Joppa. Peter goes up on the roof of the house to pray and is waiting while his hosts prepare a meal for him since he is hungry. He falls into a trance and has a vision. A large sheet full of all kinds of four-footed animals, plus reptiles and birds is let down by its four corners. Luke does not tell us whether all the animals were unclean, although from Peter's reaction to the command to kill and eat one has the impression they were. When the command comes to kill and eat, Peter replies surely not because he has never eaten anything impure or unclean. I don't think that is bravura on Peter's part. He is being honest with God. He may not be a Pharisee but he has kept to the kosher food laws of his people and religion. The voice in the vision replies back, don't call anything impure what God has made clean. Three times the vision happens until the sheet is taken back into heaven.

God in the vision is trying to tell Peter that he has made a way through Jesus for the Gentiles, whom every Jew would have considered unclean, to come to him. Peter is already on that journey with his own people. He is staying at the home of someone most Jews would have considered unclean because Simon the Tanner handled the carcasses of dead animals. Yet Peter has accepted his hospitality. The leap God is asking Peter to take is from an unclean Jew to Gentiles. Jesus had already told the disciples that they were to make disciples of all nations. That

phrase must have still been in Peter's memory. At the ascension Jesus had told the disciples that they would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth and in *Luke 24* he told them forgiveness of sins would be preached in Jesus' name to all nations. The Gentile mission is explicit in Jesus' final words to his disciples. At some point they were going to have to face that fact and begin to minister to the Gentiles. Here in *Acts 10* the Holy Spirit is preparing Peter for that task through the vision of the sheet and the unclean animals.

10:17-23 - Peter is wondering about what the vision might mean when the two servants and the soldier from Cornelius arrive at Simon's gate. They call out and do not knock, which signals them as friendly and not a threatening Roman soldier come to question or inquire of Simon's doings.

Meanwhile up on the roof Peter is still trying to figure out what the vision means when the Spirit prompts him to go down and meet the three men from Caesarea. He tells Peter they are looking for him and he is not to hesitate to go with them for the Spirit has sent them.

Notice there are three distinct means of God communicating in this section. Cornelius has a vision of an angel or a visit from an angel that gives him instructions about sending for Peter. Peter has the heavenly vision of the sheet in a trance, perhaps some kind of prophetic revelation that is symbolic in nature. Third, Peter hears directly from the Holy Spirit speaking to him giving him instructions about what to do with the men at the door. Cornelius needed an angel to speak to him since the Holy Spirit did not live in him as yet. God spoke to Peter in a symbolic prophetic vision to help him understand what he was doing. Like many prophetic visions, Peter only fully understands what God is telling him when he goes to Caesarea and starts preaching to Cornelius and his family and friends. The prompting of the Holy Spirit was practical counsel for what to do with Cornelius' men. There was nothing symbolic about it. The Spirit needed Peter to go to Caesarea with the three men and told Peter to do so. He also reassured him it was all right to go. After all, one of the men was a Roman soldier. Whether he was in full uniform or not we don't know but it is likely he was. If he was he probably made everyone at Simon's house nervous about what he wanted and how they should respond to him.

Peter comes down off the roof and identifies himself as the man the three servants are looking for. They tell him they have come from Cornelius the centurion who is a righteous and God-fearing man. He had a vision of an angel who told him to send for Peter so that Cornelius and his family could hear what Peter had to say. I am not sure Peter clearly understands as yet he is to share the gospel with Cornelius but I think the idea is starting to take shape in his head.

Peter invites the men into the house to be his guests. It is not Peter's house! It is Simon's house! At least one of these men is a Roman soldier, and the other two are almost certainly Gentiles as well. Did Peter remember Jesus welcoming Gentiles and eating with them and ministering to them? Did he remember another Centurion in Capernaum whose faith so impressed Jesus? It is possible. At any rate the Spirit has told him that he has sent these three men for Peter. Peter hasn't shared the gospel with them but he has broken the hospitality rules of the Jews by welcoming Gentiles into Simon's house. This whole story goes back and forth between Peter being a good Jew and holding to his traditional roots and Peter breaking all the rules and fully accepting the Gentiles just like he does the Jews. He is showing signs of understanding the vision and its implications. Further Peter drags Simon and his family into the whole situation, almost forcing them to go along with whatever Peter is doing. There is no dialogue with Simon trying to convince him to accept three Gentiles into his house, one of whom

is a Roman soldier. Peter simply decides and assumes that Simon will go along with whatever Peter wants!

10:23-29 - The next day Peter sets out with the three men from Cornelius, along with some other disciples from Joppa, other Jewish Christians who know Peter. The following day they arrive in Caesarea. They took two days to make the journey while Cornelius' servants took less than twenty-four hours. That suggests that Cornelius' servants were on horseback and Peter and his party went on foot and that is why it took longer to cover the thirty miles to Caesarea and Cornelius' house. They arrive and find Cornelius expecting them. He had called together his family and friends to come and hear Peter.

As Peter enters Cornelius falls at his feet in reverence. This seems odd, but think about it. An angel of God tells you to send to Joppa for this man and now he is entering your home. From Cornelius' perspective this was an extraordinary man, a man who spoke for God. Plus he is a Roman soldier and a man acquainted with authority and the chain of command. Cornelius recognizes that Peter is high up on God's chain of command so he bows down to him. Peter responds to such personal worship by saying get up I'm just a man like you! He starts talking with the people who have gathered and finds as he goes further into the house that a large group of people is there. Peter appears somewhat confused by this. He tells them that he is a Jew and it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with Gentiles or visit them. But God has shown him he must not call any man impure or unclean. So when he was sent for he came without any objection. Peter sounds like the arrogant Jew speaking to Cornelius and his family and friends. How magnanimous he is for not saying they are unclean directly yet indirectly he does that very thing! Peter has finally seen the implications of his vision and has accepted he is supposed to be at Cornelius' home. But when he asks why they sent for him he shows he still does not understand the main reason the Holy Spirit has set up this entire meeting! Peter is supposed to preach the gospel to these people and he doesn't get it!

One wonders what Cornelius was thinking at this point. I've got the right man and he has come to us, but now he is going on about being a Jew associating with Gentiles. Cornelius was a God-fearer and he knew about Jewish customs and the religious Jews not associating with someone like him.

10:34-38 - Peter finally sees what the vision and the invitation to Cornelius' home and the people gathered all mean. God accepts everyone who will come to him. He shows no favoritism to any nation. The seeds of that understanding had been in the prophets like *Jonah* and *Isaiah* but the Jews had been so focused on being the chosen people they forgot why they had been chosen! Once Peter crosses that bridge he understands what he needs to do. He begins to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Peter says in *verse 36*, "*you know the message*" about Jesus God gave to Israel. These were Gentiles and Romans he was speaking to, how did they know that message? There are two possibilities. First, Jesus' story was told in Roman circles because Pontius Pilate's capital was Caesarea and Cornelius as an officer was privy to the information. Second, he was a God-fearer and had heard at the synagogue or from Jews with whom he had contact the story of what had happened to Jesus of Nazareth. Plus by this time Philip had settled in Caesarea and was undoubtedly preaching the gospel to the Jews in the city. Cornelius may have heard Philip preach as well.

Peter tells Cornelius and his Roman friends and family that Jesus brings peace with God. He is the Jewish Messiah but he is also Lord of all. Then Peter recalls what Jesus did from his baptism by John in the Jordan and in Galilee. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power to heal and deliver those under the power of Satan because God was with him. If, as Peter says, they knew the story all Peter had to do was summarize rather than tell all the details.

10:39-43 - Peter continues with the theme of the disciples as witnesses of all that Jesus said and did in Galilee and in Jerusalem. Then he says "they" killed him by crucifying him or hanging him on a tree. Peter does not say the Sanhedrin or Pontius Pilate. He is being very diplomatic here but everyone there would have known who it was that had the power to condemn Jesus and execute him on the cross. Cornelius was a Roman officer and understood the relationship between the Sanhedrin and what they could do and the Roman government and how the Romans had reserved the power of capital punishment to themselves alone. Then Peter declares that Jesus was raised on the third day and was seen not by all the people but by the witnesses that he had chosen, namely his disciples, of whom Peter was one. They ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. Peter then says that Jesus commanded that the disciples were to preach and testify that Jesus is the one whom God has appointed judge of the world and that as the prophets have testified forgiveness of sins comes through his name alone.

If you look at the kernel of the message, or *kerygma* in Greek, that Peter preaches here there are several highlights. Jesus' ministry started with his baptism by John. He went about doing good and healing people in Galilee. He came to Jerusalem where the authorities, both Jewish and Roman crucified him. God raised him up on the third day and the disciples are witnesses to that fact. God has appointed him Lord, Messiah and judge of the world. Forgiveness of sins comes through faith in his name. Those are the essential elements of the gospel that Peter preaches to the Gentiles for the first time. They are not fundamentally different than what he had been proclaiming to the Jews. The new twist here is that God has appointed him Lord of all not just Messiah. Peter essentially expands what Messiah means and takes it beyond just the Jews to include all the nations. That is exactly what the prophets had done as well. None of what he says goes beyond what the prophets said. Peter simply states that what they said would happen we saw happen which is precisely the structure of his sermon on Pentecost in *Acts 2*. All the prophets spoke about has been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. God has made him both Lord and Messiah through his resurrection from the dead. The resurrection is still the center!

10:44-48 - The Holy Spirit comes on Cornelius, his family and friends before Peter can even finish speaking; before Peter even gives them a chance to believe in Jesus. Perhaps they had faith the moment Peter begins to speak. He had said they already knew the message about Jesus. Now they believe it. At any rate, the Holy Spirit comes and Peter cannot refuse them baptism in Jesus' name. These Gentiles all speak in tongues like the apostles had done so the tongues are a sign not for Cornelius and his Gentile friends but for the Jews who had come with Peter. The tongues prove to Peter and the Jewish Christians from Joppa that the Gentiles have now received the Holy Spirit just like they had. Water baptism is seen as the natural result of faith in Jesus and reception of the Holy Spirit.

Luke says the Jewish Christians who had come with Peter were all astonished that the Holy Spirit had come on the Gentiles. He doesn't say Peter was astonished. Had Peter expected this reaction by God to Cornelius? Had the Spirit prompted him during his message or had Peter

finally connected the dots and expected the Spirit to come as he had on them and the Samaritans? It is an interesting detail to ponder.

Now that the Spirit has come, Peter moves to the logical conclusion; these people all need to be baptized in Jesus' name. He puts the question to his Jewish Christian companions who had all been baptized, can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water because they have been baptized in the Holy Spirit just like we have! So they baptize them all. Depending on how far from the ocean they were Peter and his companions may have taken Cornelius and his family down to the shores of the Mediterranean and baptized them in the waters of the ocean. Or perhaps there was a pool nearby that would have enough water to baptize the new believers.

Afterwards they asked Peter to stay a few days with them. Can you imagine the questions they asked and the stories Peter shared about Jesus! Did some of them get included in Luke's gospel? Were some of Cornelius' friends or family sources for *Acts*? We don't know. It could also have been some of the Jewish Christians from Joppa. The most likely source for all of *Acts 10* is Peter whom Luke probably knew and spent time with in Rome when Paul was under house arrest and Mark was with him.

The bottom line of *Acts 10* is that the final circle of *Acts 1:8* has been breached. The gospel has now been preached to the Gentiles and they too have begun to be followers of Jesus. Like the Samaritans, it is Peter God uses to expand the gospel so that the Jewish Christians can have no objections. The Gentiles are full followers of Jesus just like the Samaritans and the Jews. Jesus truly is Lord of all!

Chapter 11:

11:1-3 - The word spreads quickly that Gentiles have received and believed the gospel. Notice that Luke does not say they had received the Holy Spirit here. It is possible that the Jewish Christians who were criticizing Peter did not know that the Spirit had also been given to Cornelius and his family, which may explain their harsh critique of Peter's actions. It is also possible that they knew exactly what had happened but were focused on something totally different, the breaking of the holiness barriers. When Peter gets back to Jerusalem he faces a storm of criticism from the circumcised believers. Technically that was every disciple except Cornelius and his family.

Luke is probably referring here to former Pharisees and priests who were disciples of Jesus. However, they completely miss the point of what happened in Caesarea. The Holy Spirit has been given to the Gentiles, making them full Christ-followers just like the Jews and Samaritans yet all they can focus on is the fact that Peter ate with them! It is probable that some of this group would later become the Judaizers that opposed Paul and his ministry. These are probably the same group of people who want the Gentiles to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses in *Acts 15*. They want everyone to become full Jews, proselytes to Judaism. Their charge of Peter eating with the Gentiles sounds a lot like the Pharisees' charge against Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners.

11:4-18 - Peter then recounts what happened to him and what he did to the church in Jerusalem. He describes his vision of the sheet with some slightly different details, especially in describing all the unclean animals. He also says the sheet came down to where he was so he could see into it and see all the animals in it. Peter also reports he said nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth rather than simply I have never eaten anything unclean or impure. He tells them what the voice from heaven replied that he was not to call impure or unclean what God had made

clean. Did the Jewish Christians grasp the meaning of the vision as soon as Peter reported it or were they as confused by it as Peter had been?

Peter continues and describes the men from Caesarea and how the Spirit told him he had sent them. He identifies six brothers who went with him and refers to them so they must all have been standing in front of the church with Peter when he is telling his story. Peter says Cornelius told him he was to send for Peter and that he would bring a message through which he and his entire household would be saved. That is different from what Luke reports Cornelius said in *Acts 10*. He then reaches the climax of his account. The Spirit fell on them as Peter spoke just as he had on all them at the beginning. Peter probably means that they spoke in tongues as the disciples had on Pentecost. Many of the leaders who had gathered there to hear Peter were probably among the 120 upon whom the Spirit came on Pentecost. Were all the apostles there and James and Jude the Lord's brothers? Were they upset at what Peter had done? We don't know. Peter's next line however convinces them. If God gave them the same Spirit he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus who was I to oppose God? Peter's defense is basically God did it, which is the truth!

Hearing this, the Jewish Christian disciples stop any further objections and conclude with Peter and the brothers from Joppa, that the Gentiles have been granted eternal life through repentance and faith in Jesus just like them. What happens here is not a final solution to the problem of how to treat Gentile believers in Jesus. The opposition to what Peter has done and his preaching the gospel to the Gentiles simply accepts that Peter is telling the truth and that Gentiles have believed. The issue is how will they be discipled and how will the Jewish Christians continue to preach to them in the months and years ahead. That issue is what eventually led to the Apostolic Council in *Acts 15*.

All of this happened to fulfill Jesus' command to them in *Luke 24:46-49*, to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all the nations. The dam had burst and the barriers had come down. Gentiles can now become disciples of Jesus. The situation in Antioch that follows Peter's report would not have been possible before Peter and Cornelius. It would not have been accepted or looked upon with favor by the mother church in Jerusalem.

11:19-21 - Many in the church had been scattered by the persecution that followed Stephen's martyrdom. Philip had gone to Samaria and preached the gospel. Other Hellenistic Jews went into Phoenicia, probably Tyre and Sidon, Cyprus and Antioch in Syria, preaching to Jews. Some Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene also began to preach to Gentiles in Antioch, telling them about the Lord Jesus. Many Greeks believed and gave their lives to Jesus as Lord. The persecution that scattered the Hellenistic Jewish Christians would have been led by Saul of Tarsus. Luke is transitioning to Paul's ministry and he has compressed the time-line in this paragraph. Saul's persecution had happened eleven years before. He had been in Tarsus eight years after the disciples had sent him home. So the process that Luke describes here of the disciples who were scattered after Stephen's martyrdom preaching to Gentiles in Antioch took almost a decade if Cornelius is the first Gentile convert. It is interesting to note that one of the Seven in *Acts 6* is Nicolas of Antioch, a proselyte and Lucius of Cyrene was one of the prophets and teachers in Antioch, a leader of that church. It was Jews of Cyprus and Cyrene who first preached to the Greeks in Antioch.

Did they have a great debate about whether or not they should share the gospel to the Greeks? Or did it simply happen naturally, perhaps by accident? Perhaps they were sharing with some Jews and Greeks were there listening and they believed. We don't know.

Were Cornelius and his family literally the first Gentile converts or were there Greeks in Antioch who became Christians before them? It is possible the Antiochan Gentiles were chronologically first but the apostles knew nothing of them until after Peter and Cornelius. From the standpoint of history it is difficult to tell. From the standpoint of the gospel and the mother church in Jerusalem Cornelius was first! The whole concept of the Gentiles being full believers in Jesus endowed with the Holy Spirit had to be blessed by the apostles in Jerusalem or it would have never happened. And Peter, being the leader of the apostles, was the key figure in that process. When the Spirit used Peter to bring Cornelius and his family to faith it paved the way for the Gentile ministry of the church. In that sense the situation with the Gentiles is very similar to the situation with the Samaritan Christians. Peter and the apostles had to bless it and approve of it or the Samaritans and the Gentiles would have never been accepted as full believers in Jesus and would have always been second class Christians.

11:22-24 - News of Greek Christians in Antioch finally reached the church in Jerusalem and the apostles. This would have been almost 13 years after Stephen's martyrdom and almost eight years after Saul had been sent home to Tarsus. Why send Barnabas? He was a Hellenistic Jew from Cyprus and some of the Jews who had first preached to the Greeks in Antioch were from Cyprus. It is possible he knew them. He was also trusted by the apostles and had great standing among them. Plus he was not named Son of Encouragement for nothing. Luke's description of Barnabas is very similar to Stephen in his character; a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. It is also possible that the apostles knew that they needed someone who was open and diplomatic to assess the situation concerning these Greek Christians and bridge the gap between the more strict Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and the new Gentile Christians in Antioch. Don't forget the Apostolic Council in *Acts 15* is only a few years away. This controversy over how the new Gentile Christians will be disciplined would erupt in the church. Barnabas was the perfect person to manage all the potential controversies and factions. It is quite possible that he was the one man everyone, no matter what their opinions about how the Gentiles should be disciplined could agree upon and that is why he was sent to Antioch.

The result of Barnabas' mission is that more Gentiles come to faith and the Lord blesses his efforts. That raised a problem. How was he to disciple all these Gentiles? He needed someone with more skill than he had or the other leaders had to bridge the cultural gap between Jews and Greeks. He needed someone who knew the Greek culture as well as a Greek but was grounded in the Scriptures. There was a man, but would he do it? Barnabas takes a chance and goes in search of Saul of Tarsus.

11:25-26 - Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. Had he had any correspondence with Saul in the intervening eight years since he had seen him? Neither Luke nor Paul hints that he did. Does Barnabas even know Saul is still in Tarsus? It was a great gamble. He obviously believed if he could find Saul he could convince him to come with him to Antioch. Barnabas had heard Saul's testimony; he knew God had called him to preach to the Gentiles. Now at last there were Gentile Christians and they needed discipling and the door was open to win more to the Lord Jesus. Barnabas' need for help in Antioch led him to make a bold move. Did he write to the apostles about his plan or simply go to Tarsus and trust the Spirit? We don't know. It is also hard to know how long he waited in Antioch before he went in search for Paul in Tarsus. We do know it was eight years from the time the apostles sent Saul to Tarsus and Barnabas finds him in his hometown.

When he found him he brought him to Antioch. What must that meeting have been like? Can you imagine Saul in the tentmakers shop and Barnabas walks in? What did they say to each other? Was Saul angry for being left for so long? Had the Holy Spirit told him someone was coming and to go with them? Did Barnabas have to convince Saul to come or was he so ready he dropped everything like the apostles with Jesus and went with Barnabas? All of these questions are intriguing but impossible to answer. It is clear from Luke's statement that at this point Barnabas is the leader and Paul is the assistant. Barnabas is going to do with Saul what he will do with Mark and others, mentor and encourage him until Saul will surpass him. Barnabas' encouragement gift had the rare ability to spot potential in people and bring it out without being threatened by their gifts when they were greater than his own. Saul had been almost certainly thinking about what he would do if he got a chance to teach and preach to Gentiles one day. Now Barnabas gives him that chance. Yet Saul also needed coaching and encouragement which Barnabas was able to do for him.

For a whole year Barnabas and Saul and other Jewish Christian prophets and teachers teach the new Greek Christians in Antioch and great numbers come to the Lord. Antioch becomes the new center of Christianity and in fact will supplant Jerusalem as the leading church in the east because it will be a missionary church and the Jerusalem church will be increasingly focused just on the Jews. It is also in Antioch that the Greeks give the disciples the title Christians, which meant Christ-follower, adherent of Christ or even Christ-slave. In Greek thinking they probably thought the disciples were adherents of a new mystery cult which made sense from what they could see. They had an initiation ritual, baptism, and a cultic meal, communion where they were said to eat the flesh and drink the blood of this new God *Chrestus*. It is possible that originally the Greeks gave this title to the disciples in a derogatory way but the Christians took it as their own because it described who they wanted to be: Christ-followers.

11:27-30 - During this year that Saul and Barnabas were teaching the new Greek Christians in Antioch some prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them was named Agabus. He appears again in *chapter 21* when Paul is going to Jerusalem for the final time, warning him that if he goes he will be arrested and perhaps killed. Agabus prophesies that a great famine will arise and spread all over the empire. Luke notes this occurred during the reign of Claudius, which would have been sometime during the early years of Claudius' reign because Herod Agrippa his friend was king of Judea at the time. That puts it sometime between 41 and 44. The disciples in Antioch decide to help the poor in Jerusalem and send a gift for famine relief. The elders elect Barnabas and Saul to deliver the gift. Paul notes in *Galatians 2:1* that this was fourteen years after his first visit to Jerusalem which was three years after his conversion on the Road to Damascus. The disciples need to send aid because already the Jerusalem church has become poor. The great *koinonia* or sharing of property has waned and the needs of the community have outstripped their resources. For the rest of the New Testament the Jerusalem church will be poor and will need help from their Gentile brothers and sisters. Their poverty is also probably due to the persecution that they have faced which has scattered the church and depleted their resources. Add to that the famine that has come and perhaps even a bad economy which Herod Agrippa will try and fix and one can see how the great experiment in sharing could not be sustained.

Chapter 12:

12:1-5 - Herod Agrippa decides to persecute Christians so he arrests some and puts them in prison. He has James, the brother of John arrested and then executed with the sword. This is a

curious method of execution. Romans would crucify criminals. The Jews would stone to death someone convicted of a capital crime. The sword was used by the Romans to execute Roman citizens guilty of a capital crime. It was quick and merciful compared to the cross. The question is why did Herod use the sword to execute James? Was he being merciful or so he thought? And why did he begin his persecution of Christians now? Claudius' edict to expel the Jews from Rome was in 49 so it is at least 5 years from the emperor's action so Herod's persecution is unrelated. The most likely reason is the famine. Herod needed someone to blame for the famine or to focus people's attention on something else so he picks the Christians as a convenient target. It is also probable that many Jews had learned of the believers' contact and fellowship with the Gentiles and this had greatly disturbed the Jews, especially in Jerusalem. James is the first of the Twelve to be martyred.

Herod Agrippa sees that the execution of James pleases the people so he arrests Peter and is going to have him executed as well. This all happens at the Feast of Unleavened Bread or Passover when thousands of pilgrims have flooded the city. Perhaps Herod is trying to show the Jews from all over the world that he is a worthy king who will uphold traditional Jewish faith. Luke suggests here that Herod is playing to the crowds to try and curry favor during a time of famine which would bring difficult economic times as well.

Herod Agrippa was the son of Aristobulus, grandson of Herod the Great and nephew of Herod Antipas who sheltered him when he was forced to leave Rome because of massive debts. Agrippa was raised in Rome at the court of the Caesars after his father was executed in 7 and was a good friend of Claudius. When Claudius became emperor he rewarded his friend by making him king of Judea and gave him basically the same territory as his grandfather, Herod the Great. But he only ruled from 41-44 dying at the age of 54.

Luke notes that Herod was going to kill Peter after the feast was finished and that the church was earnestly praying for Peter. Were they praying for his release, for his safety, or something else? We don't know. Presumably they were praying for his release and deliverance from execution.

12:6-10 - The night before Herod Agrippa is going to execute Peter he is sleeping in his cell between two soldiers, and bound with two chains. Sentries also stood guard at the entrance to his cell. It is possible that the High Priest or someone from the temple guards warned the king and his troops of Peter and John's miraculous escape from custody once before and Herod is taking no chances.

An angel of the Lord is sent to Peter and tells him to wake up, put on his clothes and sandals and follow him. His chains fall off his wrists and his guards are all fast asleep. The angel tells him to wrap his cloak around him and come with him. Peter follows him right out of the prison but he thinks he is asleep or having a vision. They pass the first and second guards, presumably those guarding his cell block and those guarding the outside gate to the city. The angel leads him right through the iron gate out into the street. Peter is out in the street and free of the prison when the angel leaves him. God has rescued the Rock from Herod Agrippa's plot to kill him, just as the church has been praying. Peter would one day be executed by the Romans but it was not his time as yet. This incident takes place sometime before Herod's death in 44.

12:11-15 - Peter comes to himself and realizes that God has sent an angel to rescue him and that he is not dreaming. He decides to head to Mary's home, the mother of John Mark, where many people were praying. This was probably also where the Upper Room was located, where Jesus

and the disciples had shared the Lord's Supper and where the Spirit had come upon them at Pentecost. It obviously was a special place to the Jerusalem church. This is also the first clear connection we have between Peter and Mark.

Peter arrives to the gate of Mary's house and knocks at the outer entrance. Rhoda, a servant girl in the house, comes to answer the door. She recognizes Peter's voice and is so excited she runs back into the house and exclaims that Peter is at the door! The people gathered tell her she's crazy or is seeing things or it must have been his angel, meaning probably his guardian angel. Apparently the Jews believed everyone had a guardian angel who could look like the person they were watching over and that is who they think Rhoda sees. The point is the church had been praying earnestly for Peter's release but when he knocks at the door they do not believe Rhoda. Their prayers have been answered but they can't believe it! How like us they are! Meanwhile Peter is still at the front door knocking wanting to get in. He's still out in the street! The whole scene is hilarious and you can almost see Luke with a smile on his face when he is writing it!

12:16-19 - Peter is still at the outer door knocking to get in. He is knocking which would have been suspicious in that culture because normally a friend would call out. Peter probably knocks in order to keep from making too much noise. After all he has just escaped from Herod Agrippa's prison!

Peter keeps knocking until the brothers and sisters inside finally answer the door. When they do they cannot believe it. Luke says he motioned with his hand for them to be quiet, meaning they were probably shouting and celebrating and Peter is trying to shut them up before someone notices them all in the street. He then comes into the house and recounts how the angel had come to him and rescued him. He tells them to let James, the Lord's brother, and the other brothers know what happened to him. The other brothers are probably the elders and any of the other apostles who are still in the city. By this time James has taken leadership of the Jerusalem church, partly because Peter has been traveling around Judea preaching and teaching. When Peter had told them his story and left instructions concerning what to tell James and the other apostles Luke says he left for another place. The best guess is he left Jerusalem for another city the location of which we do not know. Peter knew he needed to get out of Jerusalem because it was only a matter of time before his escape was discovered and a search would be held. If he had stayed in Jerusalem and he was found at Mary and Mark's house, then all the believers with them would have been in grave danger. Herod had already killed James and was going to kill Peter. Peter's escape had shamed the guards and Herod. There is no telling how many Herod would have killed if he had found Peter hiding in the city. Leaving provided the disciples a way to truthfully tell Herod's soldiers that Peter was not in the city and they did not know where he had gone. We can only speculate on where he would go. Perhaps he went to Joppa or Caesarea or further north into Samaria or Galilee or even outside of Herod's territory all together. That would make the most sense of all. With Peter's departure James takes the lead in Jerusalem and it appears, that once James son of Zebedee is killed, the apostles are scattered and no longer are concentrated in Jerusalem. Peter drops out of Luke's narrative at this point except for the Jerusalem Council in *Acts 15*. Luke will now turn to Paul and his mission to the Gentiles.

The next morning Peter's escape is discovered. Apparently the guards sleep through the night. After Herod has the guards cross-examined and can still find no satisfactory reason for Peter's escape he has them executed. The truth they tell is too unbelievable. Herod is too angry to

believe the miracle and takes his anger out on his guards. Peter has slipped through his fingers and he has lost face before the Jews because now he has no prisoner to execute for them.

12:19-23 - Herod returns to Caesarea from Jerusalem. Caesarea would have been his capital because it was the Roman capital and not Jerusalem. Herod kept the same custom as did the Roman procurators. He had probably gone up to Jerusalem for Passover.

Luke notes he had been quarreling with Tyre and Sidon who now sought an audience with the king and wanted to sue for peace. They secure the support of one Blastus a personal servant and friend of Herod to speak for them. Luke notes they were dependent upon Herod's territory to supply the cities with food. This appears to be a trade war and not an armed conflict. If this chapter is contemporary with *chapters 11 and 13*, then it makes sense for Tyre and Sidon to make peace with Herod Agrippa because there was a famine in the area and all over the Roman world. Ships with grain would have been scarce and Tyre and Sidon depended upon their trading ships to bring food to the city. If shipments of grain from other parts of the empire were slowing down then Judea and Herod's territory would have been a major supplier of food for Tyre and Sidon. The conflict was probably about trade and money and Herod had leverage over the two Phoenician cities which he used to gain the advantage. They needed him because he could use the great artificial port of Caesarea to bring in trade goods from around the empire and bypass Tyre and Sidon.

Herod comes with all his royal pomp and takes his place upon his throne. He addresses the people, probably concerning the new trade agreements he has signed with Tyre and Sidon. The pagans from Caesarea, Tyre and Sidon all start proclaiming him a god. Herod does not dissuade them from worshipping him so an angel of the Lord strikes him down. Luke says he was eaten by worms and dies. We know that Herod Agrippa's reign was short-lived, only three years. Josephus corroborates Luke's account of Herod Agrippa's death. It is possible that eaten by worms refers to something like a burst appendix which would have caused massive peritonitis and death.

12:24-25 - The word of God spreads and continues to increase. Note the contrast between Herod Agrippa's fate and God's Word. Herod has James killed and tries to persecute the church. He is struck down by God but the Word continues to spread and increase.

Verse 25 is a transition verse but is difficult. Luke returns his focus to Barnabas and Saul and their mission to Jerusalem with the famine offering from the church in Antioch. Was this all happening during Herod's persecution? It is difficult to know. If so, then Saul and Barnabas are also at risk being in Jerusalem when James is executed and Peter arrested. The more likely explanation is that Herod's persecution of Christians is focused around Passover and Saul and Barnabas had completed their mission to the church before it took place. *Chapter 12* becomes an interlude describing James' martyrdom, Peter's arrest and release and Herod Agrippa's death. Luke now returns to Barnabas and Saul and what they will be doing next, taking their first missionary journey. The central focus in *Acts* has now shifted. Home base for the Gentile mission will be Antioch and not Jerusalem. It is interesting to note that as the gospel spreads through the east and into Europe churches like Antioch and Rome gain influence while the mother church in Jerusalem wanes. It is possible that the closer we get to the Jewish Revolt God removed the influence of the Jerusalem church because of what is to come. The majority of Jews still reject Jesus as Messiah. Time is running out for God's ancient people. God will not allow their religion to flourish and the ancient sacrifices to continue when the New Covenant in Jesus

is here and available and the ultimate sacrifice for sin of God's Only Son has been given. God is going to remove the temple and he needs other churches around the Roman world to take the leadership. The age of the Gentiles is beginning.

Chapter 13:

13:1-3 - This is one of *THE* key passages in Acts and one of the most important sections of Scripture in the New Testament for what it describes.

The church in Antioch was a very diverse church and its leaders reflected that. Luke names the prophets and teachers who were the leaders in the church. They include: a Levite from Cyprus, Barnabas; a black African, Simeon called Niger, which means black; a North African, Lucius of Cyrene, who is probably Jewish and may have been among the North African Jews who first preached to the Gentiles in Antioch, (see *Acts 11:19-21*); a man, Manaen, probably a Jew, who grew up with Herod the tetrarch, which is probably Herod Antipas, because Herod Agrippa Luke calls a king; and Saul, a Pharisee Jew from Tarsus, educated by Gamaliel in Jerusalem and a former persecutor of Christians. What an eclectic group! They are dominated by Christian Jews but none of them are from Galilee or Judea. Saul had the most experience in Jerusalem but came to Christ probably after the rest of them. Barnabas is the one with the most connection to the apostles and the first Christians in Jerusalem. They would all be classified as Hellenistic Jews and probably spoke Greek rather than Aramaic as their native language. Manaen had the most Roman education among them because he had been brought up with Herod Antipas, who had been educated in Rome and we can assume that Manaen had too. Saul had the greatest training in the Pharisee's rabbinical tradition having been a student of Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Barnabas was a Levite and probably had some training in the temple traditions of the Jews. He was in Jerusalem at the beginning of the church but we do not know if he had come from Cyprus to serve in the temple. It appears Barnabas also has some wealth and land, some of which he had sold to share with those in need in the early church. Manaen also probably had some wealth having connections to the Herod family and their fortunes. Cyrene was a large Roman city in North Africa and we can only speculate if Lucius knew Simon from that city who had carried Jesus' cross. He probably had become a Christian because he had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for one of the great feasts of the Jews and stayed once he became a follower of Jesus as the Messiah. Simeon might have been a Jew, but if he was he was probably a proselyte. His nickname Niger means black man. It is reasonable to assume that he is an African man perhaps from the Sudan, Ethiopia or places to the south. He might be the only Gentile among this group of prophets and teachers.

The diversity of this group shows how the church is to be. We are to be made up of people from every tribe and tongue and nation. Antioch was one of the first churches to express that reality. Rome was probably another simply because of the cosmopolitan nature of the city, which was even greater than Antioch, one of the greatest Greco-Roman cities of the east.

This group of prophets and teachers is worshipping the Lord and fasting, seeking what God wants them to do next when the Holy Spirit speaks to them as a group. I imagine that they all began to sense together the Spirit's direction. We are supposed to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work God has for them to do. I do not think they understood completely what that meant accept that they knew the two leaders were to be sent off to preach the gospel. I sincerely doubt if any of that group that day understood the implications of their actions. The only one who might have would have been Saul because he had waited for this for a long time and had prepared and prayed about this for at least a decade or more. They fast and pray some more,

perhaps to make sure they have heard rightly, and then lay their hands on the two missionaries and send them off. Their prayer and laying on of hands to commission them for the work to which the Spirit has called them is a model for ordination today. God calls and we confirm the call. The laying on of hands is a sign of the Spirit's blessing, his power and protection for ministry.

Antioch is about to become the first great missionary church! The leaders respond to the Spirit's direction in the context of worship and prayer. They are unlike the apostles in Jerusalem who had to be prodded by a persecution to move out of Jerusalem and even then the Seven lead the way and not the Twelve! Antioch has a missionary spirit from the very first, perhaps because it was founded by missionaries.

13:4-5 - Luke notes Barnabas and Saul are sent on their way by the Holy Spirit. It is clear who is in charge of their mission from the beginning. The leaders of Antioch might have commissioned them for their ministry but they only did that at the direction of the Spirit. Once again the Spirit is leading in spreading the gospel. That is what he still does today!

Barnabas and Saul go down to Seleucia, the port for Antioch on the Mediterranean Sea because Antioch was on the Orontes River several miles from the ocean. They sail to Cyprus probably because that is Barnabas' home and he knows the territory. They arrive at Salamis on the eastern edge of the island and start proclaiming the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues. This would become a regular pattern for Barnabas and Paul and for Paul and his other companions as well. As Paul says in *Romans 1* the gospel is first for the Jews and also the Greeks. They always started with the Jews. They had a ready-made platform for preaching the gospel, the synagogue service on the Sabbath. As visiting rabbis custom and hospitality would dictate they would be invited to speak or bring a word. Saul and Barnabas seized on that opportunity. Plus attached to the Hellenistic synagogues of the Roman world would have been Gentile God-fearers who provided fertile ground in the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. They had already renounced paganism and were seeking the God of Israel. The message of forgiveness through faith in Jesus the Messiah and Lord would have greatly appealed to them, probably more-so than the Hellenistic Jews to whom Saul and Barnabas began to preach.

Luke also notes that John or John Mark was with them. When had Mark joined Barnabas his cousin? Was it after the famine visit to Jerusalem? That seems the most likely time. The other possibility is that Peter had come north after Herod Agrippa had tried to arrest him and Mark had accompanied him. It is interesting to speculate but we simply do not know. It is however at this time that Mark begins a long association with Barnabas his cousin and becomes the companion of Paul. This first time with Paul would not last long. Mark will leave them at Perga on the Turkish coast for reasons unknown. However, Luke comments in *Acts 15:38* that Paul believed he had deserted him and Barnabas and did not want to take him with them again. It led to the split between Barnabas and Paul with Barnabas taking Mark and heading back to Cyprus and Paul taking Silas and heading into Galatia.

13:6-11 - Barnabas, Saul and Mark traveled throughout the island and came to Paphos, a port city on the southwestern shore. They encounter a Jewish sorcerer named Bar-Jesus. Was he trying to link himself to Jesus, calling himself the son of Jesus? It appears so. He was an attendant to the Proconsul Sergius Paulus, who would have been governor of the island. As a proconsul he had senatorial rank, unlike Pontius Pilate who was a procurator and of the equestrian rank. Bar-Jesus was an attendant. Does that mean servant or advisor or something in

between? Literally Luke's Greek reads "*he was with the proconsul.*" The word for sorcerer is *magos*, the same word used to describe Simon the sorcerer in Samaria in *Acts 8*. He was a magi, a magician and astrologer, someone who used occult powers to tell the future.

The proconsul invites Barnabas, Saul and Mark to speak because he wants to hear what they have to say. Luke comments he was an intelligent man, a thoughtful and prudent man who was open to ideas. He also had the same nickname as Saul, Paulus or Paul, meaning short or little.

Elymas, the Aramaic name of Bar-Jesus which means wise man or magi, opposed Saul and Barnabas at every opportunity. He tried to keep Sergius Paulus from believing the gospel. Luke uses Saul's Roman name here, Paul, for the first time. Paul, who was filled with the Holy Spirit confronts Elymas and tells him he is a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right. He exposes his deception and warns him the hand of the Lord is against him. He tells him he will be blind for a time and unable to see. How ironic that Paul warns a Jewish magi who is opposing the gospel that he will be blind. That is exactly what happened to Paul on the Damascus Road!

Paul directly confronts enemy opposition by the power of the Holy Spirit. The enemy will always find people he can use to deceive others and keep them from hearing and believing the gospel. When we are confronted with those kinds of people we need to expose them and rebuke them in the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus! Paul could not argue or win a debate with Bar-Jesus because he was not opposing Paul in a debate. This is not like the Athenian philosophers on the Areopagus in *Acts 17*. He was trying to keep Sergius Paulus from hearing the gospel and turning away from Elymas to Jesus Christ. Elymas had him bound through his power and deception. Paul and Barnabas wanted to set Sergius Paulus free through the power of the gospel. In that sense this is a power encounter between God and Satan.

What was Barnabas doing while Paul was confronting Bar-Jesus? What was Mark doing? I think they were both supporting Paul in the confrontation, agreeing with him when they could speak but more importantly praying and asking God to intervene. Paul for his part shows his prophetic and discernment gifts in his encounter with Elymas.

13:11-12 - Immediately upon Paul pronouncing judgment on Elymas he is struck blind and gropes about seeking someone to help him. When Sergius Paulus sees the miracle and demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power he believes. He is amazed at the teaching of the Lord. A Roman proconsul has now come to faith in Jesus. A church is born on Cyprus, the first fellowship of believers on Paul's first missionary journey. Sergius Paulus was a Roman official, probably a senator in rank and class. Theophilus was also a Roman official. Did they know each other or had they heard of each other? It is impossible to know, but it must have warmed Theophilus' heart to know that a fellow Roman official was a believer in Christ just as he was.

God used a miracle and its power to bring Sergius Paulus to faith. This was not a miracle of healing however but a miracle of judgment on an enemy of God who was deceiving a person the Holy Spirit was trying to reach. Not all miracles are healing and positive. Some are negative and pronounce or dispense justice and judgment as here. Yet the results are the same and God uses them to bring people to him.

13:13-15 - Luke now changes the order of the missionaries from Barnabas and Saul to Paul and his companions. Paul is now in the lead and Barnabas is in support. There are two possible reasons for this. First, Barnabas recognized Paul's gifts and because of his encouraging spirit

allowed Paul to take the lead. Second, Cyprus was Barnabas' home territory and he knew the island best so it made sense for him to take the lead. Now they were moving to Asia Minor Paul's home territory and he was more familiar with where they were going so he took the lead.

They travel from Paphos on Cyprus to Perga in Pamphylia on the southern coast of Asia Minor. It is there John Mark leaves them and returns to Jerusalem. Luke gives no reason for Mark's leaving. However he does note in *Acts 15:38* that when Barnabas and Paul want to return to the churches they founded in Asia Minor Barnabas wants to take Mark and Paul refuses, saying he deserted them in Pamphylia. It is what leads to their split. Some have speculated that Paul came down with a case of malaria in Perga since it was common in that area of the coast and Mark panicked. That however is only speculation. It could be Mark left because of some illness and fear of catching it. It could also be that he left because he was not yet ready for the rigors of missionary travel and work. We don't know the reason. Paul's comment in *Acts 15* however does indicate that there was some negative reason Mark left the team.

Paul and Barnabas travel inland to Pisidian Antioch and go to the synagogue on the Sabbath as was their custom and strategy. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue ruler asked if they had anything they wanted to share with the assembly. He was being polite and hospitable and this was according to Jewish custom that if an out of town guest was attending they were given an opportunity to share about the Scriptures. Paul had been given an opportunity to preach the gospel to the assembled Jews and Gentile God-fearers and he seized it!

13:16 - There are several things to note in this verse that tell us the Hellenistic Jewish synagogues of the Diaspora were quite different from the synagogues of Judea and even Galilee. First, Paul stands up to preach. In Israel he would stand up to read the Scriptures but sit down to preach. Luke notes Jesus did this many times in his gospel. Here Paul stands to speak. Obviously customs were different. Second, Paul addresses his fellow Jews and the Gentiles who worship God, which probably refers to God-fearers. That means there were Gentiles present in that synagogue. That would have never happened in Judea. Peter was severely criticized in *Acts 11* for going to a Gentile's home and eating with them. In Judea one would be considered unclean if you came into contact with a Gentile. Here they are in the synagogue! The relaxing of the holiness codes in Greek areas gave Paul and Barnabas fertile ground in which to reach Gentiles. As always they preached to Jews first and then the Gentiles but their mission was to reach Gentiles. The attitudes and Hellenized culture of the Diaspora synagogues benefitted Paul and Barnabas' mission.

13:17-22 - Paul like Peter did in *Acts 2, 3 & 4* rehearses Israel's history in a condensed way focusing on several important themes. Stephen also does the same thing in *Acts 7*. He begins with God's choice of them as his people and their stay in Egypt. Then he moves to the exodus, the wandering in the wilderness and the conquest of the land. He does not mention Moses in this speech. Paul then talks about Israel's desire for a king and God giving them Saul. Then he introduces David, a man after God's heart. David is going to be Paul's springboard to Jesus.

13:23-41 - Paul tells the Jews and Gentiles gathered in the Pisidian Antioch synagogue that Jesus is descended from David, which means he is the Messiah. Here he calls him the Savior, Greek *sotar*. Paul then introduces John the Baptist and his mission to Israel. It is quite possible that these Jews already knew of John's ministry and mission. In *Acts 19* Paul meets some disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus, further to the west in Asia Province. Some of these Jews in Pisidia

had undoubtedly made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for one of the great feasts of Israel. If they had been there in the last several years they would have heard about John and what he was doing and preaching. Paul sets up John as the Elijah prophet. He says as John was finishing his work he pointed to another who was coming after him.

Paul says it is to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles that the message of salvation has been sent. The rulers in Jerusalem, meaning the high priests and Sanhedrin, people Paul had worked for, did not recognize Jesus as Messiah. Yet in condemning him they fulfilled what God had prophesied long before in the prophets. They handed him over to Pilate to have him executed. Did these people know who Pilate was? Apparently so or else Paul doesn't find it necessary to fill them in on who he is. Perhaps it was obvious to them. Jesus is crucified on the tree, which means he was cursed of God according to *Deuteronomy* as Paul well knew. The curse of the Law is a major theme of Paul's in the *Letter to the Galatians*. They laid him in a tomb but God raised him from the dead and he was seen by many of those who knew him, his disciples who had traveled with him. They are now his witnesses to the Jewish people. Paul does not include him and Barnabas among those witnesses. The point is however that they are alive and can testify to what they have seen and heard about Jesus and what happened to him. Paul does what the other apostles and prophets did with the Jews; he emphasizes Jesus' resurrection in his preaching to them. He demonstrates that because God raised him from the dead Jesus is the Messiah of Israel.

Paul now says he brings them good news, gospel. What God promised their fathers he has fulfilled in raising Jesus from the dead. Then he quotes *Psalms 2* and *Isaiah 55* as support for God raising Jesus. He follows that with a quote from *Psalms 16*, the same quote Peter used in *Acts 2* at Pentecost that speaks of God not allowing his Holy One to see decay. Paul follows Peter's pattern as well by saying David died and was buried but the one God raised from the dead did not see decay. Then he closes by saying that forgiveness of sins is available from God through Jesus and that believing in Jesus justifies you before God which following the Law of Moses could not do. This is the theme of *Galatians* which Paul will write to this church and other churches in the region before the Jerusalem Council. It is interesting to note this theme appears in Paul's initial preaching of the gospel to the Galatian churches.

He then warns them not to do what the prophets warned the people about doing, becoming scoffers about God's plan and gospel. Some of the Jews did that. It was with the Gentile God-fearers that Paul and Barnabas found their most fertile ground for evangelism.

13:42-43 - Paul and Barnabas get a good reception from the people of the synagogue who invite them back to speak the next week on the Sabbath. After the service is over many of the Jews and what Luke calls devout converts to Judaism follow Paul and Barnabas and talk with them more about the grace of God. Are the Gentile devout converts to Judaism the same as Gentile God-fearers or are these actual proselytes? Luke mixes his terms here and it is difficult to tell if he is talking about two different groups of Gentiles or the same group of people. I think it is the same group, but here he does make it sound like these were full proselytes rather than just God-fearers. The result of Paul's preaching was an opportunity for Paul and Barnabas to teach and disciple Jews and Gentiles alike who had believed the grace of God.

13:44-48 - On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear Barnabas and Paul preach. My guess is this is the largest crowd that had ever gathered around the synagogue. It created jealousy among some of the Jews who resented Barnabas and Saul for their popularity.

Some of those Jews had probably been trying to get Gentiles to listen to the Word of God for years and along comes these two strangers and in a week almost the whole city comes out to hear them! What's wrong with us? Who are these men? They aren't from our city. They should go away! Those are probably some of the thoughts of the Jewish opponents in the Pisidian Antioch synagogue.

What they didn't understand is that Barnabas and Paul were filled with the Holy Spirit and that is why their preaching was so attractive. Furthermore it was the Spirit who was drawing people to hear the gospel. The signs were there for them to read that what Paul and Barnabas were preaching was true. Jesus was the Messiah because the Holy Spirit was present for all who believed. They chose to ignore that and instead became jealous of their success. They were too full of pride. It became worse when they began to understand that Paul and Barnabas were only requiring faith in Jesus as Lord and being baptized in his name to be saved rather than to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses. The issues of the Judaizers are starting to appear in Galatia, even in the beginning of the church there.

Paul and Barnabas boldly proclaim that they will go to the Gentiles. They had to speak to the Jews first because Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, but God has opened the door for all to be saved who will trust in him. They declare that the Jews have rejected the gospel and do not consider themselves worthy of eternal life. Paul then quotes *Isaiah 49:6* that God has made them a light to the Gentiles to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Paul and Barnabas saw their mission as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that in the last days God would offer salvation to the Gentiles through the Messiah of Israel. For them the end times were present because the Gentiles were coming to faith in Jesus. It was one more proof for Paul that Jesus was the Christ!

Paul's statement about the Jews rejecting Jesus so now he and Barnabas can preach to the Gentiles raises another issue. What if the Jews in Pisidian Antioch had not rejected the gospel? What if they had all believed? Would Paul and Barnabas have not offered salvation to the Gentiles through Jesus? I don't think so because his quote of *Isaiah 49* states clearly that in the last days the Gentiles would come to faith. Maybe the difference would have been Paul and Barnabas would not have been preaching the gospel, the Jews of Pisidian Antioch would have instead.

Note *verse 48* and Luke's bold statement of God's election. All who were appointed for eternal life believed. Does that mean that those who did not believe God had not chosen or they were not appointed? That is how one can read Luke's statement. This is a strong statement of God's predestinating work through the Holy Spirit. The bottom line is faith is a mystery and a work of God in us. Luke is telling us unless the Holy Spirit draws us to Christ and gives us eyes and ears of faith to believe the gospel we will not believe. This statement is heavily weighted to the sovereignty of God side of the predestination-free will tension in the New Testament. God does not override our free will to choose him, but neither can we assume it is all up to us. We love because he first loved us. Which has the priority? Both do. If we tend to emphasize the free will part of salvation we need to always remember God's role in our decision to follow Christ and believe the gospel.

13:49-52 - Luke summarizes what happened. The gospel spread throughout the whole region. However Jewish opponents of Paul and Barnabas incited God-fearing women of high standing in the city and leading men to stir up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and have them expelled from the region. It sounds like many of the wives of leading men of the city and region were God-fearers and when they were stirred up about Paul and Barnabas and Gentiles coming to

Jesus, they stirred up their husbands in turn. The Jewish opponents used their connections to get Paul and Barnabas run out of town. They obliged, shaking the dust from their feet in protest and moved on to Iconium a city about 100 miles east from Pisidian Antioch. Luke notes however that the disciples in Antioch were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Even the expulsion of their teachers could not dampen their enthusiasm for the Lord Jesus and their newfound faith. Joy marked who they were; the joy that came from the character of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit growing in them. It was further evidence that their conversion was genuine. Paul will later write to them in *Galatians 5* and say it is the greatest evidence of the Spirit's presence, his fruit.

Chapter 14:

14:1 - Paul and Barnabas had worked out a specific missionary strategy that proved successful for their situation. They would preach at a local synagogue in a city. There they would find open Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who would believe the gospel. They would form the nucleus of a new church. Those churches were always a mixed congregation of Gentile and Jewish believers. The Gentiles were mostly Greeks and the Jews were Hellenistic Jews who were more open to Gentiles and fellowshiping with them. This strategy would not have worked in more conservative Judea. God had prepared the way among his ancient people to create his new people.

14:2-6 - Jews in Iconium stir up the Greeks there and oppose Paul and Barnabas. But rather than run Luke says Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time in Iconium. The word can mean sufficient, many, much, or long. It is impossible to tell exactly how long Luke means, but it had to have been more than a few days or weeks. They preach the gospel boldly and God confirmed the message by enabling them to do many miracles among the people in the city. The miracles confirmed the message of the gospel. They were not just part of their worship separate from their preaching. In other words they didn't do miracles just for the sake of doing miracles. They didn't have a healing service! They did miracles because it confirmed what they were saying about the Kingdom of God being among them through faith in Jesus Christ. Their focus was on preaching the gospel so people could be saved not on doing miracles. The miracles helped the preaching, that is what they were designed for just as Jesus had done!

The people of the city were divided over Paul and Barnabas; the Jews who opposed them versus those who had believed or who had been healed or even those who had seen a friend healed and hadn't yet believed but thought something wonderful was happening. The gospel divided the city because there was opposition to it just as Jesus had told his disciples. Paul and Barnabas get wind of a plot among the Jews and their Gentile allies to stone them so they flee Iconium and move on to Derbe and Lystra in the region of Lycaonia. Lystra was not more than 25 miles or so straight south from Iconium, while Derbe was about 80 to 90 miles east. Along the way they continue to preach the good news.

14:8-13 - Paul heals a crippled man in Lystra. He had been crippled from birth and had never walked so the miracle amazed the people. Paul had perceived the man had the faith to be healed and called out to him to stand on his feet. Luke doesn't say how Paul knew this. Presumably the Holy Spirit prompted him with some kind of discernment. We also need to guard against concluding that every miracle must happen this way, someone has to have the faith to believe God can heal them. That is the case here and God responded to the man's faith. At other times, like Peter and John with the man at the temple in *Acts 3*, the faith of the person healed has

nothing to do with the miracle. The Holy Spirit simply does it because of God's grace. Sometimes faith is present to believe and God responds; sometimes faith is not present and God responds directly to the need because of his compassion.

When the crowd saw what God had done through Paul they thought the gods had come down to them and began to call Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes because he was the spokesperson. This must have been a largely pagan crowd that was out in the city and not around the synagogue. In fact Luke doesn't say the first thing Paul and Barnabas did in Lystra was go to the synagogue. Did they change strategy in Lystra because of what had just happened in Iconium? Luke says Paul was speaking to the people, but doesn't mention the synagogue. They must have been in the city square speaking to the Greeks and not in the synagogue speaking to the Jews and Gentile God-fearers. It is also possible there was no synagogue in Lystra and that is why they were out in the city. Zeus was the father of the gods and because Barnabas was older and probably had a grey beard as a Jewish man they called him Zeus. Paul was the primary speaker by this time and the Greeks called him Hermes because he was the spokesperson and herald of the Greek gods. The crowd is so impressed by the healing of the crippled man the priests of Zeus bring bulls and are going to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. You can see the level of superstition and pagan influence they were under. The pagan Greeks of Lystra had no other way to explain or understand what had happened. The gods must have come down among us!

14:14-18 - When Paul and Barnabas heard the priests wanted to sacrifice to them they tore their clothes and tried to make them stop. Note that Luke names Paul and Barnabas apostles here for the first time. Barnabas was not one of the Twelve, the men Jesus had chosen from among his disciples in *Luke 6* and neither was Paul. Yet they are named apostles here by Luke. They are indeed sent ones by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel and found churches through the power and leading of the Spirit. Their mission had been confirmed by the laying on of hands of the leaders of the Antioch church. Apostle as Luke uses it here means missionary or sent one and is used in a different way than he uses it when he describes the Twelve. Paul claims he is one of the apostles in his letters and places himself on equal footing with the Twelve. The word has some fluid meaning within Luke's writing. Are there apostles today? When Luke uses it in the broader sense of missionary church planter I would have to say yes. When he uses it to describe the Twelve then the answer is no.

Paul and Barnabas are incensed that the pagans want to sacrifice to them. They rush into the crowd to make the priests of Zeus stop. Paul is now speaking to the pagans directly. He says he and Barnabas are only men just like them. They bring good news to them. They are to turn from worthless things to the living God. The Greek word for worthless can mean vain, empty, and devoid of truth. Paul is talking about their idols and especially Zeus and Hermes! The living God made heaven and earth and everything in them. He appeals to God as Creator. He says in the past God let all nations go their own ways but has not left himself without testimony to his existence. God has shown kindness to all by giving you rain and crops in their seasons. He provides plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. Paul's argument is what the Greeks mistakenly think is their god's doing is really the one true living God their Creator. He says rains, crops and even joy are signs of his blessing. The word translated joy in the NIV means joy, gladness and good cheer. Is Paul speaking of wine, sex, children, and the good things of life? He uses a different word than the normal word for joy that he uses to describe the fruit of the Spirit. Paul is saying that one of the signs of God's existence in the world is the good things in life we experience and the joy or pleasure that comes with them. God is a God of joy and goodness and

gives us good things to enjoy. Sin has marred God's world but God intends that we should enjoy life! Paul in speaking to a pagan audience appeals to God as Creator and not Jesus as Messiah.

14:19-20 - It doesn't take long for Jewish opponents of Paul and Barnabas to travel to Lystra and stir up the people against them. They seize Paul and stone him then drag him outside of the city leaving him for dead. This must be one of the times Paul reports that he was stoned in 2 *Corinthians 11*. The disciples gather around him and he gets up and walks back into the city. What was Barnabas thinking at this point? It appears that only Paul was stoned by the Jews. Was Paul's recovery miraculous? Luke doesn't directly say but by inference in the way he describes the incident it appears it was. The new church thought he was dead but then he gets up and walks back into the city. What did the Jews think? What did the pagans think was going on? What did this incident produce in the new church? The whole city must have been in an uproar over Paul, Barnabas and the gospel! The next day they leave Lystra and head for Derbe, some 80 miles to the east.

14:21-22 - Paul and Barnabas go on to Derbe, about 80 miles east of Lystra and preach the gospel there. They won a large number of disciples. Luke does not say whether they first went to the synagogue in Derbe and began their preaching there or whether they simply went out into the main square of the city like they had at Lystra. I am guessing that they went to the synagogue because that was their normal practice and strategy in the cities to which they went. I think Lystra was the exception to that strategy. Luke says some Jews came to Lystra from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowd. The more I think about it the more it makes sense that there was no synagogue in Lystra and that is why they preached in the streets.

When Paul and Barnabas had finished planting a church in Derbe they retraced their steps back through Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch. Their purpose was to strengthen the disciples in each of these cities and encourage them. Imagine how concerned they were for these new churches. They only had a minimal time in each city to plant a church and then they left. If there were some Jewish Christian believers they had access to the Hebrew Scriptures and the people could have the Word of God from the Old Testament. But unless some further eyewitnesses or apostles traveled into Galatia and the regions Paul and Barnabas had evangelized they would have known very little except the bare basics of the story of the gospel and what Jesus said and did and his teachings. That could also be a very important reason the New Testament was written. There were so many new Gentile and Jewish disciples in the cities of Asia Minor and Greece, as well as North Africa and parts of Syria and so few apostles and eyewitnesses who knew the teachings and story of Jesus that in order to spread it further and disciple the new Christians Jesus' story and teachings needed to be written down.

Paul and Barnabas encourage the Galatian Christians to remain true to their faith. They tell them through many hardships we will enter the Kingdom of God. They are not saying hardship is a condition for entering God's Kingdom; it is solely faith in Jesus. They are saying that hardship is to be expected. It is a given for a Christ-follower. By telling them this Paul and Barnabas help these new believers understand that when they get discouraged or following Jesus turns out to be harder than they thought and they are tempted to give up, what they are experiencing is normal. Don't give up. Keep the faith!

14:23 - Luke reports that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each of the new churches, men of faith, character and wisdom who could guide the believers in each city. The word for appoint

here is an interesting and ambiguous word. It can mean appoint but it literally means choose or elect by raising hands. The context renders the meaning as Paul and Barnabas chose the elders in each of the churches, but the word suggests the congregation was somehow involved in the choosing. Did Paul and Barnabas nominate them and the congregation give their approval? The word has just enough ambiguity to lend credence to that possibility. It is not so cut and dried as I had thought, as if the congregation had no say in the matter. Later, by the early second century the “Didache” (an early Christian writing of the early second century) says that the congregation elects or chooses their own bishops and deacons. Once the apostles had died out election by the congregation itself became the norm for choosing elders.

When the new elders had been chosen Paul and Barnabas committed them to the Lord's care through prayer and fasting. They wanted to make sure that these were the men whom God had chosen and they knew because of opposition to the gospel they would have a difficult time leading their churches so their prayers took on even greater importance. The inference here is that the Holy Spirit played a much greater role in guiding these new elders and churches than we understand today. With all our policies and procedures and our trust in our own wisdom to lead and guide the institution that the church has become in our time we are not nearly so dependent on the Spirit. They had nothing else! They had the Old Testament and a little of the teachings of Jesus but they did not have the whole New Testament as we do. Many of the new churches, if they had Jewish Christians in them, no doubt defaulted to the synagogue style of worship and meeting on the Lord's Day, plus they had the Lord's Supper and baptism. But if there were few Jews in the new church or none how did they even worship? All they knew was paganism! It was a huge challenge. No wonder Paul and Barnabas spent intense time in prayer and fasting before they turned the church over to the new elders and left for another city. The situation also helps us understand why Paul wrote to these churches and how valuable his advice and counsel was to each of these congregations. If *Galatians* was the first letter he wrote it helps us understand much about why he wrote and the controversy that threatened the new churches and the need for the Jerusalem Council!

14:24-28 - Paul and Barnabas continue to retrace their steps back the way they came. They reach Pisidian Antioch and then head south into Pamphylia, the region along the coast of central Asia Minor. They go down to Perga and preach the gospel there. Luke's language suggests they had not yet preached the Word of God in Perga. They landed there when they first came into Asia Minor and it was near there that Mark left them to return to Jerusalem. Some have suggested that is where Paul contracted malaria and was very ill and that was the reason Mark left them. If that is the case they may not have had the chance to preach in Perga before because of Paul's illness. They take the opportunity now as they head back to Antioch. They proceed to Attalia and take a ship back to Antioch.

When they arrive back at their home church they gather everyone together and report about what had happened and what the Lord did in Galatia. They report about God winning the Gentiles to Christ. Luke says they stay a long time there with the disciples. There is a time gap between their return to Antioch, Paul's writing of *Galatians* and the Jerusalem Council. His first missionary journey is between 47 and 48. *Galatians* is written in 48 and the Jerusalem Council is around 49. So the long time with the disciples in Antioch is around a year or a little more.

Chapter 15:

15:1-5 - Even though Antioch is considerably north from Jerusalem, the men from Judea came down to Antioch. In the Bible one always comes down from Jerusalem. For most places in the Middle East that is true. Jerusalem is higher than most cities to which people would travel so one literally does come down from Jerusalem to somewhere else.

Jewish Christian teachers came to Antioch and were teaching the people, including the Gentiles, that one must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved. Keeping the Law, with all its rules and regulations and being circumcised makes a Gentile a full Jewish proselyte. They were teaching everyone must become a Jew. What made them a Christian was their belief in Jesus as the Messiah. Paul and Barnabas were in sharp disagreement with these teachers. The word for sharp debate means discord, dispute, strife and in other contexts can mean riot or commotion. Knowing how passionate Paul could be it is no surprise that the conflict was heated!

Paul and Barnabas were appointed along with some others from Antioch to take this dispute before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. They traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria telling the churches there how the Gentiles had come to Jesus as Messiah and everyone was glad. These churches might have had some Gentiles in them but were probably mostly Jewish Christian or in the case of Samaria, Samaritan Christian. When they arrived in Jerusalem they reported everything that had happened in the Galatian churches and what God had done through them. It is interesting to note that on the way Paul and Barnabas told their story to the Christians in Phoenicia and Samaria. This was good politics as they are gaining allies in support of their position. The opposition seemed to be centered in Jerusalem among former Pharisees. Also it is probable at this time as Paul and Barnabas are on their way to Jerusalem that Paul writes *Galatians*, having heard of the troubles in the Galatian churches which are related to the reason the Council was called. I think he writes before the Council, in confidence that his position is the right one. The Judaizers had come to Antioch in opposition to the gospel of grace. It could be that Paul understood that they were traveling and teaching wherever there were Gentiles in the churches trying to push them to become Jewish proselytes as well as believers in Jesus. Alarmed at the vulnerability of his Gentile churches in Galatia Paul writes the letter and travels to Jerusalem to settle the matter once and for all! He takes advantage of the Roman postal service and writes a letter, knowing it will be delivered in a week or so. The Roman postal service enabled ordinary people to communicate and write letters back and forth with considerable frequency and reliability. Another cultural characteristic that helped the gospel spread and the apostles to communicate with their churches!

Some who were Christian Pharisees (which sounds like an oxymoron) spoke to the Council and said the Gentiles must become Jewish proselytes with full circumcision and full obedience to the Law, presumably including all the dietary laws as well. The irony here is that these are Pharisee Christians. They believe in Jesus the Messiah but they are holding on to their Pharisaical legalism. Paul had been a Pharisee as a Jew but as a Christian had abandoned their practices. He understood them perhaps better than any of the other apostles and elders because he had been one of them! He knew how bankrupt their theology was.

15:6-11 - Luke introduces the Jerusalem Council, made up of the apostles and elders, mostly from Jerusalem and Paul and Barnabas representing Antioch and the Gentile churches. How many of them were there? Did they gather elders from the Jerusalem church and other men who could be called apostles from the larger circle of Jesus' disciples? Did they try and mirror the

Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jewish people? It is an intriguing possibility but there is no way to answer the question.

Luke says after much discussion Peter got up to address the Council. We don't know what else was said but reading Peter's address one can only imagine the debate went back and forth amongst them about whether the Gentiles should be circumcised and how Jewish they had to become in order for the apostles to believe they were saved. The center of the debate was salvation and how it came to us and how God applied it to us. This was a critical moment for the church. If the Pharisee Christians had won the church would have probably died out because it would simply have become another sect of Judaism or it would have split between more conservative Jewish Christians and the more liberal Jewish Christians like Paul and Barnabas along with the Gentile believers. Who knows what that would have done? Where would the apostles have landed? But it did not split. The Holy Spirit led them to stay together and resolve their differences. It is true however that at least some of the Pharisee Jewish Christians did not give up trying to teach Gentile believers they needed to be circumcised. They are almost certainly the origins of the Judaizers who followed Paul throughout his missionary journeys and tried to undo his teachings to the Gentiles.

Peter's speech champions the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He says our hearts are made pure through faith not works. There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, all are saved by grace. The proof of that is the presence of the Holy Spirit in both. The Law and rules are impotent to save us. This was Jesus' message; it was the apostles' preaching, the same as what Paul and Barnabas had been teaching to the Gentiles.

Peter also reminds the assembly that God had chosen him to preach first to the Gentiles and they had heard the gospel and believed through Peter. Peter functions as the Rock here and in a sense puts the Pharisee Christians in their place reminding them that he is the lead apostle not them. Jesus chose Peter to lead and God had led him to preach to Cornelius. God had used Peter to baptize Cornelius and they had all received the Holy Spirit as a result. Peter gently but firmly asserts his authority here.

Peter states again what Jesus had said that the Pharisees placed a burden of law and rules upon the people that could not be followed. And the Law of Moses cannot purify the human heart it can only point out how sinful we really are. Peter had already seen what the gospel of grace could do in someone like Simon the Tanner, or Matthew and Zacchaeus or Mary Magdalene and the other women. Jesus had set them free. He knew God did not want them to go back to the way it had been. The Pharisee believers were trying to put new wine into old wineskins and Peter recognized it and spoke against it. The gospel was all about grace! If it is grace and the Holy Spirit is given to those who believe in Jesus by faith then there cannot be a distinction and all who believe whether Jew or Gentile are saved. Peter would later express some of the same ideas in his two letters to the churches. His summary here of the gospel of grace through faith is not Pauline or Petrine. It is apostolic!

15:12 - The whole assembly means the people assembled and not the church. Luke does not use the word *ekklesia* here but a word that means crowd or group. He says the apostles and elders who had gathered to hold council together listened in silence as Paul and Barnabas told what had happened in the churches in Galatia.

Paul and Barnabas finally get to tell their story to the elders and apostles in Jerusalem. They lay out the signs and wonders God accomplished through them and the results of their

preaching; many Gentiles had believed and were saved. As Peter had said it was the presence of the Holy Spirit that was the key evidence of their salvation. That is still true for us today!

15:13-21 - James stands up to summarize and suggest a solution after Paul and Barnabas finish recounting their mission. He acts as the conciliator for the apostles. He does not do this arrogantly but with humility but it is clear he carries great gravitas among the Jewish Christians, especially in Jerusalem. He was not the leader of the Pharisee Christians but it appears they respected him greatly and followed his lead. Once James had been won over grace wins the day. His solution is a model of compromise. He re-assures the Jewish Christians that they will not have to do things that are anathema to them and would insult them greatly in order to fellowship with their Gentile brothers and sisters. His minimal rules for the Gentiles are all things that are related to pagan worship practices and were grossly immoral for Jews. Paul and the other apostles who had dealt with the Gentiles see them as good and healthy yet they are not forced into teaching something to the Gentiles that puts the burden of the Law upon them. People are saved by grace through faith in Jesus not because they don't do certain things.

James reminds them all that God's purpose has always been to call a people for himself. He quotes from *Amos 9* where God says he will rebuild David's fallen tent, a Messianic passage. A remnant will return to the Lord which fits what the Jewish Christians probably saw themselves as, the remnant. God had gathered them at Pentecost and given them his Spirit as had been prophesied. *Amos* says when all of this happens God will call the Gentiles to himself as well and they too will be included into the people of God. This would all be the Lord's doing which they had witnessed in what Peter had shared and what Paul and Barnabas had shared. In short the Gentile mission was a fulfillment of prophecy. James shrewdly quotes *Amos* here who does not imply at all that the Gentiles must obey the Law and be circumcised but that God will bring them into his people.

His conclusion is that the church should not make it difficult for the Gentiles to follow Jesus. They should abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality and from the meat of strangled animals, meaning meat that has the blood still in it, and from drinking blood or eating things made from blood. These were all highly offensive to Jews because they all related to pagan worship and immorality. When one reads Paul's letters and the general letters one sees these moral standards preached consistently throughout all the New Testament writings. Paul did not disagree with James summary on the contrary he supported it. In fact meat sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality were two things Paul constantly fought against among his churches. The problem was the Greeks were so used to their pagan culture and ways that it was often difficult to give them up or see them as immoral and things that took them away from God. Paul and his fellow workers were not only calling the Gentiles to a new faith they were calling them to a new culture, a totally new way of living. That position James summarizes here in the Jerusalem Council.

15:22-23 - After having agreed with James' counsel the apostles and elders invite the whole church to help them choose two men who were part of their group to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Syria with a letter. This is a brilliant political move and helps the whole church both affirm the Council's decision and be part of the solution to the problem. It helps the people participate in the decision, to have a stake in what happens, yet it avoids a debate in the whole body which could have been divisive. Not all had the maturity and understanding to debate the matter. That task belonged to the apostles and elders. But by drawing in the whole church to let

them help choose the emissaries to send to Antioch it kept people from feeling left out of the process all together. Everyone in the Jerusalem church must have known how important this Council was. Nothing like this had happened before! The Council's decision and the process they used to carry it out builds unity!

They chose Judas, called Barsabbas and Silas. Barsabbas must have been a popular nickname because there is another Barsabbas in *Acts 1:23* whose surname was Joseph. He was the other man the believers put forward when Matthias was chosen by lot to replace Judas Iscariot. Judas may have been nicknamed Barsabbas because Judas was such a common name too. One of the Lord's brothers was named Judas or Jude and one of the remaining apostles was also named Judas, Judas son of James. Silas had been in Jerusalem and knew Peter later in Peter's ministry. He is the one who functions as Peter's secretary and helps him write *1 Peter* (see *1 Peter 5:12*). They both would have been in the circle of the elders because they were not apostles or at least not part of the Twelve. It is possible by this time that a larger group of people are included into the circle of the apostles beyond the Twelve. Luke has already called Barnabas and Paul apostles. We know James the Lord's brother was called an apostle by this time, so the circle was wider than just the Twelve.

The letter the Council sends to the Gentile believers is addressed to the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. Cilicia is curious. Had Paul planted churches there, his home territory around Tarsus, or had the gospel simply spread there naturally from Antioch? Why don't they address the Gentiles in Pamphylia, Pisidia, Lycaonia or Galatia where Paul and Barnabas had gone? It is possible that Iconium, Lystra and Derbe were considered part of Cilicia. They are listed so on the map in the back of my Bible. It appears the geographical distinctions were fluid in that time and not as precise as we would name them.

15:24-29 - The letter first of all disassociates the apostles and elders in Jerusalem from the Judaizers who had tried to teach that the Gentiles should become full Jewish proselytes in order to follow Jesus. It does not directly apologize for the false teaching but it does acknowledge that it greatly upset the Gentile believers. The second thing it does is affirm Barnabas and Paul and their ministry. The letter recognizes the hardships and risks they bore to bring the gospel to these new Gentile Christians. Thirdly, it introduces Judas and Silas, the emissaries from the apostles who will confirm by word of mouth what the letter says so that there can be no question the gospel that they first believed is genuine.

There follows the moral instructions about abstaining from food sacrifices to idols, from blood and meat from strangled animals and sexual immorality. Those instructions are introduced by the phrase "*it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.*" The Council had reached their conclusion through debate, declaration, testimony and Scripture which all finally led to the consensus expressed by James. That is how the Holy Spirit led a divided group of leaders into unity. Later they brought the whole church into the process, helping them choose whom to send back to Antioch with Barnabas and Paul. As noted above the moral instructions are all related to common pagan religious practices and the common immorality of Greco-Roman society. The new Gentile disciples lived in that world but as Jesus said he chose them out of the world to live for him. Part of the debate in the Council was how to maintain the gospel of grace through faith in Jesus and yet recognize that being a disciple of Jesus demanded life-change from a person and that they would have to go against the culture within which they found themselves. The letter encourages the new disciples and tells them they will do well if they avoid these things. It says they need to abstain from these things but does not say if you do them you are no follower of

Christ. The word for abstain means, it is enough. I would take the meaning as; it is enough if you avoid meat sacrificed from idols, etc.

15:30-35 - Judas, Silas, Paul, Barnabas and perhaps others who went with them set off for Antioch. Luke says they went down to Antioch, using picturesque language that describes going down from Jerusalem to the coast and then up to Antioch. They gather the church in Antioch and read the letter from the apostles and elders. The people are encouraged by its message. Did Silas, Judas, Paul and Barnabas read the letter with some anxiety not knowing how the people would respond? They didn't need to. When the Holy Spirit produces the kind of unity and consensus in the leaders he will bring a gracious response from the people. They should have expected a positive response because the unity in their counsel was brought about by the Spirit.

Judas and Silas are prophets who teach, encourage and strengthen the church. Luke says after some time they return to Jerusalem. However, in **15:40** Luke says Paul chose Silas to accompany him after he and Barnabas parted ways. Did Judas return to Jerusalem but Silas stay in Antioch? It appears that is the case or else Paul sent for Silas or he returned to Antioch for another purpose after he had gone back to Jerusalem. There is a time gap here again of indeterminate length and as is often the case in Luke's writings it is difficult to piece together an exact chronology of events. That is not his purpose even though we want it to be!

Paul and Barnabas remain in Antioch teaching the church and preaching the gospel. How long that lasted is difficult to say. This is not the first time Luke says Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time in Antioch teaching and preaching. Eventually they want to return to the mission field, but was the church reluctant to let them go or simply sad to see them leave because of their great gifts and the benefits they brought to the church in Antioch? Perhaps both are true. Can you imagine Paul being one of your pastors? *WOW!*

15:36-41 - It is difficult to determine precisely how long Luke means by "*some time later.*" However, it was less than a year because the time from the Jerusalem Council to Paul's second missionary journey was about a year.

Barnabas suggests to Paul they return to the churches they had planted in Galatia and see how they are doing. Did Barnabas want to continue on and plant more churches in Asia Minor or did he simply want to encourage the ones already in existence? We don't know. Paul agrees with the idea but the two friends split over whom to take. Barnabas wants to take Mark but Paul refuses because he had deserted them in Pamphylia on the first journey. It appears Paul thought Mark had quit them before and questioned his courage. The disagreement results in a split between the two of them. Barnabas takes Mark and returns to Cyprus where he and Paul began. Paul takes Silas and goes to Tarsus and on through the pass of the Cilician Gates to Derbe, Lystra and the cities he and Barnabas had visited before. Barnabas works with Mark and later in his ministry Paul changes his mind about Barnabas' cousin. He sees his value. See *Colossians 4:11* and *2 Timothy 4:11* which both affirm Mark's ministry. He had grown much under Barnabas' mentoring. Barnabas gave great support and encouragement to two of the major authors of the New Testament, Paul and Mark. Through them he also had influence upon a third major author Luke. It is doubtful that the New Testament as we know it would have been written without the mentoring and encouragement of Barnabas!

Silas joins Paul and goes with him into Cilicia, commended by the church at Antioch. It is unclear whether Silas had returned to Antioch from Jerusalem and then joined Paul or whether he had stayed in Antioch the entire year after the delivery of the letter from the Jerusalem

Council. Luke implies he had come back to Antioch after he had returned to Jerusalem after the letter had been read and he had spent some time in Antioch encouraging the church with his teaching.

Paul's first step in Cilicia with Silas was to encourage the churches he and Barnabas had planted. He cared for them first to make sure they were on solid footing and probably also to see what effect his letter had had on the situation in the Galatian churches. This is the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey and in it he will take the gospel into Europe!

Chapter 16:

16:1-4 - Paul and Silas come through Derbe and Lystra moving from east to west in Cilicia and in Lystra meet Timothy. He is a disciple of Jesus who is half Jewish, with a Jewish mother and a Greek father. His mother was also a Jewish Christian believer whose name was Eunice; see *2 Timothy 1:5*. Paul has him circumcised because he wants to take Timothy with him and Silas. That was a painful step for Timothy and had nothing to do with Timothy being accepted as a follower of Jesus. I think Paul had him circumcised because he and Silas wanted to launch another evangelistic journey and Paul's strategy was going to be similar to what he and Barnabas had done in Galatia. They would first go to a Jewish synagogue in a city and begin their preaching of the gospel there. If Timothy was circumcised then he can pass as a full proselyte and gain access to any synagogue. However, if he remained uncircumcised it might have been difficult for Paul and Silas to take him with them and freely enter some synagogues because Timothy was a Greek.

Timothy joins Paul and Silas and the three of them travel from city to city where there were churches delivering the decision of the Jerusalem Council. Silas had been one of the two representatives picked by the Jerusalem church and this would have given his testimony of the apostles' and elders' decision further weight. Luke says the churches were strengthened and grew in faith and numbers. Paul's counsel to them in *Galatians* had been confirmed. The gospel was all about justification by grace alone through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ!

16:6-10 - Paul, Silas and Timothy traveled through central Turkey but were not able to enter Asia Province, western Turkey, because of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was in charge of Paul's mission. Luke doesn't tell us how the Spirit kept them from Asia just that he did. It is the Spirit's doing that Paul ends up in Troas and has a vision about Macedonia. It is also at Troas that Luke joins his team and one of the "*we sections*" of *Acts* begins. Now Luke is an eyewitness.

Mysia is in the northwest of Turkey near Troas while Bithynia is near the north central coast of the Black Sea. Once again the Spirit keeps them from going north and continues to push them toward Troas which was a port city on the Aegean coast of Turkey south of the Bosphorus but some 200 miles north of Ephesus. When Paul has the vision of the man of Macedonia calling for help he wastes no time in crossing over to Macedonia because he sensed the Spirit calling him there to preach the gospel in Europe.

It is interesting to note that in *verse 6* Luke says the Holy Spirit kept them from entering Asia Province. In *verse 7* he says the Spirit of Jesus kept them from moving north into Bithynia. Just by his titles Luke is reinforcing the fact that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus and Jesus is God himself. In *verse 10* Luke says that the four companions had concluded that God had called them to go over to Macedonia. The inference is that the Holy Spirit is God, a person and not an energy force or power because he communicated God's will to them and was directing their mission.

16:11-15 - From Troas they sail to Samothrace, an island in the northern Aegean near the Bosphorus, and then on to Neapolis which was the port city of Philippi at the end of the Egnatian Way the main Roman road from Rome to the east into Asia. Philippi was a Roman colony and the leading city of the area. As a Roman colony it was settled by former legionary soldiers and their families as a reward for their services to Rome, especially after Octavian had defeated Anthony and Cleopatra at nearby Actium. It had also gained settlers after the battle of Philippi when Anthony and Octavian defeated the rebel forces of Brutus and Cassius. It was the seat of Roman government in the region, governed by a proconsul and the people would have been given the same rights over their land as those who lived in Italy. The citizens of Philippi considered themselves Romans rather than Greeks. Paul might have been attracted to Philippi because he himself was a Roman citizen even though he was a Jew. *Acts* and Paul's letters demonstrate that Paul was proud of his Roman citizenship and he used it to his good advantage on more than one occasion.

When they get to Philippi they go outside the city to the river seeking a place of Jewish prayer because there was no synagogue in the city. It is possible since Philippi was a fairly young city and a Roman colony that there was no appreciable Jewish population there. When they find the place of prayer Paul, Silas and Timothy begin to speak to the women who had gathered for prayer. It only took 10 Jewish men to make a synagogue but apparently there were not enough men to found one in Philippi. There were however Jewish women or God-fearers who had gathered for prayer down at the river. One of them was Lydia a merchant from Thyatira in the Province of Asia, on the road between Sardis and Pergamum and one of the seven churches to whom John writes in *Revelation*. She was a seller of purple cloth for which Thyatira was famous and which the Romans highly valued. Purple or a deep scarlet was the color of the emperors and the senate. Roman nobility wore the color on their togas. Lydia lived in Philippi and might have been the agent in Macedonia for the manufacturers in Thyatira. She was wealthy enough to have a household and a home in Philippi. She was a God-fearer, a Greek who worshipped the God of Israel as were many of the first Gentile Christians. She had sought out the place of prayer in Philippi since there was no synagogue.

Luke says the Lord opened her heart to the gospel and she received it. She is then baptized with her whole household and invites Paul and his companions to stay with her as her guests. When Luke reports that her whole household was baptized what does he mean? Supporters of infant baptism say it implies that there must have been infants in the household and that they were baptized along with the adults because they were now children of the New Covenant. The problem is we do not know how many people were in Lydia's household or who they were. Luke does not tell us. There were probably some servants or slaves that belonged to Lydia but we do not know if they were male or female. Luke never mentions Lydia's husband so we do not know if she was married or not, had any children or if any of her servants had children or not. To conclude that infants from Lydia's household were baptized at the river in Philippi after she had received the gospel is reading into the text what we want it to say in order to justify a position that the text does not directly support. The one presumption it is probably safe to make is that Lydia or Paul or someone from his party shared the gospel with the members of her household and hearing that their mistress had believed they all believe and were baptized as well. She was a God-fearer and her household knew of her beliefs. Did they share them? We don't know, but we do know after Lydia was baptized they shared them because they became Christians along with their mistress.

16:16-18 - Luke reports the incident with the slave girl as a first person account. He and Paul, Silas and perhaps Lydia and others are all headed for the place of prayer by the river when this slave girl meets them in the streets. She is demonized with an evil spirit by which she predicts the future. She had a spirit of divination something the Law of Moses forbid the Jews to practice because it was not from God but from Satan. Her owners made considerable money off of her talent, presumably charging people a good deal of money in order to have their fortune told. Unlike others her demonic power granted her more success than other soothsayers who read entrails or other pagan superstitions. She followed Paul, Silas and their friends for several days and kept shouting after them that they are servants of the Most High God, *Elyon* in Hebrew, who are telling you (literally in Greek) *A* way to be saved. Most translations read "*the way*". Luke leaves out the definite article here on purpose. I think that is what troubled and angered Paul the most. Like all demons she was trying to deceive. What she said contained partial truth. They were telling people the way to be saved. The absence of the definite article here is the key. Paul's preaching was not just *A* way to be saved it was *THE* way to be saved. That omission in her testimony and her shouting after them and calling undo attention to them caused Paul to turn around and declare to the demon to leave the girl in the name of Jesus Christ. He did not command her in the name of the Most High God, *Elyon*, but in the name of Jesus! Immediately the spirit left the girl.

This is a power encounter between the demonic spirit and Paul. Was it testing him to see if he would break or if it could get under Paul's skin? It worked on one level, Paul had had enough. On another level it didn't work because the demon is now cast out of the girl and it can no longer use her to deceive people. What did it expect would happen? Was it too proud and stupid to realize Paul had the power to cast it out by Jesus' Name and the power of the Holy Spirit? It is a puzzling situation but it is consistent with demonic behavior with Jesus. It is as if they can't help playing with fire but they end up losing every time! If its goal was to confuse people it didn't work because the pagan Philippians would have seen the power of God in Paul as greater than the power in the girl. However, the incident did lead to Paul and Silas being arrested. Perhaps that was the goal all along to goad the crowd into opposing Paul and Silas. I do not know.

16:19-24 - The slave girl is free from her demonic oppression but her owner's business is now ruined because the demon is gone. They somehow recognize Paul has delivered the girl from the spirit that used her and that they used. When they see their livelihood threatened by Paul and Silas they drag them into the marketplace before the authorities. This would not have been the proconsul but a lesser official or officials who had the power to settle lesser crimes. Notice that the slave girl's owners only grab Paul and Silas. They leave Luke and Timothy alone. They identify Paul and Silas as Jews. Perhaps they identify them this way because of their dress and Luke and Timothy are dressed differently, probably as any normal Greek would be dressed. They tell the officials that these Jews are throwing the city into an uproar by advocating things unlawful for Romans to practice. That of course is an outright fabrication. The uproar was not to the whole city but to their fortune-telling business! Notice as well that they identify the Philippians as Romans and not Greeks. Philippi was proud of its status as a Roman colony. Their dress, civil law and discourse would have been thoroughly Roman and not Greek like most of the cities around them.

The crowd is whipped into a frenzy probably because Paul and Silas look Jewish and therefore are different from the Philippians who are Romans. There may be some anti-Semitism

underneath the charges here or the slave owners are playing on the anti-Jewish feelings of the Gentile citizens of Rome. Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome not too many months before this incident. Since Philippi is a Roman colony the emperor's action would have been taken far more seriously in Philippi than any other Greek city in the area. This perhaps more than any other reason explains the crowd's opposition to Paul and Silas and the magistrates' readiness to have them flogged and thrown into prison without even a hearing. The Jews had caused riots in Rome over *Chrestus*, a corruption of the title Christ, the name Paul had used in casting out the demon from the girl, and now here were Jews using the same name right here in Philippi!

The magistrates order Paul and Silas stripped and flogged publicly before the whole crowd. This probably satisfied their bloodlust and placated the slave girl's owners. They had not committed a capital crime but a severe flogging would silence them and put them in their place. That was probably what the magistrates were thinking. Paul says in *2 Corinthians 11* that three times he was beaten with rods. That would have been the case here for him and Silas. The Romans used rods carried by the lictors in their axes, the symbol of Roman authority and justice. Paul and Silas would have been beaten with the rods and not flogged with a whip or cat o' nine tails like Jesus had been. The Greek word Luke uses means to be beaten with rods. This was a Roman punishment. After their beating Paul and Silas are thrown into prison with orders to guard them carefully. The jailer puts them into an inner cell with their feet in the stocks. This was probably a very small and short cell which would not have enabled Paul and Silas to stand up. It was designed to further humiliate and intimidate a prisoner and to maximize his discomfort.

Most curious in this whole incident is that Paul and Silas do not demand their rights as Roman citizens to a trial by jury or a hearing where they can bring witnesses to testify. They suffer silently as if they had no rights. Were they truly intimidated by the mob? Or more likely were they directed by the Holy Spirit to keep silent? They follow the pattern of the Lord Jesus here in their trial and punishment. What were Luke, Timothy, Lydia and the new believers in Philippi thinking of all of this?

16:25-28 - Luke describes a most remarkable scene. It is around midnight and Paul and Silas are in prison in the cramped little cell, their feet in the stocks, and singing praises to God! The other prisoners were listening to them. Were they singing in Greek so they could be understood? Paul was a Hellenistic Jew and Silas was a Roman citizen which probably meant he was too. It would have been less likely for him to be a Judean Jew who became a Roman citizen. During their hymn sing an earthquake happens, which was common in that area. It was so violent however that the foundations of the prison were shaken, the prison doors flew open and the prisoner's chains all came loose. This was a disaster for the jailer but wonderful for the prisoners! He was asleep when the quake happened and waking up he realizes all the doors are open and the chains have come loose. He knows he will be blamed and is going to take the Roman way out and kill himself when Paul shouts out don't do it we are all here. God has delivered Paul and Silas!

Paul and Silas exhibit extraordinary faith and trust in this situation. They have suffered a severe beating and their wounds must have been painful and sore. They are in prison in a tiny cell waiting they do not know what. Yet here they are singing praises to God! Paul and Silas praise God in the midst of their suffering which they did not deserve. They do not rail against God or question why he let this happen to them. They know what Jesus said that his followers would experience suffering and opposition. Like Peter and John they count themselves blessed to suffer for the Lord Jesus. What an amazing witness they are to us! They expect suffering. It is no

surprise to them. They also look to the greater picture of what is happening. The magistrates think they have silenced Paul and Silas and they are in control. Paul and Silas know God is in control and even now in prison they know they are in his hands. They are prepared to die if necessary. When the earthquake comes they know God has delivered them and must have been ready for an opportunity to share the gospel. They had already witnessed to the prisoners with their singing. Now they get to witness to the jailer!

16:29-34 - The jailer calls for lights and rushes in to see what has happened. The jail is probably pitch black because even if there had been torches the earthquake would have probably put them out or knocked them down. He might have heard Paul and Silas singing earlier or perhaps had heard him preaching in the city it is impossible to know. He is asleep when the earthquake occurs and since the prisoners are his responsibility if they had escaped he is ready to kill himself. Was he a soldier or a civilian? Luke doesn't tell us. When he asks Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved I don't think he is asking about eternal salvation but how can he be delivered from the situation. Paul and Silas answer his question as if he is concerned about salvation and lead him and his whole family to Christ that very night.

Paul and Silas tell him believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household. What would have happened to his family if he had committed suicide? Would his wife and children have been sold off as slaves in order to pay off any debts he owed or to hold someone accountable? His suicide would not have helped them so he must be concerned about them as well as his own skin. Paul and Silas share the gospel with him and his family. Did they live in the jail or right nearby? The jailer washes Paul and Silas' wounds and he and his family are baptized that night. Were they baptized right there in the jail? It appears so. The Spirit uses all kinds of places and circumstances to bring people to Jesus. The jailer brings Paul and Silas into his house and feeds them and cares for them. What happened to the other prisoners? Luke doesn't tell us. He does tell us that the jailer and his whole family are filled with joy because they had come to believe in God. Joy is one of the marks of Paul's letter to the *Philippians* and it is exhibited here in one of the converts of that city. God had rescued Paul and Silas from a Roman prison and in the process given them an opportunity to share the gospel and see a whole family come to Christ. And besides all that the jailer had cared for their wounds and fed them! A few short hours before as Paul and Silas had been praising God they had been in a tiny cell in chains with their feet in the stocks, their backs searing in pain from their beating with the rods. Now they were free, cared for, fed and had the opportunity to share the gospel and baptize the jailer and his whole family! God is truly awesome!

This passage like the passage about Lydia and her household is often used by supporters of infant baptism to claim that infants must have been baptized here because they must have been present in the jailer's family. That is an assumption that cannot be proven or disproven. The evidence of children being baptized here along with adult believers is based completely on reading into the text something it does not tell us. Luke simply doesn't say whether there were infants present that night when Paul and Silas baptized the jailer and his family. He does say that when Paul and Silas shared the gospel with them he believed along with his family. The evidence leans toward the conclusion there were no infants present, but that is only supposition. To claim otherwise is once again like in the case of Lydia, to read into the text what we want it to say to justify a position we are trying to defend rather than let Scripture simply speak for itself.

16:35-40 - Things have changed for the jailer, Paul and Silas. The magistrates however still think they have control of the situation. They come in the morning and tell the jailer to release Paul and Silas, thinking that they have silenced them and they will now leave quietly having learned their lesson.

Paul however now asserts his rights as a Roman citizen. The jailer tells him they are free to leave. Paul tells the officers who have delivered the magistrates' message you beat us publicly without a trial and we are Roman citizens! Now you want us to go quietly? No! They must come and escort us out of the prison! The officers return and report all this to the magistrates. When they hear that Paul and Silas are Roman citizens they are alarmed. Romans took their justice very seriously. Even though the emperor had evicted the Jews from Rome he had not declared that all Jews were now anathema to the empire nor had he stripped their citizenship. The magistrates are in a serious situation. If it gets back to the proconsul or the Senate that they have unlawfully beaten and imprisoned Roman citizens without trial and due process they could be in great trouble. They come to try and appease Paul and Silas and request that they leave the city peacefully. They want them gone so any evidence of their mistake is gone as well. Paul and Silas oblige them to a point. They go to Lydia's house where they had been staying, presumably to pick up their clothes and personal items, speak to the church gathered there and finally leave the city.

Luke says then they left, meaning Paul, Silas and Timothy. At the beginning of *chapter 17* he returns to a third person account and drops the "we". Did Luke stay in Philippi or did he go back to Troas? We do not know. Was he from Philippi or Troas? Both are possible. The next "we section" of *Acts* doesn't occur until 20:5, where Luke reports about the men Paul sent ahead of him concerning the offering for the Jerusalem poor while Paul traveled through Macedonia after having wintered in Corinth. They were going to meet him in Troas to travel on to Jerusalem. Luke says in 20:6 "we sailed from Philippi" and five days later joined the rest in Troas. It appears from this that Luke remained in Philippi. Did he become a leader in that church? It is unclear. Paul makes no mention of Luke being with him in prison in Rome when he writes to the *Philippians*. That seems curious although it is possible that Luke left him for a brief time. There is so much that we simply do not know.

Chapter 17:

17:1-4 - Paul, Silas and Timothy pass through two cities on the Macedonian coast, Amphipolis and Apollonia and then come to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue. Perhaps they simply passed through the other two cities because they had no synagogue. Paul returns now to his customary strategy; begin preaching at the synagogue in a city, win some Jews and God-fearing Gentiles to Christ and start a church.

Paul and his team go to the synagogue on the Sabbath and reason with the Jews from the Scriptures explaining and proving that Jesus is the Messiah. They do this for three weeks in a row. Paul shows them how Jesus had to suffer and then rise from the dead. Some Jews believed and a much larger group of God-fearers believed. Luke also mentions some of them were prominent women in the city. He often goes out of his way to mention women and their response to the gospel. These women probably had financial means which may explain the jealousy of some of the Jews in Thessalonica Luke mentions in *verse 5*.

Paul's preaching to the Jews and God-fearers centers around the necessity of Jesus' death as the Messiah and his rising from the dead which proves he is Messiah and his death was a death for us that paid for our sins. Paul's preaching here is very close to what Luke reports Jesus

taught his disciples after the resurrection and before the ascension. Jesus reviewed the prophetic Scriptures concerning himself and showed the disciples why he had to suffer and then enter his glory which included the resurrection. Paul must have been taught by the Holy Spirit all of this because he was not with the disciples when Jesus taught them. His time in Arabia and Tarsus must have included considerable time searching the Scriptures seeking to understand how all the prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus. Even though he did not learn his gospel from the apostles as he says in *Galatians 1* yet he learned it from the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit and it was the same gospel! That is why the apostles in Jerusalem approved of his mission to the Gentiles. Not only had he seen the Lord he was preaching what they were preaching.

17:5-9 - Some of the Jews were stirred to jealousy perhaps because they perceived Paul had "*stolen*" the prominent women who used to frequent their synagogue and support it. They decide on a desperate strategy; they round up some "*bad characters*" and get them to start a riot over Paul and the Christians. The words Luke uses describe men who frequented the marketplace who often tried to steal people's money or swindle them out of their money with schemes, and also men who were simply evil in character. Like in all large cities one can find people with whom good people do not want to associate. They are shady characters and prone to violence. That is who those who opposed Paul gathered and then encouraged to cause some sort of incident. They did and it evolved into a mob that caused a riot.

The Thessalonian church was a typical Pauline church. There were some believing Jews but the majority were God-fearing Greeks. There were also the prominent women Luke mentions. Jason, whom the rioters end up seizing and dragging into the marketplace, must have hosted the church or at least Paul, Silas and Timothy at his house. There is a Jason Paul mentions in *Romans 16:21* who was a fellow Jew and maybe even a relative of Paul's, even though his name is a Greek name. It is possible they are the same man although it is equally possible they are two totally different people with the same name.

The mob can't find Paul and Silas, note Timothy is not mentioned. Is he too young as yet to play a prominent role? They can't find them so they drag Jason into the marketplace and some of the other Christians and bring them before the city officials. They claim that Paul and Silas have caused trouble all over the world and now they have come here defying Caesar's decrees declaring there is another king, Jesus. How did the instigators know this? Had word reached them from other Jews in Macedonia or Galatia? Was this supposition on their part? However they reached their conclusion their message throws the officials and the entire crowd into an uproar. They make Jason and the rest post bond and then release them. Paul, Silas and Timothy must have been safely sequestered somewhere else. Luke's account suggests they were never in any danger from the mob because they couldn't find them. Jason and the others are forced to buy their freedom just for hosting Paul and Silas. The Jews who opposed Paul had done what they set out to do, interrupt his mission and make it difficult for him to stay in Thessalonica. Paul, Silas and Timothy had only been there three weeks; not much time to plant a church. That shortness of time more than anything else explains why Paul writes the two letters to the *Thessalonians* after he reaches Corinth and begins his work there.

17:10-12 - At darkness the Thessalonian believers send Paul, Silas and Timothy out of Thessalonica to Berea southwest down the coast about 40 miles away in order to keep them safe. One gets the feeling they did not listen to any protests from Paul and Silas about staying because

the Thessalonians could no longer guarantee their safety. That is proved out when Jews from Thessalonica whip up the populace in Berea too.

They get to Berea and go into the synagogue there to preach. Luke comments that the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians. He says they received the gospel with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul was saying was true. You can imagine the scene. Paul would quote a prophecy like *Isaiah 53* or *Jeremiah 31* and the Berean Jews would look at those Scriptures in detail to check Paul's argument to see if in fact Jesus did fulfill the prophecies. Luke does not tell us how long this process went on but my guess is because of it the Bereans had a much stronger foundation in the faith than the Thessalonians. That may be one reason why Paul did not write a letter to the Bereans or if he did it was one of greeting and not one of teaching that would later need to be included into the New Testament.

The example of the Bereans is applicable to our day as well. They tested the preached message against the Bible, the Old Testament for them, which is what we need to do as well. Don't just accept at face value everything a teacher says, especially those on the radio or the internet. Test the teaching against Scripture. That means we as a congregation need to know the Word enough to know whether any sermon or teaching is biblical or not. The more ignorant the congregation is towards the Word of God the greater our vulnerability to false teaching as a congregation and the greater the danger that the pastors and teachers can lead the church astray. We need to be grounded in God's Word like the Bereans were!

The result of their study is that many of the Jews in Berea believed not just some Jews as in Thessalonica. Because of them many of the Greeks in Berea believed as well. Luke probably means many of the God-fearing Greeks which would be the most likely group of Gentiles to follow the Messianic Jews in Berea. Once again Luke mentions the prominent women in Berea who had believed and then acknowledges that many men believed as well. The grammar of the Greek can mean that the men who believed could also have been prominent or wealthy men. Why does Luke single out the wealthy or prominent women? It could be related to Theophilus in order to help him understand that Christianity appeals to all levels of Roman society not just the poor and slaves.

17:13-15 - The same group of Jews who were jealous of Paul in Thessalonica and stirred up the crowds there learn Paul has been preaching in Berea and go to the city and agitate the crowds in Berea as well. Like in Thessalonica the Berean believers get Paul out of town to keep him safe. They go down to the coast (Berea was somewhat inland) and escort him down to Athens. However Silas and Timothy stay in Berea to continue the work with the new church there. Several things are happening here. Paul is now separated from his companions for the first time and when he arrives in Athens he is alone, without his team. That will greatly affect his ministry in Athens. Second, Silas and Timothy and especially Timothy are given an opportunity to shine and carry on the work of the gospel without Paul. Berea may be one of the places Paul saw Timothy's effectiveness and knew he could take on more ministry responsibility. Up till this point Luke has noted that Timothy had joined Paul and Silas but he has only mentioned Silas being with Paul when he is describing Paul's actions. Now he says Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. From this time on Timothy will gain more and more of Paul's confidence as an envoy from Paul and an assistant in his ministry.

Sometimes it takes a crisis to bring out the talents and abilities in people so that leaders may have more confidence in them and allow them to do the work. That happened with Silas and

Timothy in Macedonia while Paul was in Athens and on to Corinth. Paul's experiences here help us understand that it takes a team to spread the gospel and build churches.

17:16-21 - Paul is alone in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy who are still in Macedonia. Paul says in *1 Thessalonians 3* that he sent Timothy back to them to encourage them because he was so concerned for them while he was in Athens. Perhaps Silas remained in Berea or joined Timothy in Thessalonica as well. We do not know.

In the meantime as Paul walks around the great Greek city he becomes increasingly distressed. For all the Athenians' great learning and culture, the city is full of idols. For Paul that means their minds are darkened by paganism. He goes to the synagogue and even into the marketplace and reasons with both the Jews and Greeks day by day. Paul is trying his hardest to gain a hearing for the gospel and he uses his learning and what he knows of Greek culture, having grown up in Tarsus a Stoic university city and center of Greek education and philosophy.

A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers begin to debate with him, presumably in the marketplace. The Epicureans centered their philosophy on pleasure as the highest good. The Stoics wanted to understand the universe and be in synch with it and saw moderation as the highest moral good, everything needed to be in balance. The Stoics held to what they saw as the universal principles of the cosmos. One of their words for that universal principle was *logos*. They cannot figure out what Paul is saying and think he is advocating two foreign gods, Jesus and the resurrection. In Greek philosophy it would be ridiculous to get your body back again because the idea was to free the soul from the material world. It wasn't a completely gnostic view of matter but spirit was definitely higher and more desirable. Why would one want the body back after death? Your soul is finally free. The body is merely a shell for the soul here on earth. Paul's biblical view of the resurrection of the body and Jesus' resurrection as the first fruits of that great resurrection seemed to them as nonsense.

Yet, the philosophers loved nothing more than their intellectual pursuits and so invited Paul to their debating society called the Areopagus. It was a hall or place of debate and scholarly interchange with the philosophers of Athens and in their minds to be invited to speak and debate there was a high honor. They ask Paul to explain his position so they may understand it better. In their thinking knowledge was the highest good. Luke makes the comment that the Athenians loved nothing better than to talk and listen to the latest ideas and debate them. One can tell by the comment that Luke thought their pursuits were good for nothing!

17:22-23 - Paul's speech to the Areopagus is a model of apologetic preaching to a pagan crowd who know nothing of the Scriptures. First, Paul recognizes that the Athenians are religious and believe in the spiritual. He observes that there were many idols which he calls objects of worship. He does not call them idolatrous which they were, but religious which is also true. He tries to build a bridge to them and recognizes that they are searching and wanting to know God, they simply do not understand that there is only one true God.

He uses the altar to the unknown god as a bridge to speak to them about God himself. They did not know God but recognized there were gods and they might have missed one. So they build an altar to the unknown one so they do not offend him. Their paganism wants to make sure they appease all the gods and gain their favor. The Athenians are a contradiction. They pride themselves in their knowledge and understanding, their reason, yet they are also highly superstitious and bound by their pagan idolatry of appeasing the gods.

17:24-31 - Paul then argues this God who is unknown to them is actually the Lord of all creation who made everything in it. He does not live in temples made by man and needs nothing from us. In fact he gave life, breath and everything else to all of us. Paul argues from creation and the natural revelation of God in creation. Unlike in the synagogues he makes no argument about Jesus as the Jewish Messiah or fulfilled prophecies. They would not have been familiar with any of those ideas let alone accept them.

Paul continues by stating that God the Creator made mankind from one man and that all people are descended from that one man. He made us to populate the earth and set the times and places for each nation to live. He is not only Lord of heaven and earth but Lord of all the nations as well. No nation of human beings exists without his will. Paul is using Stoic concepts to make his point. They believed that universal Reason or the *Logos* ordered all things. Paul combines their concept of the *Logos* with the Jewish and biblical truth of the Creator in order to build a bridge to their thinking and win them to Christ.

God created us and set boundaries for us so that we would seek him and perhaps find him, though he is close to us. Paul then quotes a Stoic poet who said, "*for in him we live and move and have our being.*" The idea is that every moment of our existence we owe to God the Creator and every breath we take is a gift. He then quotes another Stoic philosopher that said we are his children. Paul is arguing that we are God's children, his offspring and our lives depend upon him. But because we are his offspring we need to seek the one that gave us life and breath. Paul then reasons that since we are God's children God is not an object of worship made with human hands like an idol, but he lives! In the past God overlooked such ignorance. I am not sure one can take that statement too far but it could be construed to mean that even those who worshipped idols God might accept before Jesus because they did not know any better. If they acknowledged God as God and lived before him and worshipped him as Creator God might have accepted such people into his presence. However, everything has now changed because God has set a day by which he will judge the world and hold every human being accountable. He commands everyone everywhere to repent because not only has he set a time for judging humanity he has appointed a man by whom he will judge us all. The Creator of all and Lord of history and humanity has declared Jesus Christ that man by raising him from the dead!

Paul does not lay out Jesus' death on the cross for human sin here at all. Luke's summary of Paul's speech to the Areopagus focuses on God the Creator and Jesus as the one God has chosen to judge us all because God showed him to be such when he raised him from the dead. The Stoics believed the universe was ordered by the *Logos*, the universal Reason and we are all accountable to it and governed by it. Paul makes the bridge between the *Logos* and Jesus by saying his resurrection is God's proof that Jesus is the judge. In speaking to the rational Greek philosophers Paul ignores the cross and points to the resurrection. When he gets to Corinth he says in *1 Corinthians* he would preach nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified which was foolishness to Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews. Paul adjusts his message to his audience but the focus of his preaching no matter whom the audience is Jesus and the salvation God offers through him.

17:32-34 - The philosophers are tracking with Paul up to the point of him saying God raised Jesus from the dead. When he says this many sneer at him because the resurrection was something they could not accept and in which they saw no value. The goal was to lose this body and become one with the universal *Logos*, our souls being set free from the material world and its limitations. In that sense spirit was far superior to matter, so why would my soul want a

material body back when I had gotten rid of it? Here is where Paul's biblical and Jewish understanding of anthropology conflicted with the Greek philosopher's understanding. They could not accept the biblical view of humans being a unity of body and spirit and that death sunders that unity but resurrection re-unites it again. Jesus' resurrection was seen as unnecessary and ridiculous. They could not make the connection between God's approval of Jesus as the judge through his resurrection and the evidence of resurrection as the ultimate goal of the Creator for the human race. They were with Paul up to a point but could not go all the way to Jesus and his resurrection.

Yet some did believe and Paul was able to gather a few followers with him in Athens. Luke mentions Dionysius a philosopher of the Areopagus and a woman named Damaris along with a few others. Was Paul's mission a failure in Athens? On the one hand there were some who believed and his speech did gain him some believers and an invitation to address the Council again. On the other hand it was only a few and the Areopagan philosophers proved to be one of the hardest audiences Paul addressed in his travels. Their great learning and philosophy made them resistant to the gospel. Whether or not Paul spoke to others in Athens like the people in the marketplace inviting them to follow Jesus Luke does not tell us. Paul had gone to the cream of Athenian learning and debate, gained a hearing and won a few converts. But it appears from Luke's narrative the church in Athens was very small and in that sense Paul's mission was not very fruitful and some have argued was a failure. Paul's experience in Athens may have stung him deeply. He had debated the greatest philosophers of his day with his best rhetoric and only gained a few converts. He will write to the *Corinthians* a few years later that he came to Corinth not with eloquent words and rhetoric but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power. He admits to them that his speech was not the high rhetoric the Greeks favored. It seems likely that his failure in Athens shook Paul more than we know.

That will all change when he gets to Corinth. The greatest difference between Athens and Corinth is that in Athens Paul was alone. In Corinth he is reunited with his team when Silas and Timothy return from Macedonia and he will meet new friends which will turn out to be some of his closest friends throughout the rest of his life, Priscilla and Aquila. Paul's speech is a model of apologetics to an educated, elite audience but the greatest lesson for us in ministry is the value of the team. We can't do this alone!

Chapter 18:

18:1-4 - Paul comes to Corinth, on the Isthmus of Corinth in 49. Corinth was a wealthy, wide open port city with a reputation for debauchery, like New Orleans and Las Vegas combined. If Athens was obsessed with learning and philosophy, Corinth was obsessed with pleasure and making money. The temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, dominated the Acrocorinth above the city with its thousands of temple prostitutes. Athens posed intellectual problems for Paul. Corinth posed moral and social problems. It had been rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC and was a Roman colony and capital of the Province of Achaia.

Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, fellow tentmakers and Jewish Christians who had recently fled Rome after Claudius' decree. They became some of Paul's closest and best friends, people he will tell the Romans, risked their lives for him. They will follow Paul to Ephesus and then move back to Rome and restart a church there. Paul stays with them in Corinth, making tents and preaching in the synagogue each Sabbath trying to persuade Jews and God-fearing Greeks. Priscilla and Aquila become part of Paul's ministry team in Corinth but he still awaits Timothy and Silas. When they arrive his team will be complete once again.

18:5-8 - Silas and Timothy finally return from Macedonia and when they do Paul devotes full time to preaching and discipling people. He focuses on proving to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. Some of the Jews in Corinth oppose Paul and start to become abusive. He shakes out his clothes in protest telling them their blood is on their own heads. He has preached to the Jews and they reject him now he will go to the Gentiles. Paul always began with the Jews, as he says in *Romans 1* the gospel is first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. This is his normal pattern theologically which he lays out in *Romans 9-11*. The Gentiles can be saved because Israel has rejected her Messiah. He goes next door to the synagogue and sets up the new church in the home of Titius Justus a God-fearer. Crispus, the synagogue ruler believes along with his household and he and his entire household are baptized. The same household arguments concerning possible infant baptism apply here that applied in the case of the household of Lydia and the Philippian jailer in Philippi in *Acts 16*.

Paul now has a fledgling Jewish-Greek congregation in Corinth. His problem is the city is far more morally corrupt and wide open than anywhere he has planted a church before. He has had to flee the cities in Macedonia within weeks of starting a church. If that happens in Corinth how is this church going to survive? Paul knows he needs more time but will he get it?

18:9-11 - Fortunately the Lord speaks to Paul in a vision or dream one night. He tells Paul not to be afraid or silent. The Lord Jesus is with him and he re-assures Paul that no one will attack Paul or harm him in Corinth because he has many people in the city. This is the news for which Paul has been waiting. Now he can devote his efforts to discipling the church and growing it without having to look over his shoulder all the time looking for plots against him mainly from the Jews who oppose him. Paul had been beaten and arrested in Philippi; run out of town in Thessalonica after barely a month and he had to leave Berea early as well because of opposition. Now opposition has started from hostile Jews in Corinth too but the Lord assures Paul he will be safe in spite of it. Luke reports Paul stayed in Corinth a year and a half teaching them the Word of God.

His time in Corinth and the fruitfulness of his ministry there may have affected his ministry strategy going forward. Up until this time Paul had only stayed a month or so in a city, planting a church and then moving on, often because of opposition. Here he stays eighteen months. He will stay three years in Ephesus. It appears the lessons he learned in Corinth about the fruit of a longer term ministry he applies in Ephesus. Plus, think of the circumstances that we know about the Corinthian church. Paul spent considerable time investing in them because of the Lord's reassurances and the moral and social climate in Corinth. Yet he also wrote more to this church than any other and it had the greatest moral and theological problems of any church he founded. Would the church have even survived if Paul had been forced to leave after a few months as he had in each of the Macedonian cities within which he had planted a church? His lengthy stay in Corinth was the Lord's doing for the sake of Paul, the gospel and his people in Corinth. The Lord Jesus was truly in charge of Paul's mission!

18:12-17 - Paul's Jewish opponents in Corinth bring charges before Gallio the proconsul of Achaia, centered in Corinth which was the Roman colony. Basically they state their charges against Paul as violating the Jewish law and therefore the Roman law. Gallio will have none of it. He tells them to settle it themselves because it is an internal matter of their religion and he will not be judge of such things which was a wise decision. He throws out the case and ejects them from the court. The Greek word means to drive off or drive out. The Jews take their frustration

out on Sosthenes, a Hellenistic Jew who was now the synagogue ruler after Crispus had become a Christian and gone with Paul. They beat him up in front of Gallio who does nothing to stop them. Obviously the Jews blame Sosthenes. Perhaps it was his idea to bring charges against Paul before Gallio. We don't know. We do know they blamed him for their failure and humiliation. The Lord Jesus' words to Paul had been proven true. The Jews who opposed Paul tried to attack him and failed. Paul was safe.

Gallio shows his Roman practical wisdom in dealing with the Jewish charges against Paul. He does not get taken into their religious dispute and rejects their claim for Roman justice over a Jewish matter. Pilate did not have the same wisdom partly because the Jews brought charges of sedition against Jesus to which Pilate had to pay attention. For them it was a matter of their religion. The Sanhedrin wanted Jesus executed for blasphemy but they knew that charge would not stick with Pilate. They found a way to convince Pilate that Jesus was also guilty of sedition and treason against Rome for claiming to be a king. Pilate agreed and had Jesus crucified. The Jews in Corinth could not think of a way to draw Gallio into their attempts to stop Paul. They failed to frame their charges in a way that Gallio would have to address. This is evidence of the Lord Jesus' helping Paul just as Pilate's verdict is evidence of God the Father working to orchestrate events in the sacrifice of his Son. The prophecies had to be fulfilled and they were. Jesus was crucified. In Corinth Paul is spared.

18:18-22 - Paul stayed on for some time after this incident. Luke says he spent eighteen months in Corinth. There is no clear way to tell when the charges against Paul before Gallio came during his stay. At the end of those eighteen months he left for Syria and Antioch and Priscilla and Aquila went with him. At Cenchrea he had his hair cut off because of a Jewish vow he had taken. Corinth was on the northwestern end of the Corinthian isthmus, and Cenchrae was on the southeastern side. It was the port city leading into the Aegean while Corinth led into the Adriatic. Paul travels across the isthmus to Cenchrea. Luke does not say what the vow was but it shows Paul as living in both the Jewish and Greek worlds at the same time. He was still a Jew and took his Jewish heritage seriously. He was going back to Jerusalem to report to the church and the apostles there. He must have felt it wise to demonstrate his Jewish heritage to James and the other elders in Jerusalem who might have been suspicious of Paul and wondered whether he was becoming corrupted by the Gentiles as he lived and worked among them. Paul shows remarkable political skill by taking this vow.

They arrive at Ephesus. "*They*" in *verse 19* refers to Paul, Priscilla and Aquila. Were Timothy and Silas with him as well? Luke does not say but it does not appear so. Paul goes to the synagogue in Ephesus and begins reasoning with the Jews. They want him to spend more time with them but Paul declines as he is on his way to Jerusalem first and then Antioch. The Jews in Ephesus are open to Paul and it will be the silversmiths of the city and those associated with Diana who will pose the greatest threat to his ministry there. Paul promises to return if the Lord wills and he sets sail from Ephesus leaving Priscilla and Aquila behind to perhaps prepare the way for his return and ministry.

Paul lands in Caesarea, the great artificial port of Judea built by Herod the Great, and then goes up and greets the church. The "*went up*" language Luke uses means Jerusalem. Paul came to Jerusalem at the end of his second journey and reported to James and the elders and any apostles there what had occurred in Greece. After finishing his report he "*went down*" to Antioch and back to his home base. Paul had completed his second missionary journey and the gospel had now penetrated Greece and Europe. His next target will be the Roman province of Asia and

its chief city, Ephesus, the most populous and richest Roman province in the eastern half of the empire. But it is also a center for pagan worship because of the great temple of Diana there as well as a center for magic and the occult arts. His time in Ephesus will be a power encounter between the forces of Satan and the Holy Spirit and the gospel!

18:23 - After some time in Antioch Paul once again sets out this time on his third missionary journey. He travels throughout Galatia and Phrygia to the churches he and Barnabas had planted strengthening the disciples there. Paul is headed for Ephesus via the overland route through the Cilician Gates into central Asia Minor and across country to Ephesus from the east and not via the sea.

18:24-28 - Meanwhile back in Ephesus a Jew from Alexandria named Apollos began to speak in the synagogue. He was a learned man and well versed in the Scriptures. Luke's description of Apollos is difficult. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and spoke with great passion or literally great fervor of spirit. Did he have the Holy Spirit and was therefore a believer in Jesus? He taught about Jesus accurately yet had not been baptized in Jesus' name; he had only received the baptism of John for repentance and preparing for the Messiah. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him they invited them to their home and as Luke says, "*explained to him the way of God more adequately.*" In other words they led him to Christ and had him baptized! From Luke's language I think Apollos is an "almost Christian". He knows Jesus is the one of whom John spoke but does not know the full story or about baptism in Jesus' name. It is Christian baptism that is the singular initiation rite of the faith and the sign of the reception of the Holy Spirit. It is possible the incident with Apollos is why Luke follows this with the story of Paul and the Ephesian "*disciples*" who were baptized with John's baptism and did not know about the Holy Spirit. Were they disciples of Apollos before he became a full-fledged believer? It is possible. Luke is linking together faith in Jesus, baptism and reception of the Spirit as the normal beginning of the Christian life.

Apollos was from Alexandria which was a city of considerable learning. Philo the great Hellenistic Jewish scholar was from there. He had been influenced by Platonic thought and built a Jewish theology combining the two ideas. Was Apollos familiar with him or a disciple of that school? We don't know. He was skilled in the Scriptures and was a great orator. He wanted to go to Achaia and the Ephesian Christians encouraged him because he had been a help to them. He had a mind perhaps equal to Paul's and when he came to Achaia he reasoned in the synagogues there refuting the Jews who opposed the gospel proving that Jesus was the Christ. When Paul writes to the *Corinthians* and others he commends Apollos and is always complimentary of the Hellenistic Jewish preacher. Some scholars have speculated that the *Letter to the Hebrews* was written by Apollos because it has some of Paul's theology and yet is different enough as to be from someone else's hand. Apollos is certainly a good candidate.

Chapter 19:

19:1-7 - While Apollos is in Corinth Paul now arrives in Ephesus and links up with Priscilla and Aquila. He meets some "*disciples*", people he assumes are Christians but when he asks them about receiving the Holy Spirit when they believed they are clueless! Paul's assumption is if you believe in Jesus you will receive the Holy Spirit. When they say no, we haven't heard there is a Holy Spirit that immediately sends up a red flag for Paul. All throughout *Acts* the Holy Spirit is *THE* sign of faith in Jesus, so why haven't these people received him? Their response to Paul's

question is also curious. If they were Jewish believers surely they would have known about the Holy Spirit since he is written about and promised in the Hebrew Scriptures. Were they Gentiles? I don't think so. Were they disciples of Apollos in Ephesus? They might have been but it is most likely they are disciples of John the Baptist. If they are it is incredible because it says the influence of John among the Jews had spread even to Asia Province and Ephesus. If they are disciples of John then it also points to them being Jews because Gentiles would not have responded to John's message because it concerned the coming of the Jewish Messiah.

Paul responds to their ignorance about the Holy Spirit with a question about which baptism they received. His question is important. Paul connects baptism in Jesus' name with reception of the Holy Spirit. He doesn't ask them if they have been baptized in the Spirit or spoke in tongues. He asks if they have been baptized in Jesus' name for forgiveness. John's baptism, which Apollos had proclaimed, was a sign of repentance and preparation for the Messiah. Jesus' baptism is a sign of forgiveness which then paves the way for the Holy Spirit to come into a person's life. This passage follows and connects the end of *Acts 18* with Priscilla and Aquila teaching Apollos about baptism in Jesus' name. It is clear Apollos taught Jesus as Messiah but he only knew John's baptism. His gospel was incomplete. If these Ephesian "*disciples*" were disciples of Apollos, then it could also be true that Apollos did not understand Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit for all who believed in him as Messiah. Apollos' theology was based on John the Baptist's teaching plus some stories or teaching about Jesus but not the full gospel of forgiveness in Jesus and reception of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is Jesus' sign to us that seals faith in that gospel. Luke goes to great lengths to show how Christian baptism is tied with faith in Jesus and reception of the Holy Spirit.

The proof of that is what happens next to these so-called disciples. Paul proclaims to them the full gospel of Jesus Christ and upon hearing it they are all baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul lays hands on them at their baptism the Holy Spirit comes upon them and they speak in tongues, or other languages, and prophesy as other new believers had done. Now they are full Christians because they have the Holy Spirit!

Do we teach that new believers will receive the Holy Spirit? Do we watch for signs of the Spirit? *Acts* and *Paul's Letters* outline several immediate signs of the Spirit we can watch for. Speaking in tongues and prophesying are two signs, as is the Spirit's joy and an overwhelming sense of the love of God for a person. Paul says in *Romans 8* that the simple heartfelt confession of God as *Abba*, Father, is a sign of the Spirit as well as Jesus is Lord which he states in *1 Corinthians 12*. Luke makes it clear that new believers demonstrated some sign of the coming of the Spirit into their lives. We talk about the benefits of salvation with people; they are now forgiven and have eternal life. We talk about growing in Christ from now on but we don't talk at all about the signs of the Holy Spirit in someone. The New Testament does not advocate for everyone speaking in tongues but some do. What is clear is that everyone who believes knows the Holy Spirit has come into their lives and shows that in some way. The long term confirmation of the Spirit is his fruit growing in a person, along with his gifts for service and ministry manifesting themselves in that new believer. We also divorce baptism from reception of the Spirit. We make it too much about our public confession and not enough about what God is doing in us! It is very clear in *Acts* and in *Paul's Letters* that the Holy Spirit is *THE* sign of faith in Jesus. He is the first fruits of the Kingdom's life in us. Without him there is no faith in Jesus and no salvation. It is also clear from this passage that Paul expected these "*disciples*" to know whether they had received the Spirit or not. When they had not he immediately asked them about

their baptism because baptism in Jesus' name was the normative path for the Spirit's entrance into a person's life. It was intimately connected with their profession of faith in the Lord Jesus.

19:8-12 - Paul goes to the synagogue and argues persuasively that Jesus is the Messiah and about the Kingdom of God. This was in response to the Jews' invitation to Paul to return and speak more about Jesus as Messiah in *Acts 18:20-21*. He does this for three months. Like in Corinth however, stubborn opposition to the gospel started to rise up. Some of the Jews became abusive and maligned the Way. These are the same Jews who had been open to Paul when he stopped on the way to Jerusalem at the end of his second journey. Now they start to oppose him, or at least some do. Paul does what he did in Corinth; he takes his converts and moves. They go to the lecture hall of Tyrannus, presumably a Gentile convert, and for two years Paul continues to preach and teach. This lecture hall was used by secular or pagan educators and orators. Paul now uses it to spread the gospel. He was so effective that the entire Asia Province heard the Word of the Lord Jesus, meaning the gospel. Paul stayed in Ephesus longer than any other city. We also know that he disciplined and mentored evangelists who planted churches all over Asia Province, Epaphrus being one of them who planted the church in Colossae in the Lycus Valley to the east of Ephesus. It is quite possible that the seven churches of Asia that John writes to in *Revelation 2 & 3* were all founded by evangelists trained by Paul while he was in Ephesus. Paul stayed long enough to develop a team and let them spread the gospel. After his stay in Corinth he must have realized the benefits of remaining in a city for a considerable time in order to build up the church. Plus, Jewish opposition was never as strong in Ephesus, perhaps because of the Temple of Diana.

God showed his power through Paul during his ministry in Ephesus. Paul did extraordinary miracles of healing. Articles of clothing were even taken from Paul and laid on a sick person and they got well. Evil spirits were leaving people through Paul and the name of Jesus. This is significant because Diana was the demonic power over Ephesus and her temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Here was a new power that was challenging her supremacy and her hold on the Ephesian people. The power of God was overcoming superstition and demonic oppression in Ephesus. Luke will detail that in the next section and show how this power encounter finally led to the riot that resulted in Paul leaving the city.

19:13-16 - Luke reports this bizarre incident about some Jewish exorcists using the Lord Jesus' name but not believing in him. He names the seven sons of Sceva who were using this practice in trying to exorcise demons from people. Sceva was a Jewish chief priest, though what his seven sons are doing in Ephesus Luke does not say. They apparently practiced exorcism which must have been a needed service in a city where the occult had such a powerful presence. They also apparently are not very successful at it because they decide to use the name of Jesus to try and force a demon out of a person. The evil spirit inside a man answers them with, "*Jesus I know and I know about Paul but who are you.*" Like in Israel the demons know who Jesus is. This demon also knew about Paul, meaning his ministry had made an effect on the spiritual condition of the city and through this incident was about to have an even greater effect. The demon overpowers the Jewish exorcists and beats them up so badly they run out of the house where the demonized man was, naked and bleeding. The Greek words mean wounded and naked, probably in the sense of stripped down to their underwear and not literally naked without any clothes. The point is the demonized man overpowered them because they were trying to use the name of the Lord Jesus as magic and it didn't work. The name itself without any faith or relationship behind

it carries no magical properties. But with someone like Paul, who had faith, authority and the presence of the Holy Spirit in him, the name of Jesus carries a power that the demonic cannot stand against.

This incident paints a picture of the Judaism in Ephesus which is chaotic and mixed up. These seven brothers are sons of a chief priest. They should know the Scriptures and the Law of Moses and have a solid understanding of their Jewish faith. Yet they appear desperate to try anything that will help them in their fight against the demonic. They don't use the name of Yahweh, why not? They try and use the name of Jesus. Did they have no faith in Yahweh? What were they doing as exorcists in Ephesus in the first place? The situation speaks of a Judaism that is badly corrupted by pagan and syncretistic ideas. If that is the case this incident may serve to give some insight into the Jewish-proto-gnostic heresy that Paul was trying to deal with in Colossae when he writes to the church there. It was a mix of Jewish ideas about angels, various laws and feasts along with gnostic ideas about the body being evil. It appears God's ancient people in Ephesus and Asia Province had lost their Scriptural moorings which made them ripe for any heretical ideas current in the culture.

19:17-20 - The incident with the seven sons of Sceva became known throughout the city and it caused fear among the Jews and Greeks in Ephesus. The result was the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. A revival of holiness and repentance resulted. Many who believed now came and openly confessed their involvement in the occult and sorcery. Ephesus was famous for its occult practices and was a center for the magic arts. People repenting of their past sins brought their magic scrolls and burned them publicly. This was not an idle gesture. The magic scrolls were worth a fortune. 50,000 drachmas is 137 years' worth of wages, which would have been millions of dollars. In today's money, if an average yearly wage is \$50,000, then the value of the scrolls would have been almost 7 million dollars' worth of magic books! The result was the word of the Lord, meaning the gospel, spread rapidly and grew in power. Paul's preaching and ministry was putting a dent in the demonic hold over Ephesus!

The city became a fruitful missionary ground for Paul's team. It was also a massive power encounter between the Holy Spirit and the pagan-occult demonic forces that ruled over Ephesus. The power of Jesus' name was overwhelming the demonic powers and people were abandoning their occult practices to believe the gospel and be free. This process eventually hit people in their pocket books which caused an economic impact which led to the riot at Artemis' temple. Paul's ministry in Ephesus raises the issue, is there a power encounter with demonic forces in every city where the gospel is preached? Is there one in Spokane? The gospel is the power of God to take back a city for the Kingdom of God and set free the prisoners. What are the demonic forces that have a hold on our city that need to be broken by the power of Jesus' name just like they were in Ephesus?

19:21-22 - Paul's ministry in Ephesus had been incredibly successful but he knows it is nearing time for him to move on. He plans to go back through Macedonia on the way to Jerusalem and then on to Rome which sets the stage for the writing of *Romans*. Paul wintered in Corinth in 55 from which he wrote *Romans* probably as the missionary introduction of his theology to the church in Rome. It appears he wanted to use Rome as his base in the west as Antioch had been his base in the east. He sends Timothy and Erastus on ahead of him to Macedonia to prepare for his coming while he stays a little longer in Ephesus.

19:23-27 - The power encounter between the Lord Jesus and his name & Artemis (Diana), or the demonic power behind the idol comes to a head. The temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was renowned across the Roman world for its massive size, over a hundred columns supporting its roof and its huge image of the goddess herself. It was said to be many-breasted and was purported to have fallen from heaven. Diana was the goddess' Latin name; it was Artemis in Greek although that name is pre-Greek in origin. In the Roman and Greek pantheon she is the goddess of the hunt and the moon and was often called the virgin-goddess because she swore off marriage over conflict among the gods. In Ephesus it appears her worship had been syncretized with the mother goddess or earth mother in Asia Minor into a kind of fertility cult. It was common for pagans of the time to syncretize different views of the various gods and combine them to suit their interests. This appears to have happened in Ephesus with Artemis. It also helps us understand why Christian and Jewish ideas and doctrine could be so easily syncretized with pagan ideas to form a variant of Scriptural truth and religion. It was a common practice in Asia Minor and former pagans who became Christians would not have seen it as out of the ordinary to do the same thing with the truth of Jesus. The problem was they were dealing with God's final and absolute revelation of himself, not a fluid do-it-yourself revelation of the many pagan gods of the ancient world. Increasingly today we are dealing with a pseudo-pagan attitude towards truth and biblical revelation. Syncretism is alive and well again in America!

Demetrius was a leader among the silversmiths who made little silver shrines of Artemis for the pilgrims and worshippers who came to the temple from around the world. Though the worship is pagan there is an analogy here to the money-changers and sellers of sacrificial animals at the temple in Jerusalem. Both made considerable money off of people's devotion and worship. Paul's ministry and mission had made such a dent in the hold of the demonic power behind the goddess that it stirs up Demetrius to incite the silversmiths and those who trade off the pilgrims who come to the temple. Plus they have begun to experience a drop in their profits just as the high priests did in Jerusalem when Jesus cleansed the temple of the money-changers. Demetrius addresses the craftsmen and tells them not only has their business been affected which they knew but that this fellow Paul is robbing the goddess of her worship and divine majesty, claiming that she is no goddess at all! From a demonic standpoint this is the most important issue. The Lord Jesus had been setting free people bound under her demonic influence and turning them away from Artemis to worship the true and living God. Her pride and arrogance have been hurt and now the demon behind the goddess is going to strike back!

19:28-34 - The craftsmen gathered by Demetrius begin shouting "*Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!*" Soon the whole city is in an uproar. The word means confusion or tumult and the root word means to throw into confusion or trouble. From a spiritual standpoint this is exactly what one would expect from a demon; create confusion and chaos in order to stir up a mob!

The mob seizes Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul's companions, and rushes into the great theater in Ephesus, probably because it is a structure large enough to hold a huge crowd. Notice they do not go to the temple but instead to the theater. Gaius could be two separate men both named Gaius. One is listed in *Acts 20:4* as one of those who were selected to accompany Paul with the offering from the Gentile churches for the poor in Jerusalem. Luke says he is from Derbe in Asia Minor. The other Gaius is listed in *1 Corinthians 1* as a convert of Paul's and in *Romans 16* as the person providing hospitality for Paul and his companions while they winter in Corinth where Paul writes *Romans*. Here in *Acts* the most likely Gaius is the man from Derbe

because he is mentioned as being with Paul in Ephesus. Aristarchus was from Thessalonica and was also one of those tasked with accompanying the offering for the Jerusalem poor. Luke mentions that he is with Paul in *Acts 27* when he boards the ship for Rome after his imprisonment in Caesarea. Paul mentions him in *Colossians 4* as being with Paul in Rome. Aristarchus therefore was with Paul throughout his journey to Jerusalem, imprisonment in Caesarea, voyage to Rome and his house arrest in Rome.

Paul, wanting to protect and defend his friends, wants to address the riotous crowd in the theater. The disciples, meaning the leaders or elders in the Ephesian church, would not let him. Even some Roman officials who were Paul's friends sent him a message dissuading him from speaking, fearing for his safety.

The assembly was in confusion, some shouting one thing others shouting another. Clearly this is a mob whipped into a frenzy but with very few people understanding what the controversy is really all about. This is exactly the kind of thing demonic forces would produce in people. The spiritual energy behind the mob is demonic. Did Paul see this and know it or is he simply concerned for his friends? The Jews put forward Alexander, who must have been a leader among the Ephesian Jews, to address the crowd. These were probably the Jews who opposed Paul in Ephesus and now saw an opportunity to discredit him and his ministry. When the pagan crowd sees Alexander is a Jew, most likely because of his dress, they shout in unison for two whole hours, "*Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!*" I am reminded here of Muslim crowds in Palestine, Iran or other Muslim countries who are whipped into a frenzy shouting "*Allahu akbar.*" The best the pagan mob can do is shout louder and drown out all opposition. Paul wants to reason with them and defend himself and his friends. The mob is beyond reason, whipped up by the demonic forces behind it.

19:35-41 - Finally the city clerk quiets the crowd in order to address them. Basically he says everyone knows how great the temple of Artemis is so what's the problem. He claims that her image fell from the sky, which could be a reference to a meteorite that was seen as holy and used in her image or temple by earlier pagans. He notes that neither Gaius nor Aristarchus have robbed the temple or even blasphemed the goddess and if Demetrius and the silversmiths want to press charges there are the courts. He threatens Roman interference in their city's affairs if the riot continues and no one wanted that. Ephesus was not the capital of Asia Province, Pergamum was, and it probably grated on the Ephesians that their city, the largest and most prosperous in Asia, was not the capital. The clerk's speech is a model of bureaucratic politics. He calms things down with a combination of an affirmation of the greatness of Artemis and her temple and a veiled threat of Roman interference if they don't all settle down. It is possible that the clerk is concerned that if Roman troops get involved they will close the temple and its attendant businesses all together for a time until order is restored and that would devastate the local economy far more than Paul and his mission had done. It could be that the craftsmen also see this danger and understand the implications as well. The strategy works and he is able to dismiss the crowd and order them to go home. Luke does not indicate there were any troops that had been mustered to deal with the riot or great property damage that had as yet occurred. The riot was over.

The bottom line is Paul and his team are not harmed and are free to continue his plan of wrapping up his Ephesian ministry and moving on first to Jerusalem with the Gentile offering for the Jerusalem poor and then on to Rome itself.

Chapter 20:

20:1-6 - After the riot quiets down Paul carries out his plan to leave Ephesus and go through Macedonia on his way back to Jerusalem. He travels overland from Ephesus through Macedonia encouraging the churches there until he comes to Greece where he stays three months. He had sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia and he links up with them there. Luke says he stayed in Greece but we know from *Romans 16* and *1 Corinthians 16* that Greece here means Corinth where he stayed for the winter and where he writes *Romans*.

While he is in Corinth, the Jews plot against him to harm him just as he is about to sail for Syria so he decides to retrace his steps and go overland again back through Macedonia. During the 18 months he spent in Corinth when he founded the church he had been safe from the plots of the Jews. Now they try again and apparently it was serious enough that Paul decides to cancel his sailing plans and head back north to Macedonia. He is accompanied by several men who have helped him gather the Gentile offering for the poor in Jerusalem. They are from various churches from across his ministry. Sopater from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, these three being from the Macedonian churches. Gaius is from Derbe and Timothy is from Lystra; these two men representing the Galatian churches. Tychicus and Trophimus were from Asia Province, both from Ephesus.

The group travels back through Macedonia and must have come to Philippi because Luke says the group with Paul went on ahead and waited for "*us*" at Troas. This is the beginning of the second "*we section*" of *Acts*. Paul must have met up with Luke in Philippi at this point. Luke says they stayed in Philippi through the Feast of Unleavened Bread or Passover which would date his travels as March-April of 56. They journey from Philippi joining the other disciples at Troas where they all stayed a week, encouraging the church there.

20:7-12 - On Sunday Paul spoke to the church gathered in Troas because he was leaving the next day. They came together to break bread which can mean both sharing a meal and sharing the Lord's Supper. Paul had lots to say to them and kept talking till midnight! What happens next is both tragic and funny. The church was meeting in an upstairs room and many lamps were lit, meaning it was probably very hot in the room. A young man named Eutychus was seated in a window, probably to get some air and cool down. As Paul "*talked on and on*" Eutychus fell asleep and fell out the window to the ground, three stories below, dead. Everyone runs down to Eutychus and Paul throws himself on the young man like Elijah threw himself on the widow's son. He tells everyone not to be alarmed that Eutychus is alive. They all go back upstairs to the meeting room and have something to eat. Then Paul talks the rest of the night to the church and leaves at daybreak. Luke says Eutychus is alive and the church is greatly comforted.

The way Luke reports the incident suggests that he thought Paul talked too much that night. He went "*on and on*"! He talked till daybreak, meaning he talked all night long. One wonders what he said and what the church in Troas needed to hear. It also points out one of the drawbacks of the way Paul did ministry. He had only been in Troas a few times and then always for only a short amount of time. The church needed his apostolic teaching but Paul was not able to give it to them except in an all-night meeting like this one because he was only passing through Troas. How effective was the all night sermon? It put Eutychus to sleep! How much did the rest of the church absorb? Yet what was Paul to do? He could not stay with them he had to leave. He was taking the offering to the Jerusalem poor and then was going on to Rome. His ministry in the east was wrapping up. Others would have to carry on the teaching and discipling ministry for the church. This is always the dilemma of leaders. How do I pass on my ministry to

qualified people who will carry on after me? Paul faced that challenge in Troas but also in all his churches. We face it today as well.

20:13-16 - Luke and Paul's companions set sail for Assos about thirty miles down the Aegean coast of Turkey from Troas. There they meet up with Paul who was traveling by foot to the port city. Luke does not tell us why Paul chose to go on foot, but presumably it was to meet certain people along the way. They meet him at Assos and sail on to Mitylene, 50 miles further south and then to Kios, an island off the coast about 75 miles south of Mitylene. The next day they cross over to the island of Samos and then to Miletus just to the south of Ephesus about 30 miles to avoid stopping in Ephesus and delaying his trip even further. Luke says Paul was anxious to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost. If they had spent Passover in Troas which was in March-April of 56, then Paul wants to be in Jerusalem by May-June, depending on what day Passover and Pentecost fell that year. He must have believed he could travel by ship from Troas to Jerusalem in less than 50 days. That is still a considerable amount of time yet is remarkable considering the technology of Paul's day, and that the journey would have been between 900 to 1000 miles long. The *Pax Romana* allowed travel and commerce to flow all over the Mediterranean Sea, with the greatest threat being weather as Paul would later find out.

20:17-21 - From Miletus Paul sends for the Ephesian elders to say farewell to them. Miletus was about 30 miles southwest of Ephesus on the Aegean coast. He tells them how he served the Lord in humility despite the plots of the Jews in the city. Luke does not mention the plots of the Jews but in *Revelation* John mentions in several letters about "*the synagogue of Satan*" those who say they are Jews but are not. He is probably referring to Jews who opposed the church and the name of Jesus. By the end of the first century when John writes to Ephesus and the churches in Asia Province there is considerable Jewish opposition to Christians. It is possible that the beginnings of that opposition happened during Paul's three year stay in Ephesus.

Paul says he has not hesitated to preach what would be helpful to them. He comments that he taught them publicly and from house to house. This was Paul's pattern of teaching in a large Gentile city and shows the life of the church in a city like Ephesus. There were public gatherings of many believers like in the lecture hall of Tyrannus in 19:9. And there were house groups. We read them as small groups but they were more likely house churches with 20-30 people or more, each overseen by an elder-pastor. Paul declares to both Jews and Greeks he has taught that everyone must turn to God in repentance and have faith in the Lord Jesus. There were not two different gospels, one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. There was only one, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. All must turn to him in repentance or be lost. Jesus is the only way to salvation and forgiveness of sins. Nothing has changed since Paul's day in regards to the gospel. There is only way of salvation for Jews and for Gentiles. Any Jew today cannot be saved apart from Jesus the Messiah nor can any Gentile.

20:22-27 - Paul says he is compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, which explains his need to get to Jerusalem as quickly as he can. The word for "*compelled*" means to be bound or tied. Here in context it means to be bound by duty or obligation to the Holy Spirit. Paul means the Spirit had directed him to go to Jerusalem and Paul must obey him. He comments to his friends that he does not know what will happen when he goes because in every city in which he stops the Holy Spirit warns him that prison and hardships await him in Jerusalem. Prophet after prophet must have warned Paul and yet he knows he must go. Sometimes the will of God is not pleasant

to do or easy. Such was the case with Paul. He had plans to visit Rome, so did the Holy Spirit but not in the way Paul had envisioned. Yet the Spirit's plan, which included two years of prison in Caesarea, enabled Luke to gather his eyewitness testimony which he used to write his gospel. We simply cannot see all ends and need to trust the Spirit when he leads us and that he knows what he is doing. There is always purpose with God's leading and the Spirit's promptings.

Paul's attitude was he was ready to give his life if necessary for Christ because he belonged body and soul to his Lord Jesus. His greatest desire was to finish the task God had given him to do to proclaim the gospel of God's grace. He then tells them news they do not want to hear, that none of them will ever see him again. He declares his innocence of the blood of all and states he has not hesitated to preach the whole will or counsel of God to them. In other words Paul says he has not left out parts of the Word of God because they were not popular or were hard to understand. He has faithfully preached and taught them what the Bible says and what Jesus taught.

Why does he declare he is innocent of the blood of all men? Was someone martyred in Ephesus for their faith? Was someone killed during the riot in the theater that Luke does not report? Paul states in *2 Corinthians 1* that he was in great distress in Ephesus and his life was threatened and he even thought he was going to die. He comments to the elders in *verse 19* that he was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. Paul says in *1 Corinthians 16* there was a wide door for effective work opened to him in Ephesus but there were many adversaries. Clearly there was great opposition to the gospel in Ephesus that Luke does not report and to which Paul only hints. During that opposition some may have lost their lives for the gospel and that is probably what Paul is speaking about here to the elders.

20:28-31 - Paul in his closing words to the Ephesian elders, gives us a picture of some of the most important duties of elders in any church. They are to keep watch over themselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers or bishops. The word for keep watch means to pay attention to, think about, or watch over. They are to focus their attention on their flock, the church, but also keep watch over themselves as elders. Elders guard elders. We protect and hold each other accountable. Further, it is not the church that has made them elders but the Holy Spirit; he has called them and the church has confirmed it. The elders in Ephesus heeded Paul's warning about false teachers almost too well. In *Revelation 2* John warns them to return to their first love of Jesus without giving up their vigilance against false teaching.

The word for bishop or overseer means someone who has the responsibility to make sure things done by others are done rightly. A bishop is a superintendent, a supervisor. He does not do all the work but makes sure it gets done and is done properly. In the case of a church he makes sure it is done according to God's will and the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit who is ultimately in charge of the church.

Elders are to be shepherds of the church because the church is God's flock, God's sheep. Like shepherds they are to guard, guide, feed and care for the flock. Paul notes that God bought the church with his own blood. Here is one of those places where Jesus is directly identified with God and called God. Jesus died on the cross and shed his blood in sacrifice and payment of sin. When Jesus shed his blood God shed his blood. It is Paul's way of saying the church does not belong to us; we are undershepherds of the Great Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep. We will have to give an accounting for our service and oversight of God's church.

Paul then warns them that false teachers will come among them after he leaves, savage wolves who will not spare the flock but try and destroy it. Even from your own number men will

arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples for their own ends. Watch out, be on your guard. As stated above the Ephesian elders heeded Paul's warning but too well because they forgot to maintain their love for Jesus and one another while they were on guard for false teaching. Paul may have already seen the beginnings of the pre-gnostic movement in Asia Province. Only three years later he will write to the Colossian church in Asia about a syncretistic heresy that threatened the church there that appears to be some combination of Jewish ideas plus gnostic doctrines all combined together. Paul may have seen the threat of such ideas in Ephesus as well. The Nicolaitans that John writes against to the seven churches in Asia Province in *Revelation 2* and *3* had pre-gnostic teachings, especially concerning moral issues. Paul's keen mind may have seen the threat on the horizon and he warns his friends to watch for it.

He comments that for three years he did not stop warning them day and night with tears. Luke says in *19:10* that Paul lectured every day for two years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Yet here he says he was with them three years. The two statements are not contradictory. Paul lectured every day for two years but his overall stay in Ephesus was three. It was the longest he stayed in any one city during his entire missionary travels in the east. In the end all Asia Province heard the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

20:32-35 - Paul commends them all to the grace of God which he knows is able to build them up, protect them and sanctify them or make them holy as Jesus is holy. He declares he has been innocent of coveting anyone's money or things and that he worked while he was with them to supply his own needs and the needs of his team. He probably means he made tents part time as he stayed in the city. Priscilla and Aquila were with him some of the time in Ephesus and it is likely that Paul worked with them in the trade they shared together. Why tell them he did not covet anyone's money or things? Like his statement about being innocent of anyone's blood there were probably personal attacks on Paul concerning his finances and he is making sure in his final words to the elders at Ephesus that he states his case that he served them with integrity. They all knew this but Paul wanted to give them a final reminder.

Paul tells them that he tried to model hard work for them and to help the weak or less fortunate. He then quotes Jesus that it is more blessed to give than receive. That quote is not in any of the gospel accounts and is evidence that we do not have everything of note that Jesus said. We have what we need for salvation and growing as his disciples. The quote captures the idea of the blessing of giving and the joy that comes with being generous as God is generous.

20:36-38 - Luke records a tender and emotional scene as the elders kneel and pray and say farewell to Paul. They are grieved because he had said they would not see him again. How precious his letter must have been, written to them and the other churches in Asia Province from house arrest in Rome. The elders are emotional, Paul must have been too. In the end they accompany him to his ship where he embarks and then like the farewell scene in Tolkien's *The Return of the King*, they must have watched him sail away. As far as we know, Paul was right; they never saw him again.

Chapter 21:

21:1-6 - Luke continues to describe their voyage from Miletus to Jerusalem. He notes that Paul and his friends had to tear themselves away from the Ephesian elders. It must have been a very emotional and difficult farewell. They put out to sea and sail straight to Cos which is an island northwest of Rhodes about 80 miles south of Miletus. The next day they travel to Rhodes and

then to Patara, a port city on the Lycian coast on the southern side of Asia Minor. They found a ship there and booked passage to Phoenicia and Tyre. They sail south of Cyprus and on to Tyre, a voyage of almost 600 miles, where they disembark and stay seven days with the Christians there while the ship is being unloaded.

Luke comments that through the Spirit the disciples in Tyre urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. This probably means they warned him that if he went he would be arrested and perhaps harmed. The Spirit is not giving contradictory orders to Paul, telling him go to Jerusalem and then don't go. He told Paul go to Jerusalem. Through prophetic speech in every city he is warning Paul of the cost of following what God wants him to do. The disciples hearing the warnings then add their own concern for Paul's safety and beg him not to go. Finally their ship is ready to sail and they board her and continue to Judea down the coast. Luke notes that the whole church, men, women and children came to see them off.

21:7-11 - The ship carrying Paul and his companions moves down the coast from Tyre to Ptolemais, the site of ancient Acco, about 20 miles south of Tyre and north of present day Haifa. They stayed with the church there and the next day reached Caesarea and stayed with Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven, the man who had evangelized Samaria (See *Acts 8*). He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. Did they do it once or many times? The Greek word is a present active participle. That means this was a continuous, ongoing, activity. One could easily translate this phrase, "*four unmarried or virgin daughters, the prophesying ones*" or who were prophets. They had the gift of prophecy! Why does Luke include this detail? It was probably unique that his four daughters all prophesied. Luke also wants to call attention to the fact that women did prophesy and have that gift, just as there were women in the Old Testament who prophesied and were prophets. The role of elder was a male role that agrees with the headship of the husband in a family, yet the gifts of God for his church are given by the Spirit without distinction of sex and both men and women may prophesy and have the ministry of prophet in God's church.

Paul and his friends stayed with Philip and his family for a number of days, then Agabus, a prophet came down to them from Jerusalem. This is the same Agabus who had come to Antioch and predicted the famine that would come over the Roman world in *Acts 11*. This time he comes to give Paul a message. He takes Paul's belt and ties his own hands and feet with it and says the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and hand him over to the Gentiles. Once again a prophet of the church warns Paul if he goes to Jerusalem he will be arrested and bound. He does not tell him don't go but warns him what will happen if he does go. The Holy Spirit is not contradicting his guidance and call to Paul to go to Jerusalem. He is telling him if he obeys there will be a cost, just as he told him on the road to Damascus and through Ananias.

21:12-16 - When Luke and the rest of Paul's friends heard Agabus' message they pleaded with him not to go to Jerusalem, Paul tells them he is ready to die for the Lord Jesus. He says why are you breaking my heart? Paul needed their encouragement and support not their objections as to why he should not follow the Lord's will. Sometimes God calls us to do something difficult and costly. Rather than dissuade us because we care about someone we need to support them and encourage them. No one likes to see someone harmed but sometimes God calls us to go into harm's way which is precisely what he had called Paul to do. We need to trust God's leading and believe he knows what he is doing. Paul was ready. Finally his friends are ready too.

Paul and his friends go up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompany them and take them to the home of Mnason, a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples. Did he know Barnabas, who was also from Cyprus and had been with the apostles in the beginning? It is possible. Why did they take him to Mnason and not to one of the apostles or elders? It is also possible that Mnason is one of the elders in the Jerusalem church. We don't know.

21:17-25 - When they arrived in Jerusalem they were received warmly. The next day Paul goes to see James and the elders. He greets them and reports on his ministry in detail over what God had done among the Gentiles in Greece and Asia Province. The elders praised God when they heard all that God had done.

They then report to Paul about the progress of the gospel among the Jews, especially in Jerusalem and Judea. They tell him thousands have believed and are zealous for the Law of Moses. Josephus reports that 100,000 Jews were followers of Jesus by the Jewish Revolt in and around Jerusalem. Their fervor translated into zealous attempts to keep the Law. James and the elders tell Paul that many have been told that Paul is teaching Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, and even stop circumcising their children or live a kosher lifestyle. It appears that James is trying to placate Jewish opposition to Paul and the Gentile mission. They encourage Paul to join with four men who have taken a purification vow, similar to a Nazarite vow. They want Paul to shave his head, pay the men's expenses and take part in their purification rites in order to show there is no truth to the reports about Paul and that he too is living in obedience to the Law. James then reminds Paul that the elders had written to the Gentile believers to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, and from blood and sexual immorality all things Paul had taught them as well because this was the counsel of the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem of which Paul had Barnabas had taken part. Paul agrees. Paul had taken a similar vow before his return to Jerusalem at the end of his second missionary journey. He is a far more complicated man than we think. We tend to "Gentilize" Paul and think he had abandoned all his Jewish ways and lived just like a Greek. He was far more Jewish than we understand. We also forget his advice to the Corinthians, that when he is trying to win Gentiles he will do what he must in love to reach them. The same is true for the Jews. Now he is at the center of the Jewish faith in the world. Taking a vow and showing he is a full Jew is simply a way to win the Jews and further the gospel. Paul is more than ready to do that and sees no contradiction in his behavior and teaching.

What did Luke and the other Gentiles think of what Paul was doing? Did they understand James and the other apostles? This is about eight years from the start of the Jewish Revolt and the fervor of the Jews for their faith is growing. It will spill over in the events of 66. Prior to that in 62, James the Lord's brother will be martyred in Jerusalem for his faith. His attempts to placate the Jews will ultimately fail.

21:26 - From reviewing *Numbers 6* it appears that the four men and now Paul are making a Nazarite vow, a vow of separation before the Lord. That means that no wine or anything from the grape vine may touch their lips; they could not be in the presence of a dead body and they were not to shave their hair or face for a specified amount of time, in this case seven days. Paul and the four men go to the temple and inform the priests of their vow and its length so that they can know when their sacrifice is to be offered at the completion of their vow. A Nazarite vow was one of the most serious and intense vows that Scripture talks about that the Jews could do as

a sign of their devotion to God. Obviously Paul is not able to fulfill his vow because he is beaten and imprisoned during the riot. He never comes back to complete the sacrifice. Was he automatically released from his vow? Would the priests have interpreted his circumstances as if he had violated his vow? That would have been a serious offense. Did his failure to keep his Nazarite vow contribute to the vehemence of the Jewish opposition to Paul and the plot to kill him? Luke never tells us how the situation with Paul's vow resolves itself.

21:27-29 - The seven days are nearly over and Paul and his four companions are at the temple. Some Jews from Asia Province see him and stir up the crowd against Paul. It appears that these are some of the same Jews who opposed Paul in Ephesus and had come to the city. They have probably not followed Paul but have come for Pentecost to worship. Paul had been trying to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost. They see Paul by coincidence.

They start shouting that Paul teaches against the Jews everywhere and teaches against the temple and the Law of Moses. They claim he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled it. They would have to mean he had brought Greeks into the Court of Women or into the Temple Court itself. There was a Court of the Gentiles where Gentiles would have been permitted to come so it has to be one of the inner courts they are claiming Paul has defiled. Luke notes they had seen Paul with Trophimus in the city and assumed Paul had brought him into the temple courts. Trophimus was one of the delegates from Asia Province who had accompanied Paul and the Gentile offering for the Jerusalem poor. The Asian Jews jump to a false conclusion in their zeal to attack Paul.

21:30-32 - Luke says the whole city was aroused which means there was a massive crowd at the temple. They seized Paul and dragged him from the temple courts. The temple gates were shut, probably by the temple guards to prevent the riot from spilling back into the temple proper. The mob is going to kill Paul because they have been whipped into a frenzy. This was in 56 about ten years before the Jewish Revolt broke out, but even now the Jews are growing in their fervency over any perceived slight to their temple and faith. Eventually that fervency would spill over into full-fledged revolt against Rome.

News reaches the Roman commander, presumably based in the Antonia Fortress on the northern end of Temple Mount. Luke says he takes some officers and soldiers into the crowd. That probably means at least one century and maybe two. When the rioters see the soldiers they stop beating Paul. What was his condition by this time? It was probably not good, as a mob had been beating him wanting to kill him. They are so out of control that they don't want to stone him, the Law's prescribed punishment; they want to beat him to a pulp, the actions of a mob.

21:33-36 - The commander's response to the situation is interesting and gives insight into how the Romans were dealing with the Jews and dealt with the mob attacking Paul. He arrests Paul! He's the man being beaten to death and he gets arrested! Above all the commander wants to restore order and calm down the crowd, so he arrests the object of their wrath and binds him with two chains. He doesn't arrest anyone in the crowd for beating a man who might be innocent. Perhaps he knows that if he tried to arrest some in the crowd things are going to get totally out of hand. His highest priority is to preserve order and restore the peace. After all the temple is the chief economic engine that drives Jerusalem's economy. As a Roman he probably doesn't understand the Jewish religion at all but he knows Jerusalem is a temple city and has certain privileges and benefits under the emperor.

The commander arrests Paul and puts him in chains then asks the crowd what he has done. No one can give a coherent answer so he orders his soldiers to take him back to their barracks, the Antonia Fortress. The mob is still so incensed that the soldiers have to carry Paul on their shoulders and they keep shouting, "*Away with him!*" They still want to see him dead! Who was continuing to whip the crowd into a furious state? Their actions point out how great was the hatred against Paul especially by the Hellenistic Jews from Asia. In many ways they are demonstrating the same zeal against Paul as Paul had demonstrated against the church before Jesus had met him on the Road to Damascus. All the prophecies of danger and arrest are already being fulfilled. Paul must have wondered what worse things were to come and if he was truly going to die in Jerusalem before he ever made it to Rome.

21:37-22:2 - The soldiers reach the steps to the Fortress, which puts them on the west entrance to the Fortress because the temple gates had been shut. He asks the commander if he may speak and the commander asks if he speaks Greek. That indicates that the commander is surprised Paul speaks Greek and his question also indicates Paul is not who he thought he was. The Roman asks Paul if he is the Egyptian who started a riot and led 4000 terrorists into the desert some time ago. He thinks he is some kind of Zealot terrorist returning to Jerusalem to stir up trouble. Paul's answer is classic, I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Paul drops the name of his home city, widely known in the eastern part of the empire as a great center for learning and trade. He asks if he may speak to the people. The commander gives his permission, perhaps now curious as to what Paul will say since he is not who he thought he was. Paul motions to the crowd to be silent and they quiet down, probably because he addresses them in Aramaic, but it is surprising that they let him speak. Perhaps their location on the steps of the Antonia Fortress with a contingent of armed Roman troops surrounding Paul and in a strategic position had something to do with their quieting down. Paul is about to make his defense and give his testimony.

Chapter 22:

22:2-5 - Paul begins his defense to the crowd or mob that had been beating him to death. He speaks to them in chains surrounded by Roman soldiers on the front steps, the western steps, of the Antonia Fortress on the north side of the Temple Mount. These would have been the same steps Pilate's soldiers led Jesus down when they took him to Golgotha to crucify him.

Paul begins his defense by saying he is a Jew born in Tarsus in Cilicia but brought up in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, the most famous rabbi of his day. He probably was sent to Jerusalem by his parents when he was old enough to be in school. It would have been difficult for the young boy to leave his home and family so early, but apparently his father and other Jews in Tarsus saw Paul's keen mind even at an early age and being a Pharisee he wanted him to be trained as a rabbi by the best rabbi of his time. Paul says he was thoroughly trained in the Law and was just as zealous for God as any of those in the crowd that day. He tells the crowd that he was a persecutor of the Way, even to the death, putting men and women in prison as the High Priest and the Sanhedrin can testify. This would have been many years later but the records of the high priests and the Sanhedrin would have confirmed Paul's testimony. The letters to the Damascus synagogues may have still been in their archives. Paul tells the crowd that he had letters from the High Priest to Damascus to bring back "*these people*" as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. Paul clearly lays out for the Jews in the crowd how vehement he was in his persecution of Christians. At this point he has their attention and probably has swayed many that

he could not have done what the Asian Jews accuse him of doing. I think Paul has many in the crowd thinking he is one of us! That is his purpose and it was also true. Paul had been one of them, to the point of persecuting the followers of Jesus. Were their Jewish Christians among the crowd that day? James had said there were thousands who were following Jesus as the Messiah and they were very zealous for the Law. Surely some of them were in the temple worshipping at that time, especially if it was around the Feast of Pentecost.

22:6-11 - This is the second time Luke records Paul's testimony, the other being in *Acts 9*. This time Paul gives it himself firsthand rather than Luke reporting it third hand. Was Luke there in the crowd or nearby? He was with Paul in Jerusalem, so it is quite possible.

Paul says it was near noon when they were approaching Damascus, a detail Luke does not record in *Acts 9*. A bright light flashes around him and he falls to the ground. He hears a voice saying, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" He asks, "*who are you Lord?*" This question is one of respect but not one of faith. When a bright light knocks one to the ground and a voice speaks out of the air, when in doubt acknowledge its power and authority! Lord here is probably most like, sir, yes sir. The Lord Jesus replies that he is Jesus whom you are persecuting. As far as we know Saul never knew Jesus, though he might have seen or heard him from afar, having been in Jerusalem training under Gamaliel when Jesus came to the city. There is no clear evidence from Luke or Paul in *Acts* or any of his letters that the young rabbi ever met or saw the carpenter from Nazareth. He certainly knew of him. Here Jesus links his own person to his people, the church. The seeds of Paul's theology of the body of Christ are here in his encounter on the Damascus Road. The men with him saw the light and heard a noise or voice but they did not understand what was being said. The message was for Paul's ears alone.

"*What shall I do Lord?*" This is the second time Paul calls Jesus Lord in this incident only this time he is now submitted to him. Jesus is alive and risen therefore he is the Messiah and he is Lord of all and Lord of Paul's life. This question, what shall I do Lord, became the question that dominated his life from that moment on! God chose Paul to know his will and to see and hear the Righteous One. He will be a witness to his resurrection and to Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus gives Paul instructions. Get up go into Damascus and you will be told all that you have been assigned to do. That phrase has a little more detail than *Acts 9*. Paul has an assignment from the Lord Jesus because he has chosen him for a purpose to be his apostle to the Gentiles. Paul now cannot see as the light has blinded him so his companions lead him by the hand into the city.

22:12-16 - Paul reports that a man named Ananias came to him. He does not relay any of the conversation Ananias has with the Lord or his doubts about going to see Saul. Luke may have talked to Ananias directly to get his testimony. Here Paul comments that Ananias was a devout Jew and highly respected in Damascus. This would have played to the crowd's sensibilities about following the Law. Paul is making his case that he and the other Jewish Christians have not violated the Law at all but are faithful Jews who have found the Messiah, Jesus.

Ananias comes to Paul and calls him brother. That must have been an amazing moment for Paul. He had come to Damascus to arrest and maybe kill people like Ananias and now he calls him brother! Ananias says receive your sight and Paul was no longer blind.

Then he tells Paul that the God of our fathers has chosen him to know his will and see the Righteous One, namely Jesus. Righteous One was a title for the Messiah. Peter uses it in *Acts 3*, saying the Holy and Righteous One and Stephen uses it in *Acts 7*. Now Ananias uses it with Paul.

He affirms that Paul has heard his words direct from his mouth and Paul is to be a witness of all that he has seen and heard from Jesus to all men.

Ananias tells Paul to get up and be baptized. Do it now, don't delay! Take Jesus' name, calling on him, meaning come under Jesus' authority and wash away your sins. Paul couldn't do this for himself; he had to allow Jesus to do it for him, to give him forgiveness. Call on his name means submit yourself to Jesus as Lord and Savior. Let him be your Messiah! Paul's baptism simply confirms his decision that he made on the road into the city. Jesus is Lord and Paul is forgiven not because of anything he has done to earn forgiveness but because of the grace of God to him. Paul has been justified before God by faith in Jesus alone! The persecutor of Christians has now become the preacher of Christ!

22:17-21 - Paul mentions when he had returned to Jerusalem. This is after his three years in Arabia and Damascus. This is the visit when Barnabas takes him to the apostles and tells them they need to listen to his testimony because he has seen the Lord Jesus. Saul had been debating the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem and proving that Jesus was the Messiah. They vehemently opposed him because of it and were plotting to kill him. The apostles put him on a ship and send him back to Tarsus. Paul adds that the Lord Jesus spoke to him in the temple when he was worshipping. He told him to leave Jerusalem immediately because they will not accept your testimony about me. Paul does not seem to resist being put on a ship and sent home to Tarsus in *Acts 9*. Jesus' words to him may explain why he did not resist. The Lord told him to go!

Paul tells the Lord how he persecuted the church and beat and imprisoned the followers of Jesus. When Stephen was martyred he was giving his approval to his death. Paul is telling the Lord that if these men will not believe his testimony, one who persecuted Christians and now is one of them then whose testimony will they believe? Paul is saying his transformation is so great what more do they need to see that Jesus is the Messiah! The Lord knows however and has much greater plans for Paul than trying to win skeptical Jews in Jerusalem. He tells him go, he is being sent far away to the Gentiles. This is Paul's fundamental commission and mission as an apostle of Jesus; the Gentiles.

22:22-29 - The crowd at the steps of the Antonia Fortress has been listening to Paul until he says that the Lord will send him to the Gentiles. If he had been winning them over to his side and making a good defense of who he was and his former status as a persecutor of Christians that statement undoes all that he had said. The crowd goes crazy and starts shouting for him to be killed, that he's not fit to live. Was there a general hatred among the Jews gathered in the crowd that day toward Gentiles or were they simply whipped up over a perceived slight against their temple that they thought Paul had committed by defiling it by bringing Gentiles into the temple? What is really going on here? On a spiritual level obviously spiritual evil is working to whip up opposition to Paul and the gospel. Are the Jews really that vulnerable to demonic forces? It is a curious phenomenon why the crowd so vehemently opposed Paul and what he was saying. How did this affect the Romans who were listening? They probably couldn't figure out why the people were so violently opposed to Paul. That may explain why the centurion was going to have Paul flogged. Torture him and get some information out of him so that he can restore order.

The crowd is going crazy so the commander orders Paul to be taken inside the barracks in the Antonia Fortress where they can question Paul and quiet the crowd. He orders Paul flogged, which would have been with a cat o' nine tails, like the soldiers had used on Jesus. The soldiers stretch Paul out to flog him when he asks them if it is legal to flog a Roman citizen without trial

and a conviction of guilt. The centurion in charge of questioning their prisoner immediately goes to his commander with Paul's statement and reports that he is claiming to be a Roman citizen. The commander goes to Paul and asks if he is a citizen. Paul says he is. The commander says he had to pay for his citizenship to which Paul reports that he was born a citizen. That means the commander was not a Roman or Italian and was probably an auxiliary legionary commander. At this the soldiers back away from Paul and release him. They are very nervous that they had put a Roman citizen in chains and were going to flog him.

They are nervous and afraid because Paul had certain rights as a Roman citizen and he uses them in this situation. He had a right to a trial and to defend himself before his accusers. If he was found guilty the punishment would have been a beating with rods which the lictors carried. He would not have been flogged. When Paul was eventually martyred he was beheaded with a sword and not crucified because crucifixion was never used on a citizen only on non-citizens. A non-citizen could also be "*questioned*" and flogged without trial and did not have the right to a defense. No wonder people would pay money to become Roman citizens and no wonder non-Romans hated the Romans! The rules were different for them compared to everyone else.

22:30 - The commander is still perplexed as to what the controversy is all about with Paul so he releases Paul and orders the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brings Paul before the Sanhedrin to hear his case. It is clear the commander knows the reason for the Jews' opposition to Paul and the riot has something to do with the Jewish religion. He almost certainly does not understand the reason but takes Paul to the one place where he might get some answers, the Jewish ruling council. Plus the Sanhedrin had jurisdiction in Jewish religious matters because Jerusalem was a temple city. This is a shrewd political move by the commander. He can placate the Jewish religious authorities concerning Paul and at the same time watch over Paul and defend him from unwanted attacks as a Roman citizen. For Paul God has now opened up an opportunity to witness to the Sanhedrin itself!

Chapter 23:

23:1-5 - Paul begins his defense to the Sanhedrin by stating his innocence before the Law of Moses that he has not violated the Law and has kept it in good conscience to this day. The High Priest, named Ananias, orders those nearby to strike Paul on the mouth presumably for Paul's perceived insolence. Paul lashes out with his quick mind and tongue accusing Ananias of violating the Law by being a hypocrite. Ananias was sitting in judgment over Paul for violating the Law and then orders him to be struck in violation of the Law of Moses. There had been no testimony of witnesses, no passing of judgment and the Law said no punishment was to be carried out without the testimony of two or three witnesses. Paul is absolutely correct.

Those nearby tell him he just insulted God's High Priest! Paul replies that he did not know Ananias was the High Priest and quotes the appropriate commandment that one should not speak evil about a ruler of the people from *Exodus 22:28*. Did Paul actually not know Ananias was the High Priest? It appears so. He is the titular head of the Sanhedrin but his dress may have been similar enough to the other high priests that Paul may not have immediately identified him as the High Priest. Why did Ananias order Paul struck? Since the High Priest is a Sadducee and the temple is the center of their power and theology it makes sense that since the charges involve a defilement of the temple Ananias sees Paul as attacking his leadership as well. When Paul says

he has acted in all good conscience and fulfilled the Law the High Priest snaps and orders Paul struck for such an insult.

23:6-10 - Paul knowing that the Sanhedrin was divided between Sadducees and Pharisees takes advantage of the theological divide and identifies himself with the minority Pharisees. He calls out that he is on trial for his hope of the resurrection of the dead!

My guess is Paul knew he was not going to get a fair hearing before the Sanhedrin, especially after Ananias ordered him struck before any witnesses were heard! So Paul brilliantly short-circuits the whole proceeding by appealing to the minority Pharisee party whom he knew would spring to his defense! The whole hearing degenerates into a shouting match, so much so the commander begins to fear for Paul's safety and has to get him out of the Council chambers.

Luke notes the theological differences between the Sadducees and Pharisees. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection or angels and demons but the Pharisees believed in them all. Some Pharisee teachers or rabbis wonder whether an angel has spoken to Paul and come to his defense saying they find nothing wrong with the man! How quickly they have forgotten the insult to the temple in defense of a fellow Pharisee! Were the Pharisees less threatened by Paul and the greater perceived threat was by the Sadducees because they saw Paul as attacking the temple and the base of their power? Paul succeeds in fanning the flames of the jealousy and suspicion in the Sanhedrin between the majority Sadducees and the minority Pharisees. Ananias will never get a conviction now that Paul has divided them.

The commander takes Paul away by force from the Council chambers, meaning he has his soldiers come and rescue Paul and take him back to the Antonia Fortress.

23:11 - A night later the Lord appears to Paul and tells him to take courage. As you have testified for me in Jerusalem so you will in Rome. This is the second time the Lord has appeared to Paul in a vision and given him instructions and encouragement. He appeared to him in Corinth and told Paul to not worry but stay and work because he had many people in the city. Paul had a vision in Troas of the man from Macedonia telling him to come and speak to him, and even though it was not the Lord directly speaking to him Paul obeyed the vision and crossed over into Europe. Paul tells us in *Galatians* that he did not learn his gospel from the apostles but directly from the Lord. He says in *1 Corinthians* that he received his instructions about communion directly from the Lord by revelation and not from anyone else. The same is true of his vision of heaven in *2 Corinthians*. Visions from God were not uncommon for Paul. He had received them throughout his ministry and time following Jesus. Now here in Jerusalem the Lord tells him to have courage because he is going to Rome. He will receive another vision from an angel during the storm at sea on the way to Rome telling him that none of the crew or passengers will be lost at sea, even though the ship will be a total loss. God spoke to Paul periodically at strategic points throughout his ministry to encourage him. These visions helped Paul to persevere through difficult times. It would be two years before Paul would set sail for Rome and he would be waiting a long time in prison before he would set out. The Lord's words to him in the Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem must have given him great comfort and enabled him to not despair and to keep the faith. It would also have given him great confidence to pass on to those who were with him too.

God had a plan. The words the prophets of the churches had spoken to Paul were coming true. He had experienced danger and arrest as he had come to Jerusalem, but God was going to

work it to Paul's and the gospel's advantage. He was going to Rome just as he had hoped and planned!

23:12-15 - Some Jews form a conspiracy to kill Paul and bind themselves by an oath to not eat or drink until they have murdered him. Luke says more than forty were involved in the plot. Who were these Jews who so hated Paul? Were they some of the Jews from Asia Province, or Sadducees or Pharisees? Could the fact that Paul was a Roman citizen have contributed to their hatred? Did some Jews see Paul as a collaborator with the hated conquerors? Were even some Zealots involved? It is difficult to know who was doing this. Their plan was to ambush Paul before he arrived at the Council Chambers.

The plotters go to the chief priests and elders and tell them they have sworn an oath to assassinate Paul. They are going to commit murder and believe it is a moral act. They don't see anything sinful about it! The chief priests and elders are almost certainly some of the leading Sadducees on the Sanhedrin. That tells us that the plotters were probably not Pharisees but Jews from Asia or Sadducean allies who were zealous for the temple. They tell the Sadducee elders and priests to ask for Paul to be brought before the Sanhedrin again to hear more testimony from Paul and on the way they will ambush him and kill him. They must have understood that if they murdered Paul the Romans would try and capture them and if they did they would be crucified. That makes me think there were some Zealots involved in this plot because the Sadducees were by nature conservative and cautious. Their strategy was to keep order and collaborate with the Romans in order to maintain the temple and their wealth and power. They hate Paul so much however that they cooperate with the plot, seeing a way to rid themselves of Paul and yet be able to preserve plausible deniability with the Romans. None of their number had taken the oath. From their perspective this is all about maintaining their power. It could also indicate a growing dis-ease with the Way and a perceived threat from the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. The movement was growing and they had not been able to stop it.

23:16-23 - Somehow Paul's nephew got wind of the plot and comes to Paul and tells him. We don't know who the young man is apart from the fact he is Paul's nephew. Perhaps he had followed Paul to Jerusalem to study as a Pharisee rabbi as well. Did Paul's sister live in Jerusalem too and his nephew with him? We do not know. At any rate when Paul learns his nephew's news he calls one of the centurions to take him to the commander. He does and the young man outlines the plot against Paul to the Roman commander. After learning what the Jews planned against Paul the commander warns the young man to tell no one what he has told the commander. He is not about to let a Roman citizen be murdered in Jerusalem, especially when he has not yet been brought before Roman justice. Paul has allies among the Romans and God is protecting him by exposing the plot so that Paul's life will be spared because he has an appointment in Rome.

Even in our lives we must not forget that God is often behind events orchestrating them so that we can carry out his purposes for us and for the gospel's sake. There are no coincidences and accidents where God's people are concerned. Bad things may happen because we have an enemy that wants to thwart God's plan and destroy us. But God uses even those tragic events to work out his purposes. He did for Paul and he will do the same for us!

23:23-35 - The commander orders two of his centurions to make ready a detachment of 200 soldiers, 70 cavalry and 200 spearmen or bowmen (the Greek word is uncertain) to go to

Caesarea at nine o'clock that very night. He also orders that a horse be provided for Paul so he may be taken safely to Governor Felix in Caesarea. He writes a note to Felix to explain his actions. The commander's name is Claudius Lysias. His letter describes Paul's situation and case. Claudius Lysias explains that Paul was seized by a Jewish mob who were about to kill him but his troops rescued him. He then learned he was a Roman citizen. When he brought him before the Sanhedrin for a hearing he learned that their issue with Paul had to do with "*questions about their law*". Lysias could see there was no charge against Paul that deserved death or prison but when he was informed of the plot to kill Paul he decided to send Paul to Felix at once. He also ordered his accusers to appear before Felix to state their case. This was the Roman way and Paul was now protected by Roman justice and since he was in Roman custody and would now be in Caesarea and not Jerusalem he was as safe from the plots of the Jews as he could be.

200 infantry, 70 cavalry and 200 spearmen or bowmen, 470 troops in all, were a show of Roman force and were more than enough to protect Paul. A cohort was 600 men so this was at least 2/3 of a cohort and was a formidable force especially against 40 Jews planning an ambush in the streets of Jerusalem. On the open road during a night march against a Roman formation with their prisoner protected in the middle Claudius Lysias knew they could protect Paul and the Jewish plot had no chance. If the Jews were perhaps angry with Paul for being a Roman, Claudius Lysias is going to protect a Roman citizen from a Jewish mob. It appears given the circumstances and description of the plot that there were Zealots involved! The stirrings and undercurrents that Luke describes for us here hint at the trouble already brewing in Judea. The seeds of the Jewish revolt are here. If the Zealots were involved in trying to kill Paul they were already cooperating with the Sanhedrin and the Sadducees. All of this would boil over in another ten years into full blown rebellion.

This was a blow to the Sadducees on the Sanhedrin who had hoped the plot they supported would be able to rid them of Paul. Now they were caught trying to work the Roman legal system over which they had little control and Paul being a Roman citizen had all the advantages!

The soldiers take Paul by night out of Jerusalem as far as Antipatris, which was about thirty miles to the northwest of Jerusalem some ten miles from the coast in the Plain of Sharon. Antipatris was on the road from Jerusalem to Caesarea. It was 15 miles to the east of Joppa and just slightly north. The next day only the cavalry goes on with Paul to Caesarea and the troops return to Jerusalem. When they arrive in Caesarea the cavalry commander delivers the letter from Claudius Lysias to Governor Felix and hands Paul over into his custody. He asks Paul what province Paul is from and Paul tells him Cilicia. Felix tells Paul he will hear his case when his accusers arrive and orders him kept in Herod's palace under guard which would have been the palace on the shoreline that sticks out into the sea which the Roman governors also used as their residence.

Chapter 24:

24:1-9 - Five days after Paul had been brought to Caesarea, Ananias the High Priest along with some of the elders of the Sanhedrin who were probably Sadducees, and a lawyer, or a practitioner of rhetoric, named Tertullus come to Caesarea to bring their charges against Paul.

Tertullus begins by flattering Felix for his enlightened governance in Judea. He says the Jews are profoundly grateful for his reforms and the long period of peace they have enjoyed under his leadership. Josephus and Tacitus record that Felix ruled with brutality and ruthlessness and he was greedy, so Tertullus' words are mere flattery and have no basis in reality. Felix in fact

did not hold Roman justice in high regard and this may have been why the Sanhedrin had hired Tertullus to state their case and had come to Caesarea rather than drop the charges. They may have thought they could influence the governor to see the case their way. Tertullus' flattery may have been part of their strategy; butter up the governor and maybe he will give us what we want. He uses the title most excellent Felix for the governor, the same title Luke uses of Theophilus in the prologue to *Luke* and to *Acts*. It is an honorific similar to your Excellency.

Tertullus argues that Paul is a troublemaker who has stirred up the Jews all over the world. Now he has come to Jerusalem. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect which no doubt Felix had heard of because many were proclaiming Jesus as Messiah among the Jews and there was even a church there in Caesarea led by Philip the evangelist. Had Felix received reports of the riot in Ephesus? Probably not but it is possible. Tertullus re-states the false claim that started the riot at the temple that Paul has come and tried to desecrate the temple. So the Jews seized him. This is a subtle argument. Jerusalem was a temple city and as such had some leeway under Roman law to govern the affairs of Jerusalem according to their own laws. That is why the Sanhedrin had been given broad authority to govern Jewish affairs under the Romans. Tertullus is arguing that this case should never have been turned over to Felix and that it is a temple matter that should have remained under the Sanhedrin's jurisdiction. In other words Tertullus is telling Felix this is our affair because it concerns our temple and religion so hand over Paul to us and we will deal with the matter as we see fit. He invites Felix to examine Paul himself and he will see the truth of their charges. There was obviously much more that Tertullus said before Felix but Luke as he often does just gives us the highlights.

Luke reports that the Jews, meaning Ananias and the Sanhedrin elders who had joined him, joined in the accusation against Paul, asserting that what Tertullus had stated was true. The implication of Luke's description is that Tertullus is not part of the Sanhedrin. His name is Roman and he could have been a Gentile hired by the Sanhedrin for his rhetorical skill. He could also have been a Jew with a Roman name, which is exactly what Paul was. The Sadducees would use whatever means necessary to preserve their power including working with a Gentile. They were collaborators. But would the whole Sanhedrin have approved? It is doubtful they would have so Tertullus is most likely a Jew with a Roman name.

24:10-16 - Felix invites Paul to speak. He begins by acknowledging that Felix has been governor over the Jews for many years. He became procurator in 52, this was now 57. Paul does not include the flattery that Tertullus used. He tells Felix that he can verify that Paul was in Jerusalem twelve days before and had gone up to the temple to worship. He says his accusers cannot prove their charges because he was not in the temple arguing with anyone or stirring up the crowd. He was there to worship. Paul admits he is a Jew and a follower of the Way which the Sanhedrin considered a sect, meaning probably a heretical group or at least a fringe group. He states he believes everything the Law and the Prophets state which identifies him as a Pharisee in contrast to the Sadducees who are accusing him. This distinction is probably lost on Felix but it is not lost on Ananias. Paul then states that he has the same hope in God as these men that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked and he always tries therefore to keep his conscience clear before all so that he will be raised among the righteous. This is re-stating his argument before the Sanhedrin that he was on trial for his belief in the resurrection of the dead. If there were no Pharisees among the elders of the Sanhedrin who had accompanied Ananias then this is a direct challenge to the beliefs of the Sadducees and a dig at their non-belief in the resurrection of the dead because they most certainly did not have the same hope as Paul. My

guess is Paul is attacking the High Priest and his Sadducean allies right under the nose of Felix the Roman governor and they can't do anything about it because if they try and cause a scene over doctrine Felix will simply throw out the case. Tertullus may have argued that this is not a matter for Roman justice because it concerns the temple but Paul is a Roman citizen who has been attacked by a mob and been the target of a plot to murder him. That makes it a matter for Roman justice.

24:17-21 - Paul goes on to describe why he was in Jerusalem worshipping at the temple. He had returned after many years to present offerings to the poor and was ceremonially clean when the mob attacked him in the temple. Paul proclaims his innocence stating that there was no crowd with him nor was he causing a disturbance in the temple courts. The facts are Paul was going up with the four other men who had sworn the Nazarite vow to offer the purification sacrifices. He was not teaching but was being a faithful Jew.

Paul then asks where are the Asian Jews who were the cause of the false charges against him in the first place and were the real agitators of the crowds in the temple. It was the Asian Jews who had started the whole controversy. James' strategy of the vow and Paul's ceremonial cleanliness was working until they started the commotion. Also they are not present to speak against Paul. The case has been taken up by the High Priest and the Sanhedrin. This is another hint that the murder plot against Paul was carried out by Zealots with the Council's blessing.

The Ephesian Jews are not there and can bring no charges or show any evidence. Paul then turns to the Sanhedrin elders who are there and says the worst they can bring against me is what I shouted when I was brought before them, that I was on trial for my belief in the resurrection of the dead! Lysias had been in the Council chambers that day and could confirm Paul's words and that his declaration had been the cause of the turmoil in the Council against Paul. Paul had Ananias and the Sadducees and they knew it! Their case cannot stand and Paul is innocent. Felix will not hand Paul over to them to be judged.

24:22-26 - Luke reports that Felix adjourned the proceedings and was well acquainted with the Way. He obviously was not a believer but had heard reports about what the "*sect of the Nazarenes*" was doing and what they believed. Josephus reports that by the time of the Jewish revolt there were 100,000 Jews who were followers of Jesus as Messiah in and around Jerusalem. James had told Paul that 1000's of Jews had become followers of Jesus. This new movement which the Sanhedrin and other Jews opposed vehemently made it necessary for Felix to understand something about the Way in case trouble arose over them. Now here is Paul a "*ringleader*" of the sect standing before him accused by the Sanhedrin. Yet Felix can see there is no basis in the charges they bring against Paul. So he does what any good politician would do; he stalls for time.

Felix says when Lysias returns to Caesarea he will decide Paul's case. Then he orders the centurion to keep Paul under Roman guard but to permit him some freedom and for his friends to supply his needs. Rome will not foot the bill for Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea, Paul must provide for his own needs.

Several days later Felix and his wife Drusilla who is a Jew herself bring Paul before them to hear what he has to say especially about the Way. Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and sister of Agrippa II. She had been given in marriage by her father to a Syrian client king of Rome named Azizus. Felix with the help of a Cypriot sorcerer named Atomos, which some inferior texts name as Elymas whom Paul struck blind, convinced her to leave Azizus and marry

Felix. She was named after one of Herod Agrippa's friends Drusus, father of the Emperor Claudius.

Paul talked to them frequently about faith, righteousness, self-control and the coming judgment which I am sure Drusilla and Felix greatly appreciated! As Paul's sermons got too convicting Felix would cut off Paul and tell him that is enough for now but I will send for you again when it is convenient. Luke reports that Felix was looking for Paul to offer him a bribe in order to set him free so that is why he sent for him frequently. Paul is not about to offer a bribe or do anything immoral and in violation of the Law. He stubbornly refuses and wants Felix to set him free on the merits of his case. Felix' desire for a bribe fits what we know from extra-biblical sources of his character. He was greedy!

24:27 - Paul was in prison in Caesarea, frequently brought in to speak to Felix and Drusilla and yet having the freedom to have visitors who could come and go for two years! Felix is finally recalled to Rome in 59 by Nero and Portius Festus succeeds him as governor of Judea. Felix wanted to grant the Jews, probably meaning the Sanhedrin, a favor and so he left Paul in custody in Caesarea.

It is likely that Luke during the two years Paul is held in custody in Caesarea, begins gathering material for his gospel and begins to interview many of the eyewitnesses and *huperates*, ministers of the word, he mentions in *Luke 1:1-4*. If Mary is still in Galilee or Judea during this time she is also probably one of the people with whom Luke speaks. If my guess is correct, then this is one of those historical coincidences that God uses to write down what Jesus said and did for us in the gospels. If Luke saw Mark's gospel when he and Paul finally reached Rome and met up with Mark, then it makes sense for Luke to have gathered material that is unique to his gospel during the time Paul is imprisoned in Caesarea. When he saw Mark's gospel in Rome a year or so later he used it as a template to organize his own gospel and to be in synch with one of the many accounts of Jesus' life that had already been written. That means that Luke was gathering material for his birth narratives and for many of the parables that are unique to *Luke*. It could be that most of the "*Travel Narrative*" is put together at this time. All of this is only conjecture but it provides the most likely scenario for how Luke both gathered his material and wrote his gospel for Theophilus. This is also undoubtedly the time Luke uses to interview the key players in the early history of the church that he writes about in *Acts*. People like Philip the evangelist and perhaps even Cornelius the centurion would have been right there in Caesarea.

Chapter 25:

25:1-5 - Festus goes up to Jerusalem soon after he arrives in Judea. When he gets there and holds an audience with the chief priests and Sanhedrin they present their charges against Paul urgently requesting that Paul be brought to Jerusalem for trial. This is two years after Paul's arrest and transfer to Caesarea. They still want Paul killed because they planned to ambush him on the way to Jerusalem. Obviously the men who had taken the oath to kill Paul had to modify it but they were still trying to fulfill it!

Festus knows about the case from Felix and probably from Claudius Lysias the commander of the garrison in Jerusalem. He is aware of the former plot against Paul and does not trust the Jews where Paul is concerned. The Jews may want him dead but Paul is still a Roman citizen and as such has rights. Festus tells them he is going back to Caesarea soon and they can come with him and he'll hear the case in the capital. Once again Roman justice and

authority protects Paul from the plots of the Sanhedrin and the Zealots who want to murder Paul. God is fulfilling his words to Paul. He will testify about Jesus in Rome.

25:6-8 - A week and a half later Festus goes back to Caesarea and a day after he arrives he convenes his court and orders that Paul be brought before him. When Paul is brought into the court the Jews from the Sanhedrin who had come with Festus begin to gather around Paul and bring their charges and lies to Festus. Luke notes that they could prove none of the charges. Paul is innocent.

Luke summarizes Paul's defense with the phrase, *"I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."* Paul includes the temple because Jerusalem was a temple city according to the empire and as such had some privileges other cities lacked. The Sanhedrin also had authority from the Romans to oversee the temple precincts which is why Paul refers to the Jewish law, the temple and to Caesar.

Two years before Paul was innocent as he appeared before Felix but Felix wanted a bribe and he wanted to grant the Jews a favor to get their cooperation and curry favor. Paul refused to give him a bribe so Felix let him stay in custody. Now before Festus the same charges are brought and nothing has changed except Festus is governor not Felix. The Jews still cannot prove any of the charges they bring against Paul.

25:9-12 - Festus tries to do what Felix did, ask Paul if he would be willing to go up to Jerusalem to stand trial there. Like Felix he wants to do the Sanhedrin a favor since he needs their cooperation in governing Judea.

Paul knows the implications of a trial in Jerusalem. He knows there are still men who swore the oath to kill him who consider themselves still bound by that oath. He does not completely trust the Roman authorities to protect him in Jerusalem. Paul must have thought this scenario through when the change in governors took place. He knew he couldn't go back to Jerusalem because of the blood oath on his head. The Lord had told him he was going to Rome and he would testify there just as he had testified in Jerusalem. He still had rights as a Roman citizen that Festus dare not violate. When the course of action to appeal to Caesar presented itself Paul took it.

Paul tells Festus he is in a Roman court and as a Roman citizen that is where he should be tried. He tells Festus what the governor knows, the charges cannot be made to stick and Paul is innocent. He argues if he has done anything deserving death he is not afraid to die but the charges against him brought by the Jews are false and no one has the right to hand him over to them. Paul therefore plays his trump card and seals his fate. He appeals to Caesar. Festus is now bound by the Roman legal system which gave every Roman citizen the right to appeal their case to the emperor. It is a risky move but one about which the Sanhedrin can do nothing. In fact the further away from Jerusalem Paul gets the more likely he is to be acquitted of all charges.

Festus for his part confers with his counsel and pronounces his decision. *"You have appealed to Caesar and to Caesar you will go!"* Paul is going to Rome!

25:13-22 - A few days after Paul's appeal to Caesar before Festus, King Herod Agrippa II with his sister Bernice come to Caesarea to pay their respects to the new Roman governor. Herod Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I and was a client king of Rome with his territory centered at Caesarea Philippi. Nero expanded his territory as a reward for his faithfulness to Rome in 56, a few years before this incident in *Acts 25*. From 48 to the outbreak of the Jewish

War in 66 he was given the right to appoint the Jewish high priests by the Romans. That means that Ananias was appointed by Herod Agrippa II. His territory was to the north and northeast of Judea similar to Herod Philipp's. Over time it was expanded, especially by Nero as a reward. Herod Agrippa II was held in favor by Nero the emperor so it was in Festus' best interest to seek his favor as well. This may be one of the reasons Festus asks Agrippa to hear Paul's case. Bernice was his sister, a daughter of Herod Agrippa I and not his wife. Through their father they had some connection to the Hasmonean kings which would have given them status with some of the Jews, especially the Sadducees and the priests who also saw themselves as inheriting the Hasmonean legacy.

Festus discusses Paul's case with the king and describes to him the situation with Paul. He explains to Agrippa that the elders of the Sanhedrin did not accuse Paul with any charges he anticipated rather they had *"some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus whom Paul claimed was alive."* To the Jews and Romans Jesus was dead. To his followers he was risen from the dead and very much alive! Festus tells Agrippa that since Paul had appealed to Caesar rather than stand trial in Jerusalem Festus wants Agrippa to hear the case and maybe help him better understand what to tell the emperor about Paul. Agrippa agrees and wants to hear Paul as well. Was he simply curious and flattered that Festus wants to bring him in on a case or was he curious about Christians about whom he had undoubtedly heard? Both reasons may be true.

25:23-27 - The next day Agrippa and Bernice enter the audience room with the other high ranking officials and leading men of the city. That means that most of the important leaders of the Roman Province of Judea and of the city of Caesarea are present when Paul makes his defense. Jesus' words to Paul that he will testify before Gentiles and kings are being fulfilled!

Festus explains the situation to King Agrippa and the other officials present. He says the whole Jewish community has petitioned Festus about him in Jerusalem and Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live, demanding the death penalty. Festus has found Paul innocent of any capital crime. However, he has made his appeal to Caesar and Festus is bound by that appeal. Before he sends him to Rome he asks Agrippa's help in describing the charges against Paul so that he will be able to write a coherent report to the emperor and can specify the charges against Paul for his hearing before Nero. Festus knows the Sanhedrin want Paul put to death. He also knows Paul is a Roman citizen. He is in a dilemma. He does not want to anger the Sanhedrin yet he also wants to uphold Roman law and the rights of a Roman citizen over against what he would consider an inferior people, the Jews. By asking Agrippa's advice Festus is able to soften some of the pressure from the Sanhedrin because if Agrippa says there is no basis in the charges a Jewish king has agreed with him and he can deflect the criticism of the Sanhedrin and the high priests. Remember, Herod Agrippa II was the one who had the power to appoint the Jewish High Priest, so his word carried weight in the Sanhedrin and especially among the Sadducees who controlled the temple. There is far more going on here politically than at first appears. Festus is using Agrippa in his dealings with the Sanhedrin. From that perspective Paul is simply a tool in his political maneuverings. The irony is from God's perspective Festus and King Agrippa are merely tools in God's design to get Paul to Rome where he will testify before Emperor Nero himself! God is sovereign and in control!

Chapter 26:

26:1-8 - King Agrippa gives Paul permission to speak and Paul begins his defense. This is now the third time in *Acts* that Luke records Paul's testimony and the second time Paul tells it himself. He gives more details here than in the other accounts, especially when it comes to his Jewish background as a Pharisee. He tells the king that he is glad to make his defense before Agrippa because the king is familiar with Jewish customs and "*controversies*." Did Agrippa know about Christians and their conflict with the Jewish authorities? It is likely he did, especially if Agrippa had any kind of effective intelligence gathering network.

Paul tells Agrippa that the Jews, by which Paul most likely means the Sanhedrin and those who are accusing him, know the details of his life. There are those among them who have known Paul or of Paul for most of his life and can testify that he was a Pharisee, the strictest sect of the Jewish faith. Paul speaks of the hope of the resurrection and frames the accusations against him as accusations against his belief in the resurrection. Herod Agrippa II knew the theological divide that separated Pharisee from Sadducee; he chose the high priests! He would know the ancient theological "controversy" that the minority Pharisees on the Sanhedrin believed in the resurrection and the Sadducees did not. Paul is skillfully framing the case against him as a theological controversy about whether there is a resurrection of the dead. He is intimating that the Sadducee elders on the Sanhedrin and Ananias himself don't want Paul dead because of a supposed desecration of the temple; they want Paul out of the way because he is forcefully preaching the resurrection of the dead, something the Sadducees do not believe! Paul says it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing him. Then he adds, "*Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?*"

Paul is arguing his case before Agrippa as if he is speaking to a Jewish audience and not a predominantly Gentile one, even though the majority of people present were probably Gentiles. He knows Agrippa is the key. Festus will go the way the king goes and the king is mostly Jewish and thinks more like a Jew in his theology than the pagan Festus. He also obviously understands some of the subtleties of the theological differences between the competing power parties in Judaism centered in the Sanhedrin and the temple. Thus Paul centers his arguments on the final resurrection and Jesus' resurrection just like the early sermons by Peter and John to the Jews in Jerusalem.

26:9-11 - Paul then outlines for Agrippa his career as a persecutor of Christians. He was convinced he should do "*all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth*." Did Agrippa understand the argument that Jesus could not be the Messiah because he was cursed of God because he died on the cross? I do not know, but it is possible. Certainly Agrippa knew about Jesus and that Pilate had crucified him. There were too many Christians in his own territory for him not to be aware of Jesus' story and subsequent events.

Paul says he set out to stop this new movement about Jesus in Jerusalem. He put many in prison and cast his vote when they were put to death. Paul gives evidence here that Stephen was not the only Christian martyr he saw killed. In fact it was after Stephen's execution that Paul really began his persecution. Paul says he went from one synagogue to another trying to force Christians to blaspheme and even went to foreign cities to persecute Christ-followers in his obsession to stamp out the Christian movement. What does he mean by blaspheme? In Paul's Pharisee mind claiming Jesus was God come in the flesh would have been blasphemy. Is that what he is referring to? Even claiming that Jesus was the Messiah was considered blasphemy to the Sanhedrin. Saying one was a follower of Jesus or that Jesus was a prophet was not an offense

with which Paul could charge someone under the Law. But saying Jesus was God's Son that was different!

Paul says he went to foreign cities to hunt down Christians. He implies here that Damascus was not the only Gentile city to which he traveled in search of Jesus' disciples. We do not know the others but Tyre, Sidon and the cities of the Decapolis are good candidates.

One wonders what Agrippa was thinking at this point in Paul's defense? Was he questioning how Paul could be so vehemently opposed to Jesus and now be such a staunch defender of him? What had happened to Paul to change him? Paul has Agrippa right where he wants him. Remember, his core argument is the question he asks in *verse 8*, why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead. Paul knows the center of the gospel is the resurrection. Believe that fact and everything falls into place. He is framing his argument in a masterful way for Agrippa to confront him with the truth of Jesus' resurrection!

26:12-18 - Paul says one of his journeys to foreign cities hunting for Christians was to Damascus. He had letters with a commission from the chief priests to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. The Sanhedrin could confirm this through their records and the Romans gave the High Priest authority to govern Jewish religious affairs because Jerusalem was considered a temple city. Agrippa knows this and understands it.

Paul says about noon a bright light from heaven shone around him and his companions and he fell to the ground and heard a voice speaking to him in Aramaic. This is the same version of events he tells the crowd on the steps of the Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem. The voice asked why Saul was persecuting him. Paul adds the detail that it said it is hard for you to kick against the goads. A goad was a long-handled pointed instrument used to urge on oxen when they were ploughing. Here on the Damascus Road Jesus tells Paul it is as useless for him to resist the Lord as it is for an ox to resist the goad. Paul is going to go where Jesus chooses for him to go! The point is an ox is already yoked and the ploughman is steering it where he wills. He uses the goad to encourage the ox to obey. Jesus is telling Paul resistance is futile!!! Stop kicking against God's will and submit to Jesus as Lord!

When Paul asks who it is the Lord replies, "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting!*" Then Paul adds new details about Jesus' instructions to Paul that are not present in the other two versions of his testimony. This is the center of Paul's apostolic commission as the apostle to the Gentiles. Jesus' frames Paul's commission in language that echoes both the Messianic passage of *Isaiah 35*, to open the eyes of the blind and the Servant song of *Isaiah 42*, to turn the Gentiles from darkness to light. Paul will carry the essential gospel message of the forgiveness of sins and faith in Jesus to the Gentiles; the same thing Jesus had told his disciples they were to do after the resurrection in *Luke 24*. Paul's mission was a fulfillment of messianic prophecy that when the Messiah came the Gentiles would come to faith in God through the Messiah. Did Agrippa know these prophecies? Was he learned enough in Jewish teaching to understand Paul's argument and the implications of it? If God had raised Jesus from the dead, and the Gentiles were coming to faith in God then Jesus was the Messiah! Suddenly the tables are turned on Agrippa and he is seized by the power of the gospel message. He had come to sit in judgment over Paul and now God is sitting in judgment through Paul's preaching over Agrippa!

26:19-23 - Paul now summarizes his case for Agrippa. He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Paul began to preach in Jerusalem, Judea and to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their good deeds. Paul did not separate faith from good

works, but faith is the producer of those deeds of obedience to Jesus and not the other way around. As Martin Luther said, we are saved by faith alone but the faith that saves is not alone!

Paul tells Agrippa that this is the reason the Jews seized Paul in the temple courts. He dared preach salvation to the Gentiles, something the Sadducees could not allow. So because he did they tried to kill him. Paul's basic argument is Jesus is risen and therefore is the Messiah and he was obeying Jesus not the blind Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Paul has succeeded in indicting the High Priest whom Agrippa had chosen!

He says he has had God's help to complete his mission to this very day and so here he stands testifying to the great and small alike. He tells Agrippa that he is saying nothing beyond which the prophets have already spoken, that the Messiah would suffer, then be the first to rise from the dead and would bring light, that is truth, to his own people and then the Gentiles. Paul restates what Jesus had told the disciples after the resurrection, everything about him written in the Law and Prophets must be fulfilled. His suffering, death, resurrection and glorification were all prophesied centuries before in Israel's own Scriptures.

26:24-29 - Festus shouts out that Paul must be insane and out of his mind, yet he recognizes Paul's great learning and intelligence. Why; two reasons are probable. First, Festus knows great oratory and rhetoric when he hears it and Paul has exhibited those skills. The Romans prized rhetoric and public oratory. This by the way is in marked contrast to what Paul says to the Corinthians, that he did not come to them in learned speech and rhetoric. Paul could adapt to his audience! Second, like many speeches in *Acts* Luke only gives us the highlights. There was probably a whole lot more which demonstrated Paul's mastery of Scripture, knowledge and philosophy. The underlying spiritual reason however is Festus has been convicted by Paul's preaching and is uncomfortable and wants to deflect that conviction! The Holy Spirit is working on him!

Paul responds to Festus' charge that Paul is insane by strongly denying it. He states that what he has said is true and reasonable. Then he turns back to the king, who is his true focus. Paul states that Agrippa is familiar with all Paul has talked about and he has spoken freely to him. He says none of his story has been done in a corner, in other words the details of Jesus, life, death and resurrection are widely known. The king had heard the reports. This isn't the first time he has heard all of this. Then he challenges Agrippa and brings him back to Paul's conclusion that Jesus fulfills what the prophets had said. King Agrippa, "*do you believe the prophets? I know you do!*" Agrippa responds by asking if Paul is trying to persuade him to become a Christian in such a short time. Paul says yes, except for the chains! That tells us that Paul was wearing some sort of shackles or chains around his feet or wrists as he faced Agrippa and Festus. His testimony had been so powerful Festus and Agrippa both have to resist it. Paul is the one in chains before them yet he is the one who is in charge. The Spirit has given Paul the words to say just as Jesus promised he would. Paul has shared the gospel with a king, a Roman governor and all the leading people of Caesarea! Was Luke present at Paul's hearing? The evidence suggests it because of the detail Luke records.

26:30-32 - Agrippa, Bernice and Festus all get up signaling that the hearing is at an end. They leave the audience room and debrief what they have heard with one another. Luke must have gotten what was said from a servant of one of them. They both agree that Paul has done nothing to deserve death or imprisonment. He is innocent. Festus replies Paul could be set free but he has appealed to Caesar and the governor is bound by that appeal.

According to the Sanhedrin Paul deserved death but circumstances put him before Roman justice. According to that justice, Paul's defense had won the day and he would have been found not guilty. But he had appealed to Caesar and events had to run their course. It was all part of God's plan! Paul was going to Rome!

This whole incident of Paul defending himself before Agrippa, Bernice and Festus, tells us that what God wants us to do is stay faithful to our calling. Preach the gospel; bear witness to Jesus. We have no power to control events or manipulate people into giving us an opportunity to share. In fact we should not even try. We need to let God orchestrate things which only he can do. Our part is to share the gospel when the opportunity presents itself. By himself Paul could never have orchestrated to bring together the group of people he shared with that day in Caesarea, but God did! We must stay faithful to our task and let God guide us and lead us where he wills. When we do there will be more opportunities to share and teach than we can even imagine. God truly is sovereign and in control!!!

Chapter 27:

27:1-8 - The decision is made to take Paul and some other prisoners to Rome. The other prisoners appear to be people who have also appealed to Caesar or whose cases are being sent to the emperor for justice. The prisoners are handed over to a centurion named Julius of the Imperial Regiment. This is different than the Italian Regiment to which Cornelius belonged. I do not know for certain but Julius is probably a centurion in the Praetorian Guard, the elite regiment that guarded Caesar and did his bidding. Thus he is in charge of prisoners who have appealed to Caesar and are to be brought before Nero.

Luke is still with Paul as this is a "we" section of Acts, so he is reporting first hand. Aristarchus from Thessalonica, one of Paul's assistants is also still with them. Both Luke and Aristarchus had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem with the offering for the Jerusalem poor. He had been one of the delegates from Thessalonica to shepherd the offering to Jerusalem. They sail on a ship from Adramyttium, a city on the northwestern coast of Asia Province, bound for ports along the coast of Asia.

A day out from Caesarea they land at Sidon and Julius allows Paul to go ashore, meet his friends who take care of his needs. Presumably that means food, clothing and any medicine Paul might need for the journey. From Sidon they put out to sea and sail just south of Cyprus because the winds are now against them. Luke says they crossed open sea straight to the coast of Lycia and Pamphylia and land at Myra, to the east of Rhodes and west of Perga. Julius books them passage on an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy. We know from Luke's later description that its cargo was grain, probably wheat from the Nile delta farmlands. Egypt was the main supplier of grain for Rome.

They set out for open water and the winds do not allow them to hold course. They end up sailing to the south of Crete and land at a place or bay called Fair Havens, on the south central coast of the island. The ship has taken a course that leads to open ocean instead of sailing along through the Aegean to the Isthmus of Corinth and then into the Adriatic to Italy via the passage between Sicily and Italy. Instead they end up sailing south of Crete and then chancing the open sea between Crete and Italy. Luke comments that the wind prevented them from holding their course which may mean they wanted to sail closer to the protected waters of the Aegean and Adriatic Seas along the coast of Greece but the wind was not blowing favorably for them to do this. We do not know the original course they wanted to follow and without that information we can only speculate. It seems clear however from Luke's comments that the south coast of Crete

was not in their original plans. Though there was much sea commerce throughout the Mediterranean it was still very dangerous travel and very unpredictable. Paul noted this in *2 Corinthians 11* where he says he had already been shipwrecked in his travels and had spent a night and a day adrift at sea. The point is the sea was and still is a very dangerous place for vessels, especially sailing vessels. The ancients feared it and greatly respected it. For the Hebrews the sea represented the forces of chaos in creation that God subdued. Only God could tame the sea and now God had Paul traveling to Rome upon a ship. Anything could happen! Yet God is still in control!

27:9-12 - Luke notes much time had been lost and it was now nearing the dangerous time to be sailing on the Mediterranean Sea. It was past the Fast, meaning the Day of Atonement, which puts the time in late October. Fall and winter storms start blowing across the Mediterranean late in the year. The rainy season in Israel begins in November. The odds were against them being able to sail across the open ocean without being caught in a serious storm and risking the ship, cargo and crew. Paul argues this to Julius. He has had some experience in sailing during his travels. Julius however listens to the ship's owner and pilot and decides to sail along Crete to Phoenix nearer to the eastern end of the island where there is a port in which they can winter. Fair Havens was not suitable for docking the ship until the spring sailing season. The ship's owner wants to get his grain to the markets in Italy and Rome. That is understandable. Julius however appears to be in charge, rather than the owner of the ship. That too is understandable. He is a centurion in the Praetorian Guard and is in charge of imperial prisoners. Luke says he booked passage on this Alexandrian ship, but it sounds as if booked passage means commandeered it. Julius is more than just a passenger. He is in charge of the voyage!

Luke's description of their debate over where to winter the ship tells us a great deal about travel in the Roman world. Weather played a huge part in determining sailing. No one is arguing to sail straight to Italy at present. The debate is over where to winter the ship. In the summer when the weather was good for sailing their voyage may have taken some weeks or a month. Now in the fall with winter approaching they are thinking of staying over in Crete all winter. That means from the time they set sail from Caesarea till they reach Italy they are anticipating that their voyage will take six months or more. Luke gives us no clues that Julius, Paul, the pilot or ship's owner thought this was out of the ordinary at all! The goal was to get the ship and cargo to Italy safely and if it took overwintering and six months to do it that was fine! In our modern world we are so used to being able to travel great distances in a short time, especially by air. It only took a flight of 12 hours to get from New York to Tel Aviv when we last went to Israel. Imagine if it took six months!

27:13-20 - A gentle south wind begins to blow so the pilot steers the ship along the south shore of Crete heading towards Phoenix where they want to winter. However, that south wind turns around to the northeast, the direction of violent storms, blowing down from the island and suddenly the ship is caught in a gale that they cannot fight. They are unable to turn into the wind and head back to the coast, but are forced to turn and go with the wind which drives them further away from shore and out into the open sea. They secure the lifeboat to the deck rather than towing it so it won't be lost. This boat was used in tacking the vessel and ferrying parties ashore besides being the last resort if the ship sank. The crew also passed ropes under the hull to help hold the ship together in the pounding sea. This was common practice with the wooden ships of Paul's day.

The sandbars of Syrtis were shoals near the coast of Cyrene in North Africa. The sailors fear that the strong northeast wind will push the ship into the shoals as they are driven along by the storm. In order to keep this from occurring the sea anchor is dropped from the stern to slow down the ship's momentum. However, the storm is now so severe and is pounding the ship so violently that they are forced to throw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship and keep it from being broken apart. On the third day of the storm the crew throws the ship's tackle overboard which was the mast, ropes and sail used for sailing and was heavy. It too was jettisoned in order to lighten the ship and keep it from sinking. All these measures were desperate things to do in order to lighten the ship but any good crew of Paul's day caught in a severe gale at sea would have done the same things. They are not rash but each step is more serious than the last. Luke notes that neither sun nor stars were seen for many days and the storm still raged. When all had been done they could do and still the storm came at them unabated they gave up hope of rescue. The crew and all the passengers, including Luke, began to believe they were all going to die at sea. Their situation was most grave.

27:21-26 - After all of them had gone a long time without food, probably days on end, Paul speaks to all those onboard. At first he sounds as if he is saying I told you so, we should never have left Crete. However, he doesn't berate them or scold them. Instead he tells them to take courage because not one of them will be lost. The ship will be destroyed but the crew and all the passengers will be saved. He explains to them that an angel of the God whom he serves spoke to him in the night and reassured him that he will stand trial before Caesar, and God has graciously given Paul all the lives of those on board. He encourages them to keep up their courage because Paul has faith in God that everything will work out just as God had told him. They will be saved but the ship will be lost.

Paul says *"the God whom I serve."* He does not say the one true God or the one and only God who is the creator of all things. Maybe Paul figured now was not the time for a philosophical debate with the crew. He did tell them what God had told him. Perhaps Paul knew that the miracle of their survival after such an ordeal would open doors for the gospel in ways that any debate on the ship would never do. What to say and when to share the gospel is always a matter of timing. We need to let the Spirit guide us just as Paul did with his fellow shipmates.

27:27-32 - On the fourteenth night out from Fair Havens they were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when around midnight the sailors sensed they were nearing land. Luke names the ocean near Malta the Adriatic. In Roman times the title of Adriatic was given to the Mediterranean Sea well south of Italy, unlike today when the Adriatic is properly only the arm of the Mediterranean between Italy and Greece. The sailors take soundings and find that the sea is getting shallower. They are nearing land. Now the danger is the ship will be dashed against the rocks and broken apart before they can beach her and get to shore. They drop four anchors from the stern and pray for daylight hoping they can slow the ship down enough to guide her away from any reefs.

The sailors however have other ideas. They lower the lifeboat on the excuse they are going to lower some anchors from the bow. Paul knows what is really happening and informs Julius that the crew is trying to abandon ship. Unless they stay with the ship there is no way they survive the beaching of the boat. They need the crew to survive. So Julius orders his soldiers to cut the ropes of the lifeboat and cast it away. The crew is kept on the ship but now there is no chance they can use the lifeboat to evacuate any of the passengers. They must beach the ship if

they are to all get off safely. Paul knows they will all survive but how much did Julius and the rest of the passengers and crew believe Paul's words?

27:33-38 - Just before dawn Paul speaks to them all again. He says for two weeks they have been in constant stress and gone without food. Many of them were undoubtedly seasick which would also explain why they had not eaten. He urges them to eat something because they will need their energy to survive and then reassures them that not one of them will be harmed. As if to encourage them Paul takes some bread, blesses it, breaks it and begins to eat. The passengers and crew take Paul's advice and do the same. This was not communion but a simple meal that Paul eats in front of them to encourage them all to eat. Luke notes there were 276 on board. This was not a small boat but a large ship capable of carrying a huge amount of grain and a large number of people as well. Josephus comments he was on a vessel that carried 600 passengers. Often they had up to three decks to accommodate all the passengers. Not only were their prisoners but Julius must have had a sizeable detachment of soldiers to guard his imperial prisoners. He was a centurion in the Praetorian Guard, were his soldiers as well? Did he have his whole century on board with him? We do not know, but it is possible.

When everyone had eaten as much as they wanted they threw the rest of the grain overboard to lighten the ship even further. The remaining grain had probably been used for ballast to keep the ship stable in the open ocean. They no longer needed it and wanted the ship to ride as high in the water as possible to avoid hitting a reef.

Once again Paul encourages the crew to take heart, telling them they will all survive the ordeal. Paul is an example of someone whose faith can carry a whole group of people even when he is the only one who truly understands and knows what God is going to do. Paul exhibits a great gift of faith here that influences everyone else on board the ship. Leaders are people of influence and Paul demonstrates his influence on the passengers and crew of the ship. Luke's implication is that none of them would have survived without Paul's leadership and faith. At this point even Julius is depending on Paul to lift everyone up. Leaders can do the same thing today; lift everyone up with their faith and courage so that together a group or a church can overcome some great obstacle or crisis.

27:39-44 - Dawn finally comes and the sailors see a bay with a sandy beach where they can beach the ship. The land they do not recognize because they have been blown so far off course by the northeaster. They cut loose the sea anchors and let the sea take them toward the bay, untying the rudders at the same time so they can steer the ship if possible. They hoist the foresail, a small sail at the front to aid them in steering and propelling the ship towards the shore. A large grain vessel such as they were on had a small foremast plus the larger mainmast that they had jettisoned in the storm. The rudders were two large oars used to steer the ship that were lashed down during a storm lest they break.

Unfortunately all their best laid plans do not work because the ship strikes a sand bar and runs aground off the shore and not on the beach in the bay. The bow stuck fast and the crew was unable to move the ship. The stern was now vulnerable to the pounding of the waves and the ship started to break apart. The soldiers had planned to kill the prisoners so that none would escape. This was to save them grief over not completing their mission of delivering the imperial prisoners to the emperor for trial. However, no one would hold them accountable for lost prisoners if they were run aground in a shipwreck. Their plan makes perfect sense from the soldiers' point of view. Julius however, wants to spare Paul and orders them to abandon their

plan. Those who could swim he orders to jump overboard and swim to shore. Those who cannot are to find planks or other pieces of wreckage and paddle to safety on the beach. Luke says in this way all 276 on board reached safety. God's word to Paul had been fulfilled; not one of them is lost. They have finally reached the safety of dry land!

Chapter 28:

28:1-6 - Paul and his shipmates discover they are on the Island of Malta, south of Sicily. The storm had blown them halfway across the Mediterranean Sea! The islanders show the passengers warm hospitality building a fire on the beach to help them dry out because the weather is still rainy and cold. Paul goes to gather firewood and when he puts his sticks on the fire a viper emerges from the sticks, driven out by the heat. It fastens itself on Paul's hand. But Paul shakes it off into the fire and is immune from the poison. God miraculously saves Paul from the viper's venom because he had a purpose for him to get him to Rome. God also wants Luke to get to Rome to meet with Mark so the two gospel writers can compare notes. Interestingly Luke sees the snake bite as a natural event and not a demonic attack. The Maltese think the goddess Justice has punished Paul for something and has not allowed him to escape. He has escaped from the shipwreck but Justice has found him on the land and sent the viper to kill him. When Paul is spared they conclude he must be a god himself, otherwise how did he thwart the goddess' will?

What did Julius, the crew and passengers think about the viper attack and Paul's deliverance from it? They had all been saved from the shipwreck even as Paul had said they would and now he should have died from the snake bite but he was still healthy. The doors are opening for Paul to share the gospel with his shipmates.

28:7-10 - The chief official of the island, Publius, welcomed Paul and his companions to his home and entertained them for three days showing them great hospitality. Publius was probably the Roman governor or magistrate of Malta. The name is found on inscriptions on the island as the title for the Roman governor there. His father was ill with a fever and dysentery, which is probably Luke's medical diagnosis. Paul goes into him, prays and lays hands on him and heals him. After this miracle the people bring the sick of the island to Paul to be healed which he does. Paul does what Jesus often did in a town or village, heal all the sick. This would have further reinforced their idea that Paul was a god. One wonders whether Luke was ever jealous of Paul's healing power from God. I don't think so but it is an interesting question to ponder.

It is also curious to note that Luke does not mention Paul founding a church on Malta or any disciples there. Surely he preached the gospel because he would have been given a great opportunity to do so because of all the healings God had done through him. I don't think Luke mentions the founding of a church on Malta because his purpose is to tell how God brought Paul to Rome. Rome is the focus.

28:11-16 - After wintering on Malta for three months Julius finds a ship that had wintered on the island that is heading to Rome. It too is an Alexandrian ship with the twin gods Castor and Pollux, the Gemini twins as their patron gods. The twins were often the patron gods of sailors and were believed to be able to protect them in storms. Paul, Luke and Aristarchus don't need the Gemini twins they have the Lord Jesus Christ!

They sail at the beginning of the sailing season in early February and put in at Syracuse, the chief port on the southern end of Sicily. They stay three days there and then set sail for Italy landing first at Rhegium, the closest port in Italy to Sicily. The next day they set sail for Puteoli,

which is the Italian port on the northern half of the Bay of Naples, near Pompey and Neapolis, where the Alexandrian grain ships usually docked. There in Puteoli they found some Christ-followers who invited Paul and his party which included Julius and his soldiers to stay with them. They stayed a week. This detail lends us clues as to how many soldiers Julius had with him to guard his prisoners. If Julius and his soldiers stayed with the believers in Puteoli too then it could not have been a full century. It must have been only a handful. However, it is possible that Julius had released the rest of his soldiers to return to Rome and he and a few trusted guards stayed with Paul. Luke does not tell us. It is somewhat surprising that the Christians offer hospitality to Julius and the Roman soldiers guarding Paul. Paul could have explained to them what was happening and so they welcome the soldiers as well. Again, Luke does not tell us any of those details.

"And so we came to Rome." Luke's simple phrase says so much! The Spirit had preserved Paul and their lives through shipwreck and viper attack and brought Paul where he had wanted to go and where the Holy Spirit had told him he would go. The whole *Book of Acts* has been pushing toward this moment; the gospel in Rome, the center of the ancient world. The Roman Christians would have had the letter of *Romans* in hand for several years. No wonder they greeted Paul with such excitement! Can you imagine how it affected them? Paul's letter has been instrumental in affecting so many people across the centuries. I don't think the Roman Christians were any different. He wrote it in the winter of 55 in Corinth. Now he arrives sometime in early spring in the year 59.

The disciples in Rome hear that Paul is coming and travel as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet Paul and his companions. They are traveling the Appian Way into Rome. The Forum of Appius is about 40 miles from Rome and the Three Taverns is about 30. Some of the Roman Christians had traveled many miles to see Paul and welcome him! They enter the city through the Porta Capena, the gate of the Appian Way into Rome. Paul is chained to a member of the Praetorian Guard, Caesar's elite guard corps, of which Julius is a centurion. In Rome Paul is allowed to rent quarters for himself and his friends but is under house arrest. A guard is chained to him at all times waiting for him to be brought before Caesar. Paul however is not in a prison. He is awaiting trial and is not a condemned prisoner.

28:17-20 - Three days after Paul had settled into his quarters he called together the leaders of the Jews. They were probably the leaders of the various synagogues in Rome. When they assembled Paul addressed them about his own case. He proclaims his innocence to them, that he had done nothing wrong against their people or their customs, meaning the Law or the oral tradition of the rabbis. Many of these Jews would have been Pharisees or similar to them as the Sadducees were only found in Jerusalem. Paul tells them he had been arrested and handed over to the Romans who examined him and found him innocent. This is similar to Pilate and Jesus. When the Jews in Judea objected he was forced to appeal to Caesar. That detail tells the Jewish leaders in Rome that Paul is a Roman citizen. He explains all of this because he wants to talk with the leaders about the gospel and about Jesus but he needed to tell them why he is in chains, so they will know he is not fomenting rebellion or violence against Caesar. Had some of these Jewish leaders experienced the violence and persecution of Jews after Claudius' expulsion in 48? It is possible. That expulsion had occurred over riots concerning "*Chrestus*" or Christ. Now here is Paul proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. Paul begins by being very diplomatic to the Jewish leaders in Rome trying to reassure them that he is no threat to their peace and security.

28:21-23 - The Jewish leaders tell Paul they have received no communication from Jerusalem about him and no one from Jerusalem speaks ill of Paul. They want to hear his views and learn more about the Christians because people everywhere are talking about this sect. It is curious that the Jewish leaders do not mention the Christians in Rome as there had been believers in Jesus in the great city for decades, long before Claudius' decree in 48 to expel the Jews from Rome. This is ten years later. Had many of these Jewish leaders only recently come back to Rome or even come to Rome? It is curious. Perhaps they know of the Christians but want to hear from Paul what the followers of Jesus are all about. It is possible that they have never really been able to talk directly to someone who follows Jesus as the Messiah.

They now have that opportunity as Paul talks from morning till evening, declaring and explaining the gospel to them and speaking to them about the Kingdom of God. Many from all over the city had come to where Paul was staying to hear him. Paul was doing what he said in *Romans 1*, giving the gospel first to the Jews and then the Gentiles. He is outlining the evidence from Moses and the Prophets, from all the Hebrew Scriptures, to prove that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. Here at the end of *Acts* Paul is doing what Jesus did with the disciples at the end of the *Gospel of Luke*, explaining from the Scriptures how and why Jesus is the Messiah. This is consistently Paul's evangelistic method when speaking to the Jews. He uses the Scriptures and the prophecies of the Messiah to argue the case for Jesus. It was apologetic in nature. He also uses Jesus' resurrection as the supreme proof that what all the Scriptures say is true. It had been true in Paul's life and he knew if they could once believe Jesus is risen they too would believe as he did.

28:24-28 - The results of Paul's apologetic preaching to the Jewish leaders were mixed as they often were in almost every city to which he traveled. Some believed and were convinced while others were not. There was disagreement among the leaders when they left, especially after Paul made one final statement. He quotes from *Isaiah 6* and Isaiah's call as a prophet, where God told Isaiah to preach to Israel but they will hear and not understand, see but not perceive for this people's heart has become hard and they will refuse to repent otherwise God would heal them. In *Isaiah's* context it is a warning to Isaiah and Israel that despite the prophet's warnings Israel will harden their heart against God and not turn back to him, which is exactly what happened. In Paul's context *Isaiah's* words point to the fact that God has hardened the Jews so that the gospel may go to the Gentiles who will listen. This is the basic argument of *Romans 9-11*. It raises the same dilemma that Pharaoh's hard heart raises. Did God harden the Jews or did the Jews harden their own hearts to the gospel? The answer is yes, both are true so that God may expand his people and include the Gentiles into his church. That is the undeniable result of Jewish opposition to the gospel. Paul closes out his words saying the gospel has been sent to the Gentiles for they will listen.

Later manuscripts contain v.29 which says, "*After he had said this the Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves.*" Our earliest manuscripts do not contain this verse which appears to be a scribal addition to clarify the Jew's reaction to Paul's words. For that reason the verse occurs only as a footnote in modern translations and is not included in the text. It is included however in the *King James Version* written in 1611.

28:30-31 - Luke ends his narrative with Paul preaching and teaching about Jesus to all who came to him. He is under house arrest and has not yet appeared before Caesar. He says Paul stayed there at his own expense for two whole years. One commentator notes that if a Roman prisoner

had no charges brought after two years he would be set free. Whether this is what happened or Paul did indeed appear before Nero and was acquitted we do not know. It is impossible to tell with certainty what happened when he went before Nero but the hints Luke gives in the trials before Felix and Festus, the Roman attitudes toward Paul, plus the hints by Paul himself in the *Pastoral Letters* seem to suggest he was released. After his release it appears he evangelized again, was re-arrested after two or three years, tried and finally executed around 65-66 under Nero. The personal details in *2 Timothy* and *Titus* suggest Paul went back into the Aegean Sea area and not west into Spain as he had written the *Romans* he wanted to do. That however is only conjecture. The fact is it is impossible to trace Paul's movements after his first imprisonment in Rome of which Luke speaks here in *Acts 28*.

Was Luke going to write a third volume to Theophilus detailing Paul's later work? We do not know. Luke apparently stayed with Paul throughout this time, perhaps caring for him as his personal physician. *2 Timothy 4* speaks of this. This is almost certainly the time when Luke meets with Mark personally and became familiar with Mark's gospel, which Luke would use as a template for his own. Luke finishes *Acts* before Paul is martyred. The most likely explanation is he finishes *Luke-Acts* in between Paul's first release and second arrest. One commentator says Luke wrote *Acts* later but wanted a happy ending to satisfy his readers and not show Roman opposition to Paul and his ministry. That seems a very weak argument especially since Theophilus as a Roman official would have been able to easily find out the truth of what happened to Paul. Plus four years later the Jewish War would break out and cast suspicion on all Jews whether they were Christians or not, and Nero's local persecution of Christians in Rome would have occurred in order to fix blame for the great fire started by Nero to clear land for his new mega-palace. No, the most likely explanation for why Luke ends *Acts* where he does is that Paul was still alive and in Rome when Luke wrote. That means the *Gospel of Luke* and *Acts* are published some time before Paul's second arrest and martyrdom under Nero, which puts the publishing date around 63 or 64.

Luke ends his grand narrative of the events of Jesus and the early apostles with Paul preaching the gospel unhindered in the center of the Roman world, Rome itself. The gospel has spread from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, to Samaria and finally a long ways away from the temple city in Judea, to Rome. Jesus' words in *Acts 1:8* have been fulfilled! The gospel has spread to the "*ends of the earth*"! It is still spreading today!