Luke wrote at a time when the Good News about Jesus Christ was spreading from Jerusalem throughout the Mediterranean world. Luke was probably a Gentile (non-Jew), and his material on Christian origins keeps the needs and outlook of the wider world in mind.

Luke began his presentation of the message of Christ with an account of Jesus’ life (the Gospel of Luke). In the book of Acts, Luke describes how the Christian faith was carried across the Mediterranean world. It was important for Luke to show that God’s love and mercy reaches out to all people—“God shows no favoritism,” as Peter told Cornelius (10:34). Christ is the only Savior (4:12), so all people can believe in him for salvation and new life (16:31). Despite the tendency of Jewish Christians to keep God’s grace to themselves, the church came to the united conclusion that Gentiles are fully included in God’s promises (see 15:1-31). The message of the forgiveness of sins is for all nations.

Summary

### Purposes of Acts

- **History.** Acts describes people, places, and events involved in the early spread of the Good News.
- **Geography.** Acts shows how the message was taken from Jerusalem to Rome (1:8; 8:1–9:15).
- **Biography.** Acts documents the historical reality of God’s action in redemption, the role of the Holy Spirit, the central place of prayer, the importance of angels, and the fulfillment of OT promises in the life of Jesus and in the Christian community.
- **Evangelism.** Acts gives clear examples of how Christian leaders proclaimed the Good News to different audiences (note the speeches of chs 2:5; 7; 10; 13; 22; 26).
- **Politics.** Acts presents a strong defense of the Christian faith to Jews (4:8–12; 7:53) and to Gentiles (24:20–21; 26:1–23).

### Meaning and Message


Acts shows the importance of the individuals that God has chosen to carry his message and testify about Christ. At the beginning of the apostles’ testimony, the apostles upheld the life and ministry of Jesus (1:22; 10:39–41; see Luke 1:2) and explained Jesus’ significance in God’s plan to redeem humanity (Acts 2:40; 3:15; 4:33; 10:42). Matthias was chosen to replace Judas in the company of the twelve apostles (1:12–26). Later, other Christian leaders shared in the task of testifying for their Lord, Stephen and Philip are two outstanding examples of bold witness to their faith (7:2–53; 8:4–40). Other Christians simply shared their faith as they had opportunity (e.g. 8:1–4; 11:19–21). Later, God called Paul to participate in this enterprise as his “chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel” (9:15; 22:1–21; 26:2–23). Paul, like Peter, occupies a central role in Acts as a major witness for Christ.

The apostles proclaimed that the death and resurrection of Jesus was God’s plan fulfilling Scripture (2:22–36; 3:15; 4:27–28, 33; 7:52; 8:32–35; 10:38–43; 13:26–39). Jesus was the one appointed to redeem humankind, so the apostles’ message was, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” (16:31). God offers his grace and forgiveness to all. “There is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (10:36). Luke was also apparently the author of the Gospel that bears his name. The theological viewpoint is consistent throughout both works. Each book highlights the historical reality of God’s action in redemption, the role of the Holy Spirit, the central place of prayer, the importance of angels, and the fulfillment of OT promises in the life of Jesus and in the Christian community. Luke saw God as governing the course of history for the outworking of the divine purpose.

As a responsible Hellenistic historian, Luke used good historical methods and described his procedures in detail, writing an accurate and orderly account of Christian origins (Luke 1:1–4). Where other sources can verify Luke’s writings, he demonstrates that he was careful and accurate. Luke was also a literary artist, a gifted storyteller who perceived and clearly portrayed the hand of God in the development of the Christian community. He is one of the most important historical writers between Polybius, “the last of the great Greek historians” (100s BC), and Eusebius, the first major church historian (AD 275–339).

### Date and Place of Writing

Acts was probably written in Rome, though Greece and Asia Minor are possible locations. Acts is generally dated between the early 60s AD and the end of the expected life span of Paul’s co-workers and traveling companions (mid-80s AD). Many scholars have opted for a date after AD 70, arguing that Luke used Mark as one of his sources and dating Mark in the late 60s. However, Acts makes no mention of the outcome of Paul’s trial (about AD 62), the death of James, the Lord’s brother (early 60s AD), the persecution of James; therefore, Acts probably was written before AD 62.
The Book of Acts is ... a narrative about the Triune God on an unstoppable mission to the ends of the earth.

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The material of Acts is presented carefully and accurately (e.g., Acts 11:28, 18:2); this precision has often been affirmed by archaeology, geography, and related studies. Luke has combined historical accuracy and detail with a gift for vivid and dramatic descriptions (e.g., 5:17-32; 12:1-17; 14:8-20; 16:11-40; 27:1-44). Acts is punctuated by powerful speeches of Peter, Stephen, James, and Paul (2:1-4:40; 7:2-53; 15:13-21; 22:2-23:11). The varied literary styles in Acts fit the cultural settings in a remarkable way. Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost has a strongly Jewish character (2:14-40), while Paul’s preaching before the cultured Greek philosophers in Athens uses the forms of Greek oratory (17:22-31). These characteristics all support the historical authenticity of the book.

Chronology of the Apostolic Age

Events in the apostolic age are difficult to date because few precise statements are made about time. Many events, however, can be correlated with known dates in the Roman world.

Events from AD 30 to 50. We know from Roman sources that Herod Agrippa I died in AD 34 (12:23), so his execution of the apostle James and imprisonment of Peter (12:2-17) must have happened before that date. The famine prophesied by Agabus befell Judea during the reign of Emperor Claudius (11:28-29). When the church in Antioch sent famine relief to the church in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were appointed to carry the money (11:29-30). It was Paul’s second trip to Jerusalem after his conversion. The Jewish historian Josephus dates the famine between AD 46 and 48. While Paul was in Corinth on his second missionary journey, Gallio was governor of Achaia (18:12). An inscription discovered at nearby Delphi indicates that Gallio’s term was AD 51-52. The incident in 18:12-17 probably occurred at the beginning of Gallio’s term.

Paul then left Corinth not long afterward, probably in the summer or autumn of AD 52. Paul had spent eighteen months in Corinth (18:11), so he probably arrived in early AD 50. That arrival date is confirmed by 18:2. When Paul came to Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla had recently been exiled from Rome. Claudius expelled Jews from Rome in AD 49.

Events from AD 50 to 70. Festus replaced Felix as governor of Judea during Paul’s imprisonment in Caesarea (24:27), probably in the summer of AD 59. This event helps us date events in the rest of the book of Acts. Paul’s arrest (21:33) was about two years beforehand (AD 57). Earlier that spring, Paul had celebrated Passover in Philippi (20:6). April 10 AD 57. Paul had just spent three months in Greece (20:3), probably the winter of AD 56-57 (see 1 Cor 16:15). Previously Paul had spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31; 53:56).

After Festus arrived in the summer of AD 59, Paul quicklystood trial and appealed to Caesar (25:1-12). The voyage to Rome most likely began in the fall of AD 59 (27:2) and ended early in AD 60 (28:11-16). Paul stayed in Rome “for the next two years” (28:30). The NT does not report the outcome of Paul’s trial, but he was probably released and then recaptured and martyred in Rome along with Peter and many others during Nero’s persecution (about AD 64-65).

In Jerusalem, James the brother of Jesus was stoned to death by the Jewish authorities in AD 62 (Josephus, Antiquities 20.9.1). Not long afterward, the church in Jerusalem left that doomed city and settled in Pella, one of the cities of the Decapolis east of the Jordan. Thus, when war broke out between the Jews and the Romans in AD 66, the Christians for the most part escaped its fury. That war ended in AD 70, when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed.

Events from AD 70 to 100. The NT and early Christians left few records of the period following the destruction of Jerusalem. It is possible that both Matthew and Luke wrote after AD 70, but they did not write about the developments after AD 70. Simi-
larly, the apostle John probably wrote his Gospel and three letters during the period before AD 90, but we learn few specifics about the late-first-century church from those writings. If Revelation was written in the early 90s AD, then it gives us a glimpse of what the churches in Asia Minor were facing during that time (see Revelation Introduction, “Date of Writing”).

As the apostolic age came to a close, the church around the Mediterranean grew and developed, as it would continue to do after the last of the apostles had died and the leadership of the church passed on to the following generations (see “After the Apostles,” p. 2378).
ACTS 1:1

13:1 Here Luke summarizes his first book, the Gospel of Luke, which Luke had originally written to Theophilus (Luke 1:3). Theophilius is elsewhere called “most honorable” (Luke 1:3). Theophilus was the title indicates that he was a person of very high social standing (cp. Acts 23:26, 24:2, 26:25). He was probably a benefactor or patron who assisted Luke with the expenses of publication or distribution of his work (see note on Luke 1:3).

13:2 He is proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive: The Gosps describe the evidence for Christ’s resurrection: Jesus’ tomb was empty (Luke 24:3-4), his grave clothes were undisputed (John 20:3-9), and many people saw him (see Matt 28; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:3-43; John 20:11-27). The apostles appeared to the apostles in part to over to their doubts (Matt 28:17; Luke 24:33-43, 41; John 20:27; see Mark 16:14-18). The Kingdom of God was the central theme of the apostles’ preaching (Acts 1:6-8, 11; 2:42-47; see Matt 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43). Luke 1:5-15.

13:5 baptized: See “Baptism,” 2:38-41. 13:6-11 Jesus ascents into heaven: (expected) put to place the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12; Luke 24:50). It was last physical appearance—he was taken into heaven, where he will remain “until the time for the final restoration of all things” (Acts 3:20).

13:9 This key verse outlines the geographical extension of the Good News from its Jewish starting point in Jerusalem and Judea (1:6-8), out to Samaria (8:4-25), Antioch in Syria (11:15-30), and eventually throughout the Mediterranean world to Rome (11:28-33). Christ later gave a similar call to be his witnesses...to the ends of the earth (30:3). But Jesus was his Father’s witness to the nations. He is identified as the Christ (3:18) and the One who presents the Good News. He has been raised as the witness of God to the Gentiles (3:16-17).

13:11 The apostles went to the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost) (1:5-8), the whole company of 120 disciples in Jerusalem engaged in earnest prayer (1:11-14), and then appointed an apostle to replace Judas Iscariot (1:21-25).

13:13 Christians’ ascension was to a place of ultimate power (Acts 1:13). The witnesses of the ascension went back to Jerusalem with joy and exultation, in praise and worship of Christ (Luke 24:52). They were convinced that their Lord would return again, physically and personally (1 Thes 4:16; 2 Thes 1:7-10; 2 Pet 3:10).


13:17 The book of Psalms, where it says, ‘Let his kingdom be established, with no one living in it. It also says, ‘Let someone else take his position.’

13:21 So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were being taught by the Lord Jesus—1 from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whom should we choose will join us as a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.”

13:22 So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. “Then they all prayed, ‘O Lord, you know every heart. Show us which of

Jesus’ Ascension
Jesus’ ascension to heaven was a final commissioning service for the apostles (1:6-11; Luke 24:45-53). The ascension marks the beginning of the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit through the church (Luke 24:49).

Christ’s ascension to heaven indicates his elevation to ultimate power and authority (Eph 1:19-23; Phil 2:9-11). That Jesus was going to the Father is noted in other places (John 3:13; 6:62; 13:1-3; 14:3, 28; 16:10, 16, 28, 20:17; Eph 4:8-10). It occurred at the last of Jesus’ physical appearance, after this he would remain in heaven until the “times of refreshment” (Acts 3:19).

The ascension reminds believers of Jesus’ promised return (1:11; see Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26, 28). The witnesses of the ascension went back to Jerusalem with joy and exultation, in praise and worship of Christ (Luke 24:52). They were convinced that their Lord would return again, physically and personally (1 Thes 4:16; 2 Thes 1:7-10; 2 Pet 3:10).

Jesus’ ascension anticipates the believer’s own glorious entrance into the presence of God, where Jesus has gone to prepare the way (John 12:26; 2 Cor 5:4; Phil 3:21; Heb 6:20).
these men you have chosen as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs.” Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven.

### The Holy Spirit Comes

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. “They were completely amazed. ‘How can this be?’ they exclaimed. ‘These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages!’ Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (including Jews who had converted to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!” They stood there, stupid and perplexed. “What can this mean?” they asked each other.

But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, “They’re just drunk, that’s all!”

### NATIONS AT PENTECOST

(Acts 2:9-11)

When the Holy Spirit filled the believers, people from all over the Roman and Parthian empires were in Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost. Some of those who witnessed the believers “speaking in other languages” (2:4) were converted, and many of them eventually returned to their homelands, taking with them the message of Christ.

2:14 Jews observed three great annual pilgrimage festivals, when many would go to the Temple in Jerusalem. Unleavened Bread (which includes Passover, Pentecost, and Shelters, see “Israel’s Festivals”). Lev 23:1-44; On Pentecost, when the Jewish people were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the harvest of God’s blessings, and when the disciples were united and expectant as they gathered for prayer, the Holy Spirit came and filled the gathered believers.

2:4 Everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit: This event marks the coming of the Holy Spirit to fill Jesus’ disciples, as he had promised, so that they could be powerful witnesses (1:4-5, 8). The Spirit’s wisdom, energy, and power were the driving force behind the church’s work and witness (e.g., 2:14-41, 43; 4:31; 9:17, 20, 31:9-12; see also Eph 5:18; • began speaking in other languages: The Holy Spirit gave extraordinary communication that made it possible for people from other countries to hear in their own languages about what God had done (Acts 2:6-11). This passage is one of several references to speaking in “other languages” or “tongues” (see also 10:44-48; 19:6; 1 Cor 14:2-28, 39). Here, this supernatural gift reveals the energizing presence of God’s Spirit and inaugurates the proclamation of the Good News to people of every nation.

2:11 Because Pentecost was a pilgrimage festival (see note on 2:1-4), Jews from every nation were present in Jerusalem at that time and were thus able to hear the Good News being proclaimed in their own languages. The Good News is for all people (2:18-19).

2:9-11 Parthians came from the region stretching from the Tigris River eastward to India. Medes (now called Kurds) were from Media, east of Mesopotamia and north of the Persian Gulf. Elamites were from Elam (now in Iran), north of the Persian Gulf and just east of the Tigris River. Mesopotamia lay between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Judea was well known as the Jewish homeland. Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia were Roman provinces in Asia Minor (now in Turkey; see Pet 1:1). Paul later taught and preached in some of these areas (see Acts 16:6; 19:10, 26). Phrygia and Pamphylia were districts of Asia Minor later visited by Paul (13:13; 18:23). Egypt had a large Jewish population, particularly in the city of Alexandria (see 18:24). North Africa was also represented by Libya and Cyrene. Rome was the imperial capital and the home of thousands of Jews. The Carthaginians came from the island of Crete, located south-southeast of Greece, and the Arabs from the area south and east of Jerusalem. • the inclusion of all of these nations suggests how the Good News was going to go out to the ends of the earth (1:8).
Peter Preaches to the Crowd

14 Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, “Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. 15 These people are not drunk, as some of you might be thinking. Nine o’clock in the morning is much too early for that. 16 No, what you saw was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel: 17 ‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all your sons and daughters, and your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams. 18 In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy. 19 And I will cause wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below—blood and fire and clouds of smoke. 20 The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red before that great and glorious day of the Lorp arrives. 21 But everyone who calls on the name of the Lorp will be “saved.”

22 “People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene* by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. 23 But God knew what he was doing, and his ‘prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. 24 But God raised him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. 25 King David said this about him: 26 ‘I see that the Lorp is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. 27 No wonder my heart is glad, and my tongue sings his praises! My body rests in hope. 28 For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave. 29 You have shown me the way of life, and you will fill me with the joy of your presence.*

29 ‘Dear brothers, think about this: You can be sure that the patriarch David wasn’t referring to himself, for he died and was buried, and his tomb is still here among us. 30 But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of David’s own descendants would sit on his throne. 31 David was looking into the future and speaking of his ‘Messiah’s resurrection.’ He was saying that God would not leave him among the dead or allow his body to rot in the grave. 32 God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. 33 Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. 34 For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said...”

1:27-21 *Job 2:18-32; 2:18
1:28 Num 11:29
1:29 Mt 12:13
1:30 Matt 24:29
1:31 *Job 2:12; Rom 10:13; Acts 2:27
1:32 Acts 1:16
1:33 John 2:2
1:34 *Ps 16:9; 18:5; Acts 2:25
1:35 Acts 4:11
1:36 *Acts 1:20
1:37 Acts 1:21
1:38 *Acts 1:22
1:39 John 14:20
1:40 Acts 1:21; 3:19
1:41 Acts 1:22; 4:1-2; 10:40
1:43 Rom 2:4
1:44 1 Cor 15:13-17; 10:2; 12:11, 15:20
1:45 Gal 3:2
1:46 Eph 4:2
1:47 Col 2:2
1:48 Heb 6:2
1:49 1 Pet 2:21
1:50 1 Pet 5:6

2:1-21

2:17-21 2:18-32; 2:18
2:19 Num 11:29
2:20 Matt 12:13
2:21 2:12; Rom 10:13; Acts 2:27
2:22 Acts 1:16
2:23 *Job 2:12; Rom 10:13; Acts 2:27
2:24 Acts 1:20
2:25 Acts 1:21; 3:19
2:26 *Acts 1:22
2:27 Acts 1:20
2:28 Acts 1:21; 3:19
2:29 Acts 1:22; 4:1-2; 10:40
2:31 Rom 2:4
2:32 1 Cor 15:13-17; 10:2; 12:11, 15:20
2:33 Gal 3:2
2:34 Eph 4:2
2:35 Col 2:2
2:36 Heb 6:2
2:37 1 Pet 2:21
2:38 1 Pet 5:6

2:17-21

2:17-21 *Job 2:18-32
2:18 Num 11:29
2:19 Matt 12:13
2:20 Matt 24:29
2:21 *Job 2:12; Rom 10:13; Acts 2:27
2:22 Acts 1:16
2:23 *Job 2:12; Rom 10:13; Acts 2:27
2:24 Acts 1:16
2:25 *Acts 1:20
2:26 Acts 1:21; 3:19
2:27 *Acts 1:22
2:28 *Acts 1:20
2:29 *Acts 1:21; 3:19
2:30 *Acts 1:22; 4:1-2; 10:40
2:32 Rom 2:4
2:33 1 Cor 15:13-17; 10:2; 12:11, 15:20
2:34 Gal 3:2
2:35 Eph 4:2
2:36 Col 2:2
2:37 Heb 6:2
2:38 1 Pet 2:21
2:39 1 Pet 5:6

Baptism

Baptism was an important element of Christian faith from the very beginning (2:38, cp. John 4:1-2). Baptism signifies that the removal of impurity and sin; it represents repentance from sin and turning to God for forgiveness and purification. The words “baptism” and “baptize” were already used in Judaism to refer to a religious rite for cleansing. The law of Moses established the use of water to cleanse people from ceremonial defilement (Num 19:14-19). Later, Gentiles convert to Judaism from pagan religions were admitted to Judaism only after fulfilling certain obligations, which included the study of the Torah, circumcision, and a ritual bath to wash away the impurities of the Gentile background.

John had thus preached “that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven” (Luke 3:3). John’s baptism was an aspect of his role in preparing people’s hearts to receive the Messiah (Luke 3:6-14), and those who had received his baptism and repented of their sins were those who were prepared for Jesus’ message (Luke 7:29-30).

After his resurrection, Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize new converts (Matt 28:19). Christian baptism is understood as dying and rising with Christ, signifying the death of the old life and the beginning of the new (Rom 6:1-4; Col 2:12). Thus baptism signifies a Christian’s spiritual union with Christ (Gal 3:27) and with his church. Baptism thus became the rite of initiation in the Christian community.

For this reason, many interpreters see baptism as the equivalent of circumcision, the rite that initiated membership into the nation of Israel under the old covenant (Col 2:11-12). Whatever the connection with OT circumcision, baptism signifies a changed heart and a clean conscience that come from God’s forgiveness (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:26-28; Phil 3:1; 1 Pet 3:21).


MIKVAHS

Mikvahs are baths used in Judaism for ritual cleansing on a number of different occasions. When Gentiles converted to Judaism, they would immerse themselves in water as a part of the process of becoming a proselyte. There were mikvahs at many synagogues, and the Temple in Jerusalem had a large number of mikvahs, which suggest that those who approached for worship would ritually bathe. These pools were probably used to baptize the new followers of Christ on the day of Pentecost (2:41).

BELOW: Mikvah at the temple mount in Jerusalem. LOWER LEFT: Modern day baptism in the Jordan River.
The Growth of the Church

The book of Acts outlines the church’s growth after Pentecost. In the early days there was numerical growth. Only 120 believers were present at the first prayer meeting seeking God’s promise (Acts 2:42-47). There is also ample evidence of geographical growth (1:8; 9:15). The church was not confined to Jerusalem, for the message spread to Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa on the Mediterranean coast (9:35; 42). The message of salvation in Christ also moved out from its Jewish base into Samaria (8:6–12), then to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (11:19–26). As Peter declared to Cornelius’s household, “God shows no favoritism” (10:34). The message of Good News for the people of Israel and the Gentiles (10:34) was a common way to address one another (11:15; 22:14; 31:3; 32:11–12). It was a common way to address one another: “Christ of Nazareth” (11:12; 22:14; 31:3), “Jesus, the Nazarene” (37:9, 12), or “Jesus, the Christ” (9:20). This is the first of many demonstrations of divine power given to disciples in Acts (4:32; 8:6; 9:32; 10:9–10; 13:16). The church’s sensitive handling of the Gentiles’ inclusion also resulted in significant geographical growth. “So the churches were strengthened in their faith and grew larger every day” (Acts 16:5).
Refusing to heed Jesus, God’s final Prophet, would have brought God’s blessings on the covenant people, but it was to be shared with the world.


Persecution

4:23-5:21 Jesus told his disciples to expect their defense in hostile settings (Matt 10:18-20; Luke 12:12-13), and the apostles and other leaders did so with courage and power. They were instructed to confront discrimination, injustice, and violence against God’s people, even to the point of death (Acts 4:20, 24-25; 5:28-29). limestone, they were highly emboldened in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:30-31; 5:29-30).

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After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God boldly. The Fellowship of the Church (4:32-5:16) The Believers Share Their Possessions
22 All the believers were united in heart and mind, and they praised God and enjoyed the favor of all the people. And there was no division among them, for they were all of one heart and soul.
33 Barnabas knew peer pressure, and he gave in to it on one occasion although he knew better (Gal 2:11-16). Paul’s reminder to the Romans is helpful: “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing your attitude. Then you will be able to know what God wants you to do—what is good, right, and perfect” (Rom 12:2).
34 Barnabas was not perfect, but he was a Son of Encouragement to many and a generous, unselfish man who fostered growth in others and in the church.

Ananias and Sapphira Attempt to Deceive
But there was a certain man named Ananias, who with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. 2 He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife’s consent, he kept the rest.
3 Then Peter said, “Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit and you kept some of the money for yourself. 4 The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren’t lying to us but to God!”
5 As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. 6 Then the young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.
7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

Peter asked her, “Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?”
8 “Yes,” she replied, “that was the price.”
9 And Peter said, “How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too.”
10 Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.
11 Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened.

The Apostles Heal Many
12 The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the temple in the area known as Solomon’s Colonnade. 13 But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them. 14 Yet more and more people—believers and loved by the Lord—crowds of both men and women. 15 As a result of the apostles’ work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. 16 Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and the whole area was filled with the Lord’s glory.

The Second Clash with Judaism (5:17-42)
17 The high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees, filled with jealousy, 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19 But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, 20 Go to the temple and give the people this message of life!
21 So at daybreak the apostles entered the temple.

Barnabas, like Stephen (6:5-8:2), is presented in Acts as a model Christian leader. A native of Cyprus, Barnabas was active in the Jerusalem church and demonstrated unselfish generosity in meeting the needs of the poorer members of that community. Barnabas’s given name was Joseph, but he was nicknamed Barnabas (“Son of Encouragement,” 4:36), which indicates his character. He was a suitable person to give a fair and impartial hearing to Barnabas’s wisdom is clear in his trip to Tarsus to find Saul (11:25). Barnabas had been chosen as one of the seven deacons (6:5-6), an office which was voluntary and without coercion, and it related to preserving needy men in the church and was prompted by Christian love and concern for one another.

Barnabas’s attitude toward others was marked by genuine concern and love. Barnabas’s intervention, Saul’s uninterested, attacks against believers. Barnabas’s intervention, Saul’s uninterested, attacks against believers. Barnabas’s wisdom is clear in his trip to Tarsus to find Saul (11:25). Barnabas had been chosen as one of the seven deacons (6:5-6), an office which was voluntary and without coercion, and it related to preserving needy men in the church and was prompted by Christian love and concern for one another.

Barnabas was an impressive figure (note his reception in Lystra as Zeus, 14:8-18) and a go-to man of the Holy Spirit and members of that community (4:32-37). Barnabas’s wisdom is clear in his trip to Tarsus to find Saul (11:25). Barnabas had been chosen as one of the seven deacons (6:5-6), an office which was voluntary and without coercion, and it related to preserving needy men in the church and was prompted by Christian love and concern for one another.
Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching. When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council—"the full assembly of the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought forward, but when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported. "The jail was securely locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!" When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were peripherally concerned, yet it would all end. Then someone arrived with startling news: "The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple, teaching the people!"

The Apostles Arrested Again and Examined

The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested the apostles, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would overwhelm them. Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them. "We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man’s name,\footnote{Acts 5:28}" he said. "You have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!"

"But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority.\footnote{Acts 5:24} The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross.\footnote{Acts 5:30} Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Saviour. He did this so that people everywhere may repent and turn to God, to do good things for all of us in his name.\footnote{Acts 5:31}" The high council rejected Jesus as the one to whom they were preparing to deliver judgment. They did not resist the message that God had given to Jesus.\footnote{Acts 4:27}

On the next day, all the high council and the elders and teachers of the law assembled in Jerusalem. They were in the Council of the God of Israel,\footnote{Acts 4:6} and they were even more astonished when they saw Peter and John present, who had been forbidden to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.\footnote{Acts 4:8}

"But Peter and the apostles, saying, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors, he raised Jesus from the dead, whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God put him in the place of honor at his right hand to be Prince and Saviour. This is the one whom God gave to people everywhere, so that they should repent and turn to him, doing good things for all of us in his name." When they heard this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them. But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be set outside the council chamber for a while. Then he said to his colleagues, "Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men.\footnote{Acts 5:33} Some time ago there was that fellow Th´dor, who pretended to be great, About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing.\footnote{Acts 5:34} After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered. If you this is from the third of places in Acts where Luke notes that God’s message continued to spread (see also Acts 6:2, 7; 19:20). The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.

**Empowering Leadership**

In Acts 6:1-15 the new Christian community faced a crisis of leadership. The Hellenists, the Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem, were upset because the needs of their widows were being overlooked “in the daily distribution of food.” This injustice threatened the development of the church with “rumblings of discontent” (6:1) and had to be seriously addressed. Wisely, the apostles recognized the problem (6:2-3) and called for the selection of seven men “able to administer the food program” (6:5). Many interpreters see the seven as the first deacons (see note on 6:2-6). The apostles provided empowering leadership by sensitively listening to genuine community needs. This wise handling of the issue, with the united, responsible action of both people and leaders, resulted in spiritual growth and increased the number of believers (6:7). Different groups were recognized in the church and put in place leaders to oversee the food program (6:8-15). A clear division of labor was agreed upon, with the apostles attending to preaching and teaching, and the material needs of the people being handled by other Spirit-filled leaders.

Every believer has the opportunity to exercise some kind of ministry. This usefulness of every Christian in the service of God is sometimes called the “priesthood of all believers” (1 Peter 2:9, 5:1; Rev 1:6; 1:10). No one has the same role, but all have the same calling to use their gifts in God’s service.

As a church its leaders, not to “lord it over” other people, but to serve the community (Matt 20:25:28; Mark 10:42:45; Luke 22:25:27; 1 Pet 5:2). The leaders of the church do well when they recognize both the needs of the community and those whom God has prepared to meet those needs. Good leaders recognize gifted people and help them develop, equipping the members of the body to use their God-given gifts (Eph 4:11-12).
These patriarchs were jealous of their brother Joseph, and they sold him to be a slave in Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. And God gave him favor before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God also gave Joseph unusual wisdom, so that Pharaoh appointed him governor over all of Egypt and put him in charge of the palace.

But a famine came upon Egypt and Canaan. There was great misery, and our ancestors ran out of food. Jacob heard that there was still grain in Egypt, so he sent his sons—our ancestors—to buy some. The second time they went, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, and they were introduced to Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, and all his relatives to come to Egypt, seventy-five persons in all. So Jacob went to Egypt. He died there, as did our ancestors.

Their bodies were taken to Shechem and buried in the tomb Abraham had bought for a certain price from Hamor’s sons in Shechem. When the time drew near when God would fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. But then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. This king exploited our people and oppressed them, forcing parents to abandon their newborn babies so they would die.

At that time Moses was born—a beautiful child in God’s eyes. His parents cared for him at home for three months. When they had to abandon him, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and raised him as her own son. Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in both speech and action.

One day when Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his relatives, the people of Egypt. He saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite. So Moses came to the

Stephen, like Barnabas (see 4:36–37), was an exemplary early Christian who, as a result of the boldness of his witness, was arrested and killed by the Jewish authorities. He is known as the first Christian martyr.

A Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jewish Christian, Stephen was one of seven men chosen to help administer the distribution of food to needy Christians in Jerusalem (6:1–6). He was the most prominent of the seven and is singled out as a man “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (6:5). Manifesting the grace and power of God in an unusual measure, he did miraculous things (6:8) and proved to be a bold and effective evangelist and defender of the faith (6:9–10).

His witness was so powerful, he was soon arrested by the authorities and brought before the high council for interrogation (6:9–12).

When witnesses accused Stephen of speaking against the sacred Temple and the law of Moses (6:13–14; cp. Mark 13:2; John 2:19–4:21), he defended himself before the Jewish high council (Acts 7:1–53). He spoke of Israel’s long history of resisting God and his servants—first Moses and now the Prophet whom Moses had predicted (7:51–53). The Jewish authorities, infuriated by Stephen’s bold accusations, dragged him outside the city and stoned him to death (7:54–60). As he died, Stephen prayed that they might be forgiven (7:60).

Stephen’s bold witness gave rise to the first wave of persecution of the early Christians (8:1–3). But it resulted in the Good News spreading even wider as the believers fled Jerusalem and proclaimed the message of Jesus everywhere they went (8:4; 11:19–21). Stephen’s death provides the first example of the maxim, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” His martyrdom marks the beginning of the spread of the Good News beyond the borders of Judasiasm, which ultimately made Christianity, more than any other faith, a worldwide religion. Stephen’s strong expression of faith, even as he was dying, could have been a factor in the later conversion of Saul, who observed his stoning (7:58–8:1; see 22:19–20).

Stephen’s life reminds us of the determined opposition that a faithful Christian witness can provoke. A bold testimony for Christ may be costly (see 22:20; Rev 2:10; 13), but there is no insurmountable barrier to the growth of the church (see Acts 6:1–3; Matt 16:18).
man’s defense and avenged him, killing the Egyptian. Moses assumed his fellow Israelites would realize that God had sent him to save them. 41 The next day he visited them again and saw two men of Israel fighting. He tried to be a peacemaker, and the ‘men,’ said he, are brothers. Who are you fighting each other?”

42 But the man in the wrong pushed Moses aside. “Who made you a ruler and judge over us, you who spoke to me to kill me as you killed Egyptian yesterday?” When Moses heard that, he fled the country and lived as a foreigner in the land of Midian. There his two sons were born.

43 Forty years later, in the desert near Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to Moses in the flame of a burning bush. 44 When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight. As he went to take a closer look, the voice of the Lord called out to him, “I am the God of your ancestors—God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Moses shook with terror and did not dare to look.

45 Then the Lord said to him, “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.” 46 I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groans, and I am concerned about them. 47 Now go, for I am sending you to Egypt.

48 So God sent back the same man his people had previously rejected when they demanded, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us?” Through the angel who appeared to him in the burning bush, God sent Moses to be their ruler and savior. 49 And by means of many wonders and miraculous signs, he led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and through the wilderness for forty years.

50 Moses himself told the people of Israel, “God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people.” 51 Moses was with our ancestors, the assembly of God’s people, in the wilderness, under Aaron, our high priest, and under the prophets who interpreted God’s word.

52 But our ancestors refused to listen to Moses. They rejected him and wanted to return to Egypt. 53 They said, “Make us gods who can lead us. We don’t know what has become of this Moses, who brought us out of Egypt. 54 So they made an idol shaped like a calf, and they sacrificed to it and celebrated over this thing they had made. 55 Then God turned away from them and abandoned them to serve the stars of heaven, which our ancestors—of the prophets—had in the prophets it is written, “Was it to me you were bringing sacrifices and offerings during those forty years in the wilderness, Israel?” 56 No, you carried your pagan gods—the shrine of Molech, the star of your god, Rhammanith, and the images you made to worship them.

So I will send you into exile as far away as Babylon.* 57 Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle* with them through the wilderness. It was constructed according to the plan God had shown to Moses. 58 Forty years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David.

59 David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent temple to the name of the Lord, 60 But it was Solomon who actually built it. 61 However, the Most High doesn’t live in temples made by hands. As the prophet says, 62 “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Can you build me a temple as good as that? asks the Lord. 63 Could you build my city as such a resting place? Didn’t my hands make both heaven and earth?* 64 Then Moses and Aaron, and five hundred of the elders of Israel, came to the tent of meeting. 65 It was there that they entered, and there they served as they were told.

Miracles
In the book of Acts, the activity of the living God is clearly seen in miraculous signs, wonders, and mighty works (4:29–31; 5:12–15; 6:8; 8:3–9:3; 14:13). The Bible does not attempt to prove miracles, but simply reports them. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles and other Christians96 testified to the reality of miracles—sight evidence of the power and truth of the Christian message (14:3; see John 3:2, Heb 2:4).

The greatest miracles are (1) the coming of Jesus Christ as the Word of God in human flesh (John 1:14), (2) his glorious resurrection from the dead (Matt 28:1–20; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–53; John 20:1–28; Acts 1:1–11; 2:39–41; 4:9–12; 5:24–42; 10:38–48; 13:26–41; 14:19), (3) the mighty works of God in Jesus’ earthly ministry (John 3:3–8; Matt 28:20; Eph 2:8–10). The coming of Jesus into the world to be the Savior and to die for our sins shows us how much God loves us (John 3:16; Rom 5:8; 8:32; Eph 2:4–5; 1 John 3:2). The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead reveals God’s power over death and gives us a living hope, the promise of eternal life (1 Pet 1:3–8). The person who puts faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord receives eternal life (John 1:12; 3:36; Rom 5:1; 1 John 5:13). Miracles remind us of the truth that “nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37; 18:27, 28; Matt 19:26; Mark 10:27).

7:51 Stephen raised the same charge that God had raised against his people in the wilderness: that they were hea
ten at heart and deaf to the truth, because they rejected the prophecy and ultimately resisted the Holy Spirit (see Exod 32:9; 33:13–24; 34:9; Deut 9:6, 13; 31:27; Ps 78:40). 7:55–56 Jesus standing—of God’s right hand: Usually Jesus is described as seated in heaven at God’s right hand (2:34–35; 5:31; Luke 20:44, 22:69; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 1:13; Heb 1:3, 10, 12). One possible explanation is that the Jewish leaders who were questioning Stephen, the first martyr, to heaven to honor Jesus had confirmed his Lord faithfully on earth, and now his Lord honored his promise to confess his faithful servant in heaven, standing as a witness to defend him (Matt 10:32; Luke 12:8; *the Son of man standing*) in his coming. 7:57 They put their hands over their ears: They believed that the ancient part of Jesus to the divine Son of Man (Acts 7:56) was horrible blasphemy.

7:58 Saul was the Hebrew form, Paul the Greek form of his name (see 13:9). 7:59–60 Stephen’s prayer, Lord, don’t stone him to death. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.* 8:1 As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.* He fell to his knees, shouting, “Lord, don’t charge them with this sin!” And with that, he died.

8 Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen.

Persecution Scatters the Believers
A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. *Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.* But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.

8:21 Stephen gave a defence so powerful that even his enemies could not refute his arguments. He was stoned to death on this very spot. Saul had given his life in witness for the Lord. Saul, transformed by the Lord, was called Paul in the name of Jesus Christ. Saul is the Hebrew name, Paul the Greek. The two forms are used interchangeably in the New Testament. Saul was a persecutor of the early church; Paul was a defender of the faith. Saul’s name was changed by the Lord, in Saul or Paul. Saul was a persecutor of the early church; Paul was a defender of the faith. Saul’s name was changed by the Lord, in Saul or Paul.
Philip Preaches in Samaria

But the believers who were scattered

the Good News about Jesus wherever they went. Philip, as an example, went
to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. They listened
tento Philip because they were eager

to hear his message and see the miraculous

signs he did. They felt that the spirits were cast out,
screaming as they left their victims. And

many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed.

So there was great joy in that town.

A man named Simon had been a sorcerer

there for many years, among the people of Samaria.

He claimed to be someone great.

Everyone, from the least to the greatest,
talked about him as “The Great One—the

Power of God.” They listened closely to him because for a long time he had

acted with their magic.

But now the people believed Philip’s

message of Good News concerning the King-
dom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were

baptized, and some were convinced that

they had to change their way of life.

Philip began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed.

by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard

that the people of Samaria had accepted God’s message, they sent Peter and John there.

Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these people, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the Spirit was
given when the apostles laid their hands on

people, he offered them money to buy this power.

“I let me have this power, too,” he

exclaimed, “so that when I lay my hands on

people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!”

But Peter replied, “May your money be

bought for you to think that God’s gift
can be bought! You can have no part in this,

for your heart is not right with God. Repent

of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perh-
pahs he will forgive your evil deeds for

I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are

held captive by sin.”

Pray to the Lord for me,” Simon ex-

claimed, “that these terrible things you’ve

said won’t happen to me!”

After testifying and preaching the word

of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John

returned to Jerusalem. And they stopped in

many Samaritan villages along the way to

preach the Good News.

Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch

As for Philip, he was an angel of the Lord said

to him, “Go south” down the desert road

that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.”

So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Eu-
optia, a great official under the Kandake,

down east Europe. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship. And he

was on his way returning. Seated in his carriage,

he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet

Isaiah.

The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over

and walk along beside the carriage.”

Philip ran over and heard the man read-

ing from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked,

“Do you understand what you are reading?”

The man replied, “How can I, unless

you’ve been born again.”

Acts 8:5–24

Empowered and Effective Evangelist

Philip, a prominent Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jewish Christian, was one of the first to take

the Good News of Christ to those outside the borders of Judaism. Well respected among the

early Christians, he was one of seven men chosen to administer the food-distribution pro-

gram for needy believers in Jerusalem (6:1–6). Philip was a strong and effective evangelist in

the power of the Spirit.

When Christians were forced to flee Jerusalem following the death of Stephen (8:4), Philip

carried the Good News of Christ north to the ethnically-mixed city of Samaria. There he

performed many miraculous healings and exorcisms, and people responded eagerly to his

message (8:6–7). Many men and women were baptized, including a notorious sorcerer named

Simon (8:9–13). Then, directed by an angel, Philip traveled southwest from Jerusalem toward

Gaza (8:26). There, directed by the Spirit, he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, who was returning

home after visiting Jerusalem (8:27). When the Ethiopian asked Philip to help him understand

Isa 53, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus (Acts 8:26–35); then baptized the man

by the roadside (8:36–38). Philip was then suddenly taken away by the Spirit of God to the

town of Azotus (8:39–40), where he again preached the Good News. He traveled through all

the coastal towns until he came to the large Roman city of Caesarea on the coast, where he

settled (Acts 8:40; 21:8–9).

Many years later, Paul spent a night in Philip’s home in Caesarea (21:8). By this time Philip

was known as Philip the Evangelist. He had raised four unmarried daughters, all of whom

had the gift of prophecy (21:9).

Philip exemplifies early Christian evangelists, whom the Holy Spirit empowered and guided

to authenticate their witness (see also 1:8; 3:1–6; 5:12; 6:8; 10:9–20; 13:2; 14:8; 16:6–10;

19:11–12; 20:9–12, 22–23). Philip submitted to the power and guidance of the Spirit, and God

used him to take the Good News to those beyond the borders of Judaism.

Philip continued

Saul’s Conversion (9:1–31)

The Experience of Saul near Damascus

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath, intent on killing the Lord’s followers. So he went to the high

priest and asked for letters to the synagogues in Damascus to imprison any gospel believers he might find there.

Saul traveled to Damascus without seeing anyone from Jerusalem. He went to the temple, stood outside and

prayed. Then a voice said to him, “Saul! Saul! why are you persecuting me?”

Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?”

The Lord answered, “I am Jesus, whom you were trying to kill. But now I’m sending you to bring me back to

the Jewish people and to Gentiles.”

Saul became more confident and saw.

Acts 9:1–25

The Power and Purpose of the Holy Spirit

Philip continued

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9:2 The synagogues (Greek sunagogê, “gathering place”) were local Jewish meeting places. After the Exile, Jews began to meet in local synagogues as places of instruction and centers of worship. Pray and acts of service consisted of the reading of the Law and the Prophets, exposition of the Scriptures, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving (see 13:15; 15:21; Neh 9:5; Matt 6:5; Luke 4:16-21). Jesus attended, taught, preached, and performed miracles in synagogues (Matt 12:19-21; Mark 1:21; 3:8; Luke 4:46; 13:10-13; John 6:59; 18:20-26). So did the apostles (see Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:10, 17, 18; 19, 26). Damascus, the capital of Syria, was an important center with a long and distinguished past and the nearest major city outside of Palestine. It took from four to six days to reach Damascus from Jerusalem. In fact, that’s where Paul first converted to Christianity (Acts 9:1-8). After his release, he returned to Damascus, where he continued to live (21:9-11). After a while some of the Jews wrote to the governing body. He brought letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—to back to Jerusalem in chains.

13: But Lord,” exclaimed Ananias, “I’ve heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem. 14 And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name.” 

15: But the Lord said, “Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. 16 And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.” 17 So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. 19 Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength.

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is indeed the Son of God!”

21 All who heard him were amazed. “Isn’t this the same Saul who caused so much contention among Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem?” they asked. “And didn’t he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?”

Saul’s preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn’t refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. 22 After a while some of the Jews went to the chief priests and asked them to let him down out of the city in chains. So when they had heard this, they agreed to let him down. And as he was lowered, all the believers let him down out of the city in chains. (8:39-42) The name Philip continued to live (21:8-9).

The Role of Ananias

10: Now there was a believer named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision and said, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord!” he replied.

11: The Lord said, “Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. 12 Have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again.” 13 So he left and went to Straight Street, where he found the house of Judas. There was a门前 of a man named Titus and a door that led to a room. When Ananias stepped in, the Spirit said to him, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord!” he replied.

15: “Go to Straight Street and find a man named Ananias. He is praying to me right now. 16 Have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again.” 17 So he left and went to Straight Street, where he found the house of Judas. There was a man named Titus and a door that led to a room. When Ananias stepped in, the Spirit said to him, “Ananias!”

“Here I am, Lord,” he replied.

18: “Get up, Peter!” the Lord said. “I’ve instructed a Gentile named Cornelius to see you. 19 He and a number of others at his home have prayed for you many times, and the Holy Spirit has also directed them to look for you. 20 Now go to his house and you will find a man named Saul. He is praying to me right now.” 21 Peter said, “But Lord, you know they can’t be saved!” 22 But the Lord said, “Go, Peter! I will be with you to bless him.” 23 So Peter went down to the men who were praying for him and found them in the place God had told him about. 24 Peter said, “Are you the men who prayed for me?”

They said, “Yes, brother Peter. We were praying for you to come so that we could hear from you.” 25 Peter began by telling them about Jesus, beginning with what happened to him on the cross and how God raised him from the dead. 26 He also told them about the believers in Jerusalem and how they were being persecuted. 27 Then he added, “But you have received the Holy Spirit and you too are believers in Jesus. So now let’s get started!” 28 Peter said, “But Lord, you know they can’t be saved!” 29 But the Lord said, “Go, Peter! I will be with you to bless him.” 30 So Peter went down to the men who were praying for him and found them in the place God had told him about. 31 Peter said, “Are you the men who prayed for me?”

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They said, “Yes, brother Peter. We were praying for you to come so that we could hear from you.”

1:22 Peter then returned to Jerusalem and gave the church a report of what had happened (11:1-3).
**PAUL (SAUL)**

Paul was a leading persecutor of the early Christians who later became an apostle of Jesus Christ, the most illustrious of the early Christian missionaries, and the great apostle to the Gentiles. He has done more to shape Christianity than any other individual except Christ himself. We know about him from Luke’s account of his conversion and ministry in Acts and from the thirteen letters bearing his name in the New Testament.

Paul was born in Tarsus to Jewish parents who were Roman citizens (through which he himself acquired Roman citizenship) and grew up in a traditional Jewish home. A tentmaker (or leatherworker) by trade, he was educated as a Pharisee by the well-known Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem. He became active in the violent persecution of Christians as a young man (22:3-5). But through a life-changing, personal revelation of the resurrected Jesus (9:3-6, 22:6-10), he was radically converted. He then dedicated the rest of his life to proclaiming Jesus as Savior and Lord throughout the Mediterranean world (see Gal 1:11-16). His dedication and hard work, especially among Gentiles (to whom he was specifically called), resulted in the founding of scores of churches during the first century. Most of his letters were written to these churches.

Paul’s belief in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah set him apart from his Jewish contemporaries. His vision of Jesus (Acts 9:1-43) brought him to the realization that Jesus’ death and resurrection bring righteousness and life-transforming power to those who believe in him. Paul no longer understood righteousness in terms of the careful observance of the law of Moses, but as a gift from God to those who put their trust in Christ, the Savior who died for their sins (Rom 4:1-8). And he was convinced that this gift is for Gentiles as well as Jews (Rom 3:21-28).

Paul’s thirteen letters deal with a wide range of issues, such as salvation and what Christians believe about Christ (Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians), specific problems in the church (1 Corinthians), the nature of Christian life and community (Ephesians, Colossians), and questions about Paul’s own authority as an apostle (2 Corinthians, Galatians). Some of his letters are intended to encourage young believers who are suffering for their faith (Philippians, 1 Thessalonians) or to correct false teachings (Galatians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians). Still others are written to individuals, giving specific advice related to their life and ministry (1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon). Together, these thirteen letters reveal much about the life of the earliest Christians and the problems they faced, and about Paul’s own grace-centered understanding of the Christian faith and life.

Paul’s letters, with their strong focus on Christ, reflect his all-consuming passion for Christ and his twin convictions that (1) salvation is given only to those who put their faith in Christ as Savior (Gal 2:16), and (2) every part of a believer’s life is to be devoted to serving Christ as Lord (Rom 14:7-9, 2 Cor 5:15). Of all the NT writers, it is Paul who spells out most clearly what salvation is (Rom 1-8) and gives us the fullest picture of the Christian life and Christian community. Paul’s letters also highlight the power of the Holy Spirit in believers’ lives (Eph 5:18; cp. Gal 2:20; Col 1:27). He encourages believers to pursue the high standard of a life that is truly like Christ (Rom 8:30; Eph 4:13, 15; 5:1). Believers are to live a life of love (1 Cor 13:1-13; Eph 5:2) and fully submit to Christ. Paul, more than any other NT writer, shows us how and why Christians must always find their deepest roots and motivation in the grace of Christ (Rom 12:1-2). For Paul, the whole of a believer’s life—and indeed, the entire universe—is centered in Christ and Christ alone; everything finds its true meaning only in relation to him (Col 1:15-20; 2:6-3:4).

Luke’s account of Paul’s missionary life, which spans a period of perhaps thirty years, begins with Paul’s preaching in Damascus shortly after his conversion (about AD 32-33) and ends with his imprisonment in Rome (AD 60-62). But the Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy—Titus) appear to be dated to a later time, and reliable later traditions affirm that Paul was released from prison (around AD 62) and continued his missionary activity. He was later rearrested and, after a lifetime of suffering as an evangelist for Christ—finally killed in Nero’s persecution of Christians around AD 64-67.

Paul’s desire, not only to suffer as Christ suffered but also to die as Christ died, was thus fulfilled—with the sure hope of one day being resurrected, just as Christ was resurrected (Phil 3:10-11).
They were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him, but Saul was told about their plot. 22 During the night, some of the other believers lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.

23 When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! 24 Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached in the name of Jesus in Damascus.

25 So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 26 He was with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him. 27 When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.

**Summary of the Church**

31 The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it became stronger as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord. And with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it also grew in numbers.

**The Mission of Peter to the Gentiles**

(9:32–11:18)

**Peter Heals Aeneas and Raises Dorcas**

32 Meanwhile, Peter traveled from place to place, and he came down to visit the believers in the town of Lydda. 33 There he met a man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. 34 Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up and roll up your sleeping mat!” And he was healed instantly. 35 Then the whole population of Lydda and Sharon saw Aeneas walking around, and they all turned to the Lord.

36 There was a believer in Joppa named Tabitha (which in Greek is Dorcas*). She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor. 37 About this time she became ill and died. Her body was washed for burial and laid in an upstairs room. 38 But the believers had heard that Peter was nearby at Lydda, so they sent two men to him, “Please come as soon as possible!” 39 So Peter returned with them; and as soon as he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room. The room was filled with widows who were weeping and showing him the coats and other clothes Dorcas had made for them. 40 But Peter asked them all to leave the room; then he knelt and prayed. Turning to the body he said, “Get up, Tabitha.” And she opened her eyes! When she saw Peter, she sat up! 41 He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called in the widows and all the other believers, and he presented her to them alive.

42 The news spread through the whole town, and many believed in the Lord. 43 And Peter stayed long in Joppa, living with Simon, a tanner.

**Cornelius Calls for Peter**

10 In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer* named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. 11 He was devout, God-fearing man, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God. 12 One afternoon about three o’clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. “Cornelius!” the angel said.

13 Cornelius stared at him in terror. “What is it, sir?” he asked the angel.

**Visions**

Visions are closely related to other revelatory experiences such as dreams (Gen 37:1–10; 40:1–16; 43:1–2). Classic examples include Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of the dry bones (Ezek 37:1–14) and Isaiah’s vision of the throne of God’s glory (Isa 6:1–6). Visions are prominent in Acts, and they are usually connected with prayer (Acts 9:11–12; 16:9, 10; 22:17–21, 23:11; see Luke 1:8–20). Cornelius was praying when an angel visited him (Acts 10:4–16; 30–32). The following day, Peter received a vision as he prayed (10:9–12; see 11:5–9).

15 In the previous chapter of Acts, the visions of Paul and Ananias are connected with prayer and highlight God’s involvement in their lives (9:3–6, 10–16). These visions are not chance coincidences but the providential outworking of God’s saving purpose in the world.

16 Visions give divine direction and show Christian workers the way in which they should carry out the Great Commission (see 1:8; Matt 28:18–20; Luke 24:47; see also Mark 16:15; John 20:21–23). Paul had visions on the Damascus road at his conversion (Acts 9:5–25; 22:7–10; 26:14–19), on the threshold of his missionary advance into Europe (16:9), at Corinth (18:9, 10), in the Temple (22–17:18), and again in Jerusalem before he set out on his trip to Rome (23:11). Through visions God is active in guiding the affairs of the church and in extending its mission (see the notes on 10:3, 9–16; 22:17–22; 23:11; see also Gal 1:8–9 and note 7).

**9:26–28 When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, the Christian community understandably did not immediately trust him, given his recent history of violently persecuting Christians (8:3; 9:1, 13; 22:3, 4; 26:9, 11). Fortunately, Barnabas, the “Son of Encouragement” (4:36), introduced the changed man to the apostles and explained his encounter with the Lord at Damascus, his sense of call, and his subsequent boldness in preaching in the name of Jesus in Damascus. Barnabas was able to convince the apostles that Saul’s conversion was genuine, so Saul remained with the apostles in Jerusalem, where he preached boldly for his Lord. Paul really visits this in Gal 1:18–19.

9:29 Again Saul debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, and again an assignation was planned (cp. 9:22–24).

9:30 After the believers heard about the plot, Saul was once again sent away (cp. 9:25), this time to Tarsus, his hometown, the capital of Cicilia (see “Early Apostolic Journeys”, 8:4–11; see also 21:39, 22:3, 4:25–26; cp. Gal 1:21).

9:31 This verse is one of several in Acts that detail the numerical and spiritual growth of the church (see also 2:41; 4:4–5; 5:14; 6:7; 12:24; 21:20). The first step in turning the truth of the religious principles, “the fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge” (Prov 1:7, 10; cp. Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Eccl 12:13; see Luke 7:16), and they were growing in their faith (cp. Acts 2:43, 19:17).

9:32–43 These verses describe Peter’s itinerant ministry in Judea, particularly along the seacoast, exercising spiritual gifts, given to him by God, Peter performed wonderful works, including the healing of Aeneas and raising of Dorcas. Jesus had promised such signs and wonders to the disciples (John 14:12), *Typical of Luke’s writing, the healing of a man is matched by the healing of a woman (see Luke 13:10–17, 14:1–6). The people in the area were deeply moved by these miracles, and many were drawn into the faith (Acts 9:35, 42).

9:43 Living with Simon, a tanner of hides: Tanning was an unclean business in Jewish eyes, which might suggest that Peter was not scrupulous in observing Jewish traditions (cp. Gal 2:6–9; cp. 11:7–15; 16:14; 20:29).

10:1–8 A Roman army officer: Literally a centurion, the highest-ranking noncommissioned officer in the Roman army, in command of a century, a subdivision of roughly 100 men. Luke often describes centurions in favorable terms (10:22; 21:12; 22:25–26; 23:17, 24:1; Acts 23:34; cp. 5:10; 7:5–10). The people in the area were deeply moved by these miracles, and many were drawn into the faith (Acts 9:35, 42),
The Good News Message

The apostles proclaimed the Good News message in a definite sequence, with the following elements: (1) the OT promises have fulfilled (Acts 8:30; see Acts 3:25-26). (2) God has exalted Jesus by raising him to the head of the new Israel as the divinely appointed Messiah. (3) The apostles were witnesses of God’s work in Jesus Christ, both as eyewitnesses of his public ministry and resurrection (13:31) and as his chosen advocates (2:2; 3:19; 8:40, 39-40). (4) The arrival of the Holy Spirit came at the end of your life for you at once. Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you.

"Gentiles Hear the Good News"

Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. I know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John was beheaded beginning his message of baptism. And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And all who were filled with the Holy Spirit were witnesses of all he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross. But God raised him to life on the third day. Then he showed himself to many as proof that he had been raised, as he had said through his prophets from of the Old Testament. And with many other messages he warned them to repent. But many join to the Holy Spirit, but this is a gift from God, and speaking of God’s forgiveness and salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. This basic message was repeatedly preached to many people, both Jews and Gentiles, throughout the Mediterranean world (note 1:8; 9:15; 28:31). It is echoed in the sermon of Peter 2:1-47, in 3:26-21, 4:1-7, 5:1-12, 8:1-20, 10:1-28, and 13:1-51. The same themes characterize Paul’s preaching (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3-9). All people are summoned to repentance from sin and faith in the saving power of Jesus (Acts 4:12; 13:17; 16:31)—through his death we can be “declared right with God” (13:39). Because the message is crucial to people’s destiny, those who proclaim it are warned not to change it (13:40-42; see Heb 2:3).

The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit

Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening. Peter witnessed to this when he asked those who had come with Peter that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too. For they heard them speaking in languages unknown to them. Then Peter asked, “Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?” So Peter gave them orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked them to stay with them for several days.

Peter Explains His Actions

11 Soon the news reached the apostles and other believers in Judea that the Gentiles received the word of God. “But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers criticized him. You see us were sent by God to the Gentiles with the message of peace through Jesus Christ, to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among his people, who are his inheritors, in glory with all his holy angels. To you it is granted to believe in the name of Jesus Christ, even though you were not told to do so by human beings. For John baptized with the baptism of repentance, that repentance might bring forgiveness of sins, but you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. So then what John baptized with was baptism of repentance, but what Peter preached was the forgiveness of sins through the name of Jesus.”

And the angel replied, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been accepted by God as an offering!” Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore.

10:16 Peter received the same vision three times to confirm its truthfulness (see Acts 8:32; 10:13). 10:17 The word ‘impecunious’ is a flat roof to pray. It was about noon, and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 10:18 He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. 10:18 Peter visited Cornelius.

11:1 The next day as Cornelius’s messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.”

10:21 Then Simon Peter told them, “You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean. So I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. Now tell me why you sent for me.”

10:22 Cornelius replied, “Four days ago I was praying in my house about this same time, three o’clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. 10:23 He told me, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your gifts to the poor have been noticed by God. Send messengers to Joppa and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying in the home of Simon-a tanner who lives near the seashore.’

10:25 Cornelius…worshiped him.

and do what is right. This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. I know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John...
entered the home of Gentiles* and even at end with them" they said.

Then Peter told them exactly what had happened. "I was in the town of Joppa," he said, "and while I was praying, I went into a trance and saw a vision. Something like a large sheet was let down by four corners from the sky. And it came down to me. When I looked inside the sheet, I saw all sorts of tame and wild animals, reptiles, and birds. And I heard a voice say, Get up, Peter; kill and eat them."

"No, Lord," I replied. "I have never eaten anything that your Jewish laws have declared impure or unclean."

"But the voice from heaven spoke again: 'Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.' This happened three times before the sheet, and all it contained was pulled back up to heaven."

"Just then three men who had been sent from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were staying. The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry that they were Gentiles. These six brothers here accompanied me, and we soon entered the home of the man who had sent for us. 11 He told us how an angel had appeared to him in his home and had said, 'Send messengers to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. 12 He will tell you how you and everyone in your household should be saved."

"As I began to speak," Peter continued, "the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning. 13 Then I thought of the Lord's words when he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 14 And since God gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God's way?"

"When the others heard this, they stopped objecting and began praising God. They said, 'We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life.'"

**The Church in Antioch of Syria (11:19-30) The Ministry of the Greek-speaking Believers**

"Meanwhile, the believers who had been scattered during the persecution after Stephen's death traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria. They preached the word of God, but only to Jews. 26 However, some of the believers who had gone to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyprus began preaching to the Gentiles* about the Lord Jesus. 27 The power of the Lord was with them, and a large number of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.

**The Ministry of Barnabas**

"When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, 28 they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 29 When he arrived and saw this evidence of God's blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord. 30 Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord. 31 Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul. 32 When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. (It was at this time that Barnabas traveled to Cyprus, and Saul went to Jerusalem.)"
12:4 Herod had pestilence guarded by four squads of soldiers, making it impossible for the apostle to escape (cp. 11:26). However, God was in charge, and nothing is too hard for him. (See also Gen 18:14; 13:18; 27: Matt 20:19; Mark 10:27; Luke 1:37; 18:27).

12:5 It is possible that Herod prayed earnestly: God answers the earnest prayers of his people. (cp. Gen 18:11; 31:33). However, God was in charge, and nothing is too hard for him. (See also Gen 18:14; 13:18; 27: Matt 20:19; Mark 10:27; Luke 1:37; 18:27).

12:6-9 God, through an angel, led Peter out, reunited him with his praying friends, and sent him out to Caesarea to work on the supply of the Good News. The message advanced despite determined opposition.


12:17-19 Rhoda was so surprised when Peter appeared that she let him standing at the closed door. Both she and the other believers were amazed by God’s answer to their prayers (12:3).

12:20-23 When Peter couldn’t be found after a careful search, Herod had gated the guards and put them to death (cp. 16:27). Peter, filled with his own painful end as a divine judgment on his convict when he accepted the people’s worship. Josephus records the death of Hero dei Agrrippa I in greater detail (Josephus, Antiquities 19:1-2).

12:24-25 Herod’s demise from a terrible illness (12:23) contrasts with the growth of the church as an unintended message of Good News (28:31).

13:1-3 The prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch spent significant time in worship and prayer, earnestly seeking the Lord’s will as they fasted and opened themselves to divine direction. As they prayed, the Holy Spirit spoke to them, and they set apart Barnabas and Saul in clear recognition of God’s call for them to carry out a divine work in his name. The believers’ inward journey in prayer and listening to God is matched by their outward journey in evangelism, and mighty works of healing and salvation. (Acts 13:2-3).

13:1 prophets and teachers: See “The Gift of Prophecy,” 21:11; see also 1 Cor 12:12-28; Eph 4:11. The Seleucidae suggest a Jewish background (see Gen 29:33; Luke 2:25; 3:30); he is also called “the black man” — he was probably of African descent. • Lucia is a Latin name; he came from Cyrene, the capital of Libya in North Africa. He was probably one of the preachers from Cyrene who had brought the Christian message to Antioch (Acts 11:20). • Manahen had been brought up with King Herod Antipas; he was probably Luke’s source for insight into Antioch’s thoughts and actions (Luke 9:7-9). • Barnabas and Saul are prominently featured in the subsequent narrative.

13:3 The men laid their hands on them: This story was only done after more fasting and prayer, the Pastoral Epistles warn against laying hands on persons to appoint them as a Christian leader without due care and diligence (1 Tim 4:14; 5:22). Barnabas and Saul were sent ... on the way as missionaries of the church at Antioch.

13:4 Barnabas and Saul’s first missionary journey was undertaken with a strong consciousness of the Holy Spirit as their guide. • Secultus was Antioch’s ancient seaport, located at this point more than twelve miles (20 km) west of the city at the mouth of the Orontes River. • Their journey took them westward by sea to the island of Cyprus, which was Barnabas’s hometown (4:36).

13:5 Landing in the town of Salamis, they went to the Jewish synagogues (see note on 9:2), where the Jews could hear and respond to the Christian message. They would also meet converts to Judaism (see note on 13:4) and spiritually hungry Gentiles who are sometimes described as “God-fearers” (see note on 10:2).
he had attached himself to the governor, Sergius Paulus, who was an intelligent man. The governor invited Barnabas and Saul to visit him, for he wanted to hear the word of God. 8But Elymas, the sorcerer (as his name means in Greek), interfered and urged the governor to pay no attention to what Barna‑ bas and Saul said. He was trying to keep the governor from believing.

9Saul, also known as Paul, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he looked the sorcerer in the eye. 10Then he said, “You son of the devil, full of every sort of deceit and fraud, and enemy of all that is good! Will you never stop perverting the true ways of the Lord? 11Watch now, for the Lord has laid his hand of punishment upon you, and you will be struck blind. You will not see the sunlight for some time.” Instantly mist and darkness came over the man’s eyes, and he began groping around begging for someone to take him and lead him.

12When the governor saw what had happened, he became a believer, for he was aston‑ ished at the teaching about the Lord. Paul and Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia

Paul and his companions then left Paphos by ship for Paphos in Cyprus, landing at the port town of Perga. There John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. 9But Paul and Barna‑ bas traveled inland to Antioch of Pisidia. 15 On the Sabbath they went to the syna‑ogue for the services. 16After the usual readings from the books of Moses and the prophets, those in charge of the service sent them this message: “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, come and give it.”

13:14‑16 Pamphylia and Pisidia were districts in what is now Turkey.

13:15 Greek from the law.
spoken. Instead, they condemned him, and in doing this they fulfilled the prophets’ words that are read every Sabbath. 24 They found no legal reason to execute him, but they asked Pilate to have him killed anyway. 25 When they had done all that the prophets said, they took him down from the cross and placed him in a tomb. 26 But God raised him from the dead! 27 And over a period of many days he appeared to those who had worshiped him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to the people of Israel. 28 And now we are here to bring you this Good News. The promise made to our ancestors, 29 and God has now fulfilled it for us, their descendants, by raising Jesus. This is what the second prophet says about Jesus: You are my Son. 30 Today I have become your Father. *

For God had promised to raise him from the dead, not leaving him to rot in the grave. 31 This is no reference to David, for after David had done the will of God in his generation, he died and was buried with his ancestors, and his body decayed. 32 No, it was a reference to someone else—someone whom God raised and whose body did not decay. 33 Brothers, listen! We are here to proclaim that through this man Jesus there is forgiveness of sins. 34 Everyone who believes in him is made right in God’s sight—something the law of Moses could never do. 35 Be careful! Don’t let the prophets’ words apply to you. For they said:

15:29 Greek from the choir.
he was the chief speaker. 11 Now the temple of Zeus was located just outside the town. So the priest of the temple and the crowd brought bulls and wreaths with flowers to the town gates, and they prepared to offer sacri-
fices to the apostles.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard that, they went down to Antioch. There, they gathered the believers along with the elders in the church and started to instruct and encourage them as they had done in Jerusalem. 14 They reminded them not to abandon their belief in the Lord and his teachings, but to share all they had among the believers to help them.

Then the apostles returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith and take courage. They told them not to be afraid of the Jews or anyone else. He argued forcefully that it was contrary to what God had revealed and眼前 the leaders of the church to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, “The Gentiles convert must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.” So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood up and addressed them as follows: “Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they might hear the Good News and believe. God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our an-
ccestors were able to bear? 11 We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.”

Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul talked about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

When they had finished, James stood up and said, “Brothers, listen to me. 16 Peter has told us about the time first visited the Gentiles to take them for themselves a people. And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written:” 17 “Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, 18 so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord, including the Gentiles—all those I have called to be mine.”

Circumcision

Circumcision (cutting off the male foreskin) was widely practiced in the ancient Near East (Jer 9:25-26). For Jews, it had religious significance as the sign of the covenant God had established with the people of Israel (Acts 7:8; Gen 17:9-14; Josh 5:2; John 7:22; Sirach 44:20). It was normally performed on the eighth day of a male infant’s life (Acts 7:8; Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3). The NT notes the circumcision of John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, and Timothy (Acts 16:21; Matt 3:16; Luke 1:59; 2:21; Phil 3:5). Circumcision became a symbol of the renewal of a person’s relationship with God (Deut 10:16; 30:16; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:28-29). In the later New Testament, we find that Jesus Christ tried to require Gentile Christians to undergo circumcision (Acts 15:1-5; see 21:20-21; Gal 2:4, 11-13), to which Paul and Barnabas objected (Acts 15:2). The ensuing church council at Jerusalem settled the matter in favor of not requiring Gentiles to be circumcised (15:19-29, 28-29).

Paul insisted that “it makes no difference whether or not a man has been circumcised” (1 Cor 7:19): “What is important is faith expressing itself in love” (Gal 5:6). In Galatians, Paul argued against vigorous Jewish elements who attempted to impose simple faith through Jesus Christ (Gal 2:14-21). Circumcision is not required for acceptance by God (Gal 5:6). The cross of Christ is the way that sinners enter into covenant with God (Gal 2:14-21; Col 2:11-15).

15:4-21 The first council of the church met to resolve the dispute concerning Gentiles and circumcision (15:1-2).

15:5 These Pharisees were believers, yet they exerted their spiritual authority over the law of Moses (see “The Pharisees,” Matt 3:7). Paul argued against their message most strenuously (see Gal 1:6-9; 2:14-15).

15:6 Peter, no doubt remembering his own experience in the household of Cornelius (ch 10), argued that God had already confirmed his acceptance of the Gentiles without circumcision by giving them the Holy Spirit. The underserved grace of the Lord Jesus had been made available to all.

15:13-19 James, the brother of Jesus, declared that the conversion of the Gentiles was clearly in accord with Scripture. He argued that salvation by faith was necessary to the divine will to put unnecessary requirements on the admission of the Gentiles.

15:14 Peter: Greek Simon. Peter’s given name was Simon (see Matt 16:17; 19).

15:15-19 Because God’s prophets had predicted the conversion and inclusion of the Gentiles, James argued that the Gentiles should be accepted in the church, without requiring them to practice Judaism (15:1).

14:19-20 The crowd became fickle when some Pharisees and Sadducees from Iconium and easily turned the people against the apostles. They “stoked up the people’s wrath against the living God, the apostles were his representatives, and they referred to this time of persecution as a Lesson: 19:2, 10, 14, 22, 24. The people were dead. That Paul got up and went back
The letter to the churches includes this familiar Hellenistic greeting at the end of a letter, found only here in the NT. Paul often ended his letters on a more theological note (e.g., Gal 1:23-24; 2 Cor 13:13; Eph 6:23-24; Phil 2:4; 2 Thes 3:1-2; 1 Thes 5:23-24; 1 Tim 6:21).

15:40-41 Following his disagreement with Barnabas over John Mark, Paul then chose Silas as his partner for a second missionary journey through Syria and Cilicia. The two men traveled overland to visit Derbe and Lystra, explaining the decision of the Jerusalem council and strengthening believers in their faith.

16:1-3 Paul returned to churches to which he and Barnabas had established on their previous journey.

16:4 Paul had allowed Silas to circumscribe the decision of the Jerusalem council. The wisdom of the decision was so strong in proving the validity of Paul's missionary calling and emphasis on salvation by faith alone (Gal 2:6-9), but many Jewish Christians did not. These Jewish believers demanded that Gentile converts be circumcized and observed the laws of Moses in order to be saved. These Jewish converts were apparently put to death for his faith by Jewish priests in Jerusalem (Josephus, Antiquities 20:9; Eusebius, Church History 2.23.4-18).

18

And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 19Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. 20For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations.

The Decision of the Council

Then the apostles and elders met together with the whole church in Jerusalem. They debated and sent them to Antioch with John Mark. 22Then Paul and Barnabas argued with the church over this decision. The men chosen were two of the church leaders—Judas (also called Barsabbas) and Silas. 23This is the letter they took with them:

“This letter is from the apostles and elders, your brothers in Jerusalem. It is written to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings!

24We understand that some men from here have troubled you and upset your teaching, but we did not send them! 25So we decided, having come to complete agreement, to send you official representatives along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27We are sending Judas and Silas to confirm what we have decided concerning your question.

28For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements:

29You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell.

Joyful Return to the Antioch Church

The message brought great joy to the church, where they called a general meeting of the believers and delivered the letter. 31And there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read this encouraging message.

32Then Judas and Silas, both being prophets, spoke at length to the believers, encouraging and strengthening their faith. 33They stayed for a while, and then the believers sent them back to the church in Jerusalem with a blessing of peace. 34Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch. And they many others taught and preached the word of the Lord there.

Paul’s Second Missionary Journey from Antioch (15:32-16:22)

Paul and Barnabas Separate

35After some time Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s go back and visit each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing.” 36Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark as well. 37But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. 38Their disagreement was so sharp that they parted. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. 39Paul chose Silas, and as he left, the believers entrusted him to the Lord’s gracious care. 40Then he traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there.

Paul Returns to Derbe and Lystra

41Paul went first to Derbe and then to Lystra, where he helped a young disciple named Timothy. His mother was a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek. 42Timothy was well thought of by the believers, so Paul wanted him to join them on their journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left for the city. Everyone knew that his father was a Greek. 43Then they went from town to town, instructing the believers to follow the decisions made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. 44So the churches were strengthened in their faith and grew larger every day.

A Call from Macedonia

45Next Paul traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. 46Then coming to the early Christian community at Thessalonica, he was turned head north for the province of Bithynia, 47next to Greek brothers, also in 16:40. 46:7-Phrygia, Galatia, Asia, Mysia, and Bithynia were all Greek in what is now Turkey.

15:18 The Loos has spoken— he who made these things known so long ago.

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Journeys of Paul and Barnabas

Paul and Barnabas were originally sent out by the church in Antioch of Syria about AD 47. Paul spent the next twelve years traveling around the Roman world, preaching the Good News to both Jews and Gentiles, and planting churches in the cities he visited. Most of Paul’s letters to these churches were also written during this time.

**Paul’s Journeys:**


**Rome** was the capital of the Roman Empire and the final destination of Paul’s journeys in Acts. See “Rome,” Rom 1:1-7; “The Roman Church,” Rom 16:1-16

**Corinth** stood at the crossroads of Greece, a bustling commercial hub. Paul spent 18 months there on his second journey. See “Corinth,” 1 Cor 1:1-2

**Athens,** the leading city of classical Achaia, was still a center of learning when Paul stopped there on his second journey. See “The Unknown God,” Acts 17:16-32

**Philippi** was a prominent Roman military city, and was Paul’s first stop in Macedonia on his second journey. See “Philippi,” Phil 1:1

**Ephesus** was the wealthy hub of Artemis worship. Paul tried to go there earlier, but could not until his third journey; he spent three years there. See “Ephesus,” Eph 1:1

**Cyprus** was Barnabas’s birthplace. He and Paul traveled through Cyprus on their first journey, and Barnabas later returned there. See Acts 4:36, 11:19-20, 13:4-13; 15:39

**Caesarea** was the administrative center of Palestine. Paul was imprisoned there for two years before his journey to Rome. See “Caesarea,” Acts 21:23-35

**Antioch** was the earliest and most important hub of Jewish-Gentile Christianity; from there Paul and Barnabas were sent out on their journeys. See “Antioch of Syria,” Acts 13:1-4
but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there. So instead, they went on through Myssia to the seaport of Troas. That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there.

**Journey to Philippi**

We boarded the ship at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis. From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.

**Lydia of Philippi Believes in Jesus**

On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. “She and her household were baptized, and asked us to be her guests. “If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my home.” And she urged us until we agreed.

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**LUKE**

**Beloved Doctor and Historian**


Though we know very little about Luke’s background, he seems to have first encountered Paul and his preaching in western Asia Minor, where he became a convert. Leaving his home, he devoted his life to the service of Christ and the Good News as a dedicated assistant of Paul. Paul speaks of him warmly as “the trustworthy fellow” and one of his faithful companions (Col 4:14; Phlm 1:24). Luke is the only Christian who faithfully remained with Paul when Paul was awaiting execution in Rome (2 Tim 4:11). He is the only Gentile to have his writings included in the NT.

Accompanying Paul on his last trip to Jerusalem, Luke probably acquired the information for his Gospel and the early part of the book of Acts from people he interviewed in Judea while Paul was imprisoned there for two years. He talked with extensively with people who heard and saw Jesus, and having carefully studied what others had written about him, Luke then wrote his own account of Jesus’ life and teachings (see Luke 1:1-4).

When Paul was sent by ship to Rome to have his case tried there, Luke accompanied him. While Paul was under house arrest, awaiting his trial, Luke might have used the time to write the book of Acts. The first fifteen chapters provide a chronological account of the earliest missionary work as told to him by the early followers of Christ and by Paul himself. But beginning in Acts 16:10—the point at which Luke joined Paul’s team—he provides a direct eyewitness account.

Acts emphasizes the way the Holy Spirit empowered and guided the early missionaries in their witness (1:4-5, 8) and ends with Paul still under house arrest in Rome (28:30-31).

We are indebted to Luke for many unique passages: his full account of Jesus’ birth, descriptions of Jesus’ ministry to women, many words about Jesus caring for the poor, and the only comprehensive account of the first thirty years of Christian missionary activity—carefully documented. Through Luke’s writings we gain a much deeper appreciation of the crucial work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Jesus and the early missionaries.

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**Paul and Silas Imprisoned and Released**

One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future. She earned a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes. “She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved.”

This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And instantly it left her.

Her masters’ hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace.

The whole city is in uproar because of these Jews” they shouted to the city officials. “They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice.”

A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn’t escape. So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the prisoners’ chains were broken. After the jailer heard the news, he came and locked Paul and Silas in the jail cell.

Nevertheless, the jailer was afraid to accept this, so he carried Paul and Silas to the city officials and reported what had happened. They replied, “We must never again hear such things from your mouths!”

The jailer took them to the city officials and showed them the spot where they had put Paul and Silas. They were extremely agitated, and the whole city was in an uproar.

When the jailer had realized what had happened, he brought Paul and Silas out of the prison and asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Paul and Silas replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—both you and your household.”

The jailer took them home, got them food and healed the man’s sick servant. And he and his entire household were baptized.

The jailer was overjoyed and took them to his home, where he made them a special meal as a welcome. And he and his family worshiped God, and he called on Paul and Silas to preach for him.
The doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! 17 The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He took a light and ran into the courtyard, and was alarmed when he saw that the prisoners were gone.

3. They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.” 4. And they shared the story of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household.

5. Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household immediately were baptized.

6. He brought them into his home and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

7. The next morning the city officials sent the police to tell the jailer, “Let those men go!” 8. So the jailer told Paul, “The city officials have sent us orders to let these men go. Peace be with you.” And Paul sent the officers away.

9. Paul and Silas then traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 10. As was Paul’s custom, he went to the synagogue service, and in a row he used the Scriptures to reason with the people. 11. He explained the prophecies and proved that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. He said, “This Jesus I’m telling you about is the Messiah.” 12. Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

13. But some of the Jews were jealous, so they gathered some of the marketplace to form a mob and start a riot.

17:9–10 The charges did not hold up under scrutiny, so the officials released Paul and Silas, and the group of believers posted bond. Christianity, Luke contended, was politically harmless to the Roman empire and should therefore be recognized as a permitted religion and not subjected to a public trial. Paul was able to preach for three consecutive Sabbaths, explaining the Scriptures and showing their fulfillment in Jesus.

17:10–12 In light of the strong opposition in Thessalonica, the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea, located about nineteen miles (30 km) west of Thessalonica. There the missionaries had a better reception than in Thessalonica. Many Jews came to faith, as well as many of the prominent Greek women and men. The Bereans exemplified in their attitude, for they were open-minded and eager to learn, good listeners, diligent Bible students, and thoughtful people. Paul’s faithful teaching had a strong foundation.

17:13 Paul acknowledged the determination of people in this persecution when he wrote to the Thessalonians: “We did not escape to run away from you but were eager and willing to suffer for you before God” (2 Thess 1:5). This letter is a response to false reports accusing them of causing trouble and personal quarrels. Such peace and committing reason against Caesar—serious charges of threatening the stability of the empire (cp. Luke 23:2). They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas so they could drag them out to the crowd. “Not finding them there, they dragged outJason and the other believers instead and took them before the city council. “Paul and Silas have caused trouble all over the world,” they shouted, “and now they are here disturbing our city, too.” 9. And Jason has welcomed them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against our chief magistrates, including the Roman king, Jesus.”

10. The people of the city, as well as the city council, were thrown into turmoil by these reports. The officials forced Jason and the other believers to post bond, and then they released them.

17:11 Paul and Silas in Berea That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.

11. And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul’s message. They searched the Scriptures daily after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews and Greeks, men and women, believed. 12. But when some Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, they went there and stirred up trouble. 13. The believers acted at once, sending Paul on to the coast, while Silas and Timothy remained behind, hoping Paul would come. But sending Paul with all the way to Athens; then they returned to Berea with instructions for Silas and Timothy to hurry and join him.

17:12–13 Paul Preaches in Athens While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. 14. He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.

15. He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, “What is this babbling about with these strange ideas he’s picked up?” Others said, “He seems to be preaching about some foreign god.”

16. Then they took him to the high council of the city. “Come and tell us about this new teaching,” they said. 17. “You are saying some rather strange things,” they replied, “and we want to know what’s all about.” 18. It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.

17:19 The most learned society of philosophers in the city was the Academy, founded by Plato and in existence for two centuries. The philosophers of the school of Epicurus, named after the Greek god Epicurus, were given to a certain materialism. Their teaching was compared with that of the Stoics, who were given to ethical teachings, and those of the Platonic school of the Academy, which was given to a rationalistic, idealistic point of view.

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The Unknown God

When Paul spoke to the Areopagus, the “high council of the city” of Athens (17:19), he was speaking to people who did not share his faith in the God of Abraham and Moses who had revealed himself “many times and in many ways to [their] ancestors through the prophets” (Heb 1:1). The members of his audience had a very different definition of the divine. A host of divinities inhabited their world, and the common people retained much of their belief in the ancient gods. But many of the cultural elite of Athens no longer believed in the gods in any literal sense. Instead, they held to either a form of materialism (the physical is everything) or pantheism (the divine inhabits everything).

What they all shared in common was the complete absence of the idea of a personal God who would, or even could, reveal himself to people specifically and verbally in time and history. Their myths told of the activities of the gods long ago, but they did not have faith that the ultimate reality, God himself, was known to them, or even could be known. Instead, they reasoned and discussed “the latest ideas,” hoping for a better understanding of the nature of things.

When Paul spoke in that context, he used their own poets to proclaim things that they could barely comprehend: That the God who made everything is both personal and knowable; that he revealed himself clearly, historically, and definitively in Jesus Christ; that death is not followed by either the cessation of existence or the migration of the soul, but by judgment; and that the proof of all of this is the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

What was foolishness to most of the Greeks of Athens turns out to be the ultimate truth: God is knowable, and can be known through Jesus Christ.


col. 1:15

Acts 17:16-32
Ps 50:7-15
Isa 42:5
1 Thes 1:9
Col 1:16
Rom 1:18-12
Gol 1:17-21
Heb 1:1-4

ATHENS

Northwest of the Acropolis, the Areopagus Hill of Arei, or Mars Hill, overlooks the marketplace (Acts 17:19). “Areopagus” also refers to the Athenian high council that met there. Trials were held at the Areopagus; there Socrates had faced those who accused him of defaming the Greek gods. By Paul’s day the council of the Areopagus oversaw political, educational, philosophical, and religious matters for Athens.

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT IN ATHENS

There were a wide variety of philosophical ideas current in Athens when Paul visited, but two main schools of thought dominated, Stoicism and Epicureanism (Acts 17:18).

STOICISM

Zeno of Citium (314-262 bc) founded Stoicism. Stoics studied nature’s laws and believed in the Logos, a pervasive organizing and sustaining force that gives all things their essential nature and so gives life and reason to humanity. The good life is one in which reason rules, and peace of mind and harmony with nature prevail. Many prominent statesmen were Stoics or influenced by Stoicism, including Cicero, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius. Stoic ideas proved attractive to some Christians because of the similarities between the Stoic logos and the divine Logos (John 1:1-18), and between the idea of natural law and the law of God.

EPICUREANISM

Those who followed Epicurus (341-270 bc) were empiricists; they relied upon sense experience (as opposed to reason) for knowledge. Epicureans were concerned with natural evidence and were unenthusiastic about mathematics. Their focus was ethics, the study of right behavior; they judged the value of an action or thing in terms of the pleasure or pain it brought. Epicurus saw belief in gods (meddling and powerful beings who terrified ordinary mortals) as a serious threat to tranquility. For him and his followers: neither the gods nor death (which is the end) should be feared.
Paul in Corinth

18 Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. • There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deposed all Jews from Rome. • Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers as he was also. • Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue,

with them during his year and a half in Corinth [Acts 18:11]; see Rom 16:3-4; 1 Cor 16:19. • Just as he was: Paul had been trained as a tentmaker as a young man. It is probable that he was a young man intended to become rabbis or other professionals. • 18:4-6: Since again Paul followed his custom of preaching to the Jews first and then reaching out to Gentiles after he met with rejection and opposition [Acts 13:42-49; see 1:25-26; 26:20]; Rom 1:16; 2:10; 2:29; 3:0; 4:9-12. • Paul very often wrote letters to the Thessalonian Christians after Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia with a report of how things were going there [see 1 Thess 3:6, 2 Thessalonian introduc¬ tion, “Setting”].

18:7 Titus “Titus (the Just) was a Gentile who worst fed Paul (as a God ‘fearer’); see note on 10:2. Because Titus was a common Roman name, Justus differentiates him from the better-known Titus, Paul’s co-worker (2 Cor 2:13; 7:4; 15:8; 16:2; 23:1). • 18:9-10: Paul had experienced real opposition in Corinth (18:6) and apparently was of being attacked again, so the divine message was a comfort to him [cp. 23:11; Ps 34:4-7, 19; Matt 28:20, encouraging him to persist in his public ministry and promising him the comfort of God’s promise [Ps 91:1; 2 Tim 4:17].

18:12-13: The governor of Achaia, Junio Gallio, was the oldest brother of the Roman philosopher Seneca (Seneca was a tutor to Emperor Nero). An inscription in Paphos, Crete, dated 50-51 helps to date Paul’s visit in Corinth to about that time.
Paul and brought him before the governor for judgment. 13 They accused Paul of “persecuting people to worship God in ways that are contrary to our law.”

“But just as Paul started to make his defense, Gallio turned to Paul’s accusers and said, “Listen, you Jews. If this were a case involving a matter of law or a sin that could not be overlooked, I would have reason to accept your case. 15 But since it is merely a question of words and names and your own Jewish law, I refuse to judge such matters.”

And he threw them out of the courtroom.

The crowd then grabbed Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him right there in the courtroom. But Gallio paid no attention.

Paul Visits Ephesus and Returns to Antioch

Paul stayed in Corinth for some time after that, then said good-bye to the brothers and sisters 16 and went to nearby Cenchrea. There he shaved his head according to a Jewish custom, marking the end of a vow. Then he set sail for Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him.

18:23–25 Some manuscripts read, “I must by all means see Jerusalem for the upcoming festival, but I will come back later.” 18:22 Greek the church.

CLAUDIUS CAESAR (Acts 18:2)

Claudius Caesar was emperor of Rome, AD 41–54. He issued an edict (AD 49–50) expelling all Jews from Rome: Aquila and Priscilla were among those who had left to avoid the jurisdiction of the city (18:2). The Roman historian Suetonius wrote that “because the Jews of Rome were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestos, [Claudius] expelled them from the city.” Most scholars agree that the name Chrestos was an alternate spelling for the name Christs, meaning “the messiah.”

18:14–17 Gallio’s ruling indicated that the charges against Paul were unjustified. The Roman government had nothing to fear from acknowledging Christianity as a legal religion.

18:17 It is most likely that the Greeks beat Paul because they wished to express their enmity to the Jews; it is possible that the Jews saw in Paul’s new synagogal leader someone who was unsuccessful in pleasing their case. Sosthenes may be the same person Paul called the “brother” (1 Cor 1:1), but it is impossible to say for certain.

18:18–19 Cenchrea was a seaport located on the Mediterranean, roughly 8 km east of Corinth. It was there that Paul shaved his head according to Jewish custom to mark the completion of a temporary Nazirite vow (cf. 21:1–24; see Num 6:1–21; Judg 13:7–16; 1 Sam 1, 2:11–12; Luke 1:15).

18:19–23 Paul made a quick stop at Ephesus, the most important city in the Roman province of Asia. There he left the others behind, including Priscilla and Aquila (18:26). He headed toesus, landing at Caesarea, the headquarters of the Roman forces of occupation. After a visit to the church at Jerusalem, Paul returned to Antioch, the church that he had originally commissioned. This marked the end of his second missionary journey. In Antioch, he spent a rewarding time of reporting their success and challenges of their work with the home church. Then after a short time, Paul began his third missionary journey. He went by land rather than by sea, traveling through Galatia and Phrygia to a point near the port of Sarea. From there he went up and visited the church at Jerusalem and then went back to Antioch.

Paul’s Third Missionary Journey from Antioch (18:23–41:17)

Paul Visits the Churches in Galatia and Phrygia

18:23–25 After spending time in Antioch, Paul went back through Galatia and Phrygia, visiting and strengthening all the believers.

APOLLOS in Ephesus and Corinth

24 Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. 25 He had been taught the way of the Lord, and he taught others about Jesus with an enthusiastic spirit and with accuracy.


19:25 Paul wanted to keep in touch with earlier converts and strengthen their faith.

19:26–24:65 Alexandria was the second-largest city in the Roman empire, famous for its rhetorical tradition and the philosophical work of Philo. Apollos was an eloquent speaker with an excellent knowledge of the Scriptures (the OT). His ability to argue and defend the Holy Spirit was inadequate, though. He did not understand that believers could experience and enjoy the power of the Holy Spirit as a present energizing reality. Fortunately, Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and corrected his spiritual understanding.

19:17–1:2 Paul traveled to Ephesus after Apollos had left. Subsequently, Apollos returned to Ephesus (1 Cor 1:12). The two men had different personalities, gifts, and roles, but God used each through both of them. • Some believers in Ephesus still had an inadequate understanding of the Christian faith (cp. Acts 18:26) and did not receive the Holy Spirit when they believed. They had accepted John’s baptism, which called for repentance from sin, but had not received Christian baptism, which included the gift of the Holy Spirit. When Paul had instructed them further, they were able to receive the Holy Spirit (19:15) and the Holy Spirit (19:6). APOLLOS Eloquent Advocate for Christ

Apollos was a Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jew, well versed in Scripture, who became a strong evangelist and Christian apologist. A native of Alexandria in Egypt, there was a large Jewish community, Apollos apparently came under the influence of John the Baptist’s following. He then became a bold and enthusiastic preacher of Jesus in Hellenistic synagogues, though he knew nothing of Christian baptism.

When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos in Ephesus, they invited him to their home and explained the way of God even more accurately.

27 Apollos had been thinking about going to Achaia, and the brothers and sisters in Ephesus encouraged him to go. They wrote to the believers in Achaia, asking them to welcome him. When he arrived there, he proved to be of great benefit to those who, by God’s grace, had believed. 28 He refuted the Jews with powerful arguments in public debate. Using the Scriptures, he explained to them that Jesus was the Messiah.

19:3 Greek disciple, also in 19:9, 10

Paul’s Ministry in Ephesus

19 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions and reached Ephesus on the coast, where he found several believers. 19:2 “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” he asked them.

“No,” they replied, “we haven’t even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

19:3 Then what baptism did you experience?” he asked.

And they replied, “The baptism of John.”

19:4 Paul said, “John’s baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus.”
20:1-23 When the uproar was over, Paul sent for the believers* and encouraged them. Then he said good-bye and left for Macedonia. 21 While there, he encouraged the believers to write to Jerusalem. Then he traveled down to Troas, where he stayed for three months. He was preparing to sail back to Syria when he discovered a plot by some Jews against his own life. So he decided to return through Macedonia.

22 Several men were traveling with him. They were Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe; Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. 23 They went on ahead and waited for Paul at Ephesus.

24 Against Paul's wishes, the local believers refused to send him on. The result was that he sailed to Troas. 25 There one of his friends introduced him to the Roman province of Asia. They had received his letters from the apostles, which encouraged and encouraged them. 26 This is the second time I am leaving you, and I do it with great pain. 27 For I have come to visit you only once in three years, and perhaps not even then. 28 I hope to stay with you for a while, so I can be encouraged by you and you by me. 29 I have heard through the apostles that there is great need for you. 30 So I have decided to send Titus back with this letter, along with our helper brother. 31 He will see to it that you keep your commitments to one another and to us when we come. 32 I, Paul, am an old man and now sick. 33 But I hope to see you again before long, if the Lord will permit it. 34 But I urge you to lead a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ. 35 And now, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace, mercy and peace.
us at Troas. 4 After the Passover2 ended, we boarded a ship at Philippi in Macedonia and five days later joined them in Troas, where we spent a week.

Paul’s Final Visit to Troas

On the first day of the week, we gathered with the local believers to share in the Lord’s Supper.3 Paul was preaching to them, and since he was leaving the next day, he kept talking until midnight.2 The upstairs room where we met was lighted with many flickering lamps.4 As Paul was speaking with them, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, became drowsy and finally fell to the floor.5

Paul kept talking until dawn, and when he left,6

20:12 On the first day of the week the early church commemorated Jesus’ resurrection (see note on 1:24).7

20:13 Asia was the most strategic city on the east coast of the Aegean Sea.

20:15 Miletus was the most important city on the island of Mysia. Paul’s address to the elders of the church in Miletus (Acts 20:17-38) goes on to be one of only two addresses to elders extant in the New Testament (1Cor 1:1-2). Paul’s farewell address to the elders of the church in Ephesus is found in Acts 20:19-38.

20:19 The Colossus, a huge statue 100 feet (30 meters) tall that once stood at the entrance to the city. In Paul’s time, the statue lay where it had fallen during an earthquake over 200 years earlier. It would not be restored for another 600 years. The modern-day Colossus, a huge statue 100 feet (30 meters) tall, was built on the site of the ancient statue. (1Cor 1:13; 2Pet 3:1-8). When Paul left the Ephesian elders, he commended them to “God and the message of his grace,” the divine message that was able to build them up (2Pet 3:1-8). Signs and wonders attested the reality of God’s grace at work among the Gentiles (Acts 14:3-7). Paul knew that proclaiming the Good News “all over Asia” (20:24), and he encouraged Christians to continue in “the grace of God” as they remained faithful to the Lord (Acts 13:45). Peter similarly closes with a command to Christians “for to give the grace of God in the grace of Jesus Christ” (2Pet 3:18). We need to keep the Good News “alive” (2Tim 1:8) and sustain them (Acts 20:32; see also 15:40). God’s grace is the core of the Christian message and the Christian experience, from beginning to end.

20:25 “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” This saying of Jesus is not recorded in the Gospels.

20:38 The poignancy of the occasion was heightened by the expressions of love that the elders would never hear again (20:25).

21:5-7 Tyre was an important port in Phoenicia with a maritime empire of far-flung commercial interests (see 21:35–19:47).

21:8 Philip had the title of Evangelist due to his evangelistic activity (8:40; cp. Eph 4:11, 2Tim 4:5).
The Gift of Prophecy

As Peter had declared at Pentecost, the gift of prophecy was one of the results of the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit (2:1-21; see 2:38-32). The book of Acts names a few Christian figures who were prophetic: Agabus (11:29-30; 15:1-29; 21:10-11; see also 13:1-11). One of the prophets was Agabus, whose function was similar to that of an OT prophet, performing symbolic acts (Acts 21:10-11; see 1 Kgs 11:29-32; Isa 20:2-6; Jer 13:1-11; “Prophecy in Acts.” Ezek 4:1-17) and prediction (Acts 21:9). The apostle Paul also acknowledged the prophetic gift of some Christian women (1 Cor 11:5). In the OT, most prophets were men, but several women are described as prophets: Miriam (Exod 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:4), and Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14-20; 2 Chr 34:22-23). In the NT, the gift of prophecy is given to both men and women, and several old and young, as Peter signaled in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:17-18).

Although prophecy sometimes involves foretelling the future (20:23; 21:10-11; see Rom 9:23-26; 1 Ths 4:15-17; 2 Ths 2:3-4), at its core prophecy is proclaiming God’s word by preaching, exhorting, and explaining the will of God (Acts 15:32; 19:16; Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 13:4-10). The gift of prophecy is clearly mentioned in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (and of the church) (1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:11). It is to be used for the benefit of believers (1 Cor 14:22).

Prophecy is always in need of testing (1 Ths 5:21), and the church is strongly warned against false prophets (1 Jn 4:1; 2 Ths 2:23-24). When used faithfully and in submission to God’s Word, prophetic insights may help the church to determine against false prophets (1 Jn 4:1; Rev 2:20-23). When used faithfully and in submission to God’s Word, prophetic insights may help the church to determine against false prophets (1 Jn 4:1; Rev 2:20-23). When used faithfully and in submission to God’s Word, prophetic insights may help the church to determine against false prophets (1 Jn 4:1; Rev 2:20-23). When used faithfully and in submission to God’s Word, prophetic insights may help the church to determine against false prophets (1 Jn 4:1; Rev 2:20-23).
22 “Brothers and esteemed fathers, Paul said, “listen to me as I offer my defense,” for they have reported some things against me.

23 And as they accused me, I say, ‘You are all putting me on trial before the council; 24 and you have wished to kill me, but I am not accusing you of anything unnatural or evil. 25 Only about their religious customs I am accusing you, that you should not trouble the Gentiles as they have troubled you. 26 And as I can prove to you, it is not against the customs of our people or the Scriptures 27 that I am speaking when I say that I am fasting and praying three times a day before your God. 28 I am ready to face my trial before God; I am not accusing any man.”

29 Then the commander motioned for a herald to bring Paul. 30 And he said, “If you have any other words you would like to add, you can speak now.”

31 And Paul said, “I am prepared—your honor for me is known to all, 32 because for many years I have been in contact with the Jewish council, 33 and I am in the defense of God, since I was declared in this manner a disturber of the peace by the Jews and am a Roman citizen, and I am now on trial before you. 34 If it is possible that I could have any question to add, your honor, I am ready to speak.”

23:1 The commander replied, “You have a right to speak.”

23:2 Paul said, “I intended to speak, your honor, to the council of the elders, 23:3 but because it is declared by some that I am a disturber of the peace, having been brought here by the Jews, 24 it seemed best to me to address it to the council, for I have had the command to speak this defense in Roman court. 25 After I have made my defense, I desire to speak to the council what I am accused of by them.”

26 The commander replied, “You have the right to speak.”

27 And Paul said, “I speak to the Jews, and I speak to Gentiles, 28 to the wise, and I speak to the unwise, 29 to the brave, and I speak to the weak, 30 to the rich, and I speak to the poor, 31 to my fellow Jews, and I speak to the Gentiles—of this I do not ashamed. 32 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, 33 to the Jew first and also to the Greek, 34 to all who are called on the name of Jesus Christ. 35 For the depiction of the gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, 36 for the Jew first and also to the Greek. 37 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich in mercy, 38 lavishing his kindness on all. 39 For he was not pleased with sacrifice and offering, 40 but he found it was pleasing to show mercy. 41 For he speaks: ‘What was pleasing to me was before you was pleasing to me. 42 For I have no pleasure in sacrifice and offering; I have no pleasure in burnt offerings. 43 But I have pleased mercy. 44 For, lo, as the flock to their shepherd: as the sheep to their leader: so also to their God, they are to be pleasing, 45 for he is their leader at all times. 46 He is pleased with mercy: perhaps not with sacrifice.”

47 And it was declared that the Jews should not be allowed to kill Paul, 48 and the commander said, “You may have Paul put in prison until the council decides what you are about to do.”

23:22, 23 Paul ends his speech by describing the end of the narrative. He starts by saying that he has been a Roman citizen for many years, and that he has been a witness to the people of Jerusalem, in chains, and in prison.

23:24 Paul’s speech also includes a reference to the story of the Roman governor, who was trying to prevent the Roman soldiers from attacking the Jews. Paul says that the governor was afraid of the council, and that he was willing to take the blame for the attack.

23:25 Paul then goes on to say that he has been a Roman citizen for many years, and that he has been a witness to the people of Jerusalem, in chains, and in prison.

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23:27 Paul then goes on to say that he has been a Roman citizen for many years, and that he has been a witness to the people of Jerusalem, in chains, and in prison.
prisoner, called me over and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.

The commander took his hand, led him aside, and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?”

Paul’s nephew told him, “Some Jews are going to ask you to bring Paul before the high council tomorrow; pretending they want to get some more information. But don’t do it! There are more than forty men hiding along the way ready to ambush him. They have vowed not to eat or drink anything until they have killed him. They are ready now, just waiting for your consent.”

22 “Don’t let anyone know you told me this,” the commander warned the young man.

Paul Is Sent to Cesarea

23 Then the commander called two of his officers and ordered, “Get 200 soldiers ready to leave for Cesarea at nine o’clock tonight. Also take 200 spearmen and 70 mounted troops. Provide horses for Paul to ride, and get him safely to Governor Felix.” 24 Then he wrote this letter to the governor:

26 “From Claudius Lysias, to Excellency Governor Felix: Greetings!

27 This man was seized by some Jews, and they were about to kill him when I arrived with the troops. When I learned that he was a Roman citizen, I removed him to safety. 28 Then I took him to their high council to try to learn the basis of the accusations against him. 29 Soon discovered the charge was something regarding their religious law—certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death.

30 But when I was informed of a plot to kill him, I immediately sent him on to you. I have told his accusers to bring their charges against you.”

31 So that night, as ordered, the soldiers took Paul as far as Antipatris. 32 They returned to the fortress the next morning, while the mounted troops took him on to Cesarea. 33 When they arrived in Cesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to Governor Felix. 34 He read it and then asked Paul what province he was from. “Cilicia,” Paul answered.

35 “I will hear your case myself when your accusers arrive,” the governor told him. Then the governor ordered him kept in the prison at Herod’s headquarters.

Paul in Cesarea (24:1-26:32)

24 Five days later Ananias, the high priest, arrived with some of the Jewish elders and the lawyer Tertullus, to present their case against Paul to the governor. 25 When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented the charges against Paul in the following address to the governor:

26 “Judge Felix, Paul’s accusers will add an expanded accusation to verse 6, all of verse 7, and an additional phrase in verse 8. We would have judged him by our law, but Paul, the commander of the garrison, came and violated us by taking him away from us, commanding his accusers to come before you.”

27 “You have provided a long period of peace for us Jews and with foresight have enacted reforms for us. For all of this, Your Excellency, we are very grateful to you. But I don’t want to bore you, so please give me your attention for only a moment. 28 We have found this man to be a troublemaker who is constantly stirring up the Jewish people of all the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the cult known as the Nazarenes. Furthermore, he has set up meetings here in the temple when we arrested him. 29 You can find out the truth of our accusations by examining him yourself.” 30 Then the other Jews chimed in, declaring that everything Tertullus said was true.

31 The governor then motioned for Paul to speak. Paul said, “I know, sir, that you have been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years, so I gladly present my defense before you. 32 You can quickly discover that I arrived in Jerusalem no more than twelve days ago to worship at the temple. 33 My accusers never found me arguing with anyone in the temple, nor stirring up a riot in any synagogue or on the streets of the city. 34 These men cannot prove the things they accuse me of doing.

35 But I admit that I follow the way which the high priest and all who are with him worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the prophets. 36 I have the same hope in God that these men have, that he will raise both the righteous and the unrighteous. 37 Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and all people.”

38 Judge Felix, Paul’s accusers will add an extended accusation to verse 6, all of verse 7, and an additional phrase in verse 8. We would have judged him by our law, but Paul, the commander of the garrison, came and violated us by taking him away from us, commanding his accusers to come before you.”

Excellency was often applied to persons of high social, political, or economic status (Luke 1:5). It was often applied to persons of high social, political, or economic status (Luke 1:5). The title was used for both military and civil affairs. Felix had a bad reputation see 24:24-27 and was eventually recalled to Rome by Nero.

23:31 Antipatris, a city rebuilt by Herod the Great in 9 BC on the Plain of Sharon, was a convenient military control point between Jerusalem and Cesarea.

23:35 The governor followed the proper protocol and waited for Paul’s accusers to arrive before granting an official hearing. • Herod’s headquarters was Herod the Great’s palace at Cesarea; it subsequently became the residence of the Roman governors of Judea.

24:1-4 Tertullus presented the case for the prosecution, beginning with the customary speech of praise intended to attract the attention and sympathy of the governor, followed by the statement of charges (24:1-5).

24:5 Tiroblomaker (or agitator) was a charge of political sedition. A Roman court would have taken this charge very seriously (see 16:21; 17:17; 18:13). Similar accusations were made against Jesus by Pilate (Luke 23:2, 5, 14). The term “agitator” or “agitator” is used here in a negative sense to put Paul’s religion—certainly under a pallor of suspicion if not illegal-ity (see also Acts 24:14).

24:6 The “coming day of judgment” indicates a sacrifice. The phrase is often used to denote the future judgment (see 24:14), and was a common confession of Paul’s Jewish heritage (Acts 24:14).

24:14 The fear of the “coming day of judgment” indicates a sacrifice. The phrase is often used to denote the future judgment (see 24:14), and was a common confession of Paul’s Jewish heritage (Acts 24:14).

24:16 Paul stressed that he had acted with a clear conscience and with his Jewish audience, including his worship, belief in the Jewish law, acceptance of the prophets, and hope in the resurrection (24:14, 15; see 24:21).

24:15 The last names Felix and Tertullus raise both the righteous and the unrighteous. Paul kept this final appointment with God constantly in mind (24:16). The “coming day of judgment” indicates a sacrifice. The phrase is often used to denote the future judgment (see 24:14), and was a common confession of Paul’s Jewish heritage (Acts 24:14).
24:23 money to aid his people: See note 20:12; also Rom 15:25:9; 1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 9:1-7; and to offer sacrifices to God: See Acts 27:2,3,5-6.

24:24 Perhaps Felix delayed his decision hoping that Paul would bribe him (24:26).

24:26 It is in keeping with the proper treatment of a Roman citizen to give him some freedom and allow his friends to visit him and take care of his needs.

24:26 Drusilla was the sister of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:13): “The Herod Family,” Matt 2:1-20; Drusilla had abandoned her former husband, Azziz, the king of Emesa, and married Felix. Drusilla was Jewish, so in forsaking her original husband and marrying Felix she had disregarded God’s commands (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:10; cp. Mal 2:16; Matt 19:9). Mark 12:19 and Luke 20:1-9 both criticized her for this (Antiquities 20.7.1-2). Drusilla and her husband were confronted in their conversation with Paul by the prospect of judgment.

25:2 Paul’s words about righteousness, self-control, and coming divine judgment frightened Felix, who was notably corrupt (24:26-27; see notes on 23:24, 26).

25:26-27 Felix kept Paul in custody hoping for a bribe. When this failed and his own term ended, he left Paul in prison to gain favor with the Jewish people.

25:26-27 Felix's successor was Festus, appointed by Nero to be governor of Judea, about as 59-62. Josephus describes Festus as a conscientious, honest administrator who was not able to stem the rising tide of Jewish unrest despite his strong action against the party of the Apostles (Josephus, Antiquities 20.8.10; cp. Acts 21:38). He resisted the Jewish leaders’ attempt to have Paul’s trial moved to Jerusalem, but he was not immune to their pressure (25:5).

25:7 The serious accusations were probably those raised previously (21:27-28; 24:9), but the accusations were unsupported by the evidence (24:10-13).

25:29,30 Festus, wanting to please the Jews, the governor would later state his official reason for delaying Paul’s trial and asking to move it to Jerusalem (25:17-20). His request was driven by politics, however, not justice.

25:10-11 Felix’s suggestion that Paul be tried in Jerusalem motivated the apostle’s appeal to Caesar, though not against death, but by objecting to being turned over to a biased court intent on murder, not justice (25:16). This fulfilled Paul’s conviction that he must see Rome (19:21); 21:31; 22:27; Rom 1:13-15, 15:22-29.

25:13-22 Festus discussed Paul’s case with Herod Agrippa II (ruled AD 50-100). Agrippa had come to Caesarea to make a courtesy call on the new governor. But Paul was not afraid of death, but he objected to being turned over to a biased court intent on murder, not justice (25:16). This fulfilled Paul’s conviction that he must see Rome (19:21); 21:31; 22:27; Rom 1:13-15, 15:22-29.

25:17 I did not delay: In contrast with Felix, his allies, and Festus, Paul had done nothing deserving death.
have brought him before all of you, and especially, King Agrippa, so that after we examine him, I might have something to write. 2 For it makes no sense to send a prisoner to the emperor without specifying the charges against him!"

26 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You may answer for yourself." So Paul, gesturing with his hand, started his defense: "27 I am fortunate, King Agrippa, that you are the one hearing my defense today against all these accusations made by the Jewish leaders, 28 for I know you are an expert on all Jewish customs and controversies. Now please listen to me patiently!"

29 As the Jewish leaders were well aware, I was given a thorough Jewish training from my earliest childhood among my own people and in Jerusalem. 30 If they would admit it, they know that I have been a member of the Pharisees, the strictest sect of our religion. 31 Now I am on trial because of my hope in the fulfillment of God’s promise made to our ancestors. 32 In fact, that is why the twelve tribes of Israel zealously worship God night and day, and they share the same hope I have. 33 Since the kingdom cannot be gained by force, 34 why does it seem incredible to any of you that God can raise the dead? 35 I do not believe I must do everything I could oppose the very name of Jesus the Nazarene. 36 Indeed, I did just that in Jerusalem. Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many believers 37 there to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death. 38 Many times I had them punished in the synagogues to get them to curse Jesus. 39 So was violently opposed to them that I even chased them down in foreign cities. 40 One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, amid the忻议 and ceremony of the leading priests. 41 About noon, 26:1-23

My Master, as I was on the road, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. 42 We all fell down, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will." 43 "Who are you, Lord? I asked. 44 "And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. 45 Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. Tell people that you have seen me, and tell them what I will show you in the future. 46 And I will rescue you from this people and the Gentiles. 47 Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles 18 to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God’s people, who are set apart by faith in me."

48 And so, King Agrippa, I obeyed that vision from heaven. 49 I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and to the Gentiles, that all must repent of their sins and turn to God, and prove their repentance by the good things they do. 50 Some Jews arrested me in the Temple for preaching this, and they tried to kill me. 51 But God had me right up to this present time so I can testify to everyone, from the least to the greatest. I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen—"that the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and in this way announce God’s light to Jews and Gentiles alike."

52 Suddenly, Festus shouted, "Paul, you are insane. Too much study has made you crazy!" 53 But Paul replied, "I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus. What I am telling you is true and sober truth. 54 And King Agrippa knows about these things. I speak boldly, for I am sure these events are all familiar to him, for they were not done in a corner! 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you are familiar with them. 28 Agrippa interrupted him. "Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly?"

29 Paul replied, "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains. 30 Then the king, the governor, Bernice, and all the others stood and left. As they went out, they talked it over and agreed. 31 So Agrippa said to Festus, "He could have been set free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar."

6. PAUL GOES TO ROME (27:1-28:31)

27 Then the time came, we set sail for Italy. Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius, a captain of the Imperial Regiment of Macedonia, a Roman officer. 26:28 Or "A little more, and your arguments would make me a Christian." 27:1 A Roman province in what is now western Turkey.

28:1 Paul’s question put Agrippa in a bind. If he said he believed the prophets, he knew Paul would press him on the Christian message; if not, he would offer the devilish Jews his audience. Agrippa knew that Paul wasn’t crazy and that Paul’s testimony about Jesus was historically unusual. He could not avoid Paul’s question and refused to face the claims of Christianity. Instead, the statement given by Paul was too brief for him to arrive at a responsible decision.

29:2 Paul’s bold answer shows his quickness in repartee. He challenges Agrippa and his whole audience about the value of knowing Christ and making a personal commitment to him.

30:1 The consensus of these rules was that Paul had not done anything to deserve death or imprisonment. 31:3 Julius was asked to the business of Paul. He might have been brought before Caesar. Paul might not have been alive (2:1-5). As it was, he was fulfilling God’s purposes for him (23:11).

27:1 Julius is otherwise unknown. The Imperial Regent (see note on 10:1) served in Syria during this time.

27:2-46 Paul went to Thessalonica and a co-worker with Paul in Asia (see 19:29, 20:4, 6; Phm 1:24). - Adra
cus was the governor of the southern coast of Asia Minor southeast of Troas. 27:3 Siron, the coast about 70 miles (110 km) north of Caesarea, was the first port of call. Julius treated Paul kindly but sent him to the local Christian friends to receive him.

27:4-6 Luke describes in detail the sea route north and west (27:2, 8, 10, 15, 22). These ports were on the southern coast of Asia Minor. - Myra was a regular stop for Egyptian grain ships bound for ports on the west coast of Asia Minor. 27:7 The great difficulty was due in part to the lateness of the season (27:9). 27:8-20 Paul’s ship was located at the northeastern tip of Crete, the largest of the Greek islands. 27:27 Paul’s stay on the southern side of the island of Crete. 27:9 Because it was so late in the fall, this was a dangerous time for a voyage on the Mediterranean.
sea travel because it was so late in the fall," and Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it.

26 Then, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on—shipwreck, loss of cargo, and danger to our lives as well."

27 But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the captain and the owner than to Paul. The shipwreck of Fair Havens was an exposed harbor—a poor place to spend the winter—most of the crew wanted to go to Phoenix, farther up the coast of Crete, and spend their winter there. Paul was a good harbor with only a southwest and northwest exposure.

**The Storm at Sea**

28 When a light wind began blowing from the south, the sailors thought they could make it. So they pulled up anchor and sailed close to the shore of Crete. But the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (called a “northeaster”) drove across the island and blew us out to sea. The sailors couldn't turn the ship into the wind, so they gave up and let it run before the gale.

29 We sailed along the sheltered side of a small island named Cauda, where with great difficulty we hoisted aboard the lifeboat at dawn and they left us. Then the sailors rowed the ropes out of the ship to strengthen it. They were afraid of being driven across to the sandbars of Syr­ris off the African coast, so they lowered the sea anchor and allowed the ship and were driven before the wind.

30 The next day, as gale-force winds continued to batter the ship, the crew began throwing overboard cargo. The following day they even took some of the ship’s gear and threw it overboard. The terrible storm raged for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone.

31 No one had eaten for a long time. Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, "Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Crete. You would have avoided all this damage and loss. But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. For this last night an angel of the God of whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, and he said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What’s more, God in his goodness has granted safety to every­one sailing with you.' So take courage! I believe God. It will be just as he said. But we will be shipwrecked on an island.”

**The Shipwreck at Malta**

32 About midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, as we were being driven across the Sea of Adria, the sailors sensed land was near. 33 They dropped a weighted line and found that the water was 120 feet deep. But a little later they measured again and found it was only 90 feet deep. 34 At this rate they were afraid we would soon be driven against the rocks along the shore, so they threw out four anchors from the back of the ship and prayed for daylight.

35 Then the sailors tried to abandon the ship; they lowered the lifeboat and they were going to put out anchors from the front of the ship. 36 But Paul said to the com­manding officer and the soldiers, “You will all die if the sailors stay aboard. So the soldiers cut the ropes to the lifeboat and let it drift away.

37 Just as day was dawning, Paul urged everyone to eat. "You have all become so worried that you haven’t touched food for two weeks,” he said. 38 “Please eat something to give you strength before we go onshore.”

**The Arrival at Malta**

27:29-32 The last night on which the ship was accompanied by the Dar's numerous crew occurred in late September or early October. 27:29 Some manuscripts read Clauda. 27:30 The Sea of Adria includes the central portion of the Adriatic Sea. 27:31 On 72 sails. 27:32 On 162 sailors. 27:33-35 Paul's remarks are those of a true leader who personally assesses a perilous situation, decides on action, and leads others in solving the problem. 27:36-27:39 Perhaps the most famous of the shipwreck narratives, this is the only account of the event to be included in both the Greek and Latin manuscripts of the New Testament. 27:36 The food brought renewed strength and encouragement to the frightened and exhausted crew and prisoners alike. 27:37 The number of persons onboard fits well with the idea that the Roman prisoner was known as a ship of grains of the period.

**Angels**

In the book of Acts we frequently encounter the ministry of angels. On several occasions, an angel of the Lord made possible miraculous escapes from prison (5:19; 12:6-11). An angel offered a message of encouragement to Paul in the midst of a violent storm (27:23-24). An angel also directed Cornelius to seek the Good News from Peter (10:9; 12:7; 11:13). On the other hand, we are told that an angel struck down Herod Agrippa “because he accepted the people's worship instead of giving the glory to God” (12:23). Throughout Acts, God was guiding his people in their ministry and using angels to accomplish his purposes.

The ministry of angels is also prominent in the Gospels. Angels announced the births of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 1:1-2; 2:7). Jesus was ministered to after his temptation (Matt 4:9). Angels appeared at the empty tomb after the resurrection of Jesus (Matt 28:2-3; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:23; John 20:12).

Throughout the Bible, angels are God's heavenly agents who carry out his purpose and communicate God's will to humanity (Gen 16:7; Num 22:22-34; Judg 13:13-21; 2 Kgs 1:3; 15; Zech 1:1-12; 12:8). Angels had a role in putting God's law into effect through Moses (Acts 7:39, 40; Gal 3:19). They are “spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salva­tion” (Heb 1:14). Angels dispense God's grace and sometimes administer his judgment (Acts 12:23; 2 Kgs 19:35; Rev 9:15; 16:1-12). Angels were witnesses of Christ's life (1 Tim 3:16), and they are now witnesses of the lives of God's people (1 Cor 11:10; 1 Tim 5:22). There are guardians angels who protect God's people (Matt 18:10; see also Rev 7:14; 11:9, 11: Act 12:11). Angels will accompany Christ when he returns (Matt 25:31; 2 Thess 1:7-8) and will participate in the final judgment (Matt 25:34, 41-46; 24:31; Mark 13:27; Luke 29:26; 12:8; 2 Thess 1:7).

Some angels have fallen into sin and are destined for eternal judgment (Matt 25:41; 2 Pet 2:2-4; 1 Jude 6). The only angels named in the Bible are Michael and Gabriel, who carry out special assignments (Dan 8:16; 8:19; 2:10; 12:1; 12:12; Luke 1:19-20; 1 Thes 4:16; Jude 1:9).

Although angels are spiritual and heavenly beings, angels are not to be worshiped (Isa 2:8; 40:18; 48:1-2; 1 Sam 28:18; Exod 20:5; Deut 8:5). Because they are inferior to Christ (Heb 1:5-14), angels are not to be recognized as gods (Heb 1:14).
Paul on the Island of Malta

28 Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. 29 The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us. 30 Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, bit him on the hand. 31 The people of the island saw it hanging from his hand and said to each other, “A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live.” 32 But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unhurt. Paul waited for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw that he wasn’t harmed, they changed their minds and decided he was a god.

7Near the shore where we landed was an estate belonging to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us and treated us kindly for three days. 8 As it happened, Publius’s father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him. 9 Then all the other sick people on the island came and were healed. 10 As a result we were showered with honors, for the people were all eager to have us leave so quickly as possible.

The Trip from Malta to Rome

11 It was three months after the shipwreck that we set sail on another ship that had wintered at the island—an Alexandrian ship with the twin gods* as its figurehead. 12 Our first stop was Syracuse,* where we stayed three days. 13 From there we sailed across to Rhegium. A day after a south wind began blowing, the following day we sailed up the coast to Putoeli. 14 There we found some believers,* who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. 15 The brothers and sisters* in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum* on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. 16 When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God.

17 When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to live privately or to have his own prison lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier.

Paul’s Ministry in Rome (28:17-31)

17 Three days after Paul’s arrival, he called together the local Jewish leaders. He said to them, “Brothers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman government, even though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. 18 The Romans tried me and wanted to release me, because they found no cause for the death sentence. 19 But when the Jewish leaders protested the decision, I felt it necessary to appeal to Caesar, even though I had no desire to press charges against my own people. 20 I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted and so I could explain to you that I am bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel—the Messiah—has already come.”

28:11 The twin gods were the Roman gods Castor and Pollux. 28:12 Syracuse was on the island of Sicily. 28:13 Rhegium was on the coast of Italy. 28:14 Greek brothers. 28:15 The Forum was about 41 miles (66 kilometers) from Rome. 28:16 The Three Taverns was about 33 miles (53 kilometers) from Rome.

28:1 Another Egyptian ship from Alex- andria took Paul and his companions on board after an interval of three months and the worst of the winter had passed.

28:2 Syracuse was the capital of the eastern half of Sicily.

28:3-14 They sailed across the Straits of Messina to Rhegium on the southern tip of Italy. This port was a stopping place for ships traveling from the west coast of Italy to the eastern Mediterranean. • Patellus (modern Pozzuoli) was a major port of entry for large grain ships bringing supplies from the east to Rome. Paul spent a week here with some local believers before moving on to Rome.

28:5 Paul was greeted by brothers and sisters who met his party on the way up to Rome.

28:16 Paul was allowed to have his own . . . lodging, apparently in private facilities, though he was guarded by a soldier. Though Paul was traveling in chains, “the word of God cannot be chained” (2 Tim 2:9). Paul was probably treated so well because of his social status or Roman citizenship (cp. Acts 16:38; 22:25-28).

28:17-20 Conscious that the Good News was to be presented to the Jews first (1:16; Rom 3:18), Paul was concerned that the false charges against him might already have reached Rome. Paul summarized the local Jewish leaders and gave an account of his life and work. He insisted that he was guilty of no criminal offense, but strong Jewish oppo- sition had made it necessary for him to appeal to the emperor. Paul had nothing against his own people; rather, he wanted to explain his great conviction that the Messiah they had been expecting had already come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

28:21-22 The Jewish leaders assured Paul that they had received no reports against him, and they wanted to hear his explanation of this movement. 23 Paul explained how Jesus fulfilled the OT hopes for the Kingdom of God, the master theme of Jesus’ own preaching (Mark 1:14-15; see Matt 4:12-17; Luke 4:14-21). Referring to the Scrip- tures, Paul presented the case for Jesus as the promised Messiah.

24 Paul’s all-day message met a mixed response, as it had in other quarters (cp. 13:40-51; 17:11-14).

25-28 Paul parted with scriptural words of warning that are often used in the NT to explain the Jewish rejection of the gospel (cp. Matt 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 1:12; see Rom 1:11, 12-15).

28:29 Since Jews everywhere had been given an opportunity to accept the faith (13:46; see Rom 1:16), it was now time for the Gentiles to be offered this salvation.

28:31 Despite being under house arrest (28:16), Paul boldly proclaimed the Kingdom message. • And no one tried to stop him (Greek akouleusao, “without hinder- ance”): This single word in Greek is the last word of the book of Acts and one of the keys to its meaning: God’s word cannot be chained, even when its mes- sengers are (2 Tim 2:9; see Phil 1:12-14).

When you see what I do, you will not understand.

Acts is the story of an unhindered message of Good News, available to all people throughout the world, whether they are rich, poor, Gentile, proselyte, or Jew. The mission of proclaiming this message is accomplished in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8); it embraces Jews (3:1-5; see Phil 1:12; Luke 10:22; John 21:32; 20:19; 22:25).