

Study Tool from
The Moody Bible Commentary
for

the
Unexplainable
CHURCH

REIGNITING THE MISSION OF THE EARLY BELIEVERS

A 10-WEEK BIBLE STUDY OF ACTS 13–28

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INTRODUCTION

“In order to understand the Bible, you must read it.” This is an axiom that we both firmly believe. A secondary principle to which we both hold is, “If you didn’t understand it the first time, read it again.” More than anything else, the understanding of the Bible requires reading it, and then reading it some more. For many generations, committed believers held to the principle of the clarity of Scripture. Among other things, this simply means that if followers of Jesus the Messiah read the Bible, they can understand it. Nevertheless, there are some qualifications for this general principle:

1. Understanding the Bible requires effort—we need to work at studying the Scriptures.
2. Understanding the Bible will take time—we won’t get it all immediately.
3. Understanding the Bible requires that the Holy Spirit open our hearts and minds to the Scriptures.
4. Understanding the Bible will happen only if we are willing to obey it.
5. Understanding the Bible will never be complete—we can always learn more.

Having said this, we all need some help from time to time to understand the Scriptures. A person may be reading the Bible for his or her own personal time in the Word and run across a phrase or a word, and wonder, “*What does that mean?*” Or a Sunday school teacher or small group leader might be preparing a Bible Study and wonder, “*How does this passage fit with the paragraph that went before it?*” Or pastors or teachers might encounter people confused by a particular verse and might need some help clarifying its meaning. It is for these reasons, and many more, that all of the contributors for this resource have worked so hard to produce *The Moody Bible Commentary*. We want to help that reader, Sunday school teacher, home group leader or pastor have a better understanding of the Bible. Of course, there are many good commentaries to which the Bible student could turn. What makes this commentary distinctive?

The Moody Bible Commentary is trustworthy. For generations Moody Publishers has had the slogan, “The Name You Can Trust.” That derives from being the publishing house of the Moody Bible Institute, an institution that has maintained its commitment to the truth of the Word of God since 1886. Since the founding of Moody Bible Institute, there have been countless attacks on the veracity of Scripture, innumerable attempts to undermine its teaching, and significant challenges to its authority. Nevertheless, in all that time, the administrators and professors at Moody Bible Institute have maintained a commitment to the inerrancy and inspiration of the Bible as the very Word of God. This high view of Scripture, along with a determination to practice first-rate biblical scholarship, has made Moody the name you can trust. Thirty faculty members of the Moody Bible Institute have worked together to produce *The Moody Bible Commentary* with explanations that are reliable.

The Moody Bible Commentary is understandable. The authors and editors have striven to explain the Scriptures in a simple and clear way. They defined theological terms, clarified the meaning of difficult biblical words, identified ancient sources with which readers might be unfamiliar, and gave the geographical locations of ancient biblical cities and towns. Although the writers engaged in excellent scholarly research, they made sure that readers would not need a commentary to help them understand this commentary.

The Moody Bible Commentary shows the logic of biblical books. Too often people read the Bible without regard for its literary context or structure. But the writers of Scripture, under the superintending work of the Holy Spirit, wrote inspired text with great literary artistry. Therefore, all biblical books have literary structure and strategies. One distinctive feature of this commentary

is that it follows the structures that are inherent in the biblical books themselves. The commentary on each biblical book has an outline in its introduction. The body of the commentary follows that same outline so a reader can follow the structure throughout that specific book. Moreover, the commentary itself traces the flow of thought, showing how each individual section fits in the overall argument of the biblical book. In essence, *The Moody Bible Commentary* will provide a road map through each book of the Bible.

The Moody Bible Commentary deals with difficult verses. Sometimes the most frustrating aspect of using a commentary is that it complicates the explanation of difficult or disputed verses and fails to offer help precisely where it is most needed. The authors and editors worked hard to be alert to the possible difficulties in a text and its interpretation, and to address those issues clearly. Of course, every reader finds different questions and sees different difficulties. Nevertheless, this commentary hopes to answer the more perplexing questions. For example, does a particular Bible passage seem to contradict another? Not if it is the inspired Word of God. Also, readers of Scripture are often perplexed by biblical prophecies, wondering when and how these were or will be fulfilled. When these apparent contradictions or perplexing difficulties present themselves, this commentary will address those issues. After all, if a commentary does not address the hard or unclear verses, then it really is not much help at all.

The Moody Bible Commentary uses a literal interpretive method and applies it consistently. By “literal” we mean that the method that governs this commentary understands the words of the text in a normal way. Unless there is a good reason to think otherwise, the phrases and expressions of Scripture are interpreted according to what appears to be their plain sense. If there is a figure of speech or symbol, then it is interpreted with sensitivity to that figurative expression. However, even in the case of figurative language, there is always some spiritual or physical reality the biblical author is conveying through the figure of speech. For example, Jesus is not a literal door (see Jn 10:9), but this metaphor describes Him literally, as the only way for a person to enter a forgiven relationship with God.

Virtually all biblical interpreters agree with this “literal” approach. However, all do not apply it consistently, particularly in prophetic passages. A distinctive feature of this commentary is that it understands much of prophecy in its literal sense and even prophetic symbols are recognized as referring to a genuine reality. As a result, this approach to interpretation will affect how the commentary understands Israel, the Church, and the end of days. In our view, this method of interpretation is the least subjective and easiest way to understand the Bible.

The Moody Bible Commentary sees the Old Testament as a messianic text. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples about “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Lk 24:44). In commenting on this passage, A. T. Robertson once remarked, “Jesus found himself in the Old Testament, a thing that some modern scholars do not seem to be able to do” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 2 [Nashville: Broadman, 1930], 294). Even though much of contemporary scholarship does not believe in direct predictive Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, this commentary does. It presumes that God could and did reveal the messianic hope to the writers of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, it consistently shows how these prophecies make sense in their literary context, pointing to the coming of the future Redeemer. Additionally, this commentary shows how the New Testament refers to Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of these predictions, identifying Him as the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world.

The Moody Bible Commentary is based on the original languages of Scripture. The commentary uses the *New American Standard Bible* as its English language Bible text. When you see quotations from the biblical text in the commentary, they are in bold and taken from the NASB. We chose this translation for the commentary because it is, at the same time, among the more literal and readable translations of the Bible available. However, the commentary authors did not rely on the translation of the NASB. Rather, in their research and study, they used the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts of the Bible. As a result, there are places where a commentary might point out a more favorable translation of a word or phrase. The authors explain why this particular translation is preferred and often show how a different English version may understand it in the same way or, if necessary, include their own translations of that phrase or word. As a result, this commentary provides a fresh exposition of the biblical text based on the original languages of Scripture.

The Moody Bible Commentary is user-friendly. A variety of elements make this commentary easy to use. Besides using understandable language, it is a one-volume commentary. By limiting it to just one volume, the commentary can be the one book on your shelf to which you can turn when you need help understanding the Bible. Of course there are times when readers will want to study a particular passage in greater detail. Therefore, the contributors included in-text citations, directing readers to works they can use for deeper study. Also, for those who would like greater depth in their study, there is a list of recommended works at the end of each individual commentary. Other helpful elements include an introduction to each book of the Bible, dealing with key features, such as author, date, recipients, historical setting, theological issues, place in the canon, and an outline. There are also maps of the Bible lands as they relate to the Scriptures and helpful charts that clarify the biblical text.

Other aids are included to help with your own personal study and deeper application. Of course, there are subject and Scripture indexes to help readers locate or return to key themes and issues as needed. At various points throughout, there are cross references to key Bible passages that discuss related issues (typically shown with cf. and the Bible verses). Also included are notes directing the reader to other parts of the commentary for further discussion of the same issue if it is discussed elsewhere. In addition, each chapter in the commentary includes some points of application for today's reader, reflecting the Scripture's teaching that it remains a light to guide our paths (Ps 119:105) and is useful in daily life "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2Tm 3:16). Overall, this commentary wants to give you an accessible resource that will readily open the Bible for you, making simple what some might think is overly complex.

Most of all, we want to encourage you never to substitute reading this commentary for actually reading the Bible. All of us, editors and contributors alike, want to support your reading of the Bible by helping you understand it. But it is the actual reading of the Bible that will transform our lives. We concur with the wisdom of Proverbs: "He who gives attention to the word will find good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD" (Pr 16:20).

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were amazed. After explaining how the Lord delivered him, Peter told them to inform James (the brother of the Lord) about his release, and left Jerusalem. Either sometime previously or at this point, James had become the leader of the Jerusalem assembly. Peter, who had functioned in this role at the birth of the church, recognized James' leadership here. This foreshadowed the role James would play as leader of the Jerusalem council where Peter merely served as a witness (Ac 15).

12:17-19. The escape was a mystery to the guards. Herod questioned them and ordered them **led away** for execution. Guards were held accountable for the security of prisoners, and sometimes would commit suicide to avoid execution if a prisoner escaped (See 16:27, the Philippian jailer).

b. Through Retribution: Herod Agrippa I Was Struck Dead (12:20-25)

12:20-23. In contrast to Peter's dramatic release, Luke described Herod's disastrous end. The historical situation is described well by Bock (*Acts*, 430): "Herod is caught in a dispute with Tyre and Sidon over the provision of food. These two Phoenician cities need food and commerce from the region and have engaged in trade over a long period . . . Herod can control where the commerce goes, and so, if he uses another port, such as Berytus (Beirut) or Caesarea, it could hurt Tyre and Sidon financially and possibly in terms of provision as well." Apparently Herod became infuriated with the cities, and representatives from them came to Herod at Caesarea to fix things. Once an accord was reached, perhaps in connection with Herod's celebration of Caesar Claudius's birthday, Herod sought to celebrate with a speech, the reactions to which both Luke and Josephus (*Ant.* 19.8.2 [lines 343-350]) attested. Those reactions included the people praising him as a god. This type of flattery was often heaped on rulers and dignitaries among the Gentiles; the Jews, however, reserved this honor for God. But Herod did not refuse their praise. In fact he seemed to delight in it. The Lord ordered an angel to judge him, and he died from some kind of painful and horrible intestinal disease (**eaten by worms**). **Died** is literally "breathed his last" (cf. 5:5), and was used for divine judgment.

12:24. Though Herod attempted to eliminate the church's leaders, in the end, he was eliminated. His death made it possible for the Word of God to continue its advance.

God's sovereignty is a mystery. James was executed, but Peter was miraculously released. Why God did not intervene to rescue James is a mystery that defies finite understanding. The mystery continues today. We still do not understand why God delivers some believers from danger and even death, but not others. Christians who suffer and die, sometimes as martyrs, are not notorious sinners. They are godly and love the Lord, yet the Lord allows the enemies of Christianity to persecute them. In many places in the world today, Christians suffer and die for their faith. Stott, however, has reminded us that the victory of tyrants is temporary. He said, "Tyrants may be permitted for a time to boast and bluster, oppressing the church and hindering the spread of the gospel but they will not last. In the end their empire will be broken and their power abased" (*Acts*, 213).

We do not know what would have happened to Peter if the church had not prayed. We are not even certain that they were praying for his release, since they seem to have been embarrassingly surprised when he suddenly appeared at the house where they were meeting. Like God's sovereignty, prayer is also somewhat of a mystery. Scripture makes it clear that we ought to pray and that prayer does make a difference. God answers prayer. But contrary to what some believe and teach, we do not need to have a gigantic measure of faith, only enough to believe that God will hear us and answer according to His sovereign and unalterable purposes.

In 12:25–13:3, the church at Antioch fulfilled Jesus' mandate to take the gospel to the world by commissioning two Jewish men, Paul and Barnabas, as the first missionaries to the Gentiles.

12:25. Luke continued the narrative from 11:30. Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch after delivering aid to the church in Jerusalem. They brought Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, with them. This introduction of John Mark to the narrative prepares the reader for the role he would play on the first journey.

C. To Asia Minor: The First Missionary Journey (13:1–15:35)

1. The Circuit of Proclamation (13:1–14:28)

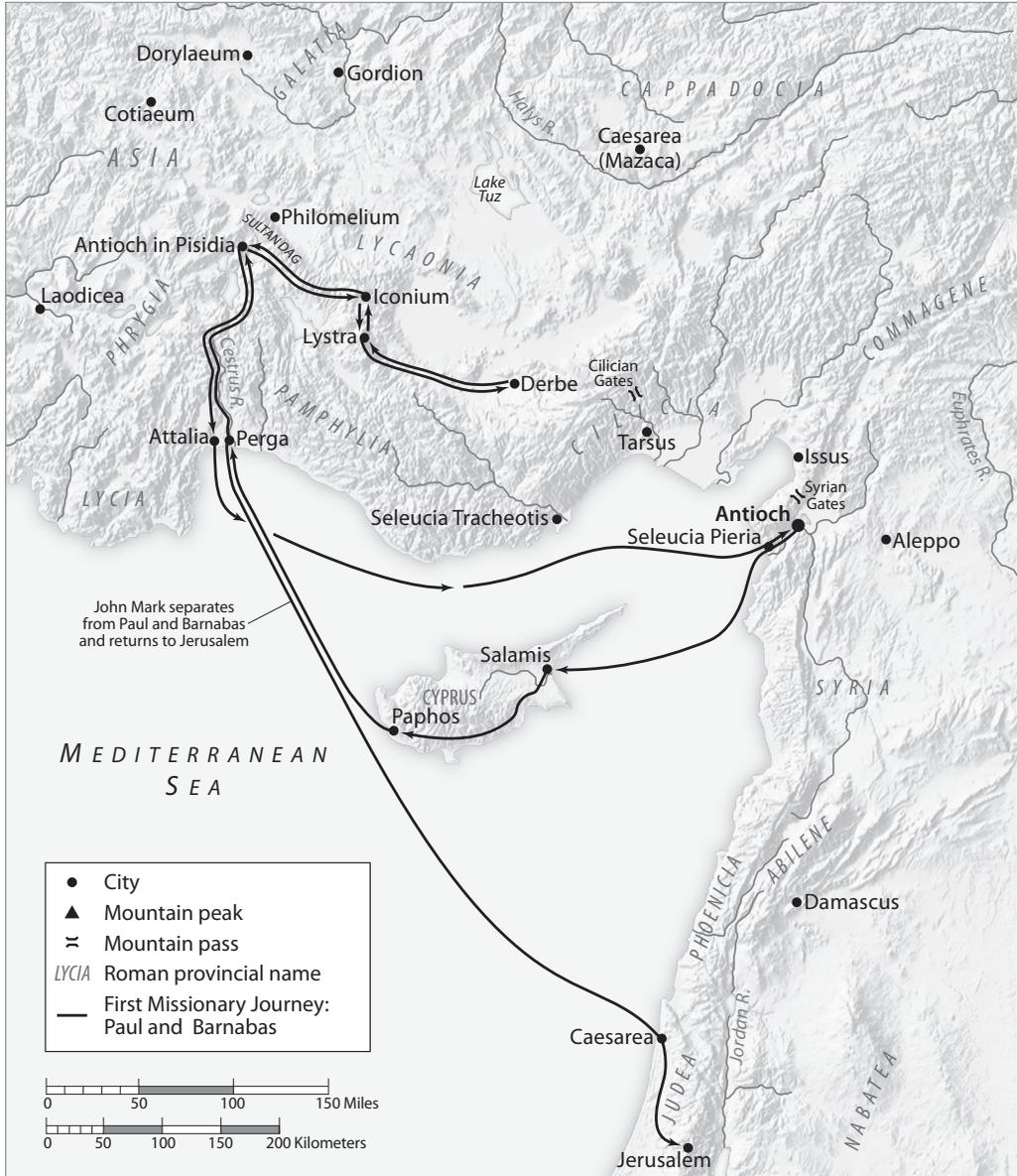
a. The Commissioning of Saul and Barnabas (13:1-3)

The elimination of Herod's threat freed the church for its first missionary endeavor. The reason the first Gentile mission began in Antioch and not Jerusalem had nothing to do with anti-Gentile bigotry in Jerusalem. Initially, the

gospel spread from Jerusalem to Antioch, so it was Hellenistic Jews who intentionally reached out to other Hellenistic Jews of Antioch (Ac 11:19). The Antiochene church was initially composed of Hellenistic Jews (Ac 11:20-21). Additionally, the Jerusalem church heard of the ministry in Antioch, sent Barnabas to investigate, and granted their approval of the church at Antioch through Barnabas (Ac 11:22-24). Ultimately,

the primary teachers at Antioch were Saul and Barnabas, both Jews (Ac 11:25-26). The reason the mission began in Antioch was that at this point Saul was ministering in Antioch and he was God's chosen vessel to be the apostle to the uncircumcised. Therefore, God sovereignly directed the Antiochene church to send these two Jewish men, Saul and Barnabas, to reach the Gentiles. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit,

Paul's First Missionary Journey



the church commissioned the missionaries, and they sailed for Cyprus, the homeland of Barnabas. When they set out for Galatia, Mark left the team and returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas made a circuit in Galatia preaching the gospel in four strategic cities—Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. On their return to Antioch, they reported how God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

13:1. The presence of both prophets and teachers is evidence God had blessed the church at Antioch with gifted men. The text here does not suggest a distinction in the ministry of prophets and teachers, but generally in the NT, prophets carry on an itinerant ministry and the teachers instruct believers in the local church. For other features related to those who were prophets, see the comments introducing 1Co 14.

The names of the men listed show the universal impact of the gospel. **Barnabas** was Jewish and from Cyprus; **Lucius** was from Cyrene in North Africa; **Simeon** (Niger) was Jewish with a Roman name; **Manaen** was a member of the upper class with connections to Herod; and **Saul** was a Jew from Tarsus, who trained under the great Rabbi Gamaliel (regarding whom, see the comments on 5:33-39).

13:2-3. The commissioning of the missionaries took place while the church was worshiping and **fasting**. The Holy Spirit gave divine authorization for the first missionary journey by directing the church to **set apart** (dedicate) Barnabas and Saul for the first missionary journey.

The church recognized the divine commission of Barnabas and Saul by the “laying on of hands” (for which, see the comments on 6:5-6). After more fasting and prayer, the men were sent out under the authority of the church.

The description of the commissioning of the missionaries suggests a twofold responsibility for the church—worship and mission. Both are essential. The church should meet to worship and also to witness to the world.

b. The Journey by Saul (Paul) and Barnabas (13:4–14:28)

(1) Antioch to Seleucia to Salamis on Cyprus (13:4-12)

(a) The Opposition by Elymas (13:4-8)

In 13:4–14:28, Luke presented the circuit the missionaries travelled, starting with Paphos in 13:4-12.

13:4-5. The missionary team went first to **Cyprus**, the home of Barnabas (cf. Ac 4:36). They

began their ministry in Salamis on the east of the island in **synagogues**, which were logical places for explaining how Jesus fulfilled OT messianic promises.

13:6-8. From Salamis, they traveled about 90 miles west to **Paphos**, the capital of Cyprus. At Paphos they encountered **Bar-Jesus** who was described as a Jewish **magician** and **false prophet**. His name meant “son of Jesus,” which is ironic because he opposed the servants of Jesus. It is also ironical that **Sergius Paulus**, who was a Gentile and **proconsul** (governor), summoned Barnabas and Paul so he could hear the Word of God from them (which is probably why Luke labeled him as **a man of intelligence**, v. 7), but Elymas (the Gk. name for Bar-Jesus) tried to keep Sergius Paulus from coming to faith. Elymas, who was the personal magician of the proconsul, realized that if Sergius Paulus trusted Christ, he would be unemployed.

(b) The Blinding of Elymas (13:9-12)

13:9-11. Luke noted Saul’s name change. Now that he was ministering in a Gentile cultural context, Saul assumed his Greek name, “Paul.” It is also significant that Paul was **filled with the Holy Spirit**, an indication that his ministry was divinely approved and inspired.

Paul announced judgmental blindness on Elymas, who was full of deceit and treachery. He was a **son of the devil**, an **enemy of all righteousness**, and attempted to pervert the truth. Paul announced temporary, not permanent, judicial blindness on Elymas.

13:12. In contrast to the blinding of Elymas, a Jew, Sergius Paulus, a Gentile, came to faith not because of the judgment on Elymas but because of the teaching of the Lord. The blinding of Elymas and the conversion of Sergius Paulus demonstrated the beginnings of the change that would happen in the early church—Israel would more and more reject the gospel, while Gentiles would be increasingly receptive. Paul noted later in Rm 11 that the Jewish people were hardened by God to allow time for the gospel to be taken to the Gentile world, and the Gentiles would be the ones more inclined initially to embrace Messiah Jesus (cf. the comments on Rm 11:11-24). Paul’s experience here at Paphos foreshadowed what he would experience throughout his life in ministry to Jews and Gentiles. His gospel message would largely be rejected by Jews but accepted by Gentiles. From a theological perspective this event provided the historical background for Paul’s discussion of Jewish

unbelief in Rm 9–11. There Paul answered the question about Gentile responsiveness to the gospel and Jewish unbelief. Did it mean that God's plan of redemption for the Jewish people had failed? The answer is an emphatic, "No!" Rather, Paul explained, Jewish unbelief opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Nevertheless, the temporary blinding of Elymas cannot be cited to support the teaching that the church has replaced Israel in God's program. See the comments on Rm 11:25–32.

This act of judgment was similar to Peter's announcement of judgment on Simon Magus (Ac 8), a comparison that functions to confirm the legitimacy of Paul's apostleship. Like Peter, who was one of the Twelve and an apostle to the Jews, Paul had the same apostolic authority as an apostle to the Gentiles.

(2) Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia (13:13)

13:13. When they arrived at the port town of Perga, John Mark returned to Jerusalem (cf. 11:30). Numerous reasons have been suggested for Mark's returning to Jerusalem. Most likely he was overwhelmed with the rigors of the ministry this missionary team was involved in, rather than that some fundamental doctrinal rift developed between John Mark and his veteran colleagues.

(3) Perga to Pisidian Antioch (13:14–50)

(a) Paul's Message in Antioch (13:14–41)

13:14–15. At Antioch, Paul established a pattern for ministry by preaching first to Jews and then to Gentiles. Paul followed this strategy in every city with a sizeable Jewish population. In Philippi, according to 16:13, it seems Paul was seeking a "place of prayer," probably for Jewish people. So even in Philippi he sought out Jewish people first.

After reading from **the Law and the Prophets**, the elders of the synagogue asked Paul and Barnabas to speak. It was customary to read from two sections of the OT—**the Law and the Prophets**, and then give an interpretation. The elders apparently considered Paul and Barnabas qualified to explain the Scriptures, so although they were visitors, they were asked to speak. Paul seized the opportunity to explain how the promises of God to Israel were fulfilled in Christ.

Paul's message spanned the historical preparations God had made to prepare the Jewish people for the coming of their Messiah (13:16–22), and what actually transpired when Jesus arrived (13:23–37). Paul concluded this review of the historical facts related to Jesus by

challenging his listeners to trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (13:38–41).

13:16. He addressed both Jews and God-fearers, Gentiles who believed in God but were not converts to Judaism. The primary theme was suggested in 13:39: justification by faith, not by keeping the Law of Moses.

13:17–41. In his message, Paul gave a brief survey of Israel's history from the exodus (Moses) to the united kingdom (David). His main purpose in 13:17–23 was to connect Christ to David: **From the descendants of this man, according to the promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus** (13:23). When David desired to build a house for God, Nathan the prophet promised David an eternal dynasty (see the comments on 2Sm 7:6–16 for the Davidic covenant). Paul identified Jesus as the promised seed of David.

Paul leaped from David to John the Baptist in 13:24–25. His main point here was to emphasize that John was not the Messiah, but that his mission was to prepare the nation for the coming of the Messiah. John was regarded favorably by most of the Jewish people, and his purpose here may have been to connect Jesus with the Baptist in an attempt to incline the listeners favorably to Him.

In 13:26–30, Paul said that though the Scriptures were read in the synagogues, Israel's leadership did not understand the message of the prophets and they condemned the Savior though He was innocent. In contrast to how the Jewish leaders and Pilate condemned and conspired to kill Jesus, God raised Him from the dead, and His followers were witnesses of His resurrection.

In 13:31–37 Paul appealed to three OT texts to prove Christ's resurrection. Psalm 2 is a royal Psalm, and v. 7 makes an intimate connection between the Messiah and God. He is God's Son. Paul alluded to Is 55:3 in v. 34, and he informed his audience that the promises made to David had been given to them through Jesus who had been raised from the dead. As did Peter in his speech in Ac 2, Paul quoted Ps 16:10, and insisted that David could not have been speaking of himself since his tomb was in Jerusalem. Paul's appeal to these texts was not arbitrary. First, as a postexilic collection, the Psalms in general, and the royal Psalms in particular, pointed forward to the future royal son of David, the Messiah. Thus, just as Paul explained, in Ps 2 God was not addressing David, but rather called the Messiah His Son. In the same way, Ps 16:10 predicts that

some future individual would not experience decay in the grave, referring not to David but rather the future Davidic Messiah. This is all in accord with the Davidic covenant (2Sm 7:12-16), in which God mercifully promised David (Is 55:3) a future descendant, the Messiah, who would have an eternal house, throne, and kingdom.

Paul's main point is in 13:38-39. Forgiveness and justification are through faith in Jesus and not by the keeping of the **Law of Moses**. Both forgiveness and justification have a forensic sense. **Forgiveness** means that the legal penalty for one's sins is cancelled, and justification means that a person is declared right with God. Paul insisted it is only through faith in Jesus' atoning death and resurrection that God grants complete forgiveness and declares a person totally righteous.

This text seems to fly in the face of the "New Perspective on Paul." Proponents of the New Perspective argue that Paul's problem with Judaism was the use of the law as a barrier to keep themselves separate from Gentiles and that Jews did not believe the law was a means to gain status with God. But it is the use of the law for justification that Paul refuted in his message. For more on the "New Perspective on Paul," see the Introduction to the book of Romans.

Paul concluded his message in 13:40-41 with a stern warning of judgment for rejecting Christ. Using a quote from Hab 1:5, he compared his audience to the Israelites who were destroyed during the Babylonian exile. The present generation of Jewish people would also experience judgment if they refused to believe that God is working through Jesus Christ. The key idea in the comparison is God's work. In the context of Acts, God's work included the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and Christ's work of building the church through Spirit-inspired witnesses.

(b) Reaction to the Message in Antioch (13:42-50)

13:42-43. In the response to Paul's message, some begged Paul to speak again the following Sabbath, and many Jews and converts to Judaism even began spending time with Paul and Barnabas. They were urged to continue to rely on God's grace and not revert to living by the law of Moses.

13:44-45. When Paul spoke the next Sabbath, the events of Paphos were repeated. When the Jewish leaders saw the favorable response of

many in the audience they were **filled with jealousy** and began to slander ("blaspheme") Paul.

13:46-48. Paul and Barnabas rebuked the opposition while saying it was necessary for the gospel to be preached to the Jewish community **first** because the gospel had primary relevance to the Jewish people (Jn 4:22; and comments at Rm 1:16). Nevertheless, Paul declared two consequences of their rejecting his message. One, they had judged themselves **unworthy of eternal life**. Here and in v. 48 are the only references in Acts where the content of **SALVATION** is described as the hope of eternal life. Two, Paul stated that rejection by the Jewish people justified his ministry to the **Gentiles**. Some have interpreted this as a transfer of Paul's ministry and message away from the Jewish people to exclusive proclamation to Gentiles. However, in the very next city (Iconium, 14:1-2), he went to Jewish people first once again. Much earlier, the prophet Isaiah had predicted the worldwide relevance of the ministry of God's Servant (Is 49:6; 42:6). The quote from Isaiah (v. 41) indicates that Jesus is God's anointed Servant.

13:48-49. In contrast to the Jews, Gentiles rejoiced and those who were **appointed to eternal life believed**. As God chose Israel as His special people, He now sovereignly granted eternal life to Gentiles. In addition, Luke indicated that no one can save himself; people are saved only because of God's gracious choice. Opposition could not stop **the word of the Lord**; the gospel made an impact upon the entire region. Luke referred to the message as **the word of the Lord** (vv. 48-49) not to describe the apostolic preaching as Scripture but to indicate that their message was from God. As Paul stated in Gl 1 the gospel is not a message he created but one he received from God.

13:50. The response of the Gentiles led to even greater opposition. Some Jewish people incited upper class women (probably Gentiles) and the Gentile leaders of the city to persecute Paul and Barnabas, who were forced to leave the district.

(4) Antioch to Iconium: Mixed Reactions (13:51-14:5)

13:51-52. With a symbolic act of judgment, Paul and Barnabas **shook off the dust of their feet** and traveled to Iconium, 90 miles southeast of Pisidian Antioch.

Like the apostles who rejoiced when flogged by the Sanhedrin (cf. Ac 5:40-42), the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Joy and courage to boldly proclaim the Word of God in

the face of persecution were evidences of the Holy Spirit in Acts.

14:1-2. At Iconium the divided response and hostility of some Jewish people at Paphos and Pisidian Antioch were repeated. When the missionaries spoke in the synagogue, a large number of both **Jews and Greeks** believed. But some unbelieving Jewish people **stirred up** the minds of the Gentiles, turning them against Paul and Barnabas. The word translated by the NASB as **embittered** is literally “to cause someone to think badly about another, *make angry, embitter*” (BDAG, 502). Paul and Barnabas were so effective in convincing Jews and Greeks of the truth of their message that Jews sought the help of Gentiles to stop the missionaries.

14:3-7. Though the missionaries authenticated their message with **signs and wonders**, the people were still divided. Some believed the slander of the Jews, but others sided with the apostles. Luke called both Barnabas and Paul **apostles**, an extension of the ministry of an apostle beyond the Twelve.

(5) Iconium to Lystra (14:6-20a)

(a) A Case of Mistaken Identities (14:6-18)

When both Gentiles and Jews attempted to stone the missionaries, Paul and Barnabas fled further southeast to the region of **Lycaonia**, and the cities of Lystra and Derbe.

14:8-10. At **Lystra** Luke provided an example of how Paul preached to Gentiles who did not know the OT. As Peter had healed a handicapped man (Ac 3), Paul healed a man who was physically challenged from birth. Luke’s purpose was to authenticate Paul’s apostleship to the Gentiles by showing that God was working in Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles with the same power that he worked in Peter’s ministry among the Jewish people. The difference between this account and Peter’s healing of the handicapped man is that Paul saw the man had **faith to be made well**. Though not stated, his physical healing was a picture of spiritual salvation.

14:11-13. The superstitious Gentiles mistakenly believed that Barnabas and Paul were the gods **Zeus** and **Hermes**. According to the local legend these gods had visited the region and blessed those who extended them hospitality but destroyed the homes of those who would not welcome them. Not wanting to risk judgment, the local temple priest brought sacrifices to worship them.

14:14-15. Barnabas and Paul vehemently protested. They did not attempt to exploit the

Lycaonians as itinerant sages might have done. Instead Paul seized the opportunity to tell the Lycaonians about God. Luke gave only a summary of Paul’s message. Paul took a different tack in preaching to Gentiles from what he did in preaching to Jews. He contextualized his message, but he did not change the essential content of his **gospel** message.

Paul called his message the **gospel**, the announcement of good news. The message of the pagan world was “bad news.” People lived in fear of fate and the fickleness of their gods. No one could know for sure what his or her eternal destiny would be, or even if there was life after death. Men and women were powerless to deliver themselves from the sinful tendencies of their fallen humanity. To helpless and hopeless pagans, the gospel is “good news.”

Because God is the creator of everything, Paul appealed for Lycaonians to repent, “to turn” from idolatry to faith in the only living God (cf. 1Th 1:19). Paul’s argument was from nature. It was not theological (Romans) or scriptural (Antioch) or philosophical (Athens).

14:16-17. Paul attempted to present a plan of salvation based on progressive revelation. The statement that in the past **He permitted all nations to go their own ways** does not mean that after God made the heavens and earth He abandoned His creation, or that He did not constantly exercise His providential and sovereign control. Paul’s point seems to indicate that God had not previously provided direct revelation of Himself to nations other than Israel, and had not called them to live under a specially revealed law similar to the law of Moses. He did, however, provide for them “general revelation,” proof of Himself in creation, as demonstrated by His provisions specified in v. 17. God has consistently provided evidence of His existence through His providential goodness by sustaining life. He gives to all men **rains, fruitful seasons, and food**. For a similar argument see Rm 1:18-32 and the comments there.

14:18. Paul’s message did not dissuade the Lycaonians from worshipping the missionaries as gods.

Paul made it clear that the people of Lystra had to choose. His presentation did not contain a hint of relativism. There is only one living God who is the creator of everything. To worship any other god is idolatry; the Lycaonians needed to repent. Had Paul been able to continue, he undoubtedly would have stated that Jesus Christ

is the culmination of redemptive history, though he would have arrived at that conclusion differently from how he did at Antioch preaching to Jews.

(b) Opponents from Iconium and Antioch (14:19-20a)

14:19-20a. Resembling a lynch mob, some Jewish people came from both Antioch and Iconium and stoned Paul. The wording of the text suggests that Paul was only unconscious and not killed, though the mob thought he was dead.

(6) Lystra to Derbe: A Favorable Reaction (14:20b-21a)

14:20b. Paul was no coward. After he regained consciousness, he went back into the city for the night. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe, which was about 60 miles away. Paul was not only courageous, he was also tough.

14:21. Luke gave only a capsule summary of Paul's ministry in Derbe. He preached "the good news" and won a large number of **disciples**.

(7) Backtracking: Derbe Back through Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch to Perga (14:21b-23)

The missionaries retraced their steps going to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia.

14:22-23. Paul and Barnabas were **strengthening** and **encouraging** the new converts. Paul was brutally honest. He warned that following Christ would not be easy. Believers should expect verbal abuse and physical persecution (**tribulations**), but he encouraged them to be faithful. In 2Tm 3:12 Paul wrote, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

They appointed elders, the spiritual leaders in the early church. 1 Timothy 3 and Ti 1 give their qualifications. After committing the new believers to the Lord by prayer and fasting, they traveled through Pisidia, preached the word in Perga, and sailed from Attalia to Antioch in Syria.

(8) Perga to Attalia to Syrian Antioch: The Conclusion of the First Missionary Journey (14:24-28)

14:24-28. Their work was complete because independent churches had been established. They gave God the credit for what they accomplished and were particularly surprised at how God had **opened a door of faith to the Gentiles**.

Some of the more significant features of the first missionary journey encompassed the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God. Almost by accident, the missionaries discovered God's plan of redemption included Gentiles as well as

Jews. Because the Holy Spirit directed the church to commission Paul and Barnabas, it was God himself who authorized the new missionary strategy of preaching the gospel to Gentiles, enabling them to come to Christ independent of Judaism—a policy that would be challenged and resolved at the Jerusalem Council.

**2. The Council of Confirmation (15:1-35)
a. The Issue at Stake (15:1-6)**

15:1-4. As a result of the first missionary journey, the conversion of Gentiles alarmed a group of Jewish traditionalists who insisted on circumcision as an essential part of maintaining one's salvation experience. The issue was not about Gentile participation in the covenant people of God.

When a group of these traditionalists came from Judea to Antioch teaching that circumcision was essential for salvation, Paul and Barnabas correctly viewed this as a threat to God's grace. After a heated debate with the protestors, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem and requested that the church resolve the issue. The meeting on this issue was called "the Jerusalem Council." Luke's account of this extremely important council explains how the early church resolved the issue of the law for Gentile believers. There is an enormous debate regarding the relationship of the Jerusalem Council with the timing of the writing of Paul's letter to the Galatians. It is not clear if Galatians was written before or after the Council. For these issues, see "Date" in the Introduction to Galatians. It is most likely that Galatians was written just prior to the Jerusalem council because Paul would likely have cited the decision of the council had it already happened.

15:5-6. **Some men** refers to those who belonged to "the party of the Pharisees" (cf. 15:5). It is not clear who these people **from Judea** were. They were Jewish people who may have been believing emissaries from the Jerusalem church who misrepresented the opinion of the apostles and the elders (vv. 5, 6), or they may have been false teachers with a Jewish background. However they are identified, they insisted that Gentile believers be circumcised and keep the other aspects of the law as befitting a member of God's covenant people. They insisted that every Gentile become a Jew in order to be right with God. Because circumcision was the physical sign for identifying a person as a member of Israel (see Gn 17), the practice became the linchpin for adherence to the law of Moses. These Jews

who advocated Gentile conversion to Judaism and obedience to the law were later rebuked as legalists in the epistle to the Galatians. **Dissension and debate** (v. 2) indicate that this was an enormously controversial issue, especially in light of Paul and Barnabas's practice of not requiring circumcision and law-keeping for those Gentiles already won to Christ. Paul's opponents understood Paul to be bringing a message that seemed to tell new followers of the Jewish Messiah that they need not obey God's laws.

Paul's concern was not primarily pragmatic, that adding circumcision to the gospel would hinder the success of the gospel. Rather, his concern was theological, that adding circumcision as a requirement would be adding works to the message of grace. Forcing Gentiles to submit to the law would distort the gospel of God's grace into a message of grace mixed with works. Paul and Barnabas protested this teaching and were appointed with a delegation to go to Jerusalem to resolve the controversy. The controversy broached in 15:1 is expanded in v. 5 and addressed beginning in v. 7. **Some of the sect of the Pharisees** (v. 5) are identified as believers.

b. The Speeches (15:7-21)

(1) Peter: Declaration of the Facts (15:7-11)

15:7-11. In the report on his ministry to Cornelius (vv. 7-11), Peter identified the heart of the issue. Salvation is by grace made available through the work of **the Lord Jesus**, not through the works of the law (v. 11). Even the Gentiles, as seen in the case of Cornelius, received the Lord by faith, received the Spirit, spoke in tongues, and were baptized. How could anyone think that they were not genuinely right with God, even apart from the works required by the law of Moses?

(2) Barnabas and Paul: Authentication of the Facts (15:12)

15:12. Barnabas and Paul reported on their ministry to Gentiles, giving a supernatural perspective. God confirmed their ministry among the Gentiles with miraculous **signs and wonders**, just as He had through Peter with Cornelius's household. See v. 8, which implies the miraculous manifestation of the giving of the Spirit to the Gentiles "just as He also did to us" (in Ac 2).

(3) James: Correlation with the Prophets (15:13-21)

15:13-21. James related the issue to God's comprehensive plan of redemption with a quotation from Am 9:11-15. James did, however, refer to

the Prophets (v.15), and while he cited only Am 9, other passages from the prophets forecast the inclusion of Gentiles *as Gentiles* (not "as Jews") among God's people (e.g., Is 2:2; 45:20-23; Jr 12:15-16; Hs 3:4-5; Zch 2:11; 8:22; and see Paul's citations of other texts on the theme of the inclusion of Gentiles in Rm 15:8-13; see the comments there). The rebuilding of David's dynasty refers to the promises God made to David (2Sm 7) and to Abraham (Gn 12:1-3), promises that had an initial, partial fulfillment in the wake of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, and the spread of the gospel, all of which signaled the presence of "messianic days." James's citation of Amos is primarily about the inclusion of Gentiles among the people of God without their having to become Jewish, not about the restoration of David's kingdom in and through the church (as covenant theologians argue). Robert L. Saucy (*The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993], 79) writes, "Amos looked forward to the times of the Messiah, which included the salvation of Gentiles without their becoming part of Israel. These times have arrived with Jesus, and the new work of God indicates that salvation is going out to the gentiles apart from keeping the law." Amos had prophesied the future salvation of Gentiles as part of God's program of redemption. God's plan is for **THE REST OF MANKIND** to **SEEK**, not only for Jews.

James's perspective drew less upon the practical experiences reported by Peter, Paul, and Barnabas and more upon the teaching of the OT prophets. If God's redemptive purposes included Gentiles, then the Jewish believers should not have erected barriers to their inclusion among God's covenant people. He recommended that the council reject the view of the legalists and not impose the law on Gentiles.

c. The Letter to Gentile Churches (15:22-35)

15:22-35. James also recommended the council send a letter to the Gentiles asking them to refrain from practices especially offensive to Jews (15:2-21). The council asked Gentiles to **abstain from** (1) **things sacrificed to idols**; (2) **fornication**; and (3) eating meat that has been **strangled** or has large amounts of **blood** in it.

The request for Gentile abstinence raises questions about the nature of these restrictions. Were the restrictions essentially a reiteration of the ceremonial aspects of the law of Moses? If

they were, then the council was contradicting its decision not to impose the law on Gentiles. The best solution is to relate the restrictions to the cultic worship in pagan temples where worshippers would strangle animals, cut their jugular veins to drink their blood, eat the meat that had been offered to idols and conclude with temple prostitution. This interpretation is consistent with Paul's teaching to the Corinthians about participating in idol worship (1 Co 10:14-22). The intent was to prevent the syncretism of paganism and the new faith. Although Gentiles did not need to convert to Judaism, they were required to leave pagan idol worship (cf. 1Th 1:9). This would preserve the testimony of the church among Jewish people, where the Torah and its strict prescriptions against idolatry are "read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (15:21).

The decision was important for three reasons. First, by not requiring Gentiles to convert to Judaism it protected the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone. Second, it preserved the purity of the church so that paganism would not be blended with the true faith. Third, the messianic faith, by not tolerating idolatry, set an important precedent of maintaining the messianic faith's testimony before Jewish people.

The wisdom of the decision was reflected in the response of the Gentile church at Antioch. When Paul and Barnabas, along with two respected men from the Jerusalem church, Judas and Silas, read the letter to the church at Antioch, the believers rejoiced. The potentially divisive issue of the law had been officially resolved and unity was preserved.

Judas and Silas ministered to the Gentile church with a message that strengthened them in their faith, and then they returned to Jerusalem (v. 34 is omitted in many manuscripts). Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch teaching **the word of the Lord**. The two continued their ministry among Gentiles unhindered by the dispute over the law of Moses.

D. To the Aegean Area: The Second Missionary Journey (15:36–18:22)

1. The Selection of the Team (15:36–16:3)

15:36–16:3. Paul and Barnabas decided to revisit the churches started on the first journey, but they disagreed on whether or not to take John Mark. Perhaps, because they were cousins, Barnabas wanted to take him. This is perfectly in keeping with Barnabas's nature as "the son of encouragement," that he would want to afford John Mark another opportunity. But Paul

objected. The mention that Mark had deserted them on the first journey supports Paul's view. This was a serious disagreement and not merely a difference of opinion. The expression **sharp disagreement** (*paroxysmos*) means "a state of irritation expressed in argument" (BDAG, 780). Both men vigorously defended their positions, leading to a separation of Paul and Barnabas. As promised in Rm 8:28, God brought good out of this disagreement. There were now two strong missionary teams instead of one!

Though Barnabas and Mark are not mentioned again in the book of Acts, Paul later spoke positively of Barnabas (1Co 9:6, Col 4:10), and also of Mark (2Tm 4:11).

The circumcision of Timothy (16:1-3) showed that the decision of the Jerusalem council was limited to Gentiles not being circumcised, not Jews. Timothy's mother was Jewish, so Timothy should have been circumcised as an outward sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Gn 17:9-14). By requiring Timothy to submit to circumcision, Paul avoided offending Jews for the purpose of ministry and recognized the continuation of the Abrahamic covenant for Jewish believers.

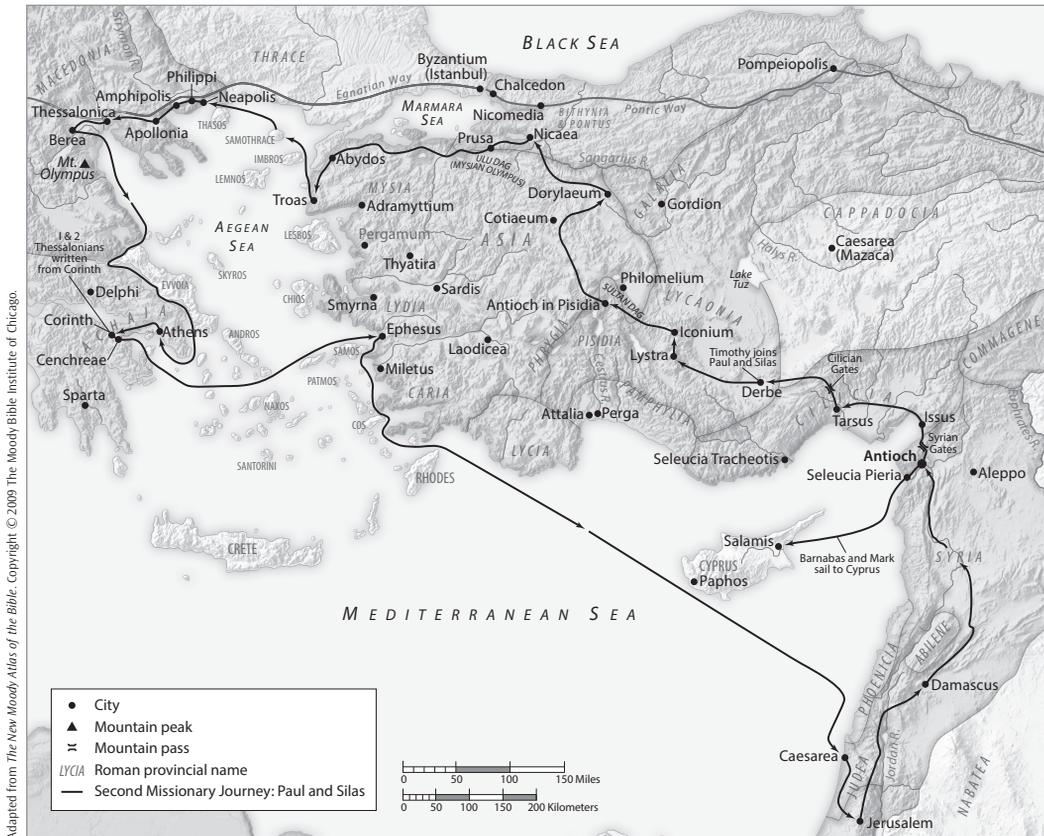
Paul's action here seems to contradict his position in Gl 2:3-5. He adamantly refused to allow for the circumcision of Titus; however, these two situations are different. Timothy was a Jew, but Gl 2:3 describes Titus as a Greek. So he was a Gentile, for whom circumcision would have been inappropriate and brought into question justification by faith alone. Paul had Timothy circumcised not as a precondition for salvation but as an outward sign of the Abrahamic covenant. Paul would never compromise the gospel, but he did compromise on lifestyle issues for the sake of effectiveness in ministry. Paul was willing to become all things to all men in order that he might win some (1Co 9:9-23). Moreover, Paul would have expected a Jewish believer like Timothy to maintain the outward sign of God's covenant relationship with Israel.

Paul continued his ministry of strengthening the churches by informing believers in Derbe and Lystra of the decision of the Jerusalem council. The wisdom of the council's decision about the law of Moses and Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy were reinforced in the positive response of the churches and their growth.

2. The Leading into Europe (16:4-10)

16:4-5. In the first journey, Luke focused on the Lord's sovereignty in opening the door of faith to a new group of people—the Gentiles. In

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



his account of the second (AD 51–52) and third (AD 53–56) missionary journeys, Luke showed the sovereignty of the Spirit in directing Paul and his companions into new geographical locations. Note that Luke did not make a sharp distinction between the second and third journeys. He began his account of the third journey almost incidentally in 18:23.

Acts 16:6–10 explains how Paul and his companions decided to preach the gospel in Macedonia. This was one of Paul's most strategic decisions because it resulted in the spread of the church westward to the continent of Europe.

16:6. Paul intended to minister in Asia, probably Ephesus after he revisited the churches planted on the first journey in Phrygia and Galatia, but **the Holy Spirit** prevented Paul and his companions from entering Asia. Luke did not tell us how, but it is obvious that He had a different plan for the missionaries.

16:7–8. Instead of turning back, Paul turned north, but again **the Spirit of Jesus** prevented

him from entering Bithynia. Paul turned west and traveled through Mysia to Troas. The change from Holy Spirit to the Spirit of Jesus reflects the early church's understanding of the deity of Jesus. Troas was located on the northwestern coast of Asia Minor or what is now part of Turkey. It was a coastal city and a departure point for Greece.

16:9–10. At Troas, in a vision, Paul saw a man of Macedonia summoning him to come to Macedonia. Paul could not have anticipated the importance of his response to the Macedonian vision. The vision marked a major turning point in the history of the church. Paul's obedient response to God's call caused the gospel to move westward and so to bridge two continents, Asia and Europe, positioning the new faith to become universal.

Longenecker reminds that the believer's response to the call of God is never a trivial matter. "Indeed as in this instance, great issues and untold blessings may depend on it" ("Acts," 458).

It may be to go across the street, across the country, or around the world. The eternal destinies of men and women may depend on our openness and willingness to obey the Spirit's promptings and move out of our comfort zones.

3. The Witness at Philippi (16:11-40)

In 16:11-40, Luke recorded that Paul began his Aegean campaign in Philippi, a strategic city on Egnatian Way (a major east-west road in the Roman Empire).

16:11-15. The missionaries sailed from Troas to **Samothrace** (an island approximately halfway to Neapolis) and then to **Neapolis** (a seaport 10 miles from Philippi). At some point, Luke joined Paul and Silas, which is indicated by the plural pronoun **we**.

Philippi was named after Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, in about 356 BC, and had developed into a major city in the province of Macedonia. Under Roman rule it was a senatorial rather than imperial province, so the city had elected magistrates (see vv. 20, 22, 35-38).

On the Sabbath, the missionaries went to a **place of prayer**. Apparently the Jewish community was small, and there was only a place of prayer rather than a synagogue (some think the place of prayer was in a synagogue). Women were present for prayer. Though participation in worship was limited, women were permitted to pray. While Paul was speaking to the women, the Lord opened the heart of Lydia to respond to the gospel. Lydia is identified as a business-woman from Thyatira who sold **purple fabrics**, which was the color of royalty and the rich. Purple cloth was extremely expensive because of the difficulty of producing the dye, which was made from mollusks (shellfish). Her name indicates she was a Gentile, so she was most likely a God-fearer (a Gentile who believed in God and followed the moral and ethical teachings of Judaism but was not a full convert). She was apparently single, perhaps a widow, since she was the head of her household, and they followed her lead in responding to the gospel. The evidence that Lydia's conversion was genuine was her offer of hospitality to the apostolic band. As did Peter (see 10:48), Paul and his companions stayed in the home of a Gentile convert.

16:16-18. On a subsequent Sabbath, Paul was confronted by a slave girl with a **spirit of divination**. A **spirit of divination** (lit., a "spirit of python," *pythona*) means "demon possessed." The "python" was a mythical serpent or dragon that guarded the Delphic oracle. The "python"

was supposedly killed by Apollo, but according to the legend "the spirit of the python" lived on, enabling those it possessed the ability to predict the future. The girl was not only demon possessed, she was a slave and exploited by her owners for profit.

Following Paul and his companions she repeatedly identified them as **bond-servants of the Most High God**. Paul objected for two reasons. First, though her statement was true, in a polytheistic culture it did not mean she recognized them as messengers of the only true God. Second, Paul did not want anyone to think that he was complicit in her magical or demonic powers.

Her constant tirade **annoyed** Paul, so he used his apostolic authority to deliver the girl from demon possession. He did this **in the name of Jesus**, giving evidence of the superiority of Jesus over demonic powers. She was delivered from the demonization, but her conversion was implied though not explicitly mentioned in the text.

16:19-24. Her owners were not happy about her conversion because it meant a loss of income. They seized Paul and Silas and accused them of disturbing the peace. The meaning of the charge about the violation of Roman customs (v. 21) is not clear. It was undoubtedly related to the loss of income and probably the fact that the religion of Rome was inclusive in contrast to Christianity, which is exclusive. If Paul and Silas were allowed to continue their ministry, it could affect the economy of Philippi and Rome's policy of religious toleration.

The magistrates arrested and punished Paul and Silas without a fair trial. They were flogged with rods (not the harsher whips with pieces of bone or metal) and imprisoned. The punishment would have involved being publicly stripped and caned. Under Roman law, however, Roman citizens were not to be beaten or whipped (see Cicero, *In Verrem* 5.62). It is unclear why Paul did not here invoke this privilege since he was a Roman citizen by birth, but it is possible that he may not have been given the chance.

16:25-26. In the middle of the night (**about midnight**) while Paul and Silas were praying and singing, they were miraculously set free. Instead of sending an angel as He did to free Peter, God used an earthquake. Though an earthquake is a natural phenomenon, God was the efficient cause behind the event.

16:27-30. The earthquake woke the jailer; and when he saw the prison doors were open, he assumed the prisoners had escaped. Since he was responsible for the security of the prisoners, he prepared to take his own life rather than risk execution. It was Roman law to execute the guard who allowed a prisoner to escape.

The jailer could not have been more surprised by what he discovered. Instead of escaping as the apostles did in Ac 5 and 12, Paul, Silas, and all the other prisoners stayed put. Seeing that the jailer was about to take his life, Paul **cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself for we are all here!”**

The jailer fell on his knees before Paul and Silas in fear, not worship. He called them **Sirs** (lit., “lords”), concluding they were undoubtedly divine men. The question he asked was not to save his life, **Sirs, what must I do to be saved?** He already knew the prisoners had not escaped. Most likely he heard enough of the gospel message from the disruptive but accurate words of the slave girl (Longenecker, “Acts,” 465), or perhaps from the missionaries following their incarceration, to recognize his spiritual need.

16:31. His cry for salvation (16:30) and Paul’s quick and concise answer captured the essence of the proper response to the gospel: **Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.** Paul urged the jailer to place his complete dependence upon the Lord Jesus for deliverance from the consequences of his sin. **And your household** does not mean that when he gets saved his household is automatically saved. The statement means that if he believed, and if his whole household believed, they would all be saved.

16:32-34. The jailer’s household was saved because they also believed, suggesting that his **household** consisted of those who were of sufficient age to exercise faith in Christ, and that infants were not among those baptized. All were immediately baptized after they believed. Though baptism does not save, it symbolizes cleansing from sin and is a further step of submission to the Lord. Luke presented twofold evidence of the authenticity of their faith. One, they opened their home to Paul and Silas. Two, they experienced the gift of joy; they **rejoiced greatly.**

16:35-40. The officials wanted to get Paul and Silas out of town quickly and quietly since the officials themselves had violated Roman law by arresting and punishing them without a trial.

Paul, however, was not willing to allow these administrators to simply dismiss the issue. Since they had been publicly punished, Paul used the leverage of his Roman citizenship to force the officials to admit publicly that they had misused their authority.

Paul did not use his citizenship to “get even.” He forced the officials to admit their error to protect the new faith from becoming an unauthorized or unfavorable religious movement. Paul also met with the believers at Lydia’s house to encourage them before leaving. He probably assured them that the officials would not punish them because of their faith in Christ.

The converts at Philippi were all completely different. Lydia was a successful businesswoman. The demon-possessed girl was a slave being exploited for profit. The Philippian jailer was a cog in the Roman machinery, afraid of losing his life. The conversion of these three individuals from culturally and economically diverse backgrounds is a testimony to the universal appeal and power of the gospel.

In this current time of social and ethnic diversity, believers also need to set an example of the power of Christ to unite rather than divide people by proclaiming the gospel to all people.

Luke, in 17:1-9, has given us only a brief summary of Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica. Paul attempted to minister in the synagogue, but was forced to flee to Berea because of Jewish opposition. The courage Paul and his team showed was remarkable. After enduring the abuse in Philippi, they then walked about 70 miles to Thessalonica to continue their missionary endeavors, but with the wounds on their bodies not yet healed from the beating.

4. The Witness at Thessalonica (17:1-9)

17:1. From Philippi, Paul traveled along the Egnatian Way to **Thessalonica**. It was a free city with its own elected officials (v. 6) and the capital of Macedonia. The city was founded by Cassander, one of the rulers of Macedonia after Alexander the Great’s death, in 315 BC and named after his wife, daughter of Philip II and half-sister of Alexander the Great. At the time of Paul’s visit, the population may have been as high as 100,000.

Paul considered Thessalonica a strategic location for preaching the gospel. The “good news” could spread east and west on the Egnatian Way, plus the synagogue in the city provided a point of contact for explaining how Christ’s life, death, and resurrection fulfilled Scripture.

17:2-3. Paul followed his personal strategy (**custom**) for ministry by going first to the synagogue. Though he had faced opposition from his Jewish countrymen on the first missionary journey, Paul remained committed to the strategy of proclaiming the gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (cf. comments at 13:46-48 and Rm 1:16). It was a wise strategy. His most effective ministry would have come from sharing the gospel with those whose backgrounds included knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and the concept of the Messiah, namely Jewish people and Gentile God-fearers.

Paul appealed to the OT to support his message that Jesus is the Messiah. It is not clear whether the reference to three Sabbaths means that Paul was only in Thessalonica for three weeks or that his ministry in the synagogue was for three consecutive weeks. The fruit of his ministry suggests the latter, so that he conducted his outreach even after the three weeks in the synagogue ceased. In either case he was obviously in the city long enough to organize a church.

Luke did not explain how Paul made his case, but his summary of Paul's preaching gives us the core message of the early church. First, Jesus' suffering and death was not a tragic and unexpected turn of events. The OT predicted both the suffering and resurrection of the Messiah. Second, this Jesus who rose from the dead is Israel's promised Messiah.

17:4. Though some Jews believed, Paul's greatest success was with Gentiles. Among the converts were **a number of the leading women**, most likely the wives of some of the city officials.

17:5-7. Some Jewish leaders became jealous. They resented that Paul persuaded Jewish people, Gentiles, and even women to become believers. They incited a mob that went to Jason's house in search of Paul and his companions. Unable to find Paul, they dragged Jason and other new believers before the city officials.

The charges were serious. One, they accused them of political agitation. Upsetting **the world** is hyperbole, but it does suggest that this new faith made a significant impact on the Roman Empire. Perhaps they had heard reports about Paul's arrest at Philippi. Two, they were defying Caesar's decrees by claiming that Christ is a king. Claiming that Jesus is an emperor rivaling Caesar was a capital offense. If the apostles had proclaimed Christ as king, they were talking about a different kind of kingdom. We know

from the epistles to the Thessalonians that Paul emphasized Jesus' second coming. Perhaps he had spoken about the future messianic kingdom. The charges were civil and political rather than religious because the Jewish leaders knew that the Romans would ignore religious issues but take strong action against anyone causing a civil disturbance or advocating a revolt.

17:8-9. The agitators were successful. The city officials required **Jason and the others** to post bail (**pledge**). **Jason** was apparently a leader in the Thessalonian synagogue who trusted Christ under Paul's ministry. He was probably affluent since his house was substantial enough to host the congregation and house Paul and his team, and **Jason** more than likely became the leader of the church after Paul left. The traditional view is that "the bond" was collateral guaranteeing Paul would not return to Thessalonica during the administration of the current officials, but it is equally possible that **Jason** and the other members of the newly founded congregation (**they**, indicating others than strictly Paul) were also implicated in the unrest and posted a bond for themselves. The bail bond may have been the satanic barrier that Paul said prevented from him from returning to Thessalonica (see 1Th 2:17-18).

Paul's ministry at Thessalonica emphasized that Paul based his message that Jesus was the Messiah on the OT and presented the evidence in a logical and persuasive format. He did not attempt to manipulate or trick people to become believers, as he explained in 1Th 2:1-4.

5. The Witness at Berea (17:10-15)

17:10. To avoid further trouble, the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea under the cover of darkness. When Paul arrived in Berea, which was about 45 miles southwest of Thessalonica, he went immediately to the synagogue.

17:11. Paul could not have known that the Bereans would become a model for how to study the Bible. Luke gave a threefold description of the Bereans' response to Paul's preaching. First, they approached Paul's teaching with some open-mindedness. The expression **more noble-minded** than the Thessalonians means that the Bereans were objective in their evaluation of Paul's message. They judged his message by the standard of Scripture rather than their preconceived prejudices. Second, they also received the Scriptures **with great eagerness**. They had an appetite to learn. Finally, they examined **the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things**

were so. They carefully evaluated Paul's message to determine for themselves if it was true.

17:12-15. The response was similar to what happened in Thessalonica. Many, including, women and men of high social and political standing, believed.

But not everyone was pleased about Paul's preaching the gospel. When the same Jewish leaders from Thessalonica discovered that Paul was preaching **the word of God** in Berea, they took action to stop him. Luke's reference to the Scriptures (v. 11) and to Paul's message as **the word of God** confirmed that the gospel had a divine origin (cf. 13:5; 15:35; 16:32). Paul made the same claim in defending his gospel to the Galatians. The gospel was not his own creation; he received it directly from the Lord (Gl 1:11-17).

The Jewish opponents from Thessalonica incited opposition, forcing Paul to go to Athens, leaving Silas and Timothy behind in Berea. It is not clear whether Paul took a ship to Athens, which was the normal means of travel in and out of that city, or went overland.

6. The Witness at Athens (17:16-34)

At Athens Paul faced the blind wisdom of pagan philosophers. Paul was alone but not intimidated because he was zealous for the honor of God and confident of the power of his gospel message.

17:16. Paul's first observation was distressing. **Being provoked** is the verb *paroxuno*, "greatly disturbed." suggests that Paul was incited to jealousy for the Lord because of the pervasiveness of idolatry. Instead of worshiping the Lord as the only true God, the Athenians were bowing down to lifeless idols. It was this inward anger that motivated Paul to proclaim Christ.

17:17. He preached in the synagogue and the marketplace to anyone who would listen. It is obvious that Paul believed that Jesus Christ was unique and that those who worshiped other gods needed to turn to the living God.

17:18. Paul confronted two of the more popular philosophies in the Roman Empire, Epicureanism and Stoicism. The Epicureans believed in pursuing a life free from pain. They held to the existence of the gods, but thought that the gods were completely detached from humanity, as any interaction with people would disturb them and, true to Epicurean doctrine, the gods had a blessed and undisturbed existence. Epicureans believed the soul was material, though composed of finer atoms than the body, and would deteriorate upon death. There was thus

no room for the theory of an afterlife. Because they prized an imperturbable life, they rejected the idea that one could anger the gods or face punishment or judgment from them since those concepts would disturb one's thoughts and disrupt life—which explains their strong reaction to Paul's mention of the resurrection and future judgment. It is misleading to call them hedonists in the modern sense. Their concept of pleasure involved avoidance of disturbances in life rather than crass self-indulgence. The pursuits of wanton amusements could be counterproductive to a happy life (for a summary of Epicureanism as it intersected with Ac 17, see N. Clayton Croy, "Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection [Acts 17:18, 32]," *Novum Testamentum* 39 [1997], 21–39). The founder of Stoicism was Zeno (342–270 B.C., from Cyprus). Stoics believed that God permeated all things, and that what was rational in humankind was the manifestation of God. Theologically they would be considered pantheists. According to Stoics, Reason or the Logos controlled the universe, but people were responsible for their voluntary actions. They rejected the Epicurean philosophy of pleasure and instead stressed virtue.

17:18. After **conversing** with Paul, the Epicureans and Stoics concluded he was a **babbler** and **proclaimer of strange deities**. **Babbler** refers to someone who picks up bits and pieces of information and then proclaims them as if he were an expert on the topic (Bock, *Acts*, 561–62). The charge Paul was a teacher **of strange deities** meant he was talking about gods they did not understand.

17:19-21. They took Paul to the **Areopagus**, the place where the Athenians discussed ideas of mutual interest. He was not arrested, but given the opportunity to give them more information about what he believed. Luke did not specify what caught their interest. He said only that from their perspective it was a **new teaching** and **strange things**. Luke's editorial comment in v. 21 implies the Athenians wasted a lot of time in useless discussions about irrelevant issues.

17:22-23. Paul's introductory comment that the Athenians were **very religious** was a commendation rather than a criticism, since he hoped to convince his audience to listen to his message. He connected with the Athenians by referring to an altar erected **TO AN UNKNOWN GOD**. It is probable there was more than one

altar to an unknown god in Athens, but Paul influenced his audience with this comment to have them focus on one God by referring to only one altar (Bock, *Acts*, 565). Paul proceeded to make known the god they worshiped but by their own admission did not know.

17:24-26. Paul began with creation. God is the creator of everything that exists and is transcendent (17:24-25). He does not dwell in man-made temples and is independent. He is the source and sustainer of life (17:26-29). Paul alluded to Adam as the single source of humanity in the statement, **He made from one man every nation of mankind**. Because He is creator, God is sovereign. He controls history (or possibly seasons) and national boundaries (**appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation**). Genesis 10–11 may have been the OT background for Paul's comment, but he did not explicitly cite it since it would have minimal significance for Greek philosophers.

17:27-31. In v. 27 Paul revealed the point of his observations about God in vv. 23-26. As the sovereign creator, God intends for men and women to seek him. The verbs **grope** and **find** are in the optative mood, which suggests finding God through human effort is only a remote possibility. The word picture suggested by **grope** is a blind man fumbling around to find his way (Bock, *Acts*, 567). This implies that, though God is near, it is highly unlikely the Athenians would find Him because their strategy was flawed. While a considerable amount about God can be apprehended from an objective consideration of creation (cf. the comments on Rm 1:18-32), Paul would make it clear that full comprehension of God requires the augmenting truth of the gospel, the proper response of repentance, and recognition of the validity of the resurrection and authority of Jesus Christ (cf. Paul's concluding words in vv. 30-31). Without these additional elements, God will not be found.

The statement **in Him (God) we live and move and exist** (v. 28) probably comes from the Greek poet Epimenides (philosopher, poet, and seer from Crete, c. 600 BC), in a poem entitled *Cretica*. The same poem is quoted in Ti 1:12. The reference to **children of God** is an allusion to a statement by another Stoic poet, Aratus. This is not pantheism. Paul argued that if men and women are living beings made in the image of God, then God is a living being. He is not a man-made object of wood or stone (v. 29). These two references to Greek poets do not mean

Paul endorsed their view of God, but he had no qualms about using pagan poets to support his argument if some of what they had written coincided with revealed truth.

Having established common ground with the Athenians, Paul stressed the need for them to repent in view of coming judgment. **Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance** (v. 30) does not mean ignorance is excusable. God's mercy was the reason that in the past He did not usually pass judgment *in this life* on mankind even though they deserved it. In other words, He did not always bring temporal destruction upon an idolatrous people as an act of judgment for their sin. Now, however, because they knew about God, they could plead ignorance. If they refused to repent, they would suffer eternal punishment. In speaking to Gentiles, the call to repent means to turn from lifeless idols to faith in the living God (1Th 1:9). Polhill writes, "The times of forbearance had now ended because their ignorance had now ended. Now they knew the one true God through Paul's proclamation. He was no longer an 'unknown God'; and should they continue in their false worship and fail to acknowledge his sole lordship of heaven and earth, their sin would no longer be a sin of ignorance but a high-handed sin" (*Acts*, 376).

Paul did not mention Jesus Christ by name, but declared the resurrection proved He has the authority to judge. Though Paul did not give the exact time of judgment, it is on a **fixed day**, meaning it is certain. That Jesus will judge the world **in righteousness** means that his judgment will be just.

17:32-34. The response was divided. Most ridiculed the idea of **resurrection**, but a few became believers. The prevailing view of death among the Greeks was either the complete extinction of the body and soul or a temporal survival of the soul after death. Neither the Epicureans nor the Stoics believed in immortality, thus they not only rejected Paul's message but also mocked (**sneer**) him. For more on the common Greco-Roman view of death, see the comments at 1Co 15:12.

Paul's ministry, however, was not a complete failure—**some men joined him and believed** (v. 34). Luke identified two of the believers by name, Dionysius the Aeropagite and a woman named Damaris. Nothing for certain is known about these two individuals. Providing the names of two individuals gives credibility to Luke's account and is consistent with Luke's

emphasis on the place of women in the life of Jesus and the early church.

Some have criticized Paul for his ministry at Athens. They appeal to 1Co 1:18-25 and claim Paul confessed he made a mistake. He focused on natural theology and Greek philosophy, not special revelation and the cross. This evaluation is too harsh. Some did become believers. Those who refused to believe rejected Paul and his statement about the resurrection not because he erred in attempting to contextualize his message.

Two truths emerge from Paul's ministry at Athens. First, Paul believed in the uniqueness of Christ and the gospel. People will not find Christ by following their felt needs. They will "grope" in darkness. People will find Christ only in the "gospel." Second, not only here but also in other locations where Luke has given us a summary of Paul's preaching, it is plain that he contextualized his message to reach his audience. Paul did not water down or corrupt the gospel, but he did attempt to proclaim the good news in the cultural and historical context of the people he wanted to bring to Christ. His refusal to dilute his message is seen in vv. 30-31. Paul must have known that his words would be a direct affront to the Epicureans who denied eternal life and future judgment, and to the Stoics who denied the transcendence of God. Contextualization is important in spreading the gospel, but doctrinal truth must not be sacrificed upon the altar of cultural relevance.

When he left Athens, Paul went to Corinth, 40 miles west of Athens. Corinth's location on the narrow isthmus that connected the mainland with the south caused it to be "the marketplace of Greece." Paul's ministry in Corinth extended from the spring of 50 AD to the fall of 52, and the mention of Gallio in 18:12-17 helps to provide one of the clearest and most unassailable historical markers for the whole book of Acts (see the comments below).

7. The Witness at Corinth (18:1-17)

18:1. Corinth was infamous for more than its commerce. It was a city of great wickedness. The Acropolis, a high hill about a mile from the city center, dominated Corinth, and the temple of Aphrodite had been built on the Acrocorinth. At one time a thousand cultic priestesses served in the temple as sacred prostitutes and came into the city in the evening to sell sexual services. This was not the case of "New Corinth," Corinth as it existed in Paul's day, though it was

morally corrupt for numerous other reasons during the first century (see the Introduction to the commentary on 1 Corinthians). Barclay quotes a Greek proverb that reads, "Not every man can afford a journey to Corinth" (William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles [Daily Study Bible]*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955, 145). Yet in Corinth, Paul witnessed the triumph of God's grace over greed and lust. For more on the background and location of Corinth, see the "The City of Corinth" in the Introduction to the commentary on 1 Corinthians.

18:2-3. Paul sometimes worked as a tent-maker to support himself (1Th 2:9), so it is not surprising that he met **Aquila** and **Priscilla**, who were also Jewish and **tent-makers**. They had been forced to leave Rome because of the edict of Claudius, issued in AD 49, expelling all Jews (whether believers or not) from Rome for causing a civil disturbance because of their dispute about Jesus.

18:4-6. Paul began his ministry in the synagogue proclaiming the gospel first to his own people. When Silas and Timothy arrived with support from the Macedonian churches Paul was able to **devot[e]** himself full time to ministry. Paul also wrote 1 Thessalonians in response to the report Timothy brought about the new church (see the Introduction to 1 Thessalonians, and the comments on 1Th 3:6).

Intense opposition forced Paul to abandon his ministry in the synagogue. In a symbolic gesture, Paul **shook** the dust off his clothes. This was a common practice among the Jews who, when returning to their home from a journey, would often knock dust off their sandals and clothes. They did this to remove any "unclean" substances that might have been picked up in Gentile lands so as to avoid rendering their homes or villages ritually impure. Paul declared the Jews were responsible for their own fate: **Your blood be upon your own heads!** (cf. Ezk 3:14-21). Their opposition justified his ministry to Gentiles (but see the comments on Rm 11:13-14).

18:7-8. Instead of leaving Corinth, Paul relocated his ministry to the house of **Titius Justus**, a god-fearer. He made his home available for Paul to continue his ministry. God honored Paul's courage and persistence. **Crispus**, the synagogue ruler, and his household were among **many of the Corinthians** who believed and were baptized.

18:9-11. Paul was human, not a superhero. In Corinth, he was almost overcome with fear. In

his Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “I was with you in a weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (1Co 2:3). The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and made two promises. He promised him divine protection: **I am with you**. Paul would not be beaten as he was at Philippi. **I have many people in this city** is a promise that Christ would bring people to salvation. Paul obeyed. He preached the Word of God in Corinth for 18 months, longer than in any other city on his second journey.

18:12-13. Some Jewish opponents from the synagogue attempted to disrupt Paul’s ministry by charging that he was violating the law. He was arraigned before the **proconsul Gallio** and brought before **the judgment seat** (*bema*) for a hearing. The Gallio episode provides one of the strongest chronological markers for students of Acts, and lends credibility to Luke’s accuracy as an historian. Gallio, born in southern Spain, was governor of Achaia for about 18 months around AD 51–52. He was the brother of the famous statesman and philosopher Seneca, and was in his own right a highly respected legal expert. His decision was both enormously important for the spread of Christianity and respected in secular political realms. The **judgment seat** was an elevated platform in the market at Corinth used for public hearings. It was where a political or judicial leader would sit to render a verdict in a case he had overseen.

The charge was apparently religious in nature. In the statement, **this man persuades** [better “seduces,” “misleads,” LSJ], 115] **men to worship God contrary to the law**, the word **law** probably refers to the law of Moses, since, if Paul were accused or guilty of violating Roman law, Gallio would not have refused to act on the accusation as he did here.

18:14-15. Gallio’s decision was extremely significant. He concluded the complaint was religious and not political, and ruled the charges were unwarranted. What Paul was doing was not a **wrong** (“a felony”) or a **vicious crime** (“a political misdemeanor”; for these definitions, see Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001], 279).

Though Judaism enjoyed legal status under Roman law, Rome had not made a decision about this new faith that was springing from Judaism. The Roman policy toward Judaism was to afford the Jewish people considerable autonomy, something the Jews insisted upon to

avoid Roman interference. Gallio acted on the basis of this policy in this situation. Gallio’s decision emphasized that he, and thus Rome, would view nascent Christianity as a subset of Judaism. Consequently, any disputes between Jewish unbelievers and Jewish or Gentile believers should be handled as an internal dispute between the two factions; Rome would not become involved.

18:16-17. He ordered the crowd to disperse. Angered by Gallio’s decision, the Jewish opposition resorted to violence. They assaulted **Sosthenes**. He may have been the believing Sosthenes in 1Co 1:1, but it was a common name so it may not have been the same man. It is impossible to say exactly who beat him and why. If this Sosthenes was a believer, then he could have recently become a believer in Jesus, and the Jewish opponents were taking out on him their frustration. Or, it could be that Sosthenes, the new leader of the synagogue who took the place of Crispus following his faith in Christ (cf. v. 8), was spearheading the case against Paul and failed so miserably that his Jewish fellows roughed him up in frustration. Or it could be that he was beaten by Gentiles who, emboldened by Gallio’s anti-Jewish act, took advantage of the opportunity to vent their hatred. That Gallio was hateful of Jews is known from secular history, and it is possible that this motivated him to ignore the beating of Sosthenes, perhaps by Gentiles. But certainty is impossible. Gallio ignored the violence, which is somewhat surprising since the Romans were concerned about maintaining peace.

Christ said in Jn 10:16 that he had other sheep. Paul’s strategy confirmed God’s sovereign plan to use the unbelief of Israel for the salvation of Gentiles.

Longenecker says that Gallio’s decision was profound (“Acts,” 486). It is additional evidence that this new faith in Jesus was not a subversive movement, and his judicial decision set an important precedent for the church to freely proclaim the gospel and expand without fearing Roman opposition.

Ephesus was the sixth major city that Paul visited in the area surrounding the Aegean Sea. But before he began an extended ministry in Ephesus, Paul returned to Antioch, and while he was in Antioch, Luke shifted his account back to Ephesus. Apollos came to Ephesus and preached in the synagogue, but he was deficient in his understanding of the gift and ministry of the Spirit. After further instruction by Priscilla

and Aquila, Apollos left Ephesus for ministry in Achaia. Apollos's lack of knowledge of the Spirit linked this account with Paul's encounter with the disciples of John (19:1-7).

8. The Return to Antioch (18:18-22)

18:18. While it is impossible to be certain regarding the details and motivation, Paul had apparently taken a temporary vow, possibly a Nazirite vow (see Nm 6:1-21) as a symbolic act of his ongoing service to God and for Israel, even while he evangelized in predominantly Gentile regions. Usually the Nazirite vow was taken within the city of Jerusalem, but was allowed elsewhere if the individual subsequently went to Jerusalem (see *m. Nazir* 1:1–9:5). For the period of the vow, he did not cut his hair, did not drink wine or anything made from the fruit of the vine, and did not touch anything that was dead (cf. Nm 6:1-21). Now that he was at the end of the vow, he got his hair cut at Cenchrea, close to Athens, before leaving for Jerusalem to offer his hair and the prescribed sacrifices on the altar in the temple. Making the sacrifices would also be a way of thanking God for the spiritual victories of God's grace while at Corinth. Though now a follower of Christ, Paul did not see this as contradicting his Jewish identity, and he never abandoned his Jewish cultural and religious practices (cf. Ac 28:17).

18:19-22. On the way to Jerusalem, Paul stopped briefly in Ephesus. After making his case for Christianity in the synagogue, he left for Antioch via Caesarea and Jerusalem, but he promised to return **if God wills**. Luke's account of Paul's travels demonstrates that he was a Spirit-filled man who made his plans but always submitted his plans and their timing to God's will.

E. To Asia and Greece: The Third

Missionary Journey (18:23–21:16)

1. Witness through Paul at Galatia and Phrygia (18:23)

18:23. Without much fanfare, Ac 18:23 marks the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey, a journey of over 1,500 miles and about four years. Paul took a route through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen those who had become disciples on the first missionary journey. While Paul was ministering to believers in those regions, God used Apollos to prepare for Paul's work in Ephesus.

2. Witness through Apollos in Ephesus and Corinth (18:24-28)

18:24-25. Apollos was from Alexandria, a city that was highly regarded as an educational

center. That helps explain why he was well educated (**eloquent**), including a strong biblical background (**mighty in the Scriptures**). The expression **fervent in spirit** (v. 25) is ambiguous. If the phrase **being acquainted only with the baptism of John** means that Apollos was ignorant of the coming and baptism of the Spirit (not a certainty given the contents of the passage), then it is unlikely that **fervent in spirit** refers to the Holy Spirit. More than likely, it describes Apollos's heartfelt enthusiasm about his work. He was not guilty of teaching error but was merely lacking in knowledge of the full details of the events associated with Pentecost. Since he taught **accurately the things concerning Jesus** and spoke out "boldly in the synagogue" (v. 26), it is unlikely that he was an unbeliever. It seems reasonable to think that he was saved in an OT sense, or more precisely, a "pre-Pentecost" sense, and that Luke included the episode about him, and about the 12 disciples of John in chap. 19, to indicate that believers caught up in this transitional matrix between the era of law and the age of grace would embrace their Messiah Jesus when they heard of Him and then receive the full new covenant blessings promised to those who had faith in the Messiah. His knowledge appears to have been deficient in matters related to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and the baptism of the Spirit associated with it, not the details of Jesus' ministry and death. After all, he **had been instructed in the way of the Lord and was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus**. What happened with Apollos and the disciples of John may have been replicated in numerous other settings, though there are no other indications of this in Acts.

18:26-28. After hearing him speak, Priscilla and Aquila recognized his deficiency but also his potential. Not wanting to embarrass him, they privately informed him of **the way of God more accurately**, providing him with the complete story of the Messiah, which undoubtedly included the gift of the Spirit. Luke again took the opportunity to emphasize the role of women in the early church by listing Priscilla first. She may have been the primary instructor of Apollos. But even if she were, there is no clear indication that Luke was using her as a paradigm for women having the freedom to teach men in a corporate church setting. The instruction to Apollos was not conducted in a church setting, and the word **explained** (*ektiithemi*, "to convey information by careful elaboration" [BDAG,

310], “to lay out something”), used also in 11:4 and 28:23, does not carry an authoritative or exhortational sense befitting the kind of teaching that was to typify church settings (see the comments on 1Tm 2:12).

Once he had a complete grasp of all that Jesus had done, Apollos became an even more effective apologist. The “brothers” encouraged him to go to Achaia, where he instilled greater confidence in believers and was even more effective in convincing Jewish people that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah. It was probably on this occasion that Apollos spent time in Corinth, in the region of Achaia (see the comments on 1Co 3:5ff.).

3. Witness through Paul in Ephesus and En Route to Jerusalem (19:1–21:16)

a. In Ephesus (19:1-41)

(1) Witness to the Disciples of John (19:1-7)

As Luke often did in Acts, he gave a general or introductory account and then a specific situation to develop the same theme. So instead of continuing with the story of Apollos, Luke returned to his main character, the apostle Paul, and his encounter with a group of John’s disciples. As was likely the case with Apollos, they had not received the gift of the Spirit, so Paul used his apostolic authority to baptize them in the name of Jesus and to give them the gift of the Spirit.

19:1-3. When Paul met John’s disciples, he asked them if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed. Here the aorist participle **when you believed** (*pisteusantes*) indicates action simultaneous with the aorist main verb **did you receive**. Usually an aorist participle, when the word order situates it before the main verb of the sentence, refers to action before the action of the main verb. But when it comes after the main verb, it usually indicates action simultaneous to the action of the main verb (as in Eph 1:20; 5:26; Col 2:13; 1Tm 1:12; see Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood*, vol. 2 of SBG [New York: Lang, 1989], 381–384). The manner in which Paul phrased his question implies that he understood that the Spirit is normally given at the time of faith in Jesus and not subsequent to it. These men had apparently responded to John’s call for repentance and baptism to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, but they were unaware that the gift of the Spirit had been given. Like Apollos, they were transitional believers (see the comments on 18:24-28).

Were these disciples believers? Some say “No,”

and base this upon the absence of the article before the word “disciples” in v. 1. Yet the word “some” does not indicate “some unsaved disciples,” but is used to distinguish true disciples from other true disciples (cf. 9:10; 12:1; 16:1, 9, 14, 16; 18:24; and Mt 16:28). These 12 had undergone John’s baptism, which was “in reference to forgiveness” (see the comments on Mt 3:5-12), suggesting that they were saved at that point in an OT sense, or, more precisely, in a “John the Baptist” sense. They apparently were deficient in the details related to the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as those related to Pentecost, all of which happened after John’s ministry ceased. They apparently did not know that the Messiah had come, that He was Jesus of Nazareth. Furthermore, the phrase **we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit** probably refers to their ignorance of the events of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit (even John had taught about the Spirit in Mt 3:11, and the Jewish people in the OT knew about the Holy Spirit; cf. e.g., Zch 4:6). It is impossible to be certain, but these, like Apollos, were probably believers in an OT sense, and by relating their story, Luke indicated that there were pockets of people who were saved as OT believers but who had not yet heard of the full facts and blessings of salvation in Messiah Jesus. They too embraced Jesus by faith and received all the benefits of the new covenant.

19:4-7. Paul acted to complete their faith by baptizing them in the name of Jesus, and God gave them the gift of the Spirit when Paul laid his hands on them. The men prophesied and spoke in tongues as evidence they had received the Holy Spirit. There did seem to be a short period of time between their reception of Jesus and their reception of the Holy Spirit. This unusual event (cf. 1Co 12:13) likely occurred to prevent a schism within the faith. Had an apostle not laid hands on them to receive the Spirit, they may have considered themselves an even more ancient body of believers than the church. They might have formed a separate community of faith and failed to come under the authority of the apostles and to recognize that they were part of the universal body of Messiah.

The phenomenon parallels the experience of the Jews who believed at Pentecost, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. This group of disciples served as an exemplar of yet another group, those saved in an OT sense but who had not heard the full story of Jesus.

Now that all of these representative groups had received the Spirit, there was no further reference to speaking in tongues in Acts. It is reasonable to conclude that speaking in tongues was designed in part as a means to prove to the early church that the gospel had made inroads into these distinct and diverse groups (for other aspects of tongues, see the comments introducing 1Co 14). Since this had been established, there was little need for tongues to continue as a normative experience for the church.

The account was also another affirmation of Paul's apostleship. Like Peter, who was instrumental in mediating the Spirit to the Samaritans, Paul had apostolic authority to mediate the Spirit to John's disciples.

(2) Witness to a Larger Audience (19:8-41)

Paul's ministry in Ephesus involved more than the ministry to the disciples of John who were favorably inclined to his message. As God had given Paul victory at Corinth, the center of Gentile immorality, He gave him victory at Ephesus, the center of Gentile idolatry. Luke told the story in two contrasting scenes: (1) Paul's ministry in the synagogue and the lecture hall of Tyrannus (vv. 8-10); and (2) the power of Paul and the powerlessness of the Jewish exorcists (vv. 11-20).

19:8-9a. True to his strategy of going first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, Paul began his ministry in the synagogue. He argued and attempted to persuade the Jewish people about the **kingdom of God** for three months. The message about the kingdom was the primary theme of Jesus' preaching (see the comments on Mt 3:1-4). Ministry in the synagogue, however, became impossible because **some were becoming hardened and disobedient**. **Hardened** (*skleryno*) carries the idea of "unyielding in resisting information" (BDAG, 930). This group of Jewish people was resistant to the gospel. They maligned Paul's message, **speaking evil of the Way**. The word **Way** describes the new way of following Jesus for Jewish people and the world (cf. comments at 9:1-2). Instead of leaving Ephesus, Paul relocated to the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

19:9b-10. The name Tyrannus may have come from a nickname for a philosopher who was a tyrant (an extremely hard teacher). Paul may have taught from the fifth to the tenth hour (11 a.m. until 4 p.m.) according to one Greek manuscript. If accurate, this was "siesta" time when all work stopped and people would be free to join Paul for his teaching. Luke was giving a

picture of Paul, who was so devoted to Christ that he worked in the morning and preached in the afternoon.

God honored Paul's tireless effort. Luke said that in a two-year period **all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews Greeks**. As a result of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, the churches at Colossae and Laodicea were started, and perhaps the other churches to which John referred in the book of Revelation.

19:11. The Lord confirmed Paul's ministry by empowering him to work **extraordinary** miracles. By using **extraordinary** (*tychousas*) to describe Paul's miracles Luke implied that they were exceptional in comparison even to the other miracles recorded in Acts. As an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul was given power that was greater than the cultic magic connected with the worship of the goddess Artemis.

19:12. Like those who were healed indirectly by Peter's shadow (Ac 5:15), people were healed indirectly by contact with Paul's **handkerchiefs or aprons**. These were items Paul used in his work as a tentmaker. **Handkerchiefs** may refer to a sweatband worn around the head, and **aprons** to some kind of belt around the waist. Luke also made a clear distinction between diseases and exorcisms.

19:13-16. Impressed with Paul's power, a group of Jewish magicians attempted to use the name of the "Lord Jesus" as a magical formula. But they did not know the person of Christ, so they did not have the power of Christ. When they attempted to exorcise demons from a man, one of the demons rebuked them and the possessed man assaulted them. Not only were they badly beaten, but they were also humiliated, fleeing the **house naked and wounded**.

The incident contrasted Paul's power and apostleship with the impotent attempt of Jewish magicians to exploit the power of the resurrected Jesus. Paul was not another first-century itinerant charlatan; he was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even the demon knew this: **I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?** asked the demon.

19:17-20. The result of this abortive attempt to misuse the power of Jesus' name was similar to the story of Ananias and Sapphira, who were judged because of their "botched" attempt to commit fraud. When the news of what had happened became known to both Jews and Greeks, the superstitious pagans of Ephesus reacted as expected. They were overcome with fear and

magnified the name of Jesus. This does not mean that they become believers, but merely that they held in awe a power that they did not understand.

Some, however, did become believers, and they gave tangible evidence of their faith by burning their books on magic. The 50,000 pieces of silver was a large sum of money—a “piece of silver” was approximately one day’s wages. The burning of books on magic was costly and a powerful public statement of their conversion.

Luke’s statement in v. 20 is crucial. Unlike the seven sons of Sceva, other first-century itinerant speakers, and unscrupulous ministers today who claim pseudo-miracles to fleece the gullible, God’s power (*kratos*) at work in Paul to produce miracles was genuine. It was for the purpose of promoting the Word of God and not for financial gain to fund an extravagant lifestyle.

With the description of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, Luke concluded his account of the church’s growth in strategic cities around the Aegean Sea. He has given a factual and graphic account of the entrance of the gospel into new regions. Though faced with opposition and persecution, the gospel was preached, people won to the faith, and churches established. Through providential circumstances and supernatural revelation, the Holy Spirit led and empowered Paul. Though much remained to be done, the evidence was overwhelming—the Lord Jesus was working through the church and especially through Paul, the apostle of God’s grace and ambassador of Christ to the Gentiles.

The worship of idols is not new. The cult of Artemis flourished in the city of Ephesus, and the residents of Ephesus had built a magnificent temple to the goddess Artemis. According to legend, the image of Artemis fell from heaven on the location of the temple. In reality, the object that fell from the sky was most likely a meteorite that resembled a multi-breasted woman, but the superstitious Ephesians built a temple on the location to honor the goddess. It was believed that worshiping Artemis, the goddess of fertility, would bring good fortune, and pilgrims came to Ephesus from all parts of the vast Roman Empire.

As is often the case, religion became a guise for economic exploitation. A guild of silversmiths made small images of Artemis and sold the idols to pilgrims who came to worship the goddess.

Paul’s ministry was so powerful that the gospel became a threat to the economic interests of the silversmiths. Demetrius, one of the silversmiths, organized a protest under the pretense of defending the honor of Artemis. When the protest escalated to a riot, the town clerk intervened, warning the protesters that they needed to follow the proper legal procedures if they wished to make charges against Paul and that they were the ones who risked committing a crime. His speech was persuasive, and he dismissed the crowd without further violence.

19:21. This verse reveals Paul’s dream of reaching the world for Christ. Jerusalem was the capital of Judaism and Rome the capital of paganism. But preaching the gospel in these two strategic cities was not only Paul’s plan, it was his divine destiny. **Spirit** (*pneuma*) is best interpreted as a reference to the Holy Spirit (see ESV; RSV; HCSB) rather than Paul’s spirit (NET; NIV; TNIV). Paul made his plans but submitted them to confirmation by the Spirit. The word **must** suggests that Paul saw it as a moral necessity, as part of his fulfillment of God’s choosing him for his apostolic office, to go to **Rome** (v. 21) and then continue on to Spain (cf. the Introduction to Romans, “Date” and “Recipients,” and the comments on Rm 15:24-28).

19:22. In preparation for his return to Jerusalem, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia. They were apparently responsible for collecting the offering that Paul planned to take to Jerusalem (see the comments on 2Co 8:4; 9:1).

19:23. This theme of v. 23 suggests that the primary issue was not about Paul but rather the gospel, which Luke identified again as **the Way**, the “way of following Jesus” (cf. comments at 9:1-2), who is the way the truth and the life (cf. Jn 14:6).

19:24-27. Demetrius, who may have been a leader of the silversmiths, organized a protest (vv. 24-25). He and the other silversmiths made their living by selling small silver images of the temple (*naos*) of **Artemis** to pagan pilgrims (v. 24). **Artemis** (the Roman goddess Diana) was the goddess of fertility. The temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was first built in the sixth century BC. It was burned down by a young man, Herostratus, on the night Alexander the Great was born in 356 BC. With gifts received from all over the world, the temple was rebuilt with great glory and splendor, finally measuring 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, over 60 feet high and adorned with 127 marble

columns. This temple also functioned as a bank. Merchants, kings, and whole cities would deposit their gold and silver there because its safety was guaranteed by the goddess Artemis herself. It was the largest building in the Greek world at that time. Today a lone pillar marks the location of this formerly magnificent structure. The temple attracted worshippers from all parts of the empire. Devotees of Artemis called her a god (*he Thea; ho Theos* was the typical Gk. word used by Christians for God), “savior,” “lord.” Extant prayers to her survive, calling upon her to give victory in athletic contests and to heal loved ones from their diseases. Worshipers bought the silver images, believing that the goddess would prosper them.

Demetrius made three charges that were all related to Christianity’s threat to the economic interests of the silversmiths but cloaked in the pretext of defending the worship of Artemis. First, Christianity was a threat to their livelihood (v. 25). Their income depended on selling idols. Second, this man Paul had persuaded many, not only in Ephesus but also in all of Asia, that man-made gods were not gods at all (v. 26). Though not stated, Paul undoubtedly preached that they should turn from idols to worship the one true God. Third, not only was his preaching endangering the income of the silversmiths, but also Artemis might be dethroned (v. 27). The verb **dethroned** (*kathaireo*) means “to tear down” or “to conquer, destroy” (BDAG, 488). Christianity was a major, not a minor, threat to the worship of Artemis in Ephesus and the world.

19:28-29. The silversmiths erupted with rage and shouted out praise for Artemis. What was a small crowd grew to a large unruly mob that rushed into the amphitheater forcibly taking two of Paul’s traveling companions with them. The amphitheater was huge, with a capacity of about 25,000, larger than most of the professional basketball arenas in America.

19:30-31. Unconcerned about his safety, Paul wanted to address the mob, but he was restrained by his disciples, and some of the **Asiarchs**. They were the leading men from the wealthy class who served one-year terms presiding over the affairs of the imperial cult and its temples. Their sympathy for Paul is surprising; perhaps as better-educated people, they were more broad-minded and did not see his message as a serious threat. The Asiarchs had authority over the theater, but could not control the mob.

Instead, they tried to prevent Paul from endangering his life. Their concern for him indicates that Paul had been effective in influencing some of the higher social classes.

19:32-34. The mob became so fanatical and chaotic that many of them did not know why they were rioting (v. 32). **Alexander** (v. 33) is impossible to identify. **The Jews had put him forward**, perhaps as a new Jewish believer, to force him to tell the chaotic crowd what the meeting was about. More likely, he was probably a Jewish unbeliever who wanted to distinguish between Paul’s messianism and their Judaism. Since Jewish people did not worship Artemis either, and since Paul was a Jew, Alexander may have been enlisted to try to distance the Jewish populace from Paul so the unbelieving Jewish people would not be persecuted by the Ephesian Gentiles when the Gentiles persecuted the Christians. It is impossible to say. But when the crowd realized that Alexander was Jewish, they exploded again in fervently shouting **Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!**

19:35-37. After about two hours of total confusion, the **town clerk** pleaded for law and order. The **town clerk** was the keeper of records, registrar, and accountant for temple funds. He was the highest civic official in the city, operating like a powerful city manager, and was the liaison to the Roman authorities. As a locally elected official, he would have been acutely aware of what was happening in the city as it related to the detrimental influence of Paul’s work on the prosperity and popularity of Artemis’s temple. His speech contained two important points. First, he reminded the Ephesians of the legend that they were guardians of the temple where Artemis’ image fell from heaven. His argument was not based on evidence but the experience, faith, and devotion of the Ephesians. He emphasized that Paul and his companions had not committed a chargeable crime, and they had not actually robbed the temple or directly blasphemed the goddess.

19:38-41. Second, he charged that the action of Demetrius and the other silversmiths was illegal and that they could make charges in the courts if they wanted to pursue the matter (vv. 38-39). His plea to follow a legal course of action was motivated by fear of Roman intervention (v. 40) not because he was sympathetic with the Way (cf. comments at 9:1-2). Ephesus’s status as a “free city” depended solely on the favor of Rome, and the clerk wanted to prevent the revoking of

the city's privileges. His speech was persuasive, and he dismissed the assembly.

The riot at Ephesus focused on the powerful impact of the gospel on paganism. The transformation of believers was so radical that they abandoned their idolatrous lifestyle, without directly attacking the culture of idolatry. The speech of the town clerk exonerated the gospel, showing it as a legal movement within the Roman Empire. The new faith was not a violent movement attempting to overthrow Roman rule. In contrast to Jewish opposition, which was usually motivated by issues about the law, Gentile opposition was due to the threat to idolatry and economic interests.

b. In Macedonia, Greece, and Asia (20:1-5)

20:1-3. Paul traveled through Macedonia and Greece strengthening the Gentile churches, but he was forced to alter his traveling plans because of a threat to his life. Instead of sailing from Cenchrea for Syria, Paul went back through Macedonia and sailed from Philippi to Troas. In addition to danger from the Jews, Paul was carrying an offering for the churches in Judea (cf. Ro 15:25-27 and comments there), and the seaport at Cenchrea would have an easy place for Jews or thieves to attack Paul. Luke did not specify where Paul **spent three months** (v. 3), but it was probably Corinth, and it was probably during this time that he wrote his epistle to the Romans (see the "Introduction: Date and Recipients" for the commentary on Romans).

20:4-5. From the names of Paul's traveling companions, we can identify them as Greeks. They represented the Gentile churches that had contributed to the gift that Paul was taking to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Paul's traveling companions were representatives from the outlying, and principally Gentile, churches. Sopater (probably the same as Sosipater in Rm 16:21), Aristarchus (see Ac 19:29; 27:2; Col 4:10), and Secundus were from the churches in Macedonia. The churches in Asia were represented by Tychicus (Eph 6:21-22; Cl 4:7-8; 2Tm 4:12; Ti 3:12) and Trophimus (Ac 21:29; 2Tm 4:20). The Galatian churches sent along Gaius, who was probably from Derbe (Ac 14:20-21) (for these points, see F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 382 and notes 16-20). They accompanied Paul probably to help protect him and to safeguard the delivery of this sizeable gift.

c. In Troas (20:6-12)

Paul's team went by ship to Troas, and Paul traveled by land to Philippi where Luke met him,

and then they sailed to Troas. At Troas Paul celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread, where there was a small group of believers who may have needed encouragement (see Ac 16:40). Paul did not consider his faith in Jesus as contradicting his Jewish identity, and so he continued to observe Jewish practices.

20:6-12. In Acts 2:42-47 Luke had described the Jewish believers; here he described a Gentile congregation. Many see this as establishing a paradigm for Sunday worship (**the first day of the week**, v. 7). But Luke always used Jewish time, making it more likely that this meeting took place on the evening of the first day (note the **message lasted until midnight** [v. 7] and that there were **many lamps** in the room [v. 8]). Thus, they met on Saturday night (when the first day of the Jewish week began). They met in the evening because believers who were common laborers or slaves would not have had a day off and would have been required to work during the day. They shared a meal together, which included the celebration of the Lord's Table. The services were not regulated by time, so Paul preached until midnight because he planned to leave the next day. The church gathered in the upper room of a private home, and the lamps, used for lighting (v. 8), probably made the air stuffy and oppressive. As a result, **Eutychus** fell asleep and fell out of the third floor window and died (v. 9). The name "Eutychus" means "lucky one," and he was indeed fortunate. Paul's statement that his **life** ("soul," *psyche*) is still **in him** means that though the fall killed him, after Paul embraced him his life was restored (v. 10). In much the same way that God used Peter to raise Tabitha from the dead (9:36-43), God enabled Paul to restore the life of Eutychus. Paul extended his visit until daylight (v. 11) and left the church on an encouraging note: **They took the boy away alive, and were greatly comforted** (v. 12). The contrast is vivid. In many instances, both Jews and Gentiles were infuriated by Paul's ministry. At Lystra he was stoned. But to believers, especially Gentiles, Paul was welcomed and loved.

It is difficult to propose why Luke included this brief episode at the conclusion of his report of the third missionary journey. Bock proposes that this episode put Paul in good company, with Jesus who raised people from the dead (Lk 7:11-15; 8:49-56; Jn 11:38-44), with Elijah and Elisha (1Kg 17:19-22; 2Kg 4:34-35) (*Acts*, 620), and maybe Luke was trying to show that Paul, like them, had God's blessing. Perhaps Luke also

included this to show that even though Paul was about to be arrested in Jerusalem, he was no criminal. On the contrary, God clearly used and approved of him.

d. In Miletus (20:13-38)

20:13-16. Luke and Paul's other traveling companions boarded a ship for **Assos**; Paul traveled by land. Luke did not explain why Paul chose to walk; it was perhaps for safety and time to reflect on what would lie ahead in his journey to Jerusalem and Rome. At Assos Paul rejoined his companions, and together they sailed for Mitylene and then to Chios and Samos. Each segment of the journey took a day, which was typical of ancient sea trips (Bock, *Acts*, 621). Paul took the ship from Chios to Samos, which did not stop at Ephesus, because he wanted to get to Jerusalem in time for the day of Pentecost. For these locations, see the map of the second and third missionary journeys.

Paul was a church planter with the heart of a pastor. He wanted people to come to saving faith in Christ, but he also wanted to develop believers who were biblically informed and fully devoted to Christ. For this task Paul was willing to sacrifice comfort and even risk his life teaching the Word of God and strengthening new converts.

From Miletus Paul summoned the elders from the church at Ephesus for his final message to them (Ac 20:17-38). His message to the Ephesian elders was unique because it was the only recorded speech in Acts directed to believers. His purpose was to prepare the church leadership for ministry in his absence. Paul was aware of the danger that lay ahead, but he was more concerned about the future of the church than his own personal safety. In his speech Paul reviewed the nature of his ministry at Ephesus and encouraged the elders to follow his example. They were to teach the word and protect the church from false teachers. He concluded with an emotional farewell informing the elders they would never see him again.

20:17-18a. After he arrived in Miletus, about 30 miles south of Ephesus, Paul summoned the elders to meet him at Miletus. It would take them about a day and a half to get to Miletus after they received the message from Paul.

The overall theme of Paul's instructions emphasized the need for elders to proclaim the whole counsel of God, to protect the church from false teachers and false doctrine, and to provide an example of humble service. Paul

used himself and the ministry he provided in the past as an example of diligence and humility as he taught them the truth (20:18b-21). He also provided an example for them based upon his present motivation, which was to discharge every facet of his ministry no matter what the cost might be (20:22-24). Finally, in 20:28-31, he warned them about the need to be on the alert (v. 31) in the future to protect the flock, and he reminded them that he had warned them about the need to do this.

20:18b-19. In ministering to the Ephesians, Paul was transparent, setting an example for them to follow. He served humbly like a bond-servant. The word **humility** (v. 19) means "an attitude of deference, submission, and servility." Those who lead the church must be willing to sacrifice their reputations and agendas, and be willing regularly to get their hands dirty when serving their people. Augustine captured the greatness of humility when he said:

For those who would learn God's ways, humility is the first thing, humility is the second thing, humility is the third thing (Quoted in Kistemaker, *Acts*, 725).

Paul was both sensitive and compassionate. He shed tears when persecuted by his enemies (20:19) and when he agonized over the Ephesian converts (20:31).

20:20-21. Paul preached and taught boldly. With great courage and unwavering devotion, Paul proclaimed the gospel message publicly and privately (**from house to house**). His message was the same for both Jews and Greeks. He called on both to repent and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For Jews, this meant turning from seeking God's favor by keeping the law to recognizing Jesus as Messiah, and for Gentiles, it meant turning from the worship of idols to Christ for forgiveness of sins.

In 20:22-24, Paul also provided an example for them based on his present motivation, which was to discharge every facet of his ministry no matter what the cost might be (20:22-24). Paul's ministry was Spirit-directed and motivated by the grace of God.

20:22-23. He was **bound in spirit** to go to Jerusalem. **Spirit** could be either Paul's human spirit (an inner compulsion) or the Holy Spirit. The reference to the Holy Spirit in v. 23 favors Holy Spirit rather than Paul's spirit. Paul was not unaware of what he was about to experience. The Holy Spirit had warned him of imprisonment (**bonds**) and suffering (**afflictions**).

20:24. Self-preservation was not a high priority for Paul. He considered his life of little value in comparison to his responsibility to preach the gospel. Paul compared his ministry to a “race” (NASB **course**, *dromon*). Like an athlete focused on finishing the race, Paul was determined to finish his task (*diakonia*, **ministry**)—the proclamation of the “good news” of God’s grace.

20:25-27. Paul turned his attention explicitly to the elders and gave them their marching orders as to how they should execute their ministry. Because Paul did not know exactly what would happen in the future, he told the elders they would never see him again. Paul did see the Ephesians again after he spent two years in Rome under house arrest; but at this point he did not know he would return to the area, so his concern was to prepare the elders for ministry in his absence.

Drawing on OT imagery of a watchman, Paul declared that he was **innocent of the blood of all men** (see Ezk 3:16-27). Because Paul had courageously proclaimed “the whole counsel of God,” he did not bear any guilt for those who rejected or distorted the gospel. He had faithfully fulfilled his obligation.

In vv. 28-31, Paul compared the ministry of the elders to a shepherd responsible for protecting his flock. Sheep need shepherds. They need a shepherd to help them find water and pasture. Wolves were a constant threat to sheep, and because sheep are defenseless, they need a shepherd for protection.

20:28. Paul gave three reasons that the elders must be vigilant. First, they were appointed by the **Holy Spirit**. Paul did not explain how the Spirit revealed their appointment. Second, the church was God’s. It did not belong to Paul or any other individual. Third, God **purchased** the church with **His own blood**, or better, “the blood of His own [Son].” Here “His own” refers to Jesus, not God the Father. It is possible that Jesus here was called God. He was called by the title *Theos* elsewhere in the NT (e.g., Jn 1:1, 18; Rm 9:5), but the NT writers were careful to avoid blending these unqualified statements of Jesus’ deity with strictly human attributes (such as blood). One never finds, for example, statements like “the cross of God” or “God was crucified at Calvary,” or “God died and rose again” (for a detailed discussion of this text, and for this understanding, see Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992],

137–141). And it is unlikely that the reference is to the blood of God the Father, who, as a spirit, does not have blood. Paul’s point in making this statement may implicitly have reminded these elders that the church they oversaw belonged to God, not to them.

The word **overseers** (*episkopoi*) in secular Greek meant “[those who have] the responsibility of safeguarding or seeing to it that something is done in the correct way” and was adopted for use in the church to describe those who provided supervision and leadership (BDAG, 379). It is a virtual synonym for elders (*presbyteroi*, v. 17), which is literally “an older man,” but had a specialized meaning that designated a church leader by his physical and spiritual maturity. These terms both signify the same office, namely that of “pastor.” Though “pastor” (*poimen*) is not used in Ac 20, the related verb *poimaino* (“to shepherd”) is found in v. 28. This suggests that those who are pastors are also elders and overseers in the church, and that pastor is not an office that differs from elder or overseer.

20:29-30. The elders have a twofold responsibility. They are to feed the sheep by teaching them the Word of God, and they are to protect the sheep from false teaching. The warning about false teachers is prophetic. The epistles reveal that false teachers were not always outsiders; often they were insiders (See 2Pt 2:1-3). False teachers are ruthless and pose a twofold danger. They will attempt to pervert the truth and persuade believers to follow them.

20:31. Paul’s final exhortation was for vigilance (**be on the alert**). He reminded them of his example. Paul was both their teacher and pastor. For three years, he had constantly watched (**night and day**) over the flock at Ephesus, even shedding tears for them.

In the conclusion of his instructions to these men, Paul committed them to God and illustrated the nature of a servant’s ministry from his own life once again (20:32-35).

20:32. Paul committed the elders to God’s care. Though Paul would no longer be with them, they would not be alone. God would be with them, and by His grace they would receive their promised inheritance. **Inheritance** (*kleronomian*) is their eternal salvation that is safeguarded in heaven for believers (1Pt 1:4).

20:33-35. Paul was no greedy charlatan. He was a man of integrity with pure motives. Paul did not covet anyone’s money (**silver and gold**) or possessions (**clothes**); rather while at Ephesus

Paul supported himself. At times, though not all the time, Paul worked as a tentmaker (Ac 18:2-3), and at other times Paul received support from the churches and devoted himself full time to ministry (Ac 18:5).

Paul was a model for helping the needy. In contrast to many of the itinerant speakers in the first century and televangelists in the 21st century, Paul's primary concern was for others, not himself. In caring for others Paul was following the instruction of the Lord Jesus who said, **It is more blessed to give than to receive.** This statement is not recorded in the Gospels, but is consistent with Jesus' teaching and ministry to the poor.

20:36-38. Before he departed, Paul knelt with the elders for prayer. The traditional posture for Jews was to stand with their hands lifted toward heaven (See 1Tm 2:8). Kneeling in this instance suggests a more personal and emotional farewell. Paul's announcement that they would never see him again brought tears and kisses. Obviously the elders loved Paul as a person and did not think of him as merely an austere apostle with divine authority. Kissing in this kind of situation was culturally appropriate and a sign of respect and regret they would never see the beloved apostle again. Though heartbroken, the elders escorted Paul to the ship.

Ministry is a serious responsibility. The church is God's flock, and leaders are called as shepherds. This role demands humility, integrity, devotion to teaching the Word of God, and protecting the sheep from false teachers (wolves). All of this would be impossible if it were not for the grace of God. Because of the Father's love and grace, God's Son shed His own blood for the church, and by His grace He will sustain those who faithfully shepherd the sheep.

e. In Tyre and Caesarea (21:1-14)

(1) Tyre (21:1-6)

In Ac 21, Luke continued his account of Paul's journey to Jerusalem and Rome (see 19:21). On the way, Paul visited believers at Tyre and Caesarea by the Sea. On both occasions, he was warned about the danger of going to Jerusalem, and his disciples attempted to dissuade him. But Paul was an apostle with a divine mission. He was ready to suffer and even to die for the Lord Jesus Christ.

21:1-3. Paul was not alone. **We** included Luke and others who were traveling with Paul. **We had parted from them** does not convey the emotional distress of leaving the Ephesian believers.

The verb **parted** (*apospasthentas*) indicates it was a painful farewell. They sailed along the coast, stopping at Cos, Rhodes, and Patara. At Patara, Paul and his companions transferred to a larger ship that was sailing for Phoenicia. The ship made port at Tyre to unload cargo. See map on the opposite page.

21:4-6. Paul and his companions went ashore and spent seven days at Tyre. **Through the Spirit** the disciples warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The expression **through the Spirit** may refer either to the human spirit or the Holy Spirit. The latter is preferred because the knowledge of what awaited Paul required knowledge of the future. Also Agabus, who warned Paul in vv. 10-11, was called a prophet, suggesting he received revelation of Paul's future from the Spirit.

Some scholars maintain, on the basis of the two warnings "by the Spirit" that Paul received and ignored, that Paul viewed some prophecies as being of a lower level of authority than the message of OT prophets, and that some prophecies could be disregarded. But the text does not actually say, "Paul, the Spirit Himself says that you should not go to Jerusalem." **They kept telling Paul through the Spirit** could just as easily mean that through prophetic revelation they knew what awaited Paul, and because of their own love for him pled with him not to go—without the plea being part of the revelatory message. It is also argued that the prophecy of Agabus in Ac 21:11—that Jewish people would bind Paul—contained an error since it was the Romans who bound Paul instead (Ac 21:31-33). However, the Jews *were* the ones who initially seized Paul (Ac 21:30; note the shout, "Away with him!" in Ac 21:36, suggesting the Jewish people turned control of him over to the Romans), and when Paul recounted the episode in Ac 26:21, he said it was Jewish people who apprehended him. These points suggest that NT prophecy is every bit as potent as that of the OT, and that there is not some sort of second-tier type of prophecy resident in the church today that may be disregarded or fallible. Paul rightly did not regard 21:4, 10-13 as a prohibition from the Spirit but as a prediction, based upon the revelatory work of the Spirit, of what awaited him in Jerusalem. After prayer with the disciples and their families, Paul continued his journey to Jerusalem.

(2) In Caesarea and to Jerusalem (21:7-16)

21:7-14. On the trip to Caesarea, Paul stopped for a day at **Ptolemais** and greeted the believers

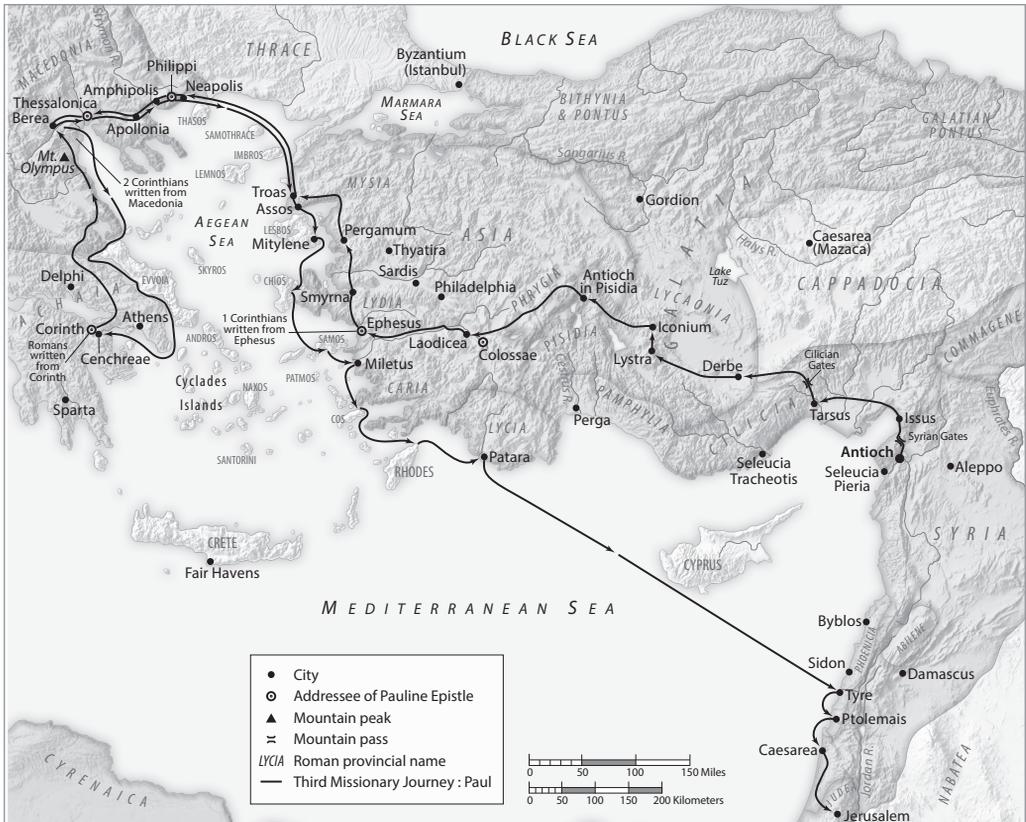
(v. 7). Luke did not explain how the church was established, but it probably came about through the preaching of the gospel by those scattered during the persecution after the martyrdom of Stephen (cf. 11:19-20). Paul stayed with **Philip the evangelist** and one of the seven chosen to supervise the distribution of food to the Hellenistic widows (cf. 6:1-7). Luke mentioned without comment that Philip had **four virgin daughters** who prophesy. His intention was perhaps to confirm that the gift of the Spirit had been given to both Jews and Gentiles and to men and women. **Agabus**, however, was the one who symbolically prophesied that Paul would be arrested and handed over to Gentiles in Jerusalem (vv. 10-14).

Again, Paul's companions responded according to human nature. They begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul understood Agabus's prophecy differently. He saw it as a prediction of what would happen and not as a prohibition (on Agabus, see also the comments above at 21:4-6).

In fact Paul said that their pleading was **breaking his heart**, a vivid statement of an assault on Paul's determination to fulfill his mission. His friends resigned themselves to the will of God (**the will of the Lord be done**). Though they desired a different outcome, they recognized that Paul had to pursue God's will.

Was Paul acting in disobedience to the will of God by going to Jerusalem? Several points suggest that he was not. First, Paul himself sincerely believed that he was in God's will (see 20:22-24). Second, he was under the impression for a long time that he should go to Jerusalem (19:21; 20:3), so this was not a rash or sinful decision. Third, Paul was told that he would suffer greatly as he bore witness (9:15-16), so that suffering in Jerusalem would not be contrary to God's will for him. Fourth, God never told Paul not to go there, but rather warned him about what to expect (20:23). Finally, 23:11 implies that Paul had God's stamp of approval on what he did and said in Jerusalem. It is hard to conceive of

Paul's Third Missionary Journey



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the mighty apostle consciously disobeying the leading of the Spirit if He did not want him in Jerusalem.

21:15-16. Some of the believers **from Caesarea** joined Paul and his companions for the overland trip to Jerusalem. They stayed at the house of **Mnason**, a Gentile convert from Cyprus, who would not object to hosting a group that included Gentiles.

Nothing could have been more definite than these two warnings, but like Christ on his final journey to Jerusalem, Paul knew what was ahead. Yet he did not allow the prospect of danger and suffering to prevent him from pursuing God's will. Sometimes in obedience to the will of God, believers may find it necessary to refuse the reasonable counsel of friends who mean well, but do not understand the compelling leading of God's Spirit.

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he reported to the Jewish congregation how God had blessed his ministry to the Gentiles. Though thankful for what God had done, the leaders informed Paul that his ministry among the Gentiles had raised suspicions about his loyalty to the law of Moses. Although many Christians today find Paul's agreement to participate in a Jewish ritual to prove his loyalty to the law surprising, in the context of the book of Acts, it makes perfect sense. He never considered faith in Jesus the Jewish Messiah as contrary to being Jewish, and so he consistently kept Jewish practices. He circumcised Timothy (Ac 16:3), took Jewish vows (Ac 18:18), kept Passover (Ac 20:6), observed Yom Kippur (Ac 27:9), and declared his absolute faithfulness to Jewish law (Ac 28:8) and customs (Ac 28:17). When on trial he never described himself as a Christian—only a Jew (Ac 21:39; 22:3) and a Pharisee (23:6; 26:5-6). His actions were unfortunately misinterpreted and ignited a riot. The Romans arrested Paul, thinking that he was a Jewish terrorist, but placed him under protective custody when they discovered that he was a Roman citizen.

F. To Rome: Paul a Prisoner (21:17–28:31)

1. His Witness in Jerusalem (21:17–23:30)

a. Before Imprisonment (21:17–30)

(1) Paul's Meeting with Jewish Believers and Their Proposal (21:17–25)

21:17-20. Paul reported on the remarkable success of his ministry among Gentiles. What God had done confirmed Paul's divine appointment as an apostle to the Gentiles. The Jewish elders, in turn, told Paul how many thousands of

Jews had believed and were zealous for the law. Verse 17 says, **the brethren received us gladly**. It is likely that on this occasion Paul delivered the proceeds of the multichurch offering gathered from the predominantly Gentile congregations scattered throughout the Mediterranean world (see the comments on 1Co 16:1-3; Rm 15:26-27; 2Co 8-9; cf. also Ac 24:17). He arrived with an enormous relief fund for the poor and persecuted believers in Judea. No wonder he was **received gladly!**

21:21. Not everyone was enthusiastic about Paul's ministry among the Gentiles. Some spread rumors that he was teaching Jews to abandon the law of Moses. The charge was twofold. One, he was telling Jews they did not need to **circumcise their children**. God established circumcision as the physical sign of His covenant with Abraham (Gn 17). Two, he was saying that Jews did not need to **walk according to the customs**. In the book of Acts, Paul stated that he always observed Jewish customs. He only refused to impose these practices on Gentile believers, a decision confirmed by the Jerusalem Council (Ac 15).

21:22-24. In view of Paul's willingness to become all things to all people (see the comments on 1Co 9:19-23), the leaders indicated they believed that the charges were not true. Yet in order to dispel doubts, the elders suggested that Paul participate in a Nazirite **vow** (see Nm 6:1-21) to show his respect for the law. A temporary Nazirite vow lasted for 30 days, but Paul probably participated only in the final days of the vow. Since Paul had been ministering in Gentile areas, he was asked to **purify** himself in addition to paying the expenses for the required offerings of the **four men** who were completing the vow.

21:25. James made it clear that Paul's participation did not void the decision of the Jerusalem Council on law versus grace and the request for Gentiles to abandon their previous pagan practices.

(2) The Jewish Leaders' Charge against and Seizure of Paul (21:26-30)

21:26. Though Paul has been criticized for participating in this vow, his actions were consistent with his philosophy of ministry. When the gospel was not the issue, Paul was willing to become all things to all men (cf. 1Co 9:20-21). This kind of accommodation is an indication of strength, not weakness. It is a wise concession, not a foolish compromise.

Though Paul had hoped to avoid unnecessary controversy over his ministry to Gentiles by participating in a Nazirite **vow**, when he attempted to complete the vow his actions ignited a riot. The angry mob seized Paul and beat him. He would have been killed if the Romans had not intervened. After order was restored, Paul asked for permission to address his countrymen.

21:27-30. Jews from the province of Asia made two accusations against Paul. First, they claimed that he was teaching **all men everywhere** against the Jewish people, the law, and the temple. This was obviously an exaggeration and false. It was similar to the charge against Stephen, who was also accused of speaking against the law and the holy place. The law and the temple were the cultural and spiritual pillars of Judaism. Luke did not record the exact charges, but Paul's teaching was seen as a direct threat to traditional Judaism.

The second charge was also serious. They claimed Paul brought **Trophimus**, a Gentile, into the temple area. Gentiles were allowed only into the outer area that surrounded the inner courts of the temple. Inscriptions in Latin and Greek warned of the death penalty for any Gentile who trespassed. It is highly unlikely that Paul would have deliberately violated the sanctity of the temple, so the charge was a lie.

The irony of this turn of events was that Paul believed he was a faithful Jew and was attempting to convince his countrymen that Jesus is the fulfillment of their messianic hopes. For his effort he was falsely accused and his life threatened.

b. After Imprisonment (21:31–23:30)

(1) His Arrest and Request to Address the Jews (21:31-40)

21:31-33. It was reported to the Roman **commander** of the **cohort** (an officer in charge of a thousand soldiers) that a riot was taking place. Paul had been violently seized by some Jewish people in the temple area (21:30), and a mob scene was quickly forming. The **commander** acted quickly to restore order. He arrested Paul and ordered him bound with two chains because he thought Paul had instigated the riot. As Agabus had predicted, Jewish hostility led to the binding of Paul by Gentiles (21:11).

21:34-36. When the commander attempted to find out the cause of the riot, the Jewish opponents were so emotionally agitated that their answers were confusing. He ordered his soldiers to take Paul to the barracks for protection. The

situation was again ironic. The Jewish people attempted to kill Paul, but he was rescued by the Romans. Paul's experience was somewhat similar to Christ's arrest and trials 30 years earlier when some Jewish people also shouted, "Away with him" (see Lk 23:18; Jn 19:15).

Paul's courage and commitment to Christ were evident in his defense. Instead of merely protesting his innocence, Paul seized the opportunity to give a testimony of his transformation by Jesus and his calling to the Gentiles.

21:37-40. When Paul asked, in Greek, for permission to speak, the commander was surprised, and concluded that Paul must be an Egyptian insurrectionist since Greek was commonly spoken in Egypt.

Though surprising, the tribune granted Paul's request, and Paul addressed the crowd in Hebrew. Many commentators think Luke used the word "Hebrew" to refer to Aramaic, the language in which Paul actually spoke, the common language of first-century Jewish people.

(2) His Address before the Crowd (22:1-21)

22:1-2. When Paul addressed the crowd in the Hebrew language, they become silent, seeing that he was one of them and not a Gentile.

22:3-5. Paul focused on his Jewish heritage, his transformation by the Messiah Jesus, and his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. First, Paul referred to his heritage. He was born and raised in Tarsus, and was trained as a Pharisee by Gamaliel, one of the most renowned teachers of the school of Hillel (on Hillel's background, see the comments on Mt 19:3; for Gamaliel, see the comments on Ac 5:33-39). Paul was zealous for God, and had received official permission to arrest Jewish believers in Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. Paul's point was that he was zealous for the law and had persecuted Jewish believers much as his countrymen were now persecuting him.

22:6-11. Paul also referred to his transformation by Jesus the Messiah. On the journey to Damascus, he was blinded by a brilliant light. He heard a voice saying, **Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?** He discovered the heavenly messenger was **Jesus the Nazarene**, one of the common titles used by Jewish people to emphasize Jesus' human origin. Paul's use of the title here is evidence that the human Jesus is now the resurrected Lord and Messiah. The Lord informed Paul that he would find out what he had been appointed to do in Damascus. Those

traveling with Paul knew something unusual had happened but did not understand the meaning of Paul's experience. They led Paul into the city.

22:12-16. Paul referred to his calling. He recounted how Ananias, a devout Jew who respected the law, was used by God to help restore his sight and informed him of his divine calling as a witness to all men. As one who personally saw the resurrected Lord, Paul met the qualifications for an apostle (cf. Ac 1:22, 1Co 9:1).

Because Paul expressed his faith by calling on the name of Jesus, he was instructed to submit to baptism as an outward sign of inward spiritual cleansing. In the early church baptism was symbolic and indispensable testimony of the conversion experience (see the comments on Rm 6:1-4; 1Pt 3:18-20); however, it is faith in Jesus and not baptism that saves (cf. Ac 16:31; Eph 2:8-9).

22:17-22. Paul provided new information about what happened when he returned to Jerusalem. As a faithful Jew, he went into the temple to pray (v. 17) and received divine guidance through a **trance** (*ekstasis*, from which the word "ecstasy" is derived). Paul's experience would resonate with Jews, who knew that God had sometimes spoken to the prophets through visions (cf. Is 6:1-13). His experience was also somewhat parallel to Peter's vision (Ac 10:10; 11:5, where *ekstasis* is also used).

Like those who were now Paul's accusers, Paul had once been an enemy of believers, but he had been wrong. The Lord warned Paul to leave Jerusalem (v. 18) because his own people would reject his testimony, though everyone knew of Paul's reputation as a persecutor of Jewish followers of Jesus (v. 19), and especially his role as a witness to the stoning of Stephen (v. 20). **Witness**, used here in reference to Stephen, may be the first use of the word *martus* in the full sense of a "martyr" in the Greek language—a witness who dies for his faith.

Instead the Lord dramatically reversed Paul's life and mission. He was commanded to go to the Gentiles (v. 21). This climactic point of Paul's testimony was more than his Jewish audience could tolerate. They exploded in anger and shouted that he did not deserve to live. Paul's statement infuriated them because they understood this as the reason that Paul had brought a Gentile into a forbidden area of the temple—the false charge they had brought against Paul.

(3) His Claim of Roman Citizenship (22:22-29)

22:22-24. Thinking that Paul had intentionally inflamed the crowd, the commander took measures to have Paul flogged with a whip, probably the *flagellum*, with pieces of bone and metal attached to the leather thongs (see the comments on Mt 27:24-26). This kind of flogging was used only on noncitizens since it could cripple or even kill the victim. It was thus completely improper to use it on Paul as a Roman citizen.

22:25-29. Rather than endure unnecessary punishment, Paul claimed his right as a **Roman** citizen. This shocked the commander, who revealed that he had to purchase his **citizenship** for a large sum of money. At various periods during the Roman Empire, it was possible to purchase citizenship, but it was very expensive and out of the question for most people. Paul, on the other hand, was born a Roman citizen. His status as a citizen immediately changed Paul's circumstances. The Romans now faced a serious problem, "How do we treat a Roman citizen who has been unjustly arrested?" Paul's appeal to his citizenship was not inconsistent with his willingness to suffer and die for his faith. In this particular situation, Paul saw the advantage of using his citizenship to proclaim the gospel and advance the kingdom. Paul probably did not realize that his citizenship would take him to Rome, but he at least knew that in his present circumstances it would give him an opportunity to witness to his own people.

Paul's defense emphasized several points. First, he was a faithful Jew, not an apostate. Second, the circumstances surrounding his faith in Jesus as Messiah were supernatural and were consistent with God's promises to Israel (cf. the comments on Rm 11:1-2). Third, his commission to the Gentiles was legitimized by the Jewish rejection of the gospel and divine revelation.

As did his Lord and Stephen, Paul showed exceptional courage before the Sanhedrin, but instead of his being executed, the outcome was ironic. Paul was rescued by the Romans.

(4) His Appearance before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:9)

(a) His Incident with the High Priest (22:30-23:5)

22:30. The commander was persistent because he was committed to upholding Roman law. He wanted to know **for certain** (the facts) why the Jews were violently opposed to Paul. The next day he ordered the Sanhedrin to convene

and brought Paul before the chief priests and council (Sanhedrin).

23:1-2. Paul did not attempt to answer specific charges; instead he based his defense on his relationship with God. He had a **perfectly good conscience before God**. Paul was more concerned about how God would judge him than the Sanhedrin. Though he was a Jew who followed Jesus, he had done nothing to dishonor God.

His claim was inflammatory. The high priest thought Paul had committed blasphemy. He ordered him struck **on the mouth**.

23:3. Paul's response was surprising. He insulted the high priest calling him a **white-washed wall**. The imagery comes from coating a decaying, crumbling wall (Ezk 13:10-16) with a veneer of whitewash to hide its true condition. Paul's implication could not have been clearer. The high priest dressed in priestly robes was a hypocrite. Jesus referred to Israel's religious leaders as whitewashed tombs (Mt 23:27).

23:4-5. It was against the law to curse God or the leader of God's people (Ex 22:28) as one of the bystanders reminded Paul. Paul's response was cryptic, **I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest**. Paul even quoted Ex 22:28. This suggests Paul knew he was speaking to the high priest and the insult was intentional and ironic. Some have suggested Paul did not recognize the high priest for various reasons, but these seem improbable. Ananias, who was the high priest, was notorious as a glutton, thief, and conspirator with the Romans. Paul was sarcastically saying, "I did not realize such a man could become the high priest of Israel."

(b) His Incitement of Pharisees and Sadducees (23:6-9)

23:6-9. Paul did not wait for the high priest to respond. He went on the offensive. Realizing (**perceiving**) that both Pharisees and Sadducees were present, he instigated a volatile debate on the resurrection. Paul was a Pharisee and appealed to his hope for a resurrection. The Sadducees denied the resurrection. Luke also said the Sadducees denied angels and spirits (v. 8). This is somewhat of a problem since there is no other evidence the Sadducees did not believe in angels or spirits (see Bock, *Acts*, 671-72 for a discussion of the options).

The two Jewish sects became engaged in a bitter and violent argument. The Pharisees became Paul's advocates. Although they did not accept his claims that Jesus is alive, they said, **We find nothing wrong with this man**.

(5) The Conspiracy to Take His Life (23:10-30)

23:10. The commander rescued Paul for a third time. When the debate degenerated into physical violence, he ordered his men to take Paul to the barracks for safety. The mob was so violent it was apparently necessary for the soldiers to carry Paul to the safety of the barracks.

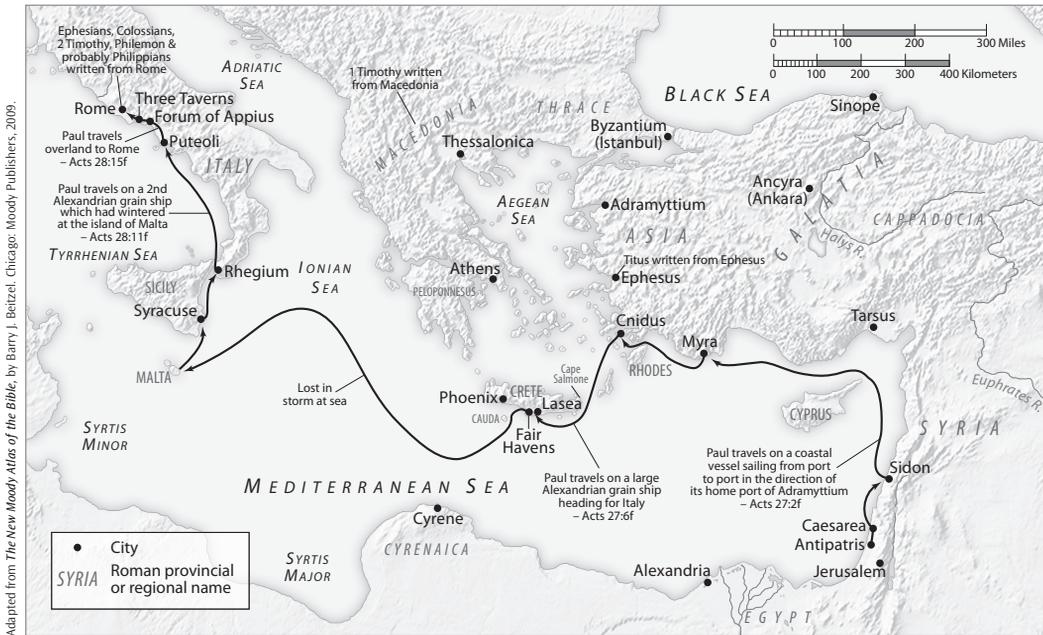
Proverbs 16:9 reads, "In his heart a man plans his course, the LORD determines his steps" (NIV 1984). Paul's situation was bleak. His fellow Jews wanted to kill him. The Romans thought he was a revolutionary and arrested him. He was the victim of lies and violence. His life was in jeopardy. There seemed hardly any chance that Paul's dream to witness in Rome would come true, yet the Lord remained sovereign.

23:11. In a theophany (a physical manifestation of God), the Lord reassured Paul that he made the right decision in coming to Jerusalem. He would have the opportunity to proclaim the gospel in Rome, the capital of the empire. He came to Paul at night. He stood by his side to assure him. He did not confront him face to face. Though Paul had every reason to be afraid, he was not a coward. The Lord told him to be courageous and confirmed that Paul's desire to proclaim the gospel in Jerusalem and in Rome (see 19:21) was His will and that it would come about. The promise in 23:11 dominates the narrative from this point on in Acts. Luke emphasized how the Lord worked providentially and supernaturally to protect Paul, His chosen servant, on his way to Rome.

23:12-15. A group of 40 Jews conspired to assassinate Paul. They made a suicidal oath vowing, essentially, "May God curse me if I fail to do this." Their **plot** was to ambush Paul in the narrow streets of Jerusalem. God, however, can and sometimes does frustrate the plans of evil men, and in this situation he providentially intervened through Paul's nephew.

23:16-22. Paul's nephew discovered the plot and told Paul. Though his discovery of the plot might seem as if it were "a stroke of good luck," it was the providence of the sovereign Lord in protecting Paul. Luke did not explain how Paul's nephew learned of the assassination plot, but he warned Paul, who asked one of the centurions to take his nephew to the commander. Paul's nephew informed the commander of the plot, and the commander cautioned Paul's nephew to keep their meeting a secret.

Paul's Journey to Rome



Adapted from *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible*, by Barry J. Beitzel. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009.

The contrast here is unbelievably ironic. Paul was threatened by his own people but protected by the Gentiles. These Jewish opponents were blinded and driven by fanatical zeal. The Roman commander, who was an unbeliever, was controlled and rational. This was high drama. The stakes could not have been higher. Paul's life was in danger. If Paul died, the new faith would receive a severe blow. If his enemies prevailed, Paul could be executed and Christianity declared an illegal religion by the Romans. But the Lord assured Paul of a different outcome (see 23:11).

After Paul's nephew informed the commander of the plot to assassinate Paul, the Romans took action to protect him. They organized a detachment of soldiers to transfer Paul to Caesarea, the center for Roman rule in Judea, where there was better security.

23:23-24. Because of the possibility of an ambush during the transfer from Jerusalem to Caesarea, a distance of 60 miles, the commander ordered a detachment of infantry, cavalry, and spearmen to escort Paul. He also ordered the transfer to take place at night for additional secrecy.

23:25. It is not known how Luke obtained his information, but he recorded a copy of the letter or at least part of it.

23:26. Claudius, the commander, wrote to Felix, who was the Roman military governor of

Judea from AD 52 to 60. Antonius Felix (born probably before AD 10) was born as a slave, the son of Antonia Minor, who was the daughter of Marc Antony, and later received his freedom, probably from Emperor Claudius. He was a social outcast and obtained his position as procurator around AD 52, but only with considerable help from his influential older brother, Pallas, and a fair amount of underhandedness to oust his predecessor, Ventidius Cumanus. Felix was morally vile and cruel. The letter from Claudius the commander was to explain the reason he was transferring Paul to Caesarea rather than resolve the problem himself in Jerusalem.

23:27-30. Though the purpose was to explain the transfer of Paul, the letter was remarkably self-serving. Claudius was brazen in his attempt to make himself look good. The English text contains eight uses of the personal pronoun "I." The other important feature of the letter is that it exonerated Paul, a Roman citizen, of civil disobedience. The charges involved issues about Jewish, not Roman, law.

2. His Witness in Caesarea by the Sea (23:31-26:32)

a. Paul's Arrival and Assignment of Quarters (23:31-35)

23:31-35. The entire contingent of soldiers accompanied Paul to Antipatris, 25 miles

southeast from Caesarea. The journey to Antipatris was the most dangerous part of the journey because the terrain was semi-mountainous and suited for an ambush. After Antipatris, the country was open and flat and less dangerous, so when they reached Antipatris, the infantry returned to Jerusalem. The soldiers delivered their prisoner to Felix, who decided to try the case even though Paul was from the province of Cilicia. This was somewhat unusual since cases were typically tried in the province of the accused. Plus, instead of receiving harsh confinement, Paul was basically under house arrest in Felix's official residence, the palace (**Praetorium**, the official abode of a governor) built by Herod the Great for himself about 75 years earlier. These developments were more than circumstantial. They revealed God's sovereign providence in fulfilling his promise to Paul that he would testify in Rome (cf. Ac 23:11).

At the time of Paul's hearing, Felix had been governor of Judea for five years. Though responsible to uphold Roman law, Felix was notorious as an inept and brutal ruler. Yet in his defense Paul boldly challenged Felix with the ethical demands of faith in Jesus Christ.

b. Paul's Defense before Felix the Governor (24:1-21)

(1) The Accusation by the Jewish Leaders (24:1-9)

24:1a. Chapter 24:1-8 continues Luke's narrative by summarizing the situation under which the charges against Paul were formed. The intensity of the opposition to Paul is reflected in the coming of the high priest, Ananias, to Caesarea and the hiring of a high-powered advocate to present the case against Paul.

24:1b-3. Tertullus's opening remarks were loaded with patronizing flattery. He praised Felix for his peaceful rule and reforms, hoping to influence the governor for a favorable decision. Civil unrest had actually become worse under Felix's rule.

24:4-6. Tertullus presented three charges against Paul. First, knowing that the Romans did not tolerate civil disorder, he said that Paul was a troublemaker, a **pest** or public nuisance. Second, he was the leader of a **sect of the Nazarenes**. Since the Romans had not yet distinguished Christianity from Judaism, which was a legal religion, Tertullus gave a cryptic description of this new faith in Jesus to raise Felix's suspicions about a new sect. Jesus was from Nazareth, so the description was accurate, but not one that

would have been familiar to Felix, plus Paul was the ringleader of this seditious movement. Third, he accused Paul of defiling the temple. The Sadducees, who were collaborators with the Romans, were responsible for maintaining order in the temple. This is why they seized Paul—they were trying to keep peace, but Paul had ignited a riot. The charge was false but one that Tertullus hoped the Romans would act on. All three of these charges were cleverly designed. Under Gallio faith in Jesus was officially and legally viewed as a subset of Judaism, and as such Rome would not view it as illegal. But anything that disturbed the *pax Romana* ("peace established by Rome") was not going to be tolerated, and even a whiff of insurrection would arouse Rome's fury. Tertullus's charges minimized the religious dispute the Jewish leaders had with Paul, and emphasized the points about which the Romans would be most concerned.

24:7-9. Though Tertullus tried to frame the case to make it appear that Paul violated Roman law, he did not provide any solid evidence. This is perhaps the reason that he encouraged Felix to question Paul further and that all the Jewish opponents present joined in a verbal attack on Paul.

In his defense, Paul denied the charges, and claimed to be a Jew, whose hope was in God's promises to Israel. Though Felix knew that Paul was innocent, he ordered him held as a prisoner for two years but with limited freedom. Felix hoped that Paul would pay him a bribe, but he also talked with Paul about faith in Jesus. Paul used the opportunity to challenge Felix with the moral demands of following Christ.

(2) The Answer by Paul (24:10-21)

24:10-13. Paul claimed that the truth was that he had gone to Jerusalem to worship God, that he was not involved in civil disobedience, and that the Jews could not prove the charges against him.

24:14-16. He said he worshiped the same God as his accusers but **according to the Way** (cf. comments at 9:1-2), which his Jewish opponents claimed was a heretical sect. Paul contended that his new messianic Judaism, with Jesus at its core, was consistent with God's promises for Israel. Paul's point was that the dispute was religious and not political, and by emphasizing this he reflected Gallio's decision years before. As did his accusers, Paul believed in the law of Moses and the prophets and had the same hope in a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

He had done his best to keep a clear conscience before God and men. Paul was not a renegade Jew, and he was not the ringleader of a subversive movement.

24:17-18. After his defense of the gospel, Paul defended himself. He had come to Jerusalem with an offering for the poor. Though a follower of Christ, Paul had not abandoned his Jewish heritage. He identified himself with the Jewish people by calling them **my nation**. He honored God by ritually purifying himself when he went into the temple.

24:19-21. Paul discredited his accusers by noting that they were not even present to defend their charges against him. The Jewish leaders had come from Jerusalem according to 24:1, but the actual Jews from Asia (v. 18), who had instigated the riot against Paul by accusing him of bringing a Gentile into the temple (21:27-28), were absent. Paul's only crime was that he believed in the resurrection. Such a belief was religious and not illegal according to Roman law or heretical according to Jewish hopes.

c. Paul's Later Experience with Felix the Governor (24:22-27)

24:22-23. Though Felix understood the basic facts about **the Way** (cf. comments at 9:1-2), he postponed his decision until Claudius Lysias, the commander who arrested Paul, came from Jerusalem. He ordered Paul placed under guard but with the privilege for his friends to visit and provide for his needs.

24:24. Because Felix's wife, Drusilla (born around AD 38), was nominally Jewish, Felix thought that perhaps she would be interested in what Paul had to say or at least she could give a more objective opinion about the controversy concerning the Way. She was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I (the "Herod" of Ac 12 who killed James), and as a member of Herod's family probably knew more about this new movement than Felix.

24:25-26. Aware of Felix's reputation for immorality and corruption, Paul emphasized **righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come** in his witness to the governor. These three terms focused on personal morality and not matters related to Felix's governorship. It is obvious from Felix's response that he was troubled by what Paul said. **Frightened** (v. 25) is the word *emphobos* rather than the more common *phobos*, and indicates a more intense emotional response. Instead of repenting, Felix dismissed Paul with the intent of meeting with him in the

future. He was not, however, interested in more information but a bribe. Though illegal, Roman officials often accepted bribes from political prisoners.

24:27. Felix ignored justice and kept Paul confined for two years because he hoped to gain the support of the Jews. At the end of the two years of Paul's imprisonment, Festus replaced Felix as governor of Judea (c. AD 58). Felix was recalled to Rome to answer for his incompetent administration of the Region, but he was rescued from severe punishment by his brother Pallas. Nothing more is known of him following this point. Festus had the reputation of a more effective and just administrator; Luke, however, portrayed him as more interested in appeasing the Jewish leadership than administering justice. At first he resisted the Jewish leadership's request to return Paul to Jerusalem, but in the end he opted for patronizing expediency rather than political justice. He decided to return Paul to Jerusalem for a hearing before the Sanhedrin.

Paul knew that there were still plans to assassinate him, so he appealed to Caesar. This sort of appeal was a benefit of Roman citizenship. Any Roman citizen accused of a crime could appeal to be tried before Caesar himself. In appealing to Caesar, Paul's concern was about more than his personal fate; he was concerned about the freedom of the church to proclaim the gospel. If Paul would be exonerated, then the church would be exonerated.

d. Paul's Defense before Festus the Governor (25:1-12)

Though undoubtedly in circumstances different from what he had expected, Paul was now in a position to fulfill the second part of his dream—to preach the gospel in Rome. But before being transferred to Rome, Paul seized the opportunity to give his testimony to both Festus and Agrippa.

25:1-3. Luke recorded Paul's hearing before governor Festus in 25:1-12. When Festus, the new governor, traveled to Jerusalem, the foremost complaint of the religious leaders was about Paul. They asked Festus to transfer Paul to Jerusalem. Luke, however, revealed that their real motive was to ambush Paul.

25:4-5. Festus refused. He required the Jewish religious leaders to follow proper legal procedures and go to Caesarea to plead their case there against Paul.

25:6. As soon as Festus returned to Caesarea, he summoned Paul for a hearing. For the

hearing he sat on a *bema*, a raised judgment seat where one in a position of judicial authority would sit to render his verdict in a court case he had overseen.

25:7-8. Paul's accusers surrounded him making numerous **serious charges**, which they could not prove. Paul denied that he had committed a crime against the law, the temple, or Caesar. He was an honorable Jew and Roman citizen. The charge about his loyalty to Caesar was perhaps the most serious. If Festus decided that Paul was a troublemaker, then he would move to prosecute him.

25:9. Instead of making a civil decision, Festus made a political one. He attempted to patronize the religious leadership by returning Paul to Jerusalem.

25:10-11. Paul protested. He claimed that he had not committed any crimes against the Jews. If he were a criminal, Paul was willing to accept even the death penalty, but if he were innocent, then he had the right to appeal to Caesar.

25:12. After conferring with his legal advisors, Festus honored Paul's request. More was at stake than Paul's well-being. Paul was concerned about protecting the legal status of the new movement, but his appeal was also motivated by his desire to proclaim the gospel in Rome. This latter motive is supported by the conclusion of Acts, which depicts Paul teaching about the kingdom of God unhindered (cf. 28:31).

e. Paul's Defense before Herod Agrippa II the King (25:13–26:32)

(1) Prelude to the Defense (25:13-27)

When Herod Agrippa II arrived with his sister Bernice to pay their respects to the new governor, Festus saw an opportunity to get his advice about Paul from two people who were more knowledgeable about Judaism. Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I (see Ac 12:1-23), and great grandson of Herod the Great. He ruled as tetrarch in Chalcis (modern northern Syria) beginning around AD 50, but eventually acquired Galilee and Jerusalem as well. He was well acquainted with Jewish customs so was occasionally consulted by the Romans, as was probably the case with Festus. Bernice was his sister, widowed when her second husband died in AD 48. After that she lived with Agrippa II, and though she denied an incestuous relationship, one probably existed.

25:13-16. Festus explained the problem that he inherited from Felix. When he was in

Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders wanted Paul executed, but Roman law permitted the accused to meet face to face with his accusers.

25:17-19. Festus omitted details about the transfer of Paul to Caesarea. When Paul's accusers presented their case against Paul, Festus was surprised by the accusations. The dispute was about Judaism and a dead man named Jesus, whom Paul claimed is alive. The complaint was obviously religious and not civil in nature, charges that Festus could not judge.

25:20-22. When Festus decided to return Paul to Jerusalem for trial, Paul appealed to Caesar. Festus was now holding him in custody until he could be sent to Caesar. Agrippa was intrigued. He asked to hear the case, and the hearing was set for the next day.

25:23. The scene was one of contrast. Agrippa and Bernice came adorned in their purple robes of royalty and gold accompanied by a host of attendants. The military commanders were present, perhaps in full dress uniforms, and the prominent men of the city in their finest robes. The prisoner was brought in, perhaps in chains. Early descriptions of Paul portray him as short, coarse, and physically unimpressive.

25:24-27. Festus explained to Agrippa and the others present the reasons he needed their opinion about Paul's case. The Jewish religious leadership in Jerusalem and Caesarea had charged that Paul should be put to death, but Festus had not found sufficient evidence to support their accusation. Plus, Paul had made an appeal to Caesar, and Festus did not know what charges he should make against him. Festus admitted that Paul's case was absurd. He had already determined that the accusations were religious and not civil (cf. 25:19). Festus was probably concerned about his reputation. If he sent Paul to Caesar without credible charges, he would appear foolish.

(2) Particulars of the Defense (26:1-29)

26:1. Since Festus had asked for Agrippa's opinion, Agrippa was the one who granted Paul permission to speak. Paul **stretched out his hand** in respect for the king (Bruce, *Acts*, 496) as he began his **defense** (*apologeomai*, from which the word "apology" is derived).

26:2-3. Paul began by saying that he considered it a privilege to make his defense before Herod Agrippa II. Paul was not patronizing the king. The statement, **especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews** is accurate because Agrippa was well

informed about Jewish customs, and certainly more objective than the Sanhedrin to evaluate Paul's case.

Paul's defense followed a typical rhetorical form of prologue (vv. 2-3), narration (vv. 4-18), confirmation (vv. 19-20), refutation (v. 21), and concluding appeal (vv. 22-23) (Bock, *Acts*, 713). Though giving a formal defense, Paul focused his account on the resurrection (cf. v. 8 and v. 23).

26:4-8. Paul had been a Jew all of his life and was even a Pharisee, who lived according to the **strictest** demands of the law. Twice Paul identified himself with the Jews, **our fathers** (v. 6) and **our twelve tribes** (v. 7). Paul maintained he was thoroughly Jewish, and his hope in the resurrection was identical to the promise that God made to His chosen people.

26:9-11. Since he considered himself a faithful Jew, Paul formerly had felt obligated to oppose **the name of Jesus of Nazareth**. Paul referred to Jesus from the perspective of an unbelieving Jew. Before the Damascus road experience, Paul believed that Jesus was not Lord or Messiah; he was from the insignificant town of Nazareth. In Jerusalem, Paul had received authority from the chief priests to imprison Jewish believers, and he had voted for the death penalty for them. He had tried to force Jewish believers to **blasphem[y]** by apparently denying Jesus. He was so **enraged** against believers that he pursued them to cities outside of Israel.

26:12-15. But while on a mission to Damascus, he had an encounter that changed his life. He saw a light that was brighter than the sun and heard a voice that asked in Hebrew, **Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? The goads** are spikes on a pole or plank that is used to train and control an ox or horse to pull a cart. The imagery implies that resistance against Jesus is painful and useless. When Saul asked who was speaking to him, the Lord identified himself as **Jesus whom you are persecuting**. The implication could not be clearer. If Jesus were the one speaking to Saul, then Jesus must be alive, and if He were alive then what he claimed was obviously true. He is the Messiah.

26:16-18. Paul then explained his commission to be a witness to the Gentiles. Paul's mission was threefold: (1) to **open the eyes** of unbelievers, (2) to turn them from darkness to light, from Satan to God, and (3) to witness so that they could receive **forgiveness of sins** and an **inheritance** among those who had been

sanctified. Sometimes the verb **sanctified** means "to be consecrated," "to be dedicated" to a certain task, "to be set apart for God," and can have the practical sense of growth in personal purity as a Christian set apart for God (see Jn 17:17; 2Tm 2:21). But often it is essentially synonymous with "being saved" (as in Ac 20:32; 1Co 1:2; 6:11), and this is the sense here. The effective cause of this supernatural transforming experience was **faith**. Of course, in describing his conversion experience in this manner, Paul hoped that both Festus and Agrippa would become convicted and repent.

26:19-21. Paul said that his Jewish opponents had tried to kill him because he was obedient to the heavenly vision. Paul gave a concise summary of his preaching. He challenged people to **repent** (lit., to change one's mind, and in the context of Acts, to specifically change one's mind about Jesus, cf. 3:13-19, especially, 3:19, and **turn to God** (based on the Heb. concept of repentance, meaning "to turn around toward God"), and perform **deeds appropriate to repentance** (the fruit of repentance being changed lives and accompanying good deeds). This is not salvation by works but a practical truth that a changed life is the inevitable result of genuine faith.

26:22-23. Paul insisted that his message was consistent with the promises of the prophets and Moses. There is little evidence that early (intertestamental) Judaism believed that the Messiah would suffer, die, and conquer death. Paul, however, though he did not cite specific texts, claimed that the OT predicted the concept of a suffering Messiah and the resurrection. Likely Paul had passages such as Is 52:13-53:12 and Ps 16:10 in mind. Jesus' correction of the thinking of the two men on the road to Emmaus supports Paul's understanding of the OT (cf. Lk 24:25-27).

26:24. Festus charged that Paul was so advanced in his training in Judaism that his thinking was ridiculous. The practical and rationalistic Romans did not believe in life after death. Longenecker has this insight about the timeless truth of Festus's charge: "Down through the ages Festus's response has been echoed by men and women too trapped by the natural to open to the supernatural, too confined by the 'practical' to care about life everlasting" (Longenecker, "Acts," 554).

26:25-27. Paul denied the charge of insanity, and appealed to Agrippa for support. He was sure that Agrippa had heard about the death

and resurrection of Jesus. Plus, Agrippa must certainly have believed in the prophets. By asking Agrippa a direct question, Paul the prisoner, became Paul the persuader.

26:28. Paul's direct question upset Agrippa. Agrippa's response has been interpreted in a way that implies he was close to a decision: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (κἰν). His response was actually somewhat cynical: "Are you trying to convince me to become a Christian?" Agrippa was ridiculing Paul for thinking that he could convince him to become a Christian with such a brief argument (see comments about the word "Christian" at 11:26).

26:29. Paul's answer contained a bit of irony. He wished that all who were present would become like him, that is spiritually free but not a prisoner in chains.

(3) Result of the Defense: A Declaration of Paul's Innocence (26:30-32)

26:30-32. Agrippa, Festus, Bernice, and the others who were present left the room to discuss the case. All agreed that Paul had not committed a capital offense. Luke recorded the words of Agrippa to vindicate both Paul and Christianity of sedition.

Paul was God's attested servant (apostle). In his account of Paul's journey to Rome, Luke showed how the sovereign Lord providentially protected his chosen servant and those who were with Paul.

3. His Witness En Route to Rome (27:1-28:15)

a. Aboard Ship (27:1-44)

After the hearing before Festus and Agrippa, Paul was placed in the custody of a centurion and put on a ship sailing for Rome. The journey was uneventful until they attempted to sail from Fair Havens for a safer harbor for the winter; then the ship was caught in a powerful storm. When the crew gave up hope, Paul emerged as a courageous Christian and assured the crew no one would be lost. The ship foundered on a reef, but all on board made it safely to land on the island of Malta.

27:1-3. Under circumstances Paul could not have anticipated, he began his journey to Rome. When he was turned over to a centurion for transfer to Rome, God used two men to assure Paul of His sovereign control over the situation. The pronoun **we** indicates that Luke was with him.

Aristarchus, a believer from Thessalonica, also made the trip with Paul. In Col 4:10, Paul

referred to Aristarchus as his "fellow prisoner," so he apparently traveled all the way to Rome with Paul. Neither Luke nor Aristarchus was given free passage, so they probably paid their own expenses. Plus, it was risky to associate with a prisoner, so both men were obviously dedicated to the Lord and to Paul.

Paul and other prisoners were placed in the custody of Julius, a centurion, who belonged to the Augustan (Imperial) Regiment, which was a special corps of men who acted as liaison officers between the Emperor and the provinces.

They sailed on a ship from **Adramyttium**, a seaport on the northeast shore of the Aegean Sea, near Troas. Instead of sailing directly across the Mediterranean Sea, they sailed north to **Sidon** to perhaps unload cargo and pick up supplies.

In the providence of God, the centurion charged with the security of the prisoners was gracious and not brutal. He allowed Paul to visit his friends who provided him with supplies for the voyage. Passengers and prisoners were responsible for their own supplies.

27:4-6. When they left Sidon the voyage became difficult. The strong winter **winds** made progress difficult, so they sailed north of Cyprus for protection from northwestern winds. After they passed Cilicia and Pamphylia, they sailed for Myra. When they reached Myra, the centurion transferred the prisoners to a ship from Alexandria that was sailing to Rome. The ship was probably carrying grain. Egypt was the breadbasket for Rome.

27:7-8. The voyage became increasingly difficult as they sailed west, but they finally reached **Fair Havens** on the island of Crete. Here there was debate and indecision.

27:9-12. Since so much time had been lost on the voyage to Fair Havens, sailing had become dangerous. The reference to **the fast** identified the time of the year. The **fast** was part of the Day of Atonement, so it was late September or October. Winter was approaching. Most sailing was discontinued from November to March.

Paul was an experienced traveler. He began to **admonish** the captain and the crew, "strongly recommending" they stay put for the winter and not attempt to reach another port. His counsel was ignored. The captain of the ship persuaded the centurion they should sail for another harbor for the **winter**. He recommended Phoenix, which has a protected harbor **facing southwest and northwest**. Its location would provide the

ship with better protection than the harbor at Fair Havens.

27:13. When a light wind came up from the south, they weighed anchor to sail for Phoenix, keeping as close to the shoreline as possible.

27:14-15. The decision to leave port was a mistake. They had not sailed far when the ship was hit broadside with a **violent wind, called Euraquilo**. The wind was a dreaded “northeastern.” Luke described it as **violent** (*typhonikos*, “typhonic”) in force. It was so powerful, the sailors lost control of the ship and were **driven along** by the wind.

27:16-17. The wind drove the ship 25 miles south to the island of Clauda. On the southern side of the island they found enough **shelter** from the wind to secure the lifeboat that was towed behind the ship. The use of “we” suggests some of the passengers may have assisted the crew.

They also used rope cables to secure the hull of the ship. Polhill lists the four possible ways they may have used the cables to make the timbers of the ship more secure (*Acts*, 521, n. 23). One, they could have passed width-wise under the ship on the outside of the hull. Two, they could have run the cables length-wise around the length of the ship on the outside. Three, the cables could have run width-wise across the inside of the ship. Four, the cables could have run length-wise inside the hull from bow to stern.

The crew was working frantically to keep the ship from running **aground on the shallows of Syrtis**. The shallows were a series of deadly sandbars off the coast of North Africa infamous as a graveyard for vessels. The ship was about 400 miles from where they started (Bock, *Acts*, 735–36).

27:18-20. On the second day of the storm, they began to **jettison** cargo (probably some of the grain; cf. 27:38). When the storm continued into the third day, the crew became so desperate they threw **tackle** overboard. Luke did not specify what equipment was jettisoned. The purpose was to make the ship lighter, so it would ride higher and take on less water from the waves that were apparently crashing over the sides of the ship.

None of their efforts were successful. The storm continued its relentless assault on the ship. After several days without seeing the sun or stars, they lost all hope and resigned themselves to death at sea.

27:21-26. In this hopeless situation, Paul emerged as man of courage and common sense.

Because the ship had been tossed around on the sea for several days, all on board had lost their appetite. No one appreciates someone who says, “I told you so,” but that is exactly what Paul said, **Men, you ought to have followed my advice . . .**

He assured them no one would drown at sea. Paul was not a divine man who could control nature. The ship would be lost, but there would be no loss of life. How did Paul know this? An angelic messenger of God appeared to him. The angel assured Paul he would **stand before Caesar**, and because it was God’s intention to protect Paul, He would also protect all of those who were with Paul. The angel’s reassurance served as a promise to Paul that God would fulfill what He had previously revealed to Paul about testifying in both Jerusalem and Rome.

Paul urged the men to **keep up their courage**. That would take faith, the kind of faith Paul had in God and his Word. We do not know if any of the sailors or soldiers became believers, but it is reasonable to assume that some did.

Paul’s speech of salvation ended with a second warning about the loss of the ship. He revealed exactly how the ship would wreck. It would **run aground on a certain island**. That was a remarkable prediction since in their present location hitting the island of Malta would be “like finding a needle in a haystack” (Bock, *Acts*, 738).

27:27-29. On the fourteenth night, the storm had driven the ship into the **Adriatic Sea** (sea of Adria—the body of water that forms the east coast of Italy). Polhill identifies this area as the Ionian sea and the north central Mediterranean sea between Greece and Italy, extending south to Crete and Malta (*Acts*, 524–25). The storm had driven the ship 475 miles from Clauda to Malta.

About midnight, the sailors sensed they were near land and began taking soundings. This would involve throwing a rope overboard with some kind of a weight on it. The depth of the first sounding was twenty fathoms (120 feet) and the second fifteen fathoms (90 feet). They were obviously nearing land. To keep the ship pointed in the direction of land, they dropped four anchors from the stern (the back of the boat) and **wished for daybreak**. They hoped that by the light of day they could determine their location.

27:30-32. The sailors had had enough. They decided to abandon ship in the lifeboat but under the pretense of putting out anchors from the bow (front) of the ship. Paul knew what they

were doing and warned the centurion: **Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.** Paul had been right so far, so the sailors cut the ropes to the lifeboat, allowing it to drift away from the ship.

27:33-34. Paul was not only a man of incredible faith but also of common sense. The men who had been struggling to save the ship had not eaten full meals, or meals at regular times, for 14 days. He urged all on board **to take some food** and assured them they would survive. The expression, **not a hair from the head of any of you will perish**, is a Hebrew idiom for being preserved without harm (see 1Sm 14:45).

Stott says that Paul's counsel shows him as a well-rounded Christian. "Here then are aspects of Paul's character which endear him to us as an integrated Christian, who combined spirituality with sanity, faith and works. He believed that God would keep his promises and had the courage to say grace in the presence of a crowd of hard-bitten pagans . . . What a man! He was a man of God and of action, a man of the Spirit and of common sense" (*Acts*, 392).

27:35-38. Paul encouraged the others to eat by first giving **thanks to God** and eating bread. This was not a communion meal. That would not give those on board the nourishment needed to survive the ship wreck. All 276 followed Paul's advice and ate. Ships like this could hold up to 600 people, so 276 was not a representative number (Bock, *Acts*, 740). Confident they would not perish, they lightened the ship even more by throwing the remaining grain overboard.

27:39-44. At first light the sailors spotted land and decided to beach the ship if possible. They cut the lines to the anchors, freed the rudders (most ships had a dual-paddle mechanism connected by a crossbar operated by a sailor for piloting a ship—but this was dismantled in the hope of the wind driving them shoreward), and hoisted the foresail (a small sail on the front of the boat) to guide the ship to land. But before they hit land, they hit a reef. The bow stuck on the reef, and the ship was pounded by the surf. Realizing that if the ship broke up, the prisoners might escape, the soldiers planned to kill them since they would be held accountable if they escaped.

The centurion intervened in order to save Paul. He ordered those who could to swim for shore and the rest to float to shore on planks and other debris from the ship. All made it safely to land.

b. At Malta and Again En Route to Rome (28:1-15)

After Paul's long interlude from the ministry, God resumed the powerful works through Paul that the apostle previously experienced, but which were put on hold during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea by the Sea. These proved to be an enormous blessing to the people of Malta, and though the text does not say it, the miracles no doubt served to add great effectiveness to Paul's witness. An added effect was the aid received by the castaways that enabled them to continue their journey.

28:1. Once the crew and passengers reached shore, they discovered they were on the island of **Malta**, about 50 miles south of Sicily. Malta, 18 miles long and 8 miles wide, was first colonized by the Phoenicians around 1000 BC but captured by the Romans in 218 BC. The islanders, however, enjoyed a measure of local autonomy with their own elected governor.

28:2-3. Luke identified the islanders as **natives** (*barbaroi*, an onomatopoeic word from which is transliterated the Eng. word "barbarians"). This term does not mean they were savages. It means they could not speak Greek, and the language they did speak sounded like "bar-bar-bar" to those who spoke Greek. They were, however, thoughtful and helpful. They built a fire for the waterlogged survivors, and Paul helped by gathering wood for fuel. However, as he was adding wood to the fire, the heat drove a **viper** out of the wood, and it struck Paul on the hand. The term (*echidna*) does not identify the species but usually refers to a poisonous viper (BDAG, 419). The observation that there are no poisonous snakes on Malta today does not undermine the integrity of Luke's account. There could have been poisonous snakes on Malta in the first century.

28:4-5. Thinking Paul would surely die, the islanders concluded he must have been a **murderer** and though he survived the shipwreck, he was now getting what he deserved. This is divine justice. The reference to **justice** (Greek, *dike*) is a reference to the Greek goddess "Justice," often depicted in Roman times as holding balanced scales, and is not the theoretical concept of justice, though that is a related idea. Paul, however, did not die. God had a plan for Paul, and the sovereign Lord protected his chosen servant.

28:6. When Paul did not die after a reasonable amount of time, the islanders **changed their minds** and foolishly decided Paul must

be a **god**. Actually, he was under God's protection, miraculously keeping him from the deadly effects of the venom of the viper.

28:7-10. The **leading** (*protos*) **man** of the island was **Publius**. He extended hospitality to Paul and his companions (probably Luke and the other believers) for three days. Publius's father was sick with a fever and dysentery. "Malta fever" was a common disorder not limited to Malta alone and was caused by drinking the unsterilized milk of diseased goats (Longenecker, "Acts," 565). Paul cured Publius' father by praying for him and placing his hands on him. This is the only instance in Acts where healing is brought about by both prayer and the laying on of hands. As in numerous other instances in Acts, the miracle provided Paul an opportunity for greater ministry. It appears that Luke began to assist Paul by establishing a clinic for medical care rather than an extensive healing ministry. This is suggested in three ways: First, Luke used two different verbs to describe their work—*iasato* (from *iaomai*, "healed," v. 8) and *therapeuonto* (from *therapeuo*, "to heal," or here in the passive, "getting cured," v. 9). In the first case the word would refer to miraculous healing and the second to curing by medical means. Second, the people expressed their gratitude to both Paul and Luke (**they also honored us**, v. 10). Third, they honored them with **many marks of respect**, a phrase used of payment of professional fees, such as to a physician, just as Luke was.

After two years of the apostle's imprisonment, this was a reaffirmation that God was still with Paul. It is possible that the miracles gave Paul confirmation that he had made the right decision in appealing to Caesar. The islanders expressed their appreciation with gifts and adequate supplies for the final leg of the journey to Rome.

28:11. After three months on Malta, Paul and his companions were put on an **Alexandrian ship**, registered in Alexandria, Egypt. The ship's figurehead was twin gods. The **Twin Brothers**, Castor and Pollux, were thought to be the protectors of seamen (Polhill, *Acts*, 535). These two were the mythical sons of Zeus and a woman named Leda who was raped by Zeus. In Latin, they were called "the Gemini," and they came to be viewed as a philanthropic pair, especially favorably inclined to travelers and sailors.

28:12-13. They sailed from Malta to Syracuse on the island of Sicily and stayed there for three days. From Syracuse they sailed to Rhegium (on

the far south "toe" of the "boot" of Italy) and then to **Puteoli**, both on the mainland of Italy.

28:14-15. Before going on to Rome, Paul was invited to stay with believers at Puteoli, 130 miles south of Rome. Paul and his companions accepted the invitation and stayed for seven days. The presence of a church in Puteoli shows the extent of the gospel impact. Paul had never been to Italy, so the church there was not started by him. Luke does not give the reason they stayed in Puteoli, but it was most likely for rest. The sea journey was over; they would walk the rest of the way to Rome.

After Paul left Puteoli, believers came from Rome and met him at the **Market [Forum] of Appius** and **Three Inns**. The **Forum of Appius** was 43 miles south of Rome and on the Appian Way, a major road leading straight to Rome. **Three Inns** was ten miles north of the Forum of Appius and 33 miles from Rome (Polhill, *Acts*, 537).

Paul was Luke's hero, yet he was still only a man. Even Paul must have been apprehensive as he neared Rome. What would happen to a Jewish tentmaker in the citadel of Roman imperial power? Luke said **he thanked God and took courage**. Something happened to encourage Paul's heart. What was it? It was the believers in Rome walking miles to meet Paul before he ever set foot in the city. Barclay says that Paul was encouraged because he realized he was not alone (*Acts*, 209).

4. His Witness in Rome (28:16-31)

a. The Setting for It (28:16-22)

God was with Paul when he arrived in Rome. Though a prisoner, he was treated with respect and granted limited freedom. Paul used his privileges to meet with his Jewish countrymen two times. The response was disappointing. In the first meeting they were neutral. They had not received any reports, either positive or negative, about Paul. They wanted to hear more about what he believed. In a second meeting, though some were persuaded that Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's hopes, most refused to believe. Paul recognized their unbelief as the fulfillment of prophecy and justification for his mission to Gentiles. Acts ends as it began with the proclamation of the kingdom of God; however, the messenger was different. Instead of Jesus teaching His followers about the kingdom of God, Paul taught about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

28:16. When Paul and his companions entered Rome, Paul was not brutalized by Roman guards.

He was chained to a guard but allowed to live in his private quarters. Paul had accomplished part of his mission. He was not treated like a revolutionary or considered a threat to Rome, nor was the Christian faith that Paul represented. The “we” sections end in v. 16 indicating that Luke likely left Paul at this point to serve as the apostle’s emissary someplace (Col 4:10-15, esp. v. 14), not that he had abandoned him.

28:17-22. Paul did not wait long to summon his countrymen. After only three days he requested a meeting with **the leading men of the Jews**. **Leading men** refers to Jews of high social and religious standing. He began by assuring them he was not a criminal. Jews in Jerusalem had charged that Paul was opposed to the law of Moses, but he assured his countrymen he was not an enemy of his own people, and he was not against Jewish customs. From Paul’s perspective, though he was a believer in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, this certainly did not mean that he was no longer Jewish. However, because of the complaints of the Jewish religious leaders, Paul had been turned over to the Romans.

Paul recounted his interaction with the Roman authorities (Felix, Ac 24, and Festus and Herod Agrippa II, Ac 25). Those rulers wanted to release Paul after a hearing. They had not heard any evidence that convinced them Paul had violated Roman law. When Paul said **there was no ground for putting me to death** (v. 18), he revealed that Jerusalem’s religious leaders wanted him executed, not merely punished or imprisoned. Paul was forced to appeal to Caesar because of their protests.

Paul assured the leaders he had nothing against his own people (v. 19). The Romans had nothing against Paul, and he had done nothing against his own people. He had no disagreement with his own people other than about their need to embrace Jesus as their Messiah (Stott, *Acts*, 398). Paul’s purpose for calling the meeting was to get acquainted with the leaders and explain why he was a prisoner. He was bound with a chain because he believed **the hope of Israel**. This phrase refers to the hope that the Messiah would come and fulfill God’s promises to Israel. Paul’s point was that this hope for the Messiah had already been fulfilled with the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, he was imprisoned only for believing that Israel’s hope had already come and not because he denied any essential tenet of Judaism.

Though they had not heard anything specifically about Paul, they had heard about the

new faith, so they requested a second meeting to hear Paul’s opinion on **this sect**. The use of the term **sect** (*haireisis*, from which “heresies” derives) means “a group that holds tenets distinctive to it, *sect, party, school faction*” (BDAG, 27). It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *minim, minut* (kind, species, heretic, heresy), which came to be used in Rabbinic literature for Jewish followers of Jesus. It implies they considered this new faith a movement within Judaism, but a movement that was dangerous and potentially promulgated error.

b. The Substance of It (28:23)

28:23. On the day of the scheduled meeting, an even greater number of Jews came to Paul’s rented house. Paul explained how Jesus fulfilled Israel’s hopes for the **kingdom of God**. He appealed to both **the Law of Moses and from the Prophets**. If he were to persuade Jews that Jesus was the fulfillment of Israel’s messianic and kingdom expectations, it was essential for him to connect Jesus to the Hebrew Scriptures. It was an extended meeting. He spoke from morning until evening.

c. The Sequel to It (28:24-31)

(1) In Regard to the Need for a Decision (28:24-27)

Some were convinced, but most refused to believe. The divided response is typical of the Jewish response to the Christian message throughout the book of Acts (cf. 13:42-45; 17:1-5, 11-14; 19:8-10).

28:24-27. The Jews of Rome disagreed not only with Paul; they **did not agree with one another**, and begin leaving after Paul warned them of making the same mistake as their closed-minded ancestors. He quoted from Is 6:9-10 (vv. 26-27) where the inspired prophet warned his generation of divine retribution for rejecting his message. The context of the warning was the call of Isaiah to his prophetic ministry, when the Lord forewarned the prophet he would face stubborn resistance. Israel rejected the prophet’s message because their heart **HAS BECOME DULL**. The word **DULL** (*epachynthe*) literally means “to make fat, well-nourished.” The figurative meaning is “to make impervious or to make gross, dull” (BDAG, 790). The result was they could not **HEAR WITH THEIR EARS** or **SEE WITH THEIR EYES**. Paul told his countrymen they risked becoming like the Jewish people of Isaiah’s generation who came under divine retribution for their deliberate rejection of God’s message through the prophet. As did Isaiah, Paul

had faithfully proclaimed the Word of the Lord; if they rejected it, they would come under the judgment of God. This meant they would pass a point where they would never be able to return to the Lord and be spiritually restored (“healed,” v. 27).

(2) In Regard to Paul’s Audience (28:28)

28:28-29. Paul said the refusal of the Jews to accept Paul’s messages justified his turning **to the Gentiles** (v. 28). God’s gracious plan of redemption cannot be frustrated even by the unbelief of His chosen people. Their unbelief gave Paul the opportunity to offer salvation to Gentiles. Paul developed the wisdom of God’s plan of salvation further in Rm 11 (see the comments there). He said the response of the Gentiles to the gospel would make Israel jealous and lead eventually to the salvation of God’s chosen people (Rm 11:11, 25-27). As Bock points out, Ac 28:28 does not state that God has permanently abandoned the Jewish nation, only that the gospel will be preached to the Gentiles and the Gentiles will respond, which means at the very least Gentiles will be more responsive initially than the Jewish people (*Acts*, 756–57). (The ms evidence does not favor including v. 29 in the original text. The information has already been given in v. 25, so nothing is lost by excluding the verse from the original text.)

(3) In Regard to Time (28:30)

28:30. That the Lord fulfilled His promise to protect Paul is seen in the unusual freedom he was granted as a prisoner. He was not restrained in a prison cell. For two years, he lived **in his own rented quarters** and was able to receive visitors.

All included Jews and Gentiles. Luke did not explain how Paul could afford his own quarters. Most likely he paid the rent from the gifts of Christians, such as the Philippians. While a prisoner, Paul wrote to the Philippians and thanked them for their generous support (Php 4:15-20).

(4) In Regard to Emphasis (28:31)

28:31. Acts ends on a note of triumph. The Word of God was being proclaimed **with all openness** (boldness), **unhindered** in Rome, the capital of the empire. As Paul testified during his second imprisonment, the messenger may be chained but not the message (2Tm 2:9).

The book of Acts also ends as it began, with the proclamation of the kingdom of God. In Ac 1, the resurrected Lord taught His followers about the kingdom of God. The setting was Jerusalem. Thirty years later, Paul taught about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The setting was different. Now, it was Rome. Jesus’ witnesses did as He commanded. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they proclaimed the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the entire world.

Luke did not reveal what happened to Paul, indicating that the book was likely written before Paul’s release. The circumstances of his imprisonment suggest he was innocent of the charges of sedition. He was not a zealous revolutionary. He was a devoted and courageous follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was Luke’s personal hero but only because God was with him. Bock is correct. In reality “God is the hero of Acts . . .” (*Acts*, 760). The Lord Jesus Christ is building His church, and all the forces of hell cannot overpower it.

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