

Bible Thoughts

with
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The Acts of the Apostles

The thoughts and note material given on these pages are only a possible suggestion of the meaning, they must not be taken as inspired, however they are prayerfully prepared and compared with other similar material. There are many ways in which God's Word can be analyzed and none must be taken in place of the Word of God itself.

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Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles

WRITER. The Acts of the Apostles does not mention the writer but was probably Luke because of the usage of "we" in some passages which suggested that it was Paul's companion Luke.

It is thought that Luke's Gospel and The Acts may have originally been one work but later circulated as two. The title "Acts," as we know it, did not appear until the 2nd century A.D.

The Gospel of Luke tells what Jesus "began both to do and teach." In the Acts, the story of what Jesus continued to do and teach through His Holy Spirit in the new Church.

DATE. The writings of Acts ends with details of Paul's earliest ministry in Rome, A.D. 65, so the material must have been written at or near that time.

The events recorded in "The Acts" covers a period of 32 years.

Themes: This book records the return to heaven of the Lord Jesus, then the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Peter's use of the key's and opening the kingdom to the Jews at Pentecost, and then to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius; the beginning of the Christian church and the conversion and ministry of Paul.

The Holy Spirit fills the scene. As the presence of the Son, exalting and revealing the Father, is the great fact of the Gospels, so the presence of the Spirit, exalting and revealing the Son, is the great fact of the Acts.

Acts is in two main parts:

1) Acts 1:1 -9.43) This first section is centered on Peter with the city of Jerusalem as the centre, this initial ministry being to the Jews.

The Jews had been given a covenant with God (Jehovah) already, but when Jesus came as the Christ they had not expected the Messiah like Jesus, did not realise who He was and so rejecting him.

Peter's preaching at Pentecost, therefore, was directed to that problem, and the need for repentance (i.e. "a changed mind").

One major problem with the Jewish nation was the apparent failure of the Old Testament promises concerning the Davidic kingdom, this was explained by the promise that the Messiah kingdom would be set up at the return of Christ [Acts 2:25-31](#); [Acts 15:14-16](#).

When the Jews turned to persecuting the apostles and finally in the stoning of Stephen, they were sending a message to God "We will not have this man to reign over us."

2) From Acts 10 Paul tends to become the centre of the action. He reaches out to the Gentiles, a new centre is made at Antioch, As "strangers from the covenants of promise" [Eph 2:12](#), all a Gentile had to do was to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" to be saved.

Acts is not really a history of the early church as Luke never reported upon the Jewish Churches outside Jerusalem or how the message reached Rome or Egypt. Also only 3 of the original Apostles, Peter James & John are included in the story. In fact it leaves many questions, such as what happened to Peter after the conversion of Cornelius, or what happened to Paul after his conversion in Tarsus.

The story basically concerns the growth of the church from Jerusalem to Rome via Samaria, Antioch and Asia.

The letter is broken up as follows:

The beginning of the church [Acts 1:1 - 2:47](#)

The church in Jerusalem [Acts 3:1 - 5:42](#)

.The church is forced to move out to Palestine [Acts 6:1 - 12:25](#)

.The church expands into Asia and Europe [Acts 13:1 - 21:17](#)

.The church at Rome [Acts 21:18 - 28:31](#)

Chapter 1

The book of Acts is the story of the Church of Christ's creation and the spread across the Roman controlled world. In the book we see Jesus at work through the Holy Spirit, He has chosen to use His people, with all their weaknesses, to take His message of salvation to the world.

v1,2 A brief introduction of the connections to the Gospel of Luke and who the writings were for. We do not know who Theophilus was. [Luke 1:1-4](#)

v2 The power and actions of the Holy Spirit are introduced and is the main "worker" throughout Acts.

v3 Jesus had remained on earth for 40 days after His resurrection providing proof of His resurrection to many people and gave further teaching about the kingdom of God. The teaching of the kingdom of God makes regular appearances during Acts. [Act 8:12](#); [Acts 20:25](#); [Acts 28:23,31](#)

v4 A repeat of the command to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit [Luke 24:49](#) The words "assembled together" can indicate "eating with" or "living with"

v5 John's message and baptism was in preparation for the coming Messiah, a change of mind and a physical showing of their change. The believers were shortly to be baptized by the Holy Spirit, an inward change, God will live in them.

v6 The believers thought that the kingdom of God was about to appear on the earth, a political kingdom centered upon the nation of Israel. But God's plan was to create a spiritual kingdom first, no one had realized at this time the plan.

v7 The reply from Jesus was that it was not for them to know what God's plan was and when it was to be completed, This knowledge was with the Father only and under His power.

v8 He told them that they had a job to do, they are to take the truth of salvation through Jesus to Jerusalem, Acts chapter 1-7; then Judea and Samaria, Acts Chapters 8-11 and then to the world. Acts chapter 11 to 28.

v9 The departure of Christ from the earth meant that He had broken off the physical and visible contact with the believers, He had now entered into the invisible presence of God. A cloud, in the Old Testament, often indicated the presence of God. e.g., Ex 40:34 *Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*

v10,11 The angels tell the disciples that He will return one day to the earth in the same way. [Luke 21:27](#); [Mark 13:26](#); [Mark 14:62](#). A promise that all believers are waiting for.

v12 The departure of Jesus to heaven had taken place from the Mount of Olives, just under 2 miles to the east of Jerusalem.

v13 The upper room may have been where they had the Last Supper [Luke 22:12ff](#); possibly the home of Mary, the mother of Mark. [Acts 12:12](#)

For other lists of disciple [Matt 10:2-4](#); [Mark 3:16ff](#); [Luke 6:14ff](#) v14 "With His brethren" The half brothers of Jesus [Matt 13:55,56](#) who thought He was mad and did not believe in Him before his death and resurrection. [John 7:5](#). In [1 Cor 15:7](#) James, the older brother, appears to have received a personal resurrection appearance. The women may have been as given in [Luke 8:2](#) and [Luke 24:10](#)

v15-26 Matthias is chosen

The apostle felt the need to chose a man to replace Judas Iscariot.

v15-26 Peter has now become the natural leader among the 120 believers. He reminds them that the betrayal of Judas was part of the plan of God and was prophesied in the Old Testament. see v20

When Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus then killed himself he automatically ended his position as one of the twelve apostles, he must be replaced so that there was twelve disciples, why? In [Matt 19:28](#) Jesus had made a promise for the twelve disciples, there must be twelve disciples for the judging of Israel. How and who to chose as Jesus made the original choice.? The person had to have been following Jesus during His earthly life and to have seen the resurrected Jesus.

Without the guidance of Jesus or the coming Holy Spirit the group used a normal Jewish practice of selection.

Two men met the conditions, "Joseph called Barsabas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias." v23. The group prayed, v24,25 and then "cast lots." They probable wrote the name of the person on paper or put coloured stones, for example a black stone for Joseph or a white stone which represented Matthias, into an jar or urn. (see Proverbs 16:33 *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD..*) They then count the numbers of stones or paper for each person. Matthias was chosen and so became one of the twelve disciples.

v18-19 Were probable put in for the sake of the readers as they may not have know the complete story.

Chapter 2

Why are the events recorded in this chapter so important?

Fulfilment of promises of the Holy Spirit:

Jesus promised John 14:16-17 The Holy Spirit will be internal to each person and eternal, "He will be in you." Up to now the Holy Spirit had only come upon a person as an external power for a period.

Just before Jesus returns to heaven He repeats the promise [Acts 1:5,8](#)

Jesus did not tell the disciples when the promise would be fulfilled, they were probably surprised when it happened and the significant of the Jewish day, - Pentecost

The day of Pentecost was given this name because it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the Passover Sunday [Lev 23:15ff](#). It was known as the "the day of the first fruits" Exodus 34:22 or the "feast of weeks." It was the day that the first-fruits of the wheat harvest were presented to God.

Jews from every nation had come on this day to celebrate this feast, and it was upon this day that God chose to start His spiritual harvest of the world.

v1 The believers were of "one mind," John 17:20,21 united in one place when God moved.

v2,3 Without warning, a sudden noise from heaven. It sounded "like a rushing mighty wind" It was loud enough to be heard outside some distance away v6. Those who were in the room also saw fire-like tongues appeared upon each person and "sat upon each of them."

The Holy Spirit had revealed Himself as an external noise and tongues of fire.

v4-6 The believers, being now filled with the Holy Spirit, leave the room. He starts to reveal His power through them by giving them the ability to speak in languages which they had never spoken before. These people were speaking in known languages, v6 the Jews who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost from other nations, and who did not speak Hebrew, were being spoken to in their own language by the believers, not only in the language of their country but in the language where they had been born, their dialects.

v9-11 Luke lists the languages spoken by the 120 believers, each Jew present hearing about the wonderful works of God in their own language.

v7 The people were amazed when they realized that these people were Galilean's. Galilean's were considered uneducated and could not even speak their own language properly, they were considered "from the backwoods."

v12 Full of amazement they are confused and keep asking each other "What does it mean?"

Not only were these Galilean's speaking foreign languages supernaturally they were also speaking with great confidence, once they had been a frightened group, now they were shouting God's works.

The Galilean dialect was very distinct and difficult for a non Galilean to follow. The ability to speak in so many languages and dialect could not fail to cause an effect.

Some say we need release of this power again in the church today, but nowhere does the Bible teach that we need more Pentecost's. The word "Pentecost" is only use in two other places, [Acts 20:16](#) and [1 Cor 16:8](#), both used as a calendar reference.

As a result of this day, Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes into a person when they believe at the moment of salvation 1 Cor 6:19; 1 Cor 12:13 v13 As normal when anything happens to a persons behaviour associated with religion, which cannot be explained, the response is "they must be drunk." They could not recognize the power of God. We must also note that not all supernatural religious behaviour is of God, Satan can make copies, if the event gives glory to God then it will not be of Satan.

v14- The first sermon by Peter

The Holy Spirit brings Peter to his feet, a changed man, full of the power of God now brings the message of salvation.

The sermon of Peter is simple, he uses scripture quotes to prove the points, and the message is Christ centered. v14-36 Peter calls the people to listen, he explains what is not the cause, "these men are not drunk, it is only the third hour (09:00 a.m.)" This is the fulfilling of a promise made by God through the prophet Joel. [Joel 2:28-32](#) God showed Joel that in the last days He will pour out His Spirit upon man, this is what you are now witnessing. This is the beginning of the period of God's grace, all who believe, Jew or Gentile, would receive the Holy Spirit when they believe.

This period of grace will end with the return of Christ and Judgement of mankind by God, but right now we are still in the time of grace "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." v21

Peter continues to highlight the blood stained path of Jesus of Nazareth, a Man incarnate, God in the form of man v22, who was given authenticity by the miracles, signs and wonders He did v22. This man, who recently was nailed to a cross and killed by

the wicked hands of the Jews v23. But God has raised Him up and brought Him back to life v24. God has now put Him on His right hand in heaven v33, where God has made Him Lord and Messiah v36.

v25-28,34-35 Peter quotes [Psalm 16:8-11](#) as prophecy of the resurrection by David, what David had said could not apply to himself as we all know that he is dead. Up to this point most people would agree but then Peter tells them that David was talking about Jesus of Nazareth, He died but we have many witnesses who have since seen Him alive, risen, the true Messiah.

But not only is He risen He is now at God's right hand, Lord of Lord's. Psalm 101:1. v36 Peter now reaches the peak of the sermon, "The Jesus you killed, God has raised up as the Messiah." *Guilty..* Peter gives the listeners the verdict.

v37 Their hearts touched, (*stab with a sword* is the meaning) they respond with true repentance, "what shall we do?"

v38 These were religious men, committed to serve God, they wanted to know what to do, more prayer, more give, more work? Peter gives them the only way to God, "Believe and you will be saved."

It is interesting to note that Peter refers to the promises and power of God in his sermon but does not mention the appearance of the tongues except that it was not produced by wine but by God as prophesied.

v41 The people were convinced, the Holy Spirit was active in their minds, realized what they had done and were guilty of the death of the Messiah, accepted Jesus as their Saviour. On that day there were 3000 baptized, (It is often normal for the Jews to only count the men and ignore the women and children, so the real figure could much larger.) over 3000 people turned to Christ that day. The Church of Christ was born.

v42-47 The basic church now gathered together in various homes and learnt from the apostles the teaching and fellowship of Christ, prayer and worship. Remembering Him in the Breaking of Bread. Giving and helping each other in life's troubles and problems. Full of gladness and joy, one together. "And the Lord added to the church each day," those who believed and asked for forgiveness.

Chapter 3

This chapter opens with the image of a man who was a cripple since birth sitting in the entrance to the temple begging for money from those entering the temple.

The time is about 3:00 p.m. when the Jews went to pray. Peter and John were also going into pray when the cripple saw them and called for money. This beggar has never been able to walk and totally depends upon those going to prayer for his living needs. Each day someone had to bring him to this place each morning and collect him at the end of the day.

v4-6 Peter and John see the man sitting begging as they enter the temple. Peter calls for him to look at him, the man expecting to receive money turns to them, possibly he thought that Peter was about to give a good gift for him. But Peter has no money but gives something far more valuable, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Jesus through Peter was providing the beggars real need. *Get up and walk*
v7 Peter does not give him time to think, he takes his hand and pulls him up, as he

does power going into his leg bones and muscles mending and healing. With a leap the man stood up.

v8,9 Together they enter the temple, the man so pleased with his new ability was praising God and leaping around, it must have brought great attention to him.

v10,11 People turn and stare at this man who they had seen for years begging in the doorway of the temple. People must have crowded round to see this miracle. Who caused it? What does it mean?

v12-16 Peter provides the answer, We did not heal the man, it was God through His Son Jesus. Peter now reminds them who Jesus was - - He was the one you arrested and denied Him in the presences of Pilate. You preferred a murderer to God's Holy Son, "the Prince of life," then you put Him to death on the cross. But God brought Him back to life, and we are witnesses to this fact. It is this Jesus who has healed this man.

v17-18 I know that you and your rulers through ignorance did this but these events were all predicted by God through His prophets. The suffering of Jesus Christ was all planned.

v19-26 "Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" cries Peter, reject Jesus and you will be destroyed v23. You are a special people of God, He promised that all the world will be blessed through you, God sent Him to you first, now turn away from your evil ways.

Chapter 4

In this chapter we see the religious leaders turned against the claims of Jesus, that He was the Son of God. This is often the problem with religion, they try to win God's forgiveness their way, by works and not the way that God wants.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and its effect, the bringing people to salvation through Jesus, was starting to upset the Jewish religious leaders, they thought that they had destroyed the message being given by the Nazarene Jesus, instead people were saying that Jesus was not dead and His message was even stronger. Following the healing of the man who was a cripple from birth, Peter and John were now preaching in the temple. Also in the temple were a group of Temple guards and [Sadducees](#). Because of the teaching and belief of the Sadducees the teaching of the disciple, resurrection, was very likely to upset them for it could affect their position and standing in the Jewish leadership. Because of this the Sadducees took Peter and John and put them in jail until the next day.

v4 The preaching may have been stopped but the Holy Spirit was not to be stopped, He was very active in the listeners hearts, five thousand heard the Word and believed.

v5-23 The Trial

Three Things showed about this trial:- 1) When a religious group is threatened they try fear to stop the threat. All the top religious leaders were present, the High Priest, past and present and all their family, they could probably trace their family back to the high priests of early Israel. Luke is describing what appears to be the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the Jews. This group considered themselves the only ones who could interpret the scriptures and the laws.

Peter and John were placed in the middle of a half circle of these people, they planned

to get the prisoners confused with questions and verbal attacks from all sides.

v7 They start by challenging the disciples, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?". But at this trial God's in charge through the Holy Spirit and Peter being filled with this power speaks out.

"We did this good deed of healing this man in the name and by the power of Jesus Christ of Nazareth who you crucified and God has brought back to life." By giving Jesus the title "Christ" they are saying that He was the Messiah that the Jews were supposed to be waiting for.

v13 When they saw that Peter and John were not afraid of them and that these two men had not been educated, they were amazed, and it put them in a tricky position. The healed man was evidence of what was being claimed by Peter, he was standing beside Peter and John in front of them. But it did not have any real affect on the hearts of the [Sanhedrin](#). Peter and John were told to leave the room while the Sanhedrin discussed the situation.

They could not deny the miracle, they could not punish Peter for a good work, yet they could not believe themselves either. So they threatened the two disciples, what would happen to them if they carried on teaching in the name of Jesus.

v18 The Sanhedrin were powerless to stop the disciples preaching, they could not punish them for doing good, the people of Jerusalem would not have accepted punishment, the were glorifying God for the healing of the man after 40 years a cripple. v21,22.

What did Peter and John do? They went back to the company of Christians and told them all that had happened. Then they joined together as one to give God the glory.

v24-31 Luke records what was spoken in prayer.

The prayer was from their hearts, no one had to say *let us pray*. Today we often pray from set words in prayer books and often at set points in the service. These people were praying and worshipping as the Spirit was leading.

The prayer involved what God had done, He was one who originated the events and controlled the result. God was and is in control, everything will be done according to His plan and purpose. They recognized that God had created the world and all that was in it, and this included all the people who were now causing problems. They were happy to accept His plan and He did not need to explain why to them.

v29 Their prayer also included two requests, they asked God to look at the threats being made by your enemies and also to give them the power, as His servants, to speak the Word of God with boldness.

v30 Finally give us faith to do wonders in the Name of your Son.

v31 God answered them in a dramatic way, a physical shaking of the house and an out pouring of the power of the Holy Spirit. God gave them the power as asked and told them to leave everything to Him.

v33-36 The first battle was over and the church has grown, witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus. The believers were with one heart and united in love for each other, those who had money were helping financially with the needs of the believers.

v36,37 The final verses of this chapter are to lead us into the events recorded in the next chapter, an example of giving by Joses, surnamed Barnabas, but this event shows in the next chapter what God feels about selfishness, pretending or hypocrisy.

Chapter 5

The free and selfless giving of Barnabas in Chapter 4 now turns to the selfishness, pretending or hypocrisy of the giving of Ananias and Sapphira.

Luke does not record why the couple wanted to sell their property but from the events of the record we can guess that they were envious, desired the churches thanks to the giving by Barnabas. They may have felt that they should also get "a pat on the pride was involved.

Was it wrong for them to sell their property and only give part of the money to the church? No, but they lied about what they were giving, saying that it was all the money, they pretended to be very generous, open handed in their giving by saying that it was all the money.

. Let us examine the events as recorded by Luke.

v1,2 Both Ananias and Sapphira were together and in agreement in what they were doing. Ananias brings the gift and lays it at the feet of the apostle Peter's feet. Luke does not record the actual words of Ananias but from Peter's response it must have been something like "we sold this land and here is all the money."

v3,4 God had revealed to Peter the truth. Ananias has the appearance of a selfless giver, but this is a lie and false behaviour in front of the church.

Peter challenges Ananias, "why has Satan led you away? you had the land, it was yours to do with what ever you wanted, when you sold the land you were still able to use the money as you wanted. You did not lie only to the church but to the Holy Spirit, to God.

v5,6 The judgement of God is swift, death for Ananias is immediate. He is buried.

v7 Three hours later Sapphira enters the building, possibly looking for her husband.

v8-11 Peter questions her, she has a chance to tell the truth but does not do so. Repeating the lie Peter tells her that she has lied to God and your punishment awaits you. Death follows immediately.

Why was God so severe in His actions? The lie was planned , premeditated, not an innocent mistake. The aim of Ananias, with Sapphira was to get glory for themselves and once they were found out were not willing to tell the truth. Pride was the desire of their heart.

God has taught the church of those days and the church today how serious He considers hypocrisy, pretending to be something you are not. [Rom 12:1-9](#)

We should all examine our reasons for doing something, our motives. Is pride and self glory involved in your work for your church?

Psalms 139:23,24

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

v11-14 The result

Believers were added to the Lord, many were healed showing that the Holy Spirit was very present and active. As a result the message spreads out from Jerusalem to the area.

The High priest and supporters were angry and jealous as the people accepted the new teachings, so they again arrested the apostles, putting them in prison. But God was in

control, and sends an angel to release them. The angel tells them to go and preach in the temple, not hide but spread the Words of Life. Going by the following verses the apostles must have been taken out of the prison in a supernatural way, the guards were still present and did not see anything.

v21-25 The next morning the High Priest officers went to get the prisoners for the trial, surprised they found the guards still on duty but the prison empty. How?

The High Priest and others, on hearing of this event, were wondering what was going to happen. Then they are told that the apostles were openly preaching in the temple.

The disciples must have been preaching with even more authority, they had just felt the authority and power of God working through Christ not even prison bars can hold the message up or block God's power.

v26 Quietly, to prevent problems with the people, the captain of the temple brings the apostles before the Council.

v27,28 Possibly with some fear the High Priest challenges the apostles, "We gave orders for you not to preach in the name of Jesus, you have filled Jerusalem with the teaching and now accuse us of His death"

v29-32 Peter and the others now respond, "We must obey God rather than men." Determined to obey God allowed the Spirit to work through them. The Council were challenged that they killed God's Son Jesus, but God raised Him again and is now sitting at the right hand of God.

v33-40 The Council members are very hurt by this accusation, they plan to kill the apostles. But God overrules in an interesting way, He uses one of the council, Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee, an unbeliever, to speak His message to the Council. He lists some previous uprisings, which being of man soon faded away. He then tells them to leave these men alone, if it is of man then it will fail as the others, if it is of God then you will never win and it will mean that you will be fighting God.

v40 Unwillingly they accept his point. The disciples are then beaten and told once again not to preach in the name of Jesus.

v41,42 They depart with joy, giving praise to God for being worthy of suffering for their Saviour. The message of Life continued to spread, Jesus is Lord of all situations. If we are in God's will then we may suffer for Him, but God will always turn your suffering into glory for Him and a triumph for us.

Chapter 6

As we enter this period of the church in Jerusalem we see some practical problems beginning to show, jealousy was starting to show its head amongst the non Jew and the Jewish members. The Jewish widows were being treated differently to the non Jew widows. The church membership was growing so rapidly, evangelical outreach, worship and communion were the centre of the work, the general administration of the church was not being dealt with and helping those not so well off was tending to help the Jewish members. The result was a church with a few doing the work and many spectators, unfortunately this is still present in many of our churches today.

Points to note about the seven men chosen.

1) They were to be selected by the church members, it was not a case of "any one fan-

cy the job?"

2) They were to be qualified, people with no problems, trust worthy, Spirit filled, wise.

3) Able to take leadership, to be supervisors, oversee, control the work.

v5,6 Once the men had been chosen they were brought before the apostles and after prayer laid hands on them as a blessing.

v7 Strong leadership does not guarantee or make sure that a church does not have problems, in this case there were twelve strong apostles in charge, yet the church still had problems. Following the new appointments the church had been saved from a possible split of Jew and Greek believers. This now allowed the Word of God to continue to be spread, the believers, including many priests, grew in number daily.

We must also note that the church was growing very rapidly and problems like this must be dealt with as soon as possible, busy leaders still need to monitor for problems and ensure that the matter is dealt with, by appointing suitable people to deal with the situations correctly.

The purpose of each church is Worship, Instruction or teaching, Fellowship, Evangelization. It is easy to concentrate on one or two at the expense of the others.

v8-15 A man under pressure

One of the appointed men was Stephen, he was a very Godly man, v5, not just an administer and caring for those in need but full of the Spirit and used by the Spirit in the spreading of the Gospel, "performing great miracles amongst the people." God was marking Stephen as one of His special messengers.

V9,10 Stephen's work started to receive special attention from the [Synagogue of Freedmen](#) and the [Sanhedrin](#), they tried to test his faith with arguments. But they were unable to respond to the wisdom which the Holy Spirit had given Stephen.

v10. Jesus had warned of persecution in [Luke 21:12-15](#)

v11 Unable to beat down Stephen in argument the Sanhedrin secretly found men, and possibly paid them money to lie and give false witness to the truth. They said that Stephen had said things against Moses and against God, all lies. These lies quickly spread through the crowd.

Up to now the Sanhedrin had not dare use violence on the believers for fear of the crowds [Acts 5:26](#) Now because of the lies the crowd were happy to let them drag Stephen before the Council. Again lies and misuse of what Stephen had said were used to persecute Stephen.

The Sanhedrin, having been twice embarrassed by Peter and the other Apostles were only too willing to accept the false witnesses.

v13 They state that Stephen never stopped talking (ceased not) to speak against the temple and the law. They misquoted Jesus, who was talking about the death of His body, not the temple [John 2:19](#). The false witnesses were distorting the words of Christ. The customs and law given by Moses were actually being completed in Jesus, His sacrifice on the cross made the temple sacrifices useless.

v15 Following these false witnesses the council turn to look at Stephen, they do not see a man full of fear, but very calm, the peace of God shows through his face, showing to all the presence of God in his life.

Chapter 7

In Chapter 6 we saw that Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and performing miracles and preaching the gospel. This had displeased some of the Jews in the synagogue. They had spread lies and lead or encouraged others to become false witnesses against him. [Act 6:8-11](#) Stephen was brought before the [Sanhedrin](#) for [interrogation](#). The seventy members of the council were probably the same ones who were involved with the trial of Jesus, led by the High Priest.

v1 Finally the High Priests asks Stephen "Are these things so? Did you blaspheme Moses and God? Had you spoke against the temple and the Law?"

v2-53 The answer given by Stephen covers two thousand years of Jewish history, a speech which shows how the Jewish scriptures pointed to Jesus.

Throughout Stephen uses scripture to prove his point and show his reverence to God and the Law.

He pointed out that Moses taught that a prophet, known as the Messiah would appear v37 and that scripture teaches that God will not always live in a temple made by men v48.

Stephen reminds them that throughout their history there were those who believed God and those who disobeyed Him. v35,v39-43

v2-16 **God selects and directs** In faith, Abraham followed the call of God to go to an unknown country. God promised that Abraham's descendants would own the land and receive the protection of God, even though at the time Abraham had no children. Isaac was born and then Isaac had Jacob. From Jacob we have the twelve sons who are the fathers of the Jewish tribes, the patriarchs v8.

Stephen then moves on to the jealousy of Joseph by the others, who sold him into slavery, but this was all planned by God.

v6 The "seed"(the children descendants)of Abraham would be taken into slavery in a strange land (Egypt). Finally after 400 years Moses was born.

v17-43 **God protects and set them free.**

v21-29 God had chosen Moses and trained him for the task but he was rejected by the people.

v32-43 God later brought Moses back to set them free from slavery, but they continued to moan, grumble and reject God.

v39 Even replacing God with a golden calf made by them. v41.

v42-44 God lives in the tent tabernacle as a witness to them but they still worshipped other god's. "ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch" Amos 5:26

v45 God gives the promised land.

v46-47 God blessed David and Solomon. Solomon built a permanent Temple but Stephen quotes from [Isaiah 66:1](#) v48-50 God speaks to His people, reminding them who He is. "God is bigger than any temple built by men" is what Stephen is saying.

Throughout Stephen's answer we find he keeps talking about "our fathers," connecting himself with the Jewish ancestors. Having shown the failures and unbelief of their ancestors. He has now shown how they were also failures, so Stephen now refers to "your fathers," which now put the Council members on the defense instead of being the accusers. They had been accusing Stephen of blasphemy, but they are the ones

who are blaspheming, they rejected the true Prophet announced by Moses, Jesus, who fulfilled the Law for Man.

The result of this is that the council members become more hateful of Stephen, so he finishes his answer with v51-53.

v54-58 As Stephen finished speaking, the hatred welled up in the council members, seventy enraged men refused to hear any more, they grabbed him and threw him out of the city where they started to stone him (Threw large stones at him to injure and eventually kill him). v55,56 But Stephen had the power and strength of God, he had great courage and looks up to heaven and God reveals to him a view of heaven and Jesus standing, waiting to receive him into heaven.

v59,60 Stephen kneeled down and committed his life into the hands of God. Then in great love he asked for God not to remember this terrible act and so punish them for what they were doing.

v60 In that instant Stephen was taken home to be with his Lord. [1 Cor 15:55-58](#)

v58 Note that there was present a young man called Saul.

Chapter 8

This chapter is a turning point for the Christian church. Act Chapter 1-7 covers the start and growth of the church in Jerusalem. For two years the believers had been evangelising Jerusalem. From Acts 8 the church is driven out of Jerusalem because of the persecution and moves in to Judea and Samaria. v1-4 The stoning of Stephen released a massive period of violence against the Jewish believers, leading this was a man named Saul. The believers were being put into prison by Saul, which made those left leave the area, preaching as they went.

Let us remind ourselves of the Lord's command [Acts 1:8](#). Jerusalem had heard the message now God wanted the rest of the world to hear as well. It is worth noting that God may make the going difficult to fulfil His desires. The Jewish believers need a little push to leave Jerusalem with the message, God used the persecution of Saul and the Jewish leaders to achieve this.

The Jewish believers may have at first not been willing to enter Samaria "For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." John 4:9 v5 Luke now picks up the story of one of these people, Philip. He was one of the seven Deacons chosen in [Acts 6:1-6](#) v5-8 He is led by the Lord into Samaria preaching Christ and showing the power of God through miracles of healing. People believed the message, the miracle confirmed the Word of God, they accepted Christ with joy.

Philip's ministry revealed the false ministry of a man called Simon.

What do we learn from this false ministry

- 1) Simon claimed to be great, a false preacher glorifies himself not Christ.
- 2) Simon used human attractions to get his message over, he was a magician.
- 3) Fake power. Simon used "magic," possibly supernatural powers and illusions to impress the people, just like the magicians with Pharaoh in Moses' day, who could perform supernatural acts with the power of Satan.

So the people talk about him "This man is great with the power of God.", but his power was small compared with the God driven power of Philip.

v12-13 Simon recognizes the power of God and says that he believes, he is baptized and follows Philip round as he preaches.

v14-17 God did not allow the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit, Why? He wanted the Jewish believers, the Apostles to see that the Jew was not different to the Samaritan. So the Holy Spirit came onto them in the presence of the Jewish believers, as they laid hands on them. All one in Christ.

v18,19 We now see that Simon's conversion was not real, he wanted the power of the Holy Spirit and thought he could get it with money. Another sign of false faith, going through the religious way of living, but for the wrong reason, material gain not spiritual.

v20-23 Peter's response, "You cannot buy salvation or God with money, only by giving your heart to Him. Repent Simon of your evil"

v24 Simon's reply asking them to pray for him at first seems to indicate that he is humbling himself, but there is no record of asking forgiveness of the Lord himself.

v25 The disciples return to Jerusalem, preaching to the Samaritans as they went.

v25-40 God's way of evangelising

v26 God now does what appears to be a strange action, Philip's ministry and Evangelization in Samaria was very successful, it could not have been better! Yet we see God has other priorities for He directs Philip away from the area to a road which goes from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert. Jerusalem is about 40 miles from Samaria, while Gaza is over 100 miles. This command meant a long journey for Philip.

v27,28 Philip obeys the directing of God. He is led to meet a very important man, an Ethiopian on his way home after worshipping in Jerusalem.

v29 God tells Philip to join with the man. The Man is reading from [Isaiah 53:7-8](#). Philip does not force himself onto the man, he gently asked "Do you understand" "No I need help come and join me" is the Ethiopians reply.

v34 Philip lets the man ask the questions, and God opens the chance for Philip to tell him about Jesus the person Isaiah was talking about. The man was seeking answers and God had supplied the answers.

v36,37 The man has obviously recognized that he is a sinner and needs washing through the blood of Jesus. Philip knows that baptism does not save so he questions the man on his faith, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." was the mans excited reply.

v38,39 The man is baptized there and then, showing his new faith, the soul has been saved and can now take the message on to his home land. [Psalm 68:31](#). The Nation of Ethiopia has the Gospel of Salvation, because Stephen was open to the leading of God. This work now finished God also moves Philip on to Azotus, on the coast, and then further north to Caesarea, preaching as he went.

Chapter 9

We had a mention of Saul, who was later to become Paul, in the previous chapters. Saul was in agreement with the stoning of Stephen, he was present but we are not told that he actually threw any stones. [Acts 7:58](#); [Acts 8:1](#)

He came from Tarsus, hated Christ and wanted to destroy Christianity. In [Acts 8:3](#) "But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.", this was in the Jerusalem area, now he goes

to the High Priest for letters of authority to the synagogues in Damascus. [Acts 22:4](#); [Acts 22:19,20](#). Persecution of this level could have destroyed the spread of the Gospel, but God had things in control, the suffering small match flame of the gospel was soon to burst into a "forest fire," spreading fast across the world.

v3-5 Saul starts out on his journey, several days into his journey, just as he is approaching Damascus, about midday, [Acts 22:6](#) God acts. A light which shone brighter than the noonday sun shines on Saul, he falls to the ground in terror. He hears a voice, speaking in Hebrew [Acts 26:14](#) [Acts 22:6-11](#) "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?". It is interesting that Saul says "Who are you, Lord?", he has already accepted this must be someone special, he calls him "Lord"

At this point he does not understand, he has not connected the light with his task of persecuting Christians. When the voice identifies itself, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," Saul has to ask himself, "The man from Nazareth, the man who blasphemed, the one who died on a cross, how can it be? "

v6,7 Saul, still shaking with terror, ask "what shall I do?" the voice continues "Get up, go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

As fast as it had appeared the light was gone. Silence.

v5 "it is hard for thee to kick against the goads (sharpened sticks, spears)." does not appear in the text in some early copies and may have been added in later copies, being taken from [Acts 26:14](#) The people with Saul are also terrified, they heard the voice, possibly did not understand what was said and could not see anyone. [Acts 22:9](#)

v8 Saul now stands up, his eyes open but can see nothing. This man, who had planned to enter the city to terrorize the Christians, now enters as a blind man, needing the guidance and help of others.

v9 For three days Saul goes without food, his eyesight was gone but as he thinks about what had happen he begins to realize that he has seen Jesus, alive and with great power.

v10-12 Meanwhile God is moving onto the next stage of His plan. God speaks to Ananias in a vision, telling him to go to Saul of Tarsus who is praying and has had a vision of you coming to him. We are not told much about Ananias but v13 suggests he was not one of those who had fled from Jerusalem. How Ananias became a believer is not given.

v13,14 To Ananias this command brings terror, he has heard all about Saul's activities, fear fills his heart as he replies to the command. In the mind of Ananias Saul was to be avoided, he was a murderer of God's people.

v15,16 But God does not look at a persons present life, He can see the future and tells Ananias that Saul was a chosen person for the spreading of the good news of salvation through Jesus to the world. God also tells Ananias that Saul would also suffer for this work.

v17 Ananias obeys the command and identifies himself as a follower of Jesus to Saul. With love and kindness Ananias, calling him "brother" talks to Saul. "Jesus, who you saw on the road has sent me to you. For you to receive your sight back and receive the Holy Spirit."

The "laying on of hands" was not the normal way to receive the Holy Spirit, perhaps it

was to confirm to the local believers that Saul was now a believer. [Acts 8:14-17](#)

v18 Once enemies, now brothers, Ananias and Saul are one in Christ. Saul is baptized to show that Jesus is now his Saviour.

v19 Saul has changed his mind about Jesus, he needed to be educated into the truth. This came from the Damascus Christian Church, Saul enjoyed the close fellowship with these believers.

v20-21 Within a few days Saul is preaching in the synagogues that Christ was the Son of God. What a shock to the Jews, a man who had hated Jesus was now telling all that He was the Son of God.

v22 Saul was well educated in the scriptures, now he could see how it had been pointing to the coming Saviour and was able to silence any arguments by the Jews in the synagogue.

v23 How long this lasted we are not told but now Luke reports "And after many days were fulfilled," Saul had now become the hated believer and the Jews were hunting Saul, they were out to kill him.

The "many days" must have been quite a long period, in [Gal 1:11-17](#) we find that Saul describes this period, he had gone off to Arabia to be taught of God. We are not told exactly the length of this period but [Gal 1:17,18](#) suggests about 3 years

v24,25 Saul must have returned to Damascus where the Jews plotted to kill him. [2 Cor 11:32,33](#) indicates that the Jews plotted with the governor of Damascus. But the Damascus believers helped Saul to escape during the night in a basket lowered down the city wall. An event which must have been humbling for Saul.

v26 Saul now travels to Jerusalem, he had not been to the city since his conversion.

The believers in Jerusalem had experience Saul's earlier attempts to destroy them so were very afraid of him, not believing that he had been saved. Saul is rejected by the believers and hated by his old Jewish friends because he was a Christian.

v27-28 One man has faith and belief in Saul, Barnabas, He stood by Saul and brings him to the disciples. He tells them how the Lord had come to Saul on the road and how he had since been preaching Christ boldly throughout Damascus. Barnabas was not affected by Saul's past or the public opinion. He had the courage to stand up for Saul.

v29 Saul was now accepted by the Jewish believers and speaks out for Christ in the city. It was not long before he came up against those who had stoned Stephen, the Grecians (Hellenistic Jews). [Acts 6:8](#), His old friends. Very quickly they became his enemies and attempted to put Saul to death.

Why did they hate Saul so much? Saul had found the truth and it had changed his life. Here was evidence that Jesus was alive and powerful, the evidence must be destroyed.

v30 So to protect Saul the Jerusalem believers sent him to Caesarea and then onto Tarsus, his home town.

v31 Luke seems to suggest that the Jewish believers had felt that they could do without Saul as he points out that after his departure there was peace in the area and the Church was allowed to grow in the Lord.

Saul now disappears from the story for a while, and does not reappear until [Acts 11:25](#). It must have been quite a shock to Saul, but it was all part of God's plan. This time was to be a period of training for Saul, the 'desert or faraway' time when Saul needed to put his full trust in God, Saul may have needed a time of humility to prepare

him for the future.

v32 The story returns to follow Peter's ministry with two of the few miracles recorded. Supernatural events were more common during the earlier growth of the church as God proved the authority of special people like Peter. Today God does not work miracles through His people as He did with the disciples, instead the proof and authority is in His written Word.

v33 As Peter enters the town of Lydda he comes across a sick man. We are told that Aeneas was bedridden for eight years with paralysis but no other information, how paralysed was he? How did he become sick? Why did Peter chose him to heal?

v34,35 Peter, on seeing the man, tells him that "Jesus has made you well, get up and make your bed." Immediately the man is healed, broken nerves joined, unused muscles restored, he stands again after eight years, and the people saw and believed. This one miracle caused a spiritual awakening to spread through the area.

Note that Peter gave the glory to Jesus, the man had not asked for healing, the healing was instant and complete.

v36,37 We now move about ten miles onto the coast town of Joppa where a woman lived whose name was Tabitha, a very busy believer and well loved, but she becomes sick and died.

v38 The believers (disciples) heard that Peter was nearby in Lydda and sent two men to ask him to come.

v39 Because of the slowness of travel in could have been a day or so later when Peter arrives at Joppa. Luke never mentions that they asked for a miracle, the people of Joppa wanted to show how wonderful a woman she was in her serving of the Lord.

v40,41 Peter requests that they leave the room. He now prayed over the body of Tabitha. Then commanded her "to arise." Life flows back into Tabitha, she sits up, with Peters support she gets off the bed. Peter then calls in the rest of the church, who see a living Tabitha, what amazement and joy for them. [John 14:12](#)

v42 As a result of this event "Many believed in the Lord."

v43 Peter now remains in the area for some time.

Chapter 10

v1,2 God takes another step in His plan, He arranges for two men of very different outlook, Cornelius, a Roman centurion and Peter the Apostle.

As a centurion Cornelius would be in command of one hundred soldiers as part of a Roman battalion or *cahort*

Most Roman soldiers worshipped many gods. But Cornelius has chosen to serve the God of the Jews, not just the word but worship as well. He was not a Christian but was looking to follow and obey God in all his life. He was a seeker of God and he was about to find the answer, Cornelius was about to become the first Gentile in the Church of Christ.

v3-8 An angel visits Cornelius about 3:00 p.m. in a vision. The angel brought a message from God, "I have heard your prayers, now send men to Joppa and find the man Simon Peter living with Simon the tanner."

Cornelius calls for two special men, having told them what had happened, he sends

them to Joppa, they were a servant and a soldier who both obeyed without question. v9-16 Meanwhile God needs to prepare Peter for the coming visit. At about noon the next day Peter is waiting for the midday meal, while waiting he goes up onto the flat roof of the house, possible for the cool and a quite place for prayer.

As he prays he falls into some kind of trance and receives a vision.

A Jew was very proud to keep the Old Testament Laws of God especially on which food they could and could not eat [Lev 11:1-43](#) [Deuteronomy 14:3-21](#) So for Peter to be told that he must kill and eat the food on the sheet, which contained all the animals which a Jew was not allowed to eat, you would therefore expect him to react in this way. "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."

Peter's response is strange, He says "Not so Lord," Admitting that God was Lord of all yet refusing to obey the command.

God repeats the command a total of three times, each one ending with the words "Do not call anything unclean that God has made clean."

v17,18 Did Peter understand the command? He was still very puzzled. As he thinks about the vision the two men from Cornelius arrive. They are Gentiles and the Jewish household would be reluctant to let them enter the house.

v19,20 The Holy Spirit speaks, "Go and meet these men for I have sent them to you. Do not have any doubts."

The grace of God had been opened to all on the cross. At first it had been offered to the Jew, then the Samaritans, now the rest of the world. Would Peter understand that Christ's death and resurrection was meant to be offered to anyone who will accept, Jew or Gentile. Would he have [prejudices](#)?

Prejudice is a sign of pride, "my way is the best" and is often part of tradition. In many cases prejudice will cause pain. *The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.* [James 2:9](#)

21-23 Peter now realized the meaning of the vision, the men are 'unclean' Gentiles but God wants Peter to ignore the fact. Peter invites the men from Cornelius in and hears about Cornelius and what God's angel has told him.

Peter gives lodging, a place to sleep and eat, to the Gentiles. He has accepted God's command. [Gal 3:28](#)

v24 Not only does Peter go to see Cornelius in Caesarea with these Gentiles but also some other believers from Joppa also travel the thirty miles with Peter.

v25-26 When Peter reaches the house of Cornelius, Cornelius comes to meet him and falls down to worship Peter, Peter could have been full of pride but he tells Cornelius to "stand up, I am a man just like you."

v27 On entering the building Peter finds many others had come to meet him.

v28,29 The Jewish fisherman reminds them that according to Jewish law it is wrong for him to come into the home of a Gentile, but he continues to tell them that God has already told him that I must not call any person unclean from now. Peter is in a strange situation, for him it is an uncomfortable situation, but he is also beginning to get an experience of the Grace of God for all Man.

v29-33 Why therefore have you asked for me to come to you? he asks. Cornelius tells of the vision he had had four days earlier and the message he had received.

v34-43 Peter now realizes that this new truth is not selective by nation, in every nation anyone who fears and obeys Him is welcome to come to God. Peter then tells the people of Jesus of Nazareth, who was the Son of God, His life, death and resurrection, we can all witness to these facts. Today we are preaching the truth, that "that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

v44 While Peter is speaking the Holy Spirit enters the Gentile believers. The Jewish believers were amazed, they saw that the Holy Spirit gave these Gentile believers the same abilities and powers as they had received at Pentecost. This miracle showed the Jews that God had accepted the Gentiles into His new church of Christ, they were treated the same way so there is one family, there is no Jew or Gentile. [Gal 3:28](#)

v47,48 The Gentiles were then baptized in the Name of Jesus as a sign of their faith in Jesus their new Lord.

Chapter 11

We must realize that God will never change, but His plans, as they develop, will cause changes to Man. We must be prepared to follow these changes.

All changes must be examined to make sure they are of God, but then God's people must be open to these changes, remembering that they may also effect their life directly.

In the previous chapter Peter was shown by God to make changes to his life forever, any prejudices he had to Gentiles were broken down, Cornelius was now a brother in Christ.

v1 As soon as Peter returns from his life changing experience the Jewish believers were wanting to take up the matter, v3 "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them"

Jewish believers were holding onto their past, they felt that they must still keep all the Jewish laws to be "good Christians" so Peter now has to explain His actions.

v4-10 Peter tells his story to the people, he puts the facts, as they happened, before the Jerusalem believers, as he tells the story he emphasized the actions of God in the events, Peter shows that God Himself designed the visions and the events which followed.

v16 Peter finishes his story with a reminder of the words of Jesus "ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

v17 Peter now brings on the main point of his story - "If God gave them the same gift as he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I think that I could work against God?". Peter has shown them the plan of God, now they have to step out in faith and follow Peter or refuse the truth and so turn their back on God's way.

v18 As they hear the facts the believers go quite, then turn to glorifying God as they see the grace of God.

This story reminds us that we must be open to any changes God has as part of His plan's but we must also examine them to make sure that any changes are of God.

The Message spreads

v19 As a result of the persecution after Stephen's death many of the believers have left

Jerusalem, preaching as they went, they had reached Phoenicia (Tyre, Sidon), Cyprus and Antioch but were only preaching to the Jews.

v20-24 Then they started preaching to the Greek and God blessed their work, a great number coming to know Jesus as their Saviour.

The church at Jerusalem hears of this outreach and decides to send Barnabas to help in this work and give encouragement to the believers in the area. (It was Barnabas who supported Saul before the Jerusalem church [Acts 9:27-30](#)).

v25 Barnabas goes to look for Saul in Tarsus and brings him to Antioch.

Up to now the believers had been called "Followers of the Way" now they became known as "Christians."

v27-30 During the year that Barnabas and Saul worked in Antioch a prophet comes from Jerusalem. The Spirit had given him a warning message that there was soon to be a famine in Palestine. Claudius Caesar was Emperor from AD 41-54. In the year AD 46 Palestine was hit by a bad famine.

The people of Antioch decide to make a collection of money to help the Jewish believers. We are not told how long they took to put together the collection before they sent it with Saul and Barnabas to Jerusalem.

Chapter 12

Up to now most of the preaching of the gospel was throughout the area of Jerusalem with Peter being the central person. However, the message of Christ was also meant to reach the Gentiles. God had started by removing the prejudice of Peter and the other Jewish Christians to the Gentiles, now was about to open the doors fully to the Gentile nations, but not with Peter, it was Saul(Paul) who was about to come to the front in the Gentile outreach.

Stephen had been killed about ten years previous, and since then persecution was common for the Jerusalem church, but now it was about to get worse.

v1-5 Herod Agrippa 1, the grandson of Herod the Great has shown great interest and encouragement in the Jewish faith, even though his family were Edomites and not Jews. As a result he had a close relationship with the religious leaders.

He only reigned from AD 41-44 but during that time he decides to persecute the Christians, this time the persecution was for the leading Apostles "because it pleased the Jews." He started by killing James Zebedean, the brother of John and arrested Peter, probably put in prison in the Antonia fortress.

v6 Peter was guarded by four soldiers at a time, two chained to him, one on either side of him and two at the door of the cell. They normally divided the day into four, so six hours of guarding for each group of four soldiers.

Herod has planned to put Peter on "Trial" after Easter (Passover, or following feast of Unleaven Bread). It was against Jewish law to have a trial or execution during the seven days of this celebration.

v5 The Jewish believers are praying over the situation, but seemed to think there was no way out. Compare [Acts 5:17-20](#)

v6-10 God now moves. As Peter slept between the two soldiers, (he was obviously at peace with the situation) an angel enters the room filling the room with light. Peter is

so deep in sleep the angel has to give him a shake to wake him up. The chains fall off, Peter gets dressed and they leave the room. The light and the noise of the chains do not wake the soldiers.

v10-11 They pass all the guards, the doors opening of their own accord and soon leave the building. Peter thinks that he is dreaming. However, he soon realizes this is real as the angel leaves him. He realises that God is fully in control.

v12 Peter goes to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. The house is obviously being used a meeting place for one of the groups of Jewish believers. Another group were meeting with James v17.

v13,14 A servant girl answers Peter's knocking on the door of the house, she recognised the voice of Peter and runs to tell the others instead of letting Peter in.

v15,16 As Rhoda tells the group that Peter is outside they do not believe her. Seeing that they had been praying for God to release Peter they do not seem to have had any faith in their prayer requests. "Thou art mad.", "It is his angel.". When they do open the door they just cannot believe it.

v17 Peter tells how God released him. Peter gives God the glory. He sent the angel, removed the chains, silenced the guards, opened the doors. Following this Peter then goes into hiding.

What do we learn from this event?

1) *If we meet an impossible to solve problem commit it all over to God.*

2) *If you feel it is impossible, remember God can do anything if He wants too. If you ask for help, believe that it can happen.*

3) *Impossible situations are often created by God to attract your attention.*

v18,19 You can imagine the reaction of the guards when they find Peter gone. Herod searches for Peter but when he cannot find him decided to "examine," possibly torture then punish the guards with execution. Herod probably thought that they were part of the plot to release Peter.

v19 Herod's pride had been hit, he moves from Judea to Caesarea.

v20 Tyre and Sidon now feel the effect of a damaged pride as Herod pours out his anger on them. The towns send representatives to Herod to try to make peace, through Blastus, as they depended upon the food produced in Herod's country for their food. Herod plans to answer their request but also decides to show off by putting on some special royal garments (set of special clothes). Ancient Jewish Historian, Josephus, gives a description of the royal garments, - the cloth, used to make the clothes, was made of silver thread. this meant that the clothes glowed in the sun.

Herod is sitting on his throne giving an address to the people from Tyre and Sidon, the listeners seeing him glowing in the sun start to shout "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man!".

Herod accepts this praise, accept the 'divine' honours, making him so proud of himself.

v23 God sends an angel to punish Herod for his pride, for making himself a god. He died a terrible death, eaten by worms and dies five days later.

v24 The persecutor dies, nothing can stop the spread of the Word of God.

v25 Barnabas and Saul have delivered the money to the Jerusalem church sent from the Antioch churches [Acts 11:29-30](#).

The two elderly apostles now return from their mission, but taking a young John Mark with them.

Chapter 13

Luke had concentrated mainly on the outreach in and around Jerusalem during the earlier records in Acts, now the record moves out into other area's, mainly centered upon Antioch in Syria.

Luke starts with a list of five men who are involved in the ministry in the Antioch church. They were serving as prophets and teachers.

Barnabas, who was known earlier, [Acts 4:36-37](#); [Acts 9:27](#); [Acts 11:22-26](#);
Simeon, who may have been from Africa as he was also called "Black."

Lucius from Cyrene [Acts 11:20](#) who may have been one of the those who started the church.

Manaen, who was a close friend or relative of Herod the Tetrarch (Antipas). The one who killed John the Baptist, [Mark 6:20-28](#).

Last in the list, Saul, later to become Paul.

v2-3 The Holy Spirit sends a message to these church ministers to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work God wants them to do. Paul had already been called by God [Acts 9:15](#), now He tells Barnabas to join in the work with Saul. The church now prays and confirms their support in the calling to the work.

Barnabas and Saul also take John Mark when they departed for Seleucia. [Acts 12:25](#). Mark was the cousin of Barnabas [Col 4:10](#).

v4-7 Barnabas comes from Cyprus [Acts 4:36](#) so it was obvious that Cyprus would be their first area of the ministry.

They started at Salamis on the eastern end of the island, then moved onto Paphos, the capital, at the western end where they meet a problem for their ministry. An unusual situation, a Jewish false prophet and sorcerer who was called Bar-Jesus (Translated "Son of Jesus, Joshua) Elymas means "wise man" or "sorcerer").

v7 The Roman deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, wants to hear of the new faith and Word of God but Bar-Jesus tries to stop the message. Saul, or Paul as he is later to be called, recognize Elymas as a child of the devil, using the power of the Holy Spirit, Saul makes him blind for a time as a judgement for his changing and rejection of God's Word. This miracle was also evidence to the Roman deputy, Sergius Paulus that Saul and Barnabas were true messengers from God and believed the message of salvation.

Mark's Failure

v13 After leaving Paphos the three missionaries sail for Perga in Pamphylia (Southern Turkey). There John Mark leaves the team to return to Jerusalem. We are not told why Mark did this, Mark was a very devout Jew so he may have found it difficult to deal with Gentiles, or he had a disagreement with Saul or possibly homesick. All we are told is that Saul(Paul) did not want to have Mark with him on a later missionary journey. [Acts 15:36-41](#).

Luke now uses the name of Paul not Saul.

v14-25 After the departure of Mark, Paul and Barnabas travel onto Antioch. On the

Sabbath day they joined the Jews and possible Gentiles who were God fearing, in the synagogue. As was the normal, a visitor to the synagogue were often asked to give a word during the service.

Paul takes full advantage, starting back at the Jew's time in Egypt Paul goes through their history highlighting the possibility of a coming Messiah, God was preparing the way for the Messiah. Finally he reminds them of John the Baptist and his preaching "behold, there cometh One after me."

v26-30 Paul now tells them that the Messiah came but was rejected by the Jewish religious leaders, they did not recognize Him because they did not understand the teaching of the Prophets. Yet though they found no reason to do it, they put Him to death. But then God raised Him from the dead. Many saw Him and give witness to His resurrection.

v32 Paul up to now had been saying "they," now starts to use "you," Paul now tells them "we now tell you of this Gospel" using the Old testament Paul now tries to show them that Jesus was the Messiah, Paul tries to give them the Good News.

v33 [Psalms 2:7](#); is quoted, see also [Heb 1:5](#) , this verse is talking about the resurrection of Christ.

v34 [Isaiah 55:3](#) is quoted. In [2 Samuel 7:12-17](#) David was promised that the Messiah would be a descendent of David, and that the Messiah would be for ever, 2 Sam 7:13,16. Therefore if Jesus had remained dead He could not have been the Messiah, Jesus had to be resurrected to be an eternal Messiah.

v35 The third quotation was from [Psalm 16:10](#), this Psalm must be referring to the Messiah not David, who in now dead, buried and the body gone to dust. Peter also used this quotation at Pentecost [Acts 2:24-28](#).

v38-41 Paul now tells the people in the synagogue to make a decision. Belief in Jesus, as the Messiah, would give them two blessings.

1) The Law cannot give, forgiveness of sin. [Gal 2:16](#); [Rom 3:19-20](#).

2) The Law cannot make a person right with God.

But belief in Jesus could make them "justified" before God.

"Justification" is an act by God who has stated that "a person who believes in His Son is made right when they stand before God. [Rom 4:1-8](#)

v40 Paul tells them that they make sure they do not make the same mistake and ignore the Prophets.

v41 [Habakkuk 1:5](#)

v42 at the end of the service, as they left the synagogue, the Gentiles in the meeting wanted to hear more on the next Sabbath.

v43 Later many of the Jews and those Gentiles who had taken on the Jewish faith followed Paul and Barnabas wanting them to continue their preaching.

v44,45 During the week those who had heard the message had spread the message, the whole city came to hear the message, probably most were Gentiles. This makes the Jews envious and angry, so they try to stop the message.

v46 Paul tells the Jews that they had been given the message of salvation first, [Acts 3:26](#); [Rom 1:16](#) but they rejected it and so "judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life.". Now the message is going to the Gentiles.

v47 Paul quotes [Isaiah 49:6](#) to prove his point. See also [Luke 2:29-32](#).

v48,49 The divine side of evangelization, God knows which people will choose to follow Him, for God these people are the "Elect." Eph 1:4,5 but this needs someone go with the message so that they can make the decision, "Word of the Lord was spread abroad."

v50-52 Envy shows amongst the Jews, the unbelieving argue with Paul and Barnabas and then using the city leaders and legal action threw them out of the city. But this did not disappoint the two missionaries, they "Shook of the dust of the city" [Luke 9:5](#); [Luke 10:10,11](#) and moved on to Iconium with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 14

Iconium - a divided city

This is a city which is more Greek than Roman, it was in the Roman province (area) of Galatia.

v1-3 Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue to minister to the large number of Jews and Greeks present. Their message was received by most present with great happiness, many believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

But as had happened before, the unbelieving Jews caused problems and stirred up hatred and evil in the Greeks against the ministry, but this did not stop the work and Paul and Barnabas continued to preach, performing, by the power of God, signs and miracles as proof that they were God's messengers and they had faith. [Acts 15:12](#); [Gal 3:5](#); [Heb 2:4](#). But faith does not come from miracles, it helps, but it is all of His Word of grace. see v26; [John 2:23-25](#)

v4-6 The city, as a result of the Jewish unbelievers, was split, part supporting the apostles, part the Jews. The Christians were threatened with stoning by the unbelieving Jew's, Greek's and the town leaders, but the apostles became aware of the danger and left for Lystra and Derbe, towns in the Roman province of Galatia.

Lystra was about eighteen miles to the southwest of Iconium, Paul was to visit this town three times on his various missionary journeys. The second, [Acts 16:1-5](#), where Paul met Timothy, and on the third journey [Acts 18:23](#)

Lystra

v8-10 They meet a crippled man, disabled from birth so had never been able to walk. This man was listening to Paul talking in the market place. God made Paul sense that this man believed the Words of God and had faith. [Rom 10:17](#) Paul turns to him and commands "Stand up on your feet!", immediately the faith brought healing and the man jumped up and began to walk.

If the damaged legs of the man had been due to a recent illness people may have doubted the miracle, but they knew this man had never walked. Peter also healed a man crippled from birth [Acts 3:1-11](#).

v11-13 The crowd's reaction and response showed a crowd who believed in mythical (imaginary, fictitious) gods. Jupiter (or Zeus) was the supposed chief of these gods, so Barnabas was thought to be Jupiter, while Paul, the messenger, was Mercury (or Hermes). Jupiter was believed to be the protector of the city and this reaction allows

the temple of Jupiter priests to become important and started offering sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas.

v14-19 Paul and Barnabas could have easily accepted this worship and tried to use the event to preach the truth but this is not the way of God, only He should be worshipped. Consider [2 Cor 4:1,2](#); [1 Thess 2:1-5](#).

Paul and Barnabas told the people that they were not gods but normal people just like them, the gods you were worshipping are just imaginary, a fable, we are telling you about the true God. Paul does not refer to the Old Testament because most of the people were Gentile pagans and knew nothing of the Old Testament. He starts with creation, made by one God, who is alive. A God which gives many blessings and is a forgiving God. Neither has He judged the nations for their wrong lives as yet.

v19 The people had calmed down a little, until unbelieving Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium, these quickly stirred up the people and they stoned Paul until they thought he was dead and threw him out of the city.

v20-22 There were new believers in Lystra, as they stood looking at the apparently dead body, praying for guidance and help, Paul suddenly stands up.

Was Paul really dead? We are not told.

Out of this event God was glorified. Paul and Barnabas departed for Derbe the next day, preaching and teaching.

They later returned to Lystra, then onto Iconium and Antioch, preaching and encouraging the new believers, to remain in faith and be prepared for problems and tribulation. How they were able to enter and preach in these cities from which they had previously been thrown out is not explained, but we must remember nothing is impossible to God, He opened the doors.

v22 The apostles were able to encourage the believers, "confirming" their belief and increasing their faith.

v23 The apostles, having prayed for each new church and created church leaders. "Ordained" indicates that they were appointed by some sort of vote. By appointing these leaders the apostles were ensuring the proper operation and organizing of the local churches. The title "elders" is the same position given as "bishop" or "pastor" elsewhere in the New Testament. [Titus 1:5,7](#);

v24-28 Working their way through the area they finally come back to Antioch. The church is called together and they were able to report how God had opened the doors to the Gentiles and the result was the opening of the door of salvation to the Gentiles.

Chapter 15

This chapter shows that progress of the Gospel can often be hindered, delayed by some people who are not open to the leading voice of God. Paul and the disciples face one such challenge about twenty years after Pentecost.

The problem starts with some Jews who were teaching that Gentiles, without circumcision as instructed by Moses a person cannot be saved. This group, who had been Pharisees v5, appears to have come from the Jerusalem church, but was not with the churches permission, v24.

These people wanted to remove the freedom for both the Jews and Gentiles which

comes with Christ, salvation is by grace. [Gal 2:1-10](#); [Gal 5:1ff](#)

It is not unexpected that some Jews, who had been trained throughout their life to respect the Law of Moses would not have a problem with salvation by grace. As a result they were mixing the Law and Grace, the effect of this was to block the way for a believer to access God, the way that Jesus had opened on the cross with His death, [Heb 10:19-25](#), was being closed by their teaching, they were insisting that obeying the Law of Moses was essential for salvation. "You have to become a Jew to be saved." [Eph 2:11ff](#); [Gal 5:1](#); [Acts 15:10](#)

The message of the Gospel is all in the work of Christ on the cross [1 Cor 15:1-8](#); [Heb 10:1-18](#). If a person adds anything to this Gospel then God has given a warning of punishment. [Gal 1:1-9](#).

This must warn us of any group who teaches that "if you do not worship our way you cannot be saved."

A further danger from this teaching was that the Gentiles saved, through the work of Paul and Barnabas, had not received this additional teaching and so were not saved and was a waste of time. It is not surprising that Paul and Barnabas argued strongly against this teaching. v2.

Paul and Barnabas were instructed (by God [Gal 2:2](#)) to go to the Jerusalem church leaders. Though each local church was independent, decisions by the church in Jerusalem were respected.

v6-18 **The Discussion**

It appears that there were four separate meetings in this conference.

- 1) v4 A public meeting of welcome and report.
- 2) [Gal 2:2](#) a private meeting of Paul and the main leaders.
- 3) v5-6 A second public meeting where the Judaizers were presenting their case. [Gal 2:3-5](#)
- 4) v6ff A public meeting lead by four main leaders.

v6-11 **Peter looks at the past**

The report written by Luke seems to indicate that Peter had been quietly listening at the previous meetings, now feels led to speak. He reminds the church of four ministries to the Gentiles that God has allowed Peter to be involved in.

1) v7 God chose Peter to take the message to the various groups, the Jews [Acts 2](#); The Samaritans [Acts 8:14-17](#) and finally the Gentiles [Acts 10](#). The Jews had initially objected to Peter going to Cornelius and eating with him, but Peter was able to prove that it was all in the plan of God. Peter emphasized that the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles exactly the same as given to the Jews at Pentecost, and they Gentiles did not obey the Law of Moses, they just believed.

2) v8 The Gentile received the Holy Spirit as a witness of being born again. God would not have given the Holy Spirit if obedience to the Law of Moses was needed.

[Gal 3:2](#)

3) v9,11 God originally made the Jew special, but the work on Calvary has made the Jew and the Gentile of no difference. [Rom 10:9-13](#)

4) v10 The Law had been given to protect the Jew from the Gentile but it was also a yoke for the Jewish nation, it controlled them, was a burden to them, but Jesus took away this burden. [Gal 5:1ff](#); [Col 2:9-17](#); [Matt 11:28-30](#). The Law cannot remove sin in

a person [Gal 2:21](#), give the Holy Spirit [Gal 3:2](#), or give life eternal [Gal 3:21](#). It could only be done through God's Son [Rom 8:1-4](#).

v12 It appears that Peter's words had some affect as all the audience remained silent as Paul and Barnabas now make their report of what God had done amongst the Gentiles. They were able to tell of God's miracles as proof of it being in the Will of God, God saved by grace not by the Law. [Gal 3:5](#) These two men had great respect in the church of Jerusalem v25.

v13-18 **James sums up and makes a recommendation**

James was the brother of Jesus [Gal 1:19](#). James did not believe in Jesus until the resurrection. [1 Cor 15:7](#); [Acts 1:14](#)

James has a tendency towards the teaching of the Law so he was very acceptable to those who wanted to add the Law to Grace.

James starts by agreeing with Peter that God was saving the Gentiles through Grace only. v17 must have caused a few comments "Gentiles upon whom My name is called," as this was the Jews title for hundreds of years. Today God calls both Jew and Gentile out for his people. Judaizers thought that this action was reducing the glory of Israel, they could not see or accept that we are "all one in Christ." [Gal 3:28](#), this was the 'mystery' hidden from the Jews and revealed in the church by the Holy Spirit.

v15-17 James also said that the prophets confirmed this by quoting Amos 9:11-12 *"In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name," declares the LORD, who will do these things.*

v18 This was all part of God's plan.

v19-35 **The Decision**

v19 James makes a decision.

v22 The whole church accepts the decision by James.

v28 The Holy Spirit has guided the meeting to make a doctrinal and practical decisions on living the Christian life.

v20 James recommends that the church writes to all the Gentile churches informing them of the decision. To help the Jewish believers James also asks that the Gentile believers agree to avoid the sins of [idolatry](#) and [immorality](#) and try not to eat blood and animals which had died from strangulation.

Why the problem with the food? The early church often eat together as part of their worship, often in each others homes. Gentiles could eat food which could upset Jews meeting with them and possibly causing a Law / Grace split. Paul talks about the subject Roman 14 - 15

v23-29 The letter sent with four disciples to act as witnesses.

v30-31 the four men departed for Antioch to deliver the letter where it was greeted with joy.

Partner problems

v36ff Paul and Barnabas agree to set off to re-visit the new churches but Paul is not happy about taking John Mark as he had deserted them in the work [Acts 13:13](#). What started out as a discussion turned into a serious argument and resulted in two teams going out, Paul took Silas and headed for Syria and Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus.

Was this split right? Let us remember that God is in control in all situations. Two teams are now preaching the Gospel.

Chapter 16

A new member of the team?

Paul and Silas have been to Derbe and have now moved onto Lystra. They probably visited the various groups of believers in each town.

While in Lystra they meet Timothy. His mother, Eunice was Jewish but father was a Greek. Timothy may have been converted during Paul's first visit as Paul referred to him as "his own son in faith." [1 Tim 1:2](#) and "my beloved son" [1 Cor 4:17](#). In [2 Tim 1:5](#) we are told that Timothy's grandmother and mother had been first to become believers. Timothy may have also seen the problems that Paul had during his last visit. [Acts 14:19-20](#), Paul refers to them when he wrote to Timothy. [2 Tim 3:10-11](#).

Timothy came with great recommendation by the church members v2 so Paul wants to take him with him on his missionary journeys. However, Paul felt there could be a problem.

v3 Circumcision was discussed at the Jerusalem meeting. [Act 15:1ff](#) and it had been agreed that circumcision was not required for salvation, so why does Paul circumcise Timothy as this could be agreeing with the legalistic Jews?. Timothy would be working with Jews and Gentiles in the churches and Paul felt that the Jews might be offended by an uncircumcised person teaching them. Paul was concerned for Timothy's ministry, not his salvation. [Rom 14:13-15](#)

Timothy was to be used by the Lord over many years, helping the churches grow, often travelling with Paul. Becoming the pastor of the church in Ephesus [1 Tim 1:3](#) and appears to have joined Paul in the Roman prison. [2 Tim 4:21](#).

New Doors to Open v6-40

The team moves out into the area moving about present day Turkey, preaching and seeing many turn to Christ. Then the Holy Spirit somehow commanded them not to continue into Asia. God then leads them North West towards Troas. This must have been a surprise to Paul as the outreach was so successful in the area.

v9 Paul is given a night vision to go into Macedonia, which is the start of Europe.

v10 The report by Luke now refers to "we" instead of "they," so we can assume that Luke had now joined the team as they crossed to Macedonia.

v11 From Troas to Neapolis the port of Philippi was a sea journey of about 150 miles, the passage indicates it took two days.

v12 Arriving at Philippi, which is about ten miles inland from the port. Luke tells us that they remained there many days. He does give a detailed report of this visit which suggest he may have come from the area.

v13-15 Philippi was a Roman city, and Paul's action suggest there may not have been a synagogue in the city. (It required ten Jewish men to open a synagogue) They "go down to the river where prayer was offered" and meets a group of Jewish women including Lydia, she was probably not a Jewess but a gentile who was seeking the truth, "worshipper of God" indicates this..

Paul had been called to the country by a "man" in his vision, yet the first contacts were Jewish women. The Jewish rabbis were known not to encourage teaching women, so it may have been strange for Paul and his party to make this contact. However, Paul was open to God's leading and it is obvious that God had prepared the way as the woman opened her heart to the message and then opened her home to the apostles.

Lydia must have been successful, she was a purple dye supplier from Thyatira, this purple dye was very expensive, being made from a mollusc (snail) found in this area of Thyatira.

v16 As soon as the Good News message arrives Satan moves in to try to destroy it.

A young girl, possibly a slave, is demon possessed and pretended to tell fortunes. This had created much money for her masters.

As Paul and his team obviously went to the river side to pray regularly, as they passed this girl would shout out to them, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Paul does not want the message of salvation to be announced by Satan's slaves. Note that Satan will often appear as an angel of light, but changing the truth slightly. In this case the people would link the girl with the apostles message. Paul therefore turns to the girl, and in the Name of Christ tells the evil spirit to leave the girl.

Her masters have now lost their source of money and wanted Paul and Silas punished and drag them before the town officials.

As is usually the case the charge had nothing to do with the real problem, there was prejudice, "these Jews," exaggeration (made it appear bigger than it was), for the city was not in trouble. Finally there were lies, Paul and Silas were charged with teaching "customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

The magistrates response is to take off the apostles clothes and command them to be beaten with rods, they are then thrown into prison. The jailer was commanded to guard them well, so throws them into the inner prison and fastens their feet into a stock (this is constructed of two pieces of wood, mounted on top of each other and hinged at one end, the other end would have a lock. holes are cut so that the legs of the prisoner could be placed between the two pieces of wood and locked in place.)

v25-32 Paul and Silas must have been in considerable pain, having been beaten and now restricted in their movement by the stocks. Instead of sleeping they are praising God, giving Him the glory in prayer and song. It must have been loud as all the prisoners could hear them and probably the jailor, these two prisoners were so different! God now reveals His presence with an earthquake, the foundations of the prison building are shaken, all the prison doors swing open, and all the chains and stocks holding the prisoners open.

The jailer is very frightened, not because of the earthquake but because under Roman law, if any prisoners escape he will be punished in the same as the escaping prisoner, obviously there were prisoners awaiting the death sentence. The jailor decides to save them the problem and is about to commit suicide when Paul calls out, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

In love and compassion Paul has stopped the man killing himself he now shows him the way of salvation.

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?", a cry from many people in the world, the answer

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" [Acts 2:38,39](#); [Acts 4:12](#); [Acts 8:37](#); [Acts 13:38,39](#).

The words "and your household." does not mean that the jailors faith will save all his family, salvation has to be a personal action, each must trust Christ personally. Children cannot be saved by their parents salvation, they must also accept Christ as their Saviour.

v33 The jailor is a changed man, with love and care he looks after Paul and Silas. Luke does not tell us about the other prisoners, possibly some were also saved.

v35 The next day the magistrates, realizing that they did not really have a case against Paul and Silas, sent word to the jailer to release them. Paul, however, was not willing to be ignored, they had not committed a crime and if they now left it would affect the local believers. Paul wants to prove that they were not guilty so he responds with "You have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison. And now do you thrust us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and fetch us out."

Paul has used his Roman citizenship, he challenges the officials on their actions being illegal, a Roman citizen have to have a proper trial and could not be whipped. Saul could also have referred the incident to the Emperor.

v39 The alarmed officials came and request Paul and Silas leave the city.

We are not told that they apologized for their action but this action of Paul would have meant that the officials would be careful with the local church, incase Paul chose to raise the matter with the Emperor later.

v40 The apostles remain in the city long enough to encourage the believers before they departed.

God plans and controls all events of His people, some may be involved in dramatic events to bring salvation, the jailor, others, like Lydia, found Jesus with a quite talk by the river.

Chapter 17

Luke tells us of Paul's ministry in three separate cities, Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. He shows us how the three towns responded to the message of salvation given by Paul and Silas. In these three towns we can also see how the people today could respond to the message.

v1-5 Luke seems to have returned to using "they" so we have to presume that he is not part of the party and Timothy is not mentioned until later so they may have remained in Philippi.

Thessalonica

Leaving Philippi Paul and Silas head South West 100 miles to the capital of Macedonia, Thessalonica (modern Salonika). There is no mention of a stop at Amphipolis and Apollonia. Paul normally took the message to the main cities, he then normally expected the new believers to take the message to the smaller surrounding towns. [1 Thess 1:8](#) Possibly this was the plan for these two towns.

The city of Thessalonica is located on several important trade routes and also had a good harbour. Most of the people were Greek but it was still under the control of

Rome, though there were no Roman soldiers based there because it was a "free city." Because of this it had a citizens assembly to create local rules and authority.

For three Sabbaths, Paul goes to the synagogue, talking to those present and answered their questions as he spoke to the Jews about Jesus, using the Old Testament scriptures to prove who Jesus was. Resurrection was the main point of the Christian faith, this is the major problem for a Jew.

Luke also tells us that there were many Greeks in the synagogue, these were [proselytes](#) or "God seeking" Gentiles.

Some of the Jews believed the message and joined Paul and Silas, Luke also tells us that many Greeks became believers.

v5-8 The result of the message did not bring joy to everybody, the unbelieving Jews were jealous and were hurt to see so many leaving the synagogue. They use "wicked fellows" to stir up the people and planned to drag the apostles before the magistrates but could not find them so instead dragged Jason and other believers before the magistrates. Jason had been the person who had been caring for Paul and Silas while they were in the city.

They were charged with disturbing the peace and saying "there is another king," Jesus. The word which we translate "another" means "another of a different kind," different to Caesar. The King and Kingdom of a believer is not of this world [John 18:36-37](#), but we cannot expect unbelievers to understand this.

v9 the magistrates demanded that Jason should remove Paul and Silas from the city and that he would make sure that they would not return, as guarantee the magistrates made Jason supply a "money bond" that he would carry out this instruction. It appears that Paul had tried to return but was not able to, he blamed it on Satan's work. [1 Thess 2:18](#) However, this restriction on Paul did not stop the message going out, the believers in the church at Thessalonica took the message instead to the area. [1 Thess 1:6-9](#)

Berea

v10-15 Paul and Silas now move onto Berea about 45 miles to the west. When Paul entered the synagogue he finds great interest, they were so interested that the synagogue members were each day searching the scriptures to confirm what Paul was saying. That reminds us that we should always check the scriptures for any teaching received, without it, wrong teaching can be taken on by a church.

Luke tells us that many of them believed.

Once again opposition arises, this time due to the unbelievers from Thessalonica coming and making the city turn against the message.

The Berea believers secretly take Paul by boat to Athens where he is joined by Timothy and Silas.

Timothy later, being a Greek and not known by the town, was able to return to Thessalonica [1 Thess 3:1-6](#)

Athens

Athens had been a powerful city once, the home of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, ancient philosophers, (people who study and teach), but it was becoming weaker and less important. It was still thought to be the centre of culture and education but its glory had long passed. Paul found it interesting that the people were still hungry for spiritual things but had turned to idol worship instead of seeking the true God, especially as

they thought they were very intelligent and knew all the answers.

Most Greek religions created gods in the image of men, they were given super powers but with human attributes, envy, hatred, jealousy were all part of their "gods."

Paul may have only had Luke with him at this time [1 Thess 3:1](#). Looking round at all these idols, and knowing that the source was Satanic, Paul tries to talk about the true God to various groups, to those in the market place, to the Jews in the synagogue, to devout people. All this caused some of the philosophers to call Paul "a babblers" (talking in a confused way)

There were two types of philosophers in Athens, the Epicurians and the Stoics.

The Epicurians tried to find the truth by experience and not by reasoning. They did not believe in a God and their way of living was by seeking pleasure. To some "pleasure" could mean pain and suffering, others a life without any pain or problems. They wanted to just "Enjoy life"

The Stoics taught that there was "one World God," rejecting idol and pagan worship. They lived for self control, pleasure was not 'good' neither pain 'evil.' They were full of pride and their achievements, they did not need the help of a God of any sort. They "Endured life"

v19-21 The Council of Aeropagus were responsible for the religion and education in the city so were interested in this "new teaching." Paul was therefore invited to speak to them at a special meeting.

v22 Paul is not on trial as he speaks, the council want to know the details of this doctrine.

Paul's message starts by praising them for being so religious, so many god's, so religious that they had an altar to "the unknown god," just incase they had missed a god. It was this God that Paul wanted to tell them about.

v24-27 God is the creator, he is greater than anything, supplying all that the world and the people need, life, food, so there is nothing He needs from Mankind. He does not live in man made buildings, but He does watch over Man and his needs and wants contact with men, any who look for Him will find Him.

This one passage shows that all the temples built in Athens by men and being use as places of worship are a waste of time, these do not worship God but give glory to men.

v26-29 These man made Greek gods did not care for the problems of man, but the God Paul is talking about created all men and nations from one man, all being equal. v26.

This would have cause the Greeks some concern as they thought that they were a special race.

This God is near to man v27. v28 Paul quotes from two of their own poets. God created mankind, so we are His "natural children," we are "created in the image of God"

Gen 1:26, we are not the spiritual children of God until we believe in Christ. [John 1:11-13](#). It is therefore foolish to make images of man and say they are gods.

v30-31 God loves us and wants to be our saviour. God has been patient with the sin and wrong doing of men, for now He is holding back His anger at our sins, but right now He is commanding all to repent, to turn to Him and away from wrong. He has set a time when He will judge but has now sent a Saviour who died and is now alive and has taken the punishment for all who believe.

v32 Resurrection of the dead caused much laughter, to a Greek the body of a man was

just a container he will occupy for a while, to be released from the body one day. To raise a dead body and relive in it again must be wrong, they could not see how a God would be interested in personal judgement done while in this body. They believed in eternal life, but as a spirit not with a body.

v32-34 Some laughed at Paul's message, some wanted to hear more, some believed and accepted Christ as their Saviour.

Paul was not told to leave so we believe that he continued to preach. The people of Athens thought that they were special, they thought they knew everything, Paul's remark "The times of this ignorance" sums up why they chose to ignore the message.

See [1 Cor 1:25-31](#)

Chapter 18

Paul leaves Athens and moves West to Corinth. The wickedness of this city was known all over the Roman world. The position of the city made it central for trade and travel. It had many religions and strange beliefs, this bringing in much riches for the city people. Corinth was a very important city.

Helpers and workers appear

v1-5 God leads Paul to a Jewish couple Aquila and Priscilla, they were in the same work as Paul, a tent maker. It was normal for all Jewish rabbis not to be paid by their students for their teaching, so they all had a trade to support them, Paul made leather tents. [1 Cor 9:6-15](#); [2 Cor 11:6-10](#)

We are not told if Aquila and Priscilla were believers when they met Paul but it is likely they were. They were to become a very committed couple in serving the Lord, even putting themselves in danger. [Rom 16:3,4](#)

During the week Paul and this couple made tents but each Sabbath they entered the synagogue to preach Christ to the Jews and Greeks there.

v5 When Silas and Timothy arrived they brought financial support for Paul [2 Cor 11:9](#) so Paul was able to preach the message full time.

v6-8 As the message of salvation spreads the usual opposition appears, the unbelieving Jews rejected the message. Before this had caused Paul to move on but here he feels the Lord's leading him to turn away from the Jews and go to the Gentiles. Though he never stopped witnessing to the Jews, from now on his main calling was for the Gentiles.

"Your blood be upon your own heads; " means that you are to blame for your own decision and judgement.

God now brings two more believers into the work, Titus Justus and Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue. The message of salvation spreads and many are saved.

v9,10 For the chief ruler of the synagogue to have become a believer must have hit the unbelieving Jews very hard, it is therefore possible, though Luke does not mention it, that there was serious opposition and this is why God gave Paul a message of encouragement. God had already been working, He had "many people in this city."

Paul continues the work in Corinth for eighteen months.

v12-17 In these verses we can see that God is in full control of any opposition. A new Pro counsel is appointed by Rome and the unbelieving Jews think that they can use

this to stop Paul, to make this new "Christian teaching" illegal. The Jews actually broke the law themselves by forcing Paul to attend the court. Paul was prepared to defend himself but God had already prepared the proconsul Gallio for he saw that it was not a Roman Law being broken, but Jewish understanding of their own religion and throws it out. But it does not end their, the Greeks then take the new leader of the synagogue, Sosthenes, and beat him in front of the proconsul, a real anti-Jewish behaviour, but the proconsul ignores their actions. In 1 Cor 1:1 Paul refers to a brother in Christ Sosthenes, did this Jewish ruler become a believer? The Jews tried to make the Christian faith illegal, instead the power of God made it acceptable, by refusing to get involved, Gallio the proconsul, indicated that Rome would not get involved.

v18-22 **By God's Will**

v18 Paul now leaves Corinth after the eighteen months and sails for Syria, his two co-workers, Aquila and Priscilla go with him.

Cenchrea was the seaport of Corinth [Rom 16:1](#) and there was a group of believers there.

Paul has his hair cut off during this time in Cenchraea, "he had made a vow." is probably talking about the Nazirite vow mentioned in [Numbers 6](#). This vow was voluntary as a sign of their belief, it was not part of salvation so it was an indication of devotion to God. The hair was allowed to grow for a set time and then cut off to show the end of the vow. We are not told why Paul did this. As part of this vow the person had to present an offering sacrifice in Jerusalem, this may be what Luke was referring to in v21.

This does not mean that the early believers felt that they should observe Jewish feasts, Paul taught that salvation did not involve any religious offerings or attending religious observances. Consider [Gal 4:1-11](#); [Rom 14:1 - 15:7](#); [1 Cor 9:19-23](#)

v19 Arriving at Ephesus where he made contact with the Jews in the synagogue, obviously they were very interested in the message as they wanted him to stay longer.

v22 Landing at Caesarea he then went overland to Jerusalem, then onto Antioch, giving reports of the work as he went.

v23 We are not told how long Paul remained in Antioch before he started out on his third missionary journey.

Luke gives very little information on the initial part of the journey except to tell us that Paul was "strengthening all the disciples." Luke wants the reader to get to Ephesus, with its 300,000 people it was the capital city of the Roman area of Asia. It had a large harbour and was very wealthy due to the trade. It also had a large temple to 'Diana,' 418 feet by 239 feet and 50 feet high. Inside it had the "sacred image" of Diana(Artemis) which was said fell from the sky, probably a meteorite. [Acts 19:35](#), this temple brought in many extra visitors.

Diana(Artemis) was the god of fertility, so there were hundreds of "priestesses" available at the temple for visiting men.

Paul was to remain here for three years.

v23-28 Apollos, a man with only part of the message.

Paul had left Priscilla and Aquila behind in Ephesus while he went onto Jerusalem, they continued the spread of the message until Paul returned.

It appears that one day they heard a visiting Jew, Apollo, preaching part of the mes-

sage of salvation. Apollos was from Alexandria, a city of great education, it had a university and a very large library.

Apollos was well educated in the Old Testament and was very able at teaching. Unfortunately his message ended at John the Baptist, he knew nothing of Jesus, Calvary and the resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. God had sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Christ, it included a baptism of repentance in preparation of the coming Messiah. [John 1:15-34](#); [Mark 1:1-11](#)

v26 Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos away to their home and added the missing information to his message of God. Apollos now becomes a strong missionary for God, he helped the believers at Ephesus so much they recommend him to other churches.

Chapter 19

Paul was moving through the area and comes to Ephesus where he finds a group of twelve men who said that they were 'disciples' of Christ but there was something missing.

v2-7 "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" asks Paul. The presence of the Holy Spirit in a persons life proves that they belong to Jesus and born again. [Rom 8:5-9, 16](#); [1 John 5:9-13](#); [Eph 1:13](#)

Their reply showed that they knew nothing of the Holy Spirit, they, like Apollo had turned to God following the message of John the Baptist, they may have actually been converts of Apollo.

Some people feel that these men had been saved but need the "baptism of the Spirit" but this does not agree with the above scripture and also Paul realized there was something wrong.

These men had been baptized under the message of John the Baptist, a baptism of repentance, this was done under the Old Testament covenants, but these ended with Jesus at Calvary. [Heb 10:1-18](#). Paul explains the action of Christ on the cross and they are now baptized in the Name of Christ. The action of Paul in laying on of his hands is not a contradiction, it confirmed that Paul was God's messenger, as the effect of the presence of the Holy Spirit was the same effect as previous at Pentecost, it joins the men onto the church of God as one body. See [Acts 2:4-11](#); [Acts 10:44-46](#); [Acts 8:14ff](#)

v6 What happened here, speaking in tongues, does not appear again in Acts, so it is not the normal for the church today, it was to show to the different groups, there was no Jew, John the Baptist followers, Samaritans, Gentiles, that they were all one in the Lord. [1 Cor 12:13](#). No where are believers told to seek a Baptism of the Holy Spirit or speak in tongues, we are however told to be filled with the Spirit. See Paul's letter to the Ephesians, see how many times he talks about the Holy Spirit effect on our lives.

v8-9 Paul is able to speak in the synagogue for three months before the opposition appeared, Paul left the synagogue and moved into a school house, taking the believers with him. He continued to minister for two years under these conditions.

v11-12 The spread of the message was very successful, due to the believers carrying the message out to the surrounding towns a God using miracles and acts of faith through Paul to help spread the message.

Ephesus was the centre of the [occult](#) v18-19 and God allowing Paul to use "special

miracles" was demonstrating God's power in a Satanic stronghold. But Satan always tries to oppose the work.

v13-19 Jewish priests were known to get involved with casting out demons, [Luke 11:17-20](#) but for them to use the name of Jesus would be unusual as it would be admitting His authority. These men did not have the authority from Jesus, they did not even have any sort of fellowship with Jesus, so this is why they used it together with the name of Paul when they tried to cure a man who was demon possessed.

The result was not what they expected, the demon's response was v15 "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?". The demonised man then attacks the seven priests. As a result of this many believed and "the name of Jesus was magnified.". The cost of the books destroyed, as the people turned to Jesus, is estimated to be about the annual wages of 150 men.

If these men had been able to cast out the demon then the name of Jesus would have been challenged and dishonoured. See a similar event [Acts 16:16-18](#).

v21 Luke reveals Paul's plans as led by the Spirit, this includes the first mention of his proposed visit to Rome. This was fulfilled, but not as Paul expected. While Paul remained in Ephesus, Timothy and Erastus visit the various churches proposing a "love offering" collection for the poor saints of Jerusalem.

v23-41 Objection appears, the spread of the message was affecting the worship in the Temple of Diana, many shops sold shrines for the worshiper to take home and their income was suffering. Satan now gets the silversmiths with Demetrius as leader to make a public protest. [1 Tim 6:10](#) The Love of Money!

The silversmiths were encouraging idol worship and immorality, corrupt, sinful behaviour. They were interested only in their money not the free grace of God that Paul was preaching, but they did not mention this fact they used pride and honour of the Ephesians for their city and encourage the greatness of the temple of Diana.

They could not find Paul so seize two of Paul's helpers, Gaius and Artitarchus and dragged them into the Roman [amphitheatre](#). Paul wanted to go into the theatre but was held back by the believers.

v32-34 The crowd were confused, most had just joined the crowd not knowing why. We now see race prejudice, a Jew named Alexander is put forward to tell the people that the Jews did not agree or support the message. He never had a chance, as soon as the crowd realized he was a Jew they shouted for two hours "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!". The Jews are not allowed to worship idols by God and this behaviour was very hurtful for a Jew. v35 It was the city clerk who eventually brings the situation under control. He did it for a political reason, Ephesus was a "free city," the Romans would be very pleased if they had an excuse to remove this status.

The clerk calmed the crowd down telling them how great their city was, he continues by telling them that the prisoners were neither robbers or had blasphemed the goddess Diana, there was no cause for their action. If the silversmiths had a problem they should bring it before the town leaders.

The message has received "official approval" in Ephesus.

This calmed the crowd and they went home, probably please to have saved their city and temple of Diana, very few would have tried to find the truth.

Ephesus and the temple have now been destroyed, the position of the city is now only visited by people interested in history, yet Paul wrote four letters to the believers in this city of Ephesus, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Revelations, these are still giving today's believers encouragement and help.

Chapter 20

v1 In the following chapters Luke records Paul's journey to Jerusalem, his arrest, and the journey to Rome.

Paul leaves Ephesus after peace had been restored, he visits various groups of believers as he travels to Greece, Paul has great care for all the churches. [2 Cor 11:23-28](#)

During the journey Paul had expected Titus to join him at Troas [2 Cor 2:12-13](#). They were finally to meet in Macedonia [2 Cor 7:5-7](#)

v4 A group of men from various churches were travelling with Paul to assist in handling the collection [2 Cor 8:1-24](#)

When he arrived at Greece he stayed for three months but then has to change his plans as the Jews were planning to attack him while at sea, instead he travelled back through Macedonia.

Instead of sailing from Corinth he travels overland to Philippi, goes by boat to Troas where the group had planned to meet up.

v6 Luke now changes to using "we" and "us" indicating that he was now travelling with Paul.

v6-12 They remained in Troas for a week, meeting the local believers on the Sunday, "the first day of the week," [1 Cor 16:1-2](#). The first day of the week had become the "Lord's Day" because Jesus arose on this day, so completing the Salvation Plan of God. The Church was also "born" on the Sunday at Pentecost.

The believers held the meeting in the evening because Sunday was not a rest day, many of them would have been slaves so could only come after work.

In the early church the believers shared a "love meal" where they shared a normal meal together, this was different to the "Breaking of Bread," the Lord's Supper Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 11:17-34; and would have been taken separate from the meal. It is also possible that some people often had a "Breaking of Bread" as part of their meal at home.

Possible Paul felt that he would never visit Troas again, so he gave a long sermon from The Word of God [1 Tim 4:13](#). Paul felt he had much to tell the church, unfortunately one of the listeners, Eutychus, probably a young slave, fell asleep, as a slave he would have been working very hard all day. The text tells us that he falls asleep slowly, he had tried to stay with Paul, unfortunately, as he slept Eutychus falls out of the third floor window and is killed.

v10 Luke tells us that Paul immediately ran down to the body and raised Eutychus from the dead. We may ask today why did no one notice that the young man was in danger, we should care for each other.

v13-18 Paul now sets off on the rest of the journey, he chooses to walk from Troas to Assos, about twenty miles, possibly to spend as much time with the believers from Troas and have a time of quite with the Lord as he walked. The rest of the group sailed

along the coast and meet Paul at Assos.

v16 Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost so they planned not stop at Ephesus, instead Paul sends a message to the Ephesian elders to travel thirty miles to meet them and the ship at Miletus.

v18-38 When Paul meets the Elders from Ephesus he starts by talking about the past v18-21, he speaks of faithfulness to the Lord during his three years at Ephesus. From the "first day" he gave himself to the work v18, serving the Lord as a slave of Jesus Christ, v24. Paul always made sure people understand that his ministry was for God and not for himself. [1 Thess 2:1-13](#). Paul always lived a life which could be examined by any one as he had nothing to hide v18-19.

His message is known by many, he does not speak just to churches and fellowship but any who will listen.

v22-27 Paul now speaks of the present. His journey to Jerusalem is "bound"(being guided) by the Spirit. He knew that there was possible danger but had been revealed (told through various believers in each city) by the Holy Spirit that he was going to suffer for his belief.

v24 Paul says, "I consider my life is not worth anything, I just want to finish the task the Lord Jesus has given me, to take the gospel of God's grace to the people.". His life is a gift from God and the Lord has given him a job which he wants to finish. v24-27 Paul has been commissioned by God to take the message to the world, one day he knows that he will be judged by God for all his actions.

v28-35 The future: Paul gives a warning for the future to the Ephesian believers. There are dangers around us, v29 "wolves" will enter the church and try to destroy the "flock," the believers. Not only will these dangers come from outside but there will be danger from some of the "believers", counterfeits, fake believers, who will use the church for personal gain [Matt 7:15-23](#); [Matt 10:16](#); [Luke 10:3](#); [2 Peter 2:1-3](#). It is important that a believer has a good knowledge of the Word of God so that they can detect these dangerous fake believers. Note [3 John 9-11](#); [1 John 2:18-19](#)

v32 build on the Word of God, worship and prayer [Acts 6:4](#); [John 15:7](#)

v33 Avoid the desire for riches and cloths, do not desire (covet) what other people have, this could lead to lies, hatred, stealing to get what you want. [1 Tim 3:3](#)

v34,35 earn your own money and work for your living as Paul was a tent maker. [Luke 10:7](#); [1 Tim 5:18](#)

v36-38 Final prayers together and good-byes.

Chapter 21

Paul and his party now set sail, Miletus to Cos, then onto Rhodes, finally arriving at Patara after leaving the Ephesian leaders three days earlier. This ship was obviously stopping at every port and this was too slow for Paul. He finds a boat sailing for Phoenicia, a 400 mile journey, where the boat was to unload its cargo.

v4 Paul had never visited Tyre but they found believers, probably due to the persecution by Paul before he became a believer.

v5-6 The party remained here for a week, during which time the Holy Spirit reveals to these believers of the danger in Jerusalem.

Considering the Tyre believers had only met Paul a week before he had obviously become a very loved brother to them when he left.

v8 The ship travels via Ptolemais to Caesarea where their boat journey is to end.

The party stay with Philip, one of the original deacons. [Acts 6:1-6](#) twenty years before.

v10-12 While they stayed there a man called Agabus, a prophet, comes to Paul with a second warning. Agabus was not a stranger to Paul, they had worked together in famine relief. [Acts 11:27-30](#). Agabus gives his message in a very easily understood way, he ties Paul's hands and feet using Paul's [girdle](#), telling him that the Holy Spirit had told him that this is what will happen to Paul in Jerusalem.

v13,14 Paul responded that he was prepared to be bond for the Lord.

Was Paul right or wrong to make this trip to Jerusalem? The warnings were coming from the Holy Spirit, Paul understood the danger for him, [Romans 15:30-31](#); [Acts 20:22-23](#). It is possible to take these warnings as "get ready" warnings instead of "must not go" instructions, Agabus did not tell Paul "he must not go," just "this is what will happen" if you go. The message from the Lord [Acts 23:11](#) confirms this meaning.

Knowing what was about to happen to him, Paul was very brave and had great trust in the Lord to still continue.

v15-17 The party arrives at Jerusalem

The original party plus some from Caesarea head for Jerusalem. Caesarea to Jerusalem is about sixty five miles and would have been a two to three day journey.

v18-20 The first meeting of Paul and the Jerusalem leaders is full of praise for God but it is obvious that the legalist Jews were very much at work.

The legalists were saying that Paul was teaching the Jews to leave the laws and customs given by Moses. They were not concerned with the gentiles, that had been agreed at the Jerusalem meeting previously [Act 15:1-31](#).

Why were the Jews still following these rules? Paul had warned the Gentiles not to get involved with the old Jewish customs, but no one has told the Jews not to follow the customs unless they thought it was part of their salvation. Jews were free to follow special customs or ceremonies.

v23-27 The leaders suggested that Paul demonstrated his attitude and reverence to the Law ceremonies by taking part in a Nazirite ceremony with four men and pay for their costs. Paul agrees to this as it did not involve a persons salvation through faith.

v27ff **The misunderstood missionary**

The temple was only open to the Jews, but there was a small area, the Court of Gentiles, where gentiles were allowed. However Paul is in the Jewish area when a group of Asian Jews see him and immediately say he has brought a Gentile into the temple area. They had seen him earlier with Trophimus an Ephesian outside the temple.

They dragged Paul outside the temple, the crowd joins in probably not knowing what it was about. These would have killed Paul if the Roman soldiers had not come to his rescue.

The soldiers arrested Paul. Claudius Lysias [Acts 23:26](#) is unable to find out why the Jews were attacking this man, so, take him into the Roman Antonia Fortress for questioning.

The captain of the Roman guards, Claudius, thought that Paul is an Egyptian who had been causing problems earlier and was surprised when Paul speaks to him in Greek.

v36 reminds us of the time when Jesus was arrested. [Luke 23:18](#); [John 19:15](#)
Paul asks to speak to the Jews, Claudius is happy to allow this as it will supply the evidence of what was going on.

Paul speaks to the silent crowd in their own language Hebrew.

21:37 - 22:24 Be ready to explain

Paul now speaks to the Jews in their own language v40, he used the right method to allow the message to reach them. Remember Pentecost how God sent His message in the languages of the people [Acts 2:1-11](#)

The events are now continued in Chapter 22.

Chapter 22

Paul builds a bridge to the crowd by saying "I am a Jew like you who is zealous (fully committed) to God."

His conversion [Act 9:1ff](#)

Paul starts by sharing his past story, When he started to persecute the new religious group, 'The Way,' under official Sanhedrin business, he could see no wrong in his actions of hunting these Christians down v4,5. The fact that now he has found how wrong he was and God called him to serve him shows that God will accept all who want to come to Him, even anyone who hated His people.

Paul identified himself with Ananias the High Priest, a devout Jew, he received authority from him and the elders to go to Damascus hunting the Christians. On the way Jesus reveals himself to Paul. Those with Paul saw the light, but did not hear the voice. Paul started out under instruction of the High Priest, now he is under the control of God, to take the message to all men. v10

After Paul's conversion and baptism he stays in Damascus for a while. [Acts 9:19](#). He eventually returned to Jerusalem but at first was not accepted by the believers until Barnabas stood up for him [Acts 9:26-29](#)

v17 While in Jerusalem Paul receives a warning from God to leave immediately because the Jews will not accept your witness and message. [Acts 9:29-30](#)

v21-23 The Lord also commanded Paul to now take the message to the Gentile, at which point the crowd would not listen anymore. No devout Jew would accept contact with a Gentile.

v24 As the riot restarted, Claudius, the chief captain ordered that Paul be tied up and prepares, to [scourge](#) him, to examine by torture.

v25 As Paul is tied he speaks to the centurion, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?" When Claudius heard that this man who spoke Hebrew and Greek, was a Roman citizen he was a little frightened, he could be in serious trouble if he had tortured Paul. He wants to know how he became a Roman citizen, it had cost him money, but Paul was born a Roman citizen. The soldiers had made serious errors, Paul is quickly released. God has used the great power of the Rome Empire to protect his people and spread the message.

v30 Claudius now has to find out why the Jews were attacking a Roman citizen, so arranges the accusers to come the next day.

Chapter 23

The Roman Captain had two problems, Paul, as a Roman citizen, had to be informed what the charges were against him, secondly he needed a charge for him to record as to why he had been involved.

He decide that the most obvious action was to take Paul before the Jewish leaders and get them to make the charge. It was therefore arranged for the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders, to carry out the investigation.

The Roman captain brings Paul into the council and then waits and watches.

Paul starts with the personal approach, links himself with the council with "Men and brethren," identifying himself as a Jew. He continues by saying that he has lived as a good Jew, not broken the Law. However this action results in the high priest commanding Paul to be hit across the mouth. Note [John 18:22](#)

Paul appears to be angered by this action, calling the high priest a "whited wall!" means he was a hypocrite [Matt 23:27](#), and behaves against the law. When Paul is told that the man was the high priest he does not apologize to the man, only refers to the office.

Ananias was an evil man, he was known to steal from the other priests and did all he could do to increase his position with the Romans. He used force to achieve his ends. In the year A.D. 66 Ananias was hunted out by Jewish guerrillas during a revolt against Roman authority, they found him hiding in a water channel and killed him there. God had proved Paul's reaction a true prophesy. v3

Why did Paul not know the high priest? He had been out of the area for some years and it is possible as the council meeting was informal Ananias may not have been wearing his uniform of office.

v6-9 Paul has realized that he will not get a fair trial so now switches to doctrinal. He has noted that there were Sadducee's and Pharisees present. Paul states that he believed in Resurrection, this immediately splits the council as Sadducee's and Pharisees violently disagree over resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is the main point of the Gospel, it proves his claims.

The Roman Officer, fearing for Paul's life, sends in the army to bring him to the castle.

v11 The Lord gives Paul a message, "Take courage, you have witnessed for me in Jerusalem, now you must go to Rome to witness for me there.". To us it may appear that Paul's visit to Jerusalem had been a failure, but Jesus spoke with commendation, He was pleased with the results.

v12-15 A secret plan by the Jews. A group of Jews plan to take the law into their own hands, they had sworn an oath to kill Paul. The Jewish council were involved in the plan.

v16-22 But God was in control.

We do not know anything about these relatives of Paul, the nephew was probably not a Christian as that would have prevented him being able to hear the discussions, but he must have felt it was wrong and goes to warn Paul in prison.

How did the Roman captain know that the boy was telling the truth? The captain could have used this insider knowledge of the plot to his advantage, allow them to destroy Paul, though it would be a problem for him to lose a prisoner, but then he could de-

stroy the Jewish council for their involvement.

Claudius' plan was very simple, get Paul out of Jerusalem to prevent any plots, then by sending him to Caesarea he is putting him under the power of Felix, the Roman governor.

The journey from Jerusalem to Caesarea is about 65 miles and could have been easily attacked, but God put this problem into Claudius' mind and he arranged for "Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and threescore and ten horsemen, and two hundred spear men, at the third hour of the night." v23. 470 soldiers left about 9:00 p.m. with Paul, half the soldiers in Jerusalem as guards for Paul.

v26-30 Claudius sent a letter to Felix with the soldiers. There is a slight change in the truth as he did not rescue Paul because he was a Roman citizen, he did not learn that until later. [Acts 21:37-39](#).

They first travelled over night about 37 miles to Antipatris, quite a journey in a short time. The soldiers on horse back now continued the journey, the foot soldiers returned to Jerusalem. 27 miles later Paul is handed over to the control of Felix.

Antonius Felix was the governor of Judea, his wife was Drusilla, a Jewess, the daughter of Herod Agrippa 1 [Acts 12:1](#). She was the sister of Herod Agrippa 2 [Acts 25:13ff](#). Paul is now put under house arrest, not in prison, being kept in the Palace built for Herod the Great and where Felix was now living.

Chapter 24

Under the Roman laws the "citizen" was often the first condition to be protected, but this caused a problem, corruption in the justice system. Paul soon found this problem. In this chapter we see the Roman law in operation.

v1-9 Accusation

To a Jew, Jerusalem was the "centre of the world" this is why the official party "came down" from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Ananias, elders and a lawyer Tertullus arrive from Jerusalem five days later, it was Tertullus who now makes the accusation against Paul. v2-4 Tertullus, the counsellor, starts with what was normal in the courts, a period of *flattery* of the judge. He said that the judge was so "wonderful" in his life and work, the idea was to get the judge on your side before the trial starts.

We have to question the "peace" as it required a large number of soldiers to protect and bring Paul to the judge Felix.

v5,6 The accusations against Paul are even less truthful, he brings three charges, "a pestilent (dangerous) fellow," a "mover of sedition (spreading illegal activities) and ringleader" and finally a "profaning (acting in a none holy or religious way) the temple".

In some ways the first charge was true, wherever Paul had been the Jews had caused riots or there was a turning to the true worshiping of God, he was dangerous to the old, man controlled worship, that existed amongst the Jews. It was always the Jews who caused the problems, never the Roman authorities.

The political charge of sedition was more serious, no Roman authority would be pleased to encourage what appears to be a revolt against the Roman State. The Jews were allowed to continue their worship but only if it did not create a threat to the Ro-

man Empire. This charge would have got the attention of Felix.

Again there is some truth in the charge as Paul had preached that Jesus was the King and Lord of the believers, this could be turned into treason against Caesar. [Acts 16:20-21](#); [Acts 17:5-8](#). It was also illegal to start a new religion without approval by Roman Authorities, "the sect of the Nazarenes." The Christian faith was still linked to the Jews faith at this time. Gentiles were allowed to worship according to the Jewish faith so at first there was no problem, later, as the Christian churches separated from the synagogues, trouble with the authorities appear.

The third charge was a little more difficult for Tertullus as it involved a Roman officer and his action. The original charge by the Asian Jews was that he brought in Gentiles to the temple, so polluted the temple [Acts 21:28](#), the charge made by Tertullus was that Paul "profaned the temple" v6. Why? the Asian Jews had disappeared and the charge could not be proved, no witness, no proof.

The Jews were allowed to prosecute anyone who broke Jewish law, even execute in some cases, this is what would have happened to Paul if the Soldiers had not arrived. Tertullus knew that if the Jews had not been stopped Felix would not have been involved.

v10-21 **Paul's Answer**

Felix asks Paul to speak. No flattery from Paul just that Felix had experience and knowledge. v22 suggests that Felix has knowledge of the "Nazarene sect" and how the Jews were reacting to it.

v11-16 Paul answers the charges. Paul was in the temple to worship and not to cause a problem, he had never preached in the temple, he had agreed with Peter and the elders not to evangelise in Jerusalem [Gal 2:7-10](#). Paul continues, that he had only been in Jerusalem a week and would not have had time to cause problems.

Paul now turns to the next charge, Paul again knew that both Sadducee and Pharisees were present so uses their different understanding of scripture. Though Saul was now a Christian he still worshipped the same God as he did as a Jew, the only difference is that the worship is through Jesus Christ our Priest. [John 5:20-24](#).

Sadducees accepted the 5 books of Moses but not the rest of the Old Testament, they could not accept resurrection because it was not in the Books of Moses. They questioned Jesus on the matter [Matt 22:23-33](#). The Pharisees did believe in the resurrection, but this was a problem for them, if Paul's belief was heretical then so were they.

v17-21 Paul now explains why he was in the Temple, he had come with help for the Jewish people and was there to make his own offering to God with four Jews fulfilling their Nazarite vows.

He finally challenges the accusers, the Asian Jews, as a Roman citizen these Jews should have been present to face the accused, or the charges cancelled.

He comments that the council had mistreated him and not allowed him to speak. It is a good job for Ananias that he did not mention that he had been hit across the face, a serious act against a Roman citizen. "If I have done anything wrong," says Paul, "then it is that I believe in the resurrection."

v22,23 Felix decided to end the examination until Claudius, the Captain of the guard arrives. Paul is to be put under guard but allowed his friends to visit him.

v24-27 **Felix's attitude**

Some days later Felix and his wife Drusilla sent for Paul to hear about his faith. Paul's sermon gives three reasons, a persons righteousness, self-control, behaviour and future judgement. Felix was disturbed by the sermon but chose "to wait for a more convenient time."

v26 Felix had hoped that Paul would offer him money to be released, he probable knew about the money he had brought to help the Jewish Christians, so he often saw Paul.

v27 In an attempt to please the Jews he kept Paul a prisoner. After two years Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus.

Chapter 25

Festus seems to have taken up his duties more than Felix, after three days he goes to Jerusalem, but he soon comes across the Jewish politics. The Jewish leaders, with high priest Ismaeli, soon brought Paul to his attention. Still trying to kill Paul they try to persuade Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem.

Festus has a problem, if he releases Paul he would have a serious Jewish problem, if he keeps Paul in prison, he has a Roman citizen, in prison, with no official charge. Moving Paul to Jerusalem would have been too obvious, but Festus chose to hold the trial in Caesarea, did he know of the previous problems? Though there is no evidence that he did.

v7,8 When the Jews presented their accusations, they were numerous, but none could be proved and Paul said that he was innocent of any of the charges.

v9-12 Festus, try to please the Jews and remove the problem, suggests to Paul that he returns to Jerusalem to have the trial. A Roman judge was not allowed to move the trial without the prisoners permission and Paul refused to go, instead he claimed the right of every Roman citizen to be judged by Caesar. It must have made the Jewish leaders very angry as this action took the chance to destroy Paul completely away from them. Why did Paul make this decision?

First, God had told him that he was going to Rome, not Jerusalem.

Second, This action has forced the Romans to protect him from the Jews.

Third, a trial in Jerusalem would be fixed, not a fair and truthful trial.

v13-22 Festus and Agrippa

Festus still has a problem, he has no legal charge against Paul to send to Nero, so when king Herod Agrippa II and sister, Bernice, made a state visit he discussed the situation with him. This was the great-grandson of the Herod who killed the babies in Bethlehem. Rome had given Herod Agrippa II the legal control of the temple in Jerusalem. Festus had already realized that the charge of the Jewish leaders against Paul was a "religious charge," nothing to do with the civil laws. Festus understood that the major problem was to do with the resurrection of a man Jesus. v19

King Herod was an expert in the Jewish way of life and had probably known about Jesus, Paul and this new sect, the "Christians" [Acts 26:2-3](#)

Acts 25:23 to Acts 26:32 **Festus, Agrippa and Paul meet.**

This trial starts with much show and ceremony. There are also present many Roman chief captains and important men from the city. See [Acts 9:15](#).

v26 suggests that Festus wanted Agrippa to be the judge and examine Paul but there is no record of this, by the end of the trial Paul seems to become the "judge" of the lives of Festus, Agrippa and Bernice

Chapter 26

In this chapter we have a record of the life of Paul, his early life, his hunting of the Christians and conversion.

King Agrippa is in charge of the trial and tells Paul to speak freely.

Paul thanks Agrippa for hearing the case. Paul knew that Agrippa accepted the Old Testament prophets, v27 and has understanding of the Jewish beliefs.

There are five main area's of his testimony.

v4-11 I was a Pharisee. My early life is well known by the Jews, I was a devout Pharisee [Phil 3:5](#) and a son of a Pharisee [Acts 23:6](#). I have served God day and night as a Pharisee. As a result of his understanding of the Jewish teaching and his conviction of Resurrection he is now in this situation, I have claimed a promised hope given to the twelve tribes by God, for this I am accused by the Jews.

v8 The Greeks, the Romans and the Sadducees would not believe or accept Resurrection, but Paul comments that God can do anything including resurrection of the body. To Paul resurrection is very important, If resurrection was not possible then that means that Jesus had not risen, without that fact there was no Gospel.

As a Pharisee Paul also hunted down the new sect and believers of Jesus Christ, punishing them and trying to make them deny Jesus, even helped in sending them to death, v10 "I gave my voice against them." means that I agreed with all that happened.

v11 the early Christians continued to meet in the synagogues and he hunted them out in Jerusalem and then moved out to other cities.

v12-13 I travelled to Damascus with the authority of the chief priests. He thought he had all the correct knowledge and at midday I saw a light. This light was supernatural, the glory of God coming down from heaven. Paul also hears a voice speaking to him, Jesus was speaking to him in the Aramaic language.

v14-18 Paul was blind for three days, but his spiritual eyes are being opened, he had seen the living Jesus Christ, now he hears his future life, to go to the "blind" Gentiles with the Gospel, to turn them from the darkness of Satan to the light of God. Consider [2 Cor 4:3-6](#).

v17 Jesus promised protection, see also [Acts 22:17-21](#); [Acts 18:9](#); [Acts 23:11](#)

v19-21 I obeyed the vision from heaven. Paul had received his instructions and starting at Damascus had spread the Word. The Jews had been out to kill him right from Damascus, [Acts 9:20-25](#), Jerusalem [Acts 9:29-30](#), [Acts 17:1-6](#), [Acts 18:12](#)

v21 Because of these the Jews seized me in the temple and wanted to kill me.

v22-32 I witnessed to small and great. This commitment to the message shows just how true Paul's conversion was, he was prepared to die for his Lord.

Paul's message was always based upon what he had witnessed and upon the Old Testament scriptures.

v24 The word "Gentile" upsets the Jews [Acts 22:21-22](#) and now seems to upset Festus, he accused Paul of being mad. Festus did not really think Paul was mad because the

trial would have been ended at that point and Paul taken off to a mental home and not to Caesar, no it was reflecting his attitude to what Paul was saying.

v26-28 Paul turns back Agrippa, "Do you believe in the prophets" asks Paul, "I know you do." This forces Agrippa to make a decision, for or against the Gospel. The result of any decision. [John 3:18-21,36](#).

Both Festus and Agrippa realized that they had to make a decision. but did not want to make it, so they ended the hearing.

v31,32 Both Agrippa and Festus decided that Paul was innocent of any crime deserving death penalty, he could have been set free but because he had appealed to Caesar then he must be tried by Caesar.

Did Paul make a mistake in appealing to Caesar? No it took him away from the Jewish leaders who would not be able to charge him with their religious charges.

Agrippa and Festus made the wrong decision, they had heard the message of salvation, now they were to be judged by God.

Chapter 27

Paul had always wanted to go to Rome [Acts 19:21](#) but not as a prisoner. God had promised that he would witness for Him in Rome [Acts 23:11](#). Paul, having appealed to be tried by Caesar, now sets out on the journey to Rome.

v1-5 A number of prisoners are loaded onto a ship at Adramyttium in Caesarea, being under the control of a Centurion Julius, they set sail for Sidon, about 80 miles away.

At Sidon the centurion allows Paul to visit his friends.

Luke goes into considerable detail on this journey, to show the faith of Paul and the effect it has on others.

Both Luke and Aristarchus are travelling with Paul. Paul called Aristarchus "his fellow prisoner" [Col 4:10](#) though there is no record of him being arrested, possibly Aristarchus has voluntarily joined Paul in the prison to give him help.

The ship continues onto Myra in Lycia using Cyprus for protection against the winds. The Centurion and prisoners now change to a larger ship travelling from Alexandria in Egypt to Italy. This must have been quite a large ship as in v37-38 we read of 276 people being on the ship. The ship was probably carrying grain to Rome as Egypt was a large supplier of grain for Rome.

v7 The weather slowed the ships progress, "many days" were taken for the 130 miles from Myra to Cnidus. From there they sailed south southwest under the protection of Crete eventually arriving at the port Fair Havens near Lasea on Crete.

The "Fast" refers to the "Day of Atonement" which occurs September/October. It was now probably September and the area was now entering the winter, storms would be expected.

v10 suggests that Paul may have received a warning from God about the coming journey. However, the captain of the boat said it was safe and the centurion accepted his decision.

Why would the centurion not accept Paul's warning. Fair Havens was not well protected from the winter storms, it would not therefore be comfortable to spend the winter there. Phoenix, 40 miles away, and was a far better port to spend the winter, so they set

sail.

v13-15 At first the wind was gentle, but Paul's warning was soon proved right. The word "tempestuous" means "typhoon." The sailors were talking about Euroclydon meant "a northeasterner." The wind was so strong that the sailors were not able to put the sails up, they just let the boat drift as they could not steer the boat.

v16-19 The boat ends up 23 miles to the south, off the island of Cauda. The sailors then pull in a small boat which was often towed behind the ship, this was to prevent it being damaged or damaging the ship by being tossed against it. They also wrapped ropes or chains round the hull of the boat to give it more strength.

The next day they start throwing overboard some of the cargo trying to make the ship lighter. Finally on the third day they threw overboard the ships furniture.

The "we" in v19 showed all were involved in this work.

v20 They were unable to see the sun or stars to use them to work out their position, the situation seemed hopeless.

v21-24 Paul, the prisoner, now takes control, Paul quietly reminds them of his warning, but then goes on to share the Word of God with them, he tells them that God had told him that no one would be lost, only the boat would be wrecked.

v24 God has reminded Paul of His promise, "you will be brought to Caesar." However, God has told me that the ship will be wrecked upon a certain island. Once again God has given a word of encouragement to Paul.

v27-32 Paul gives further warnings in faith.

After fourteen days at sea and drifted 500 miles off course into the Adrian sea, now called the Ionian sea, the crew feel that they are near land and confirm that the water depth was getting shallower, from 120 feet to 90 feet.

After dropping four anchors in an attempt to stop the boat running onto any rocks on the shore some of the crew decided to leave the ship by getting into the small boat (v16). This was an act of unbelief, Paul had told them of God's promise, if they left the ship God would not offer His protection.

The soldiers accepted Paul's reminder and cut the small boat free, so preventing any one leaving.

v33-38 With the arrival of daylight Paul gives them encouragement to eat, apparently they had gone without food during the storm, he knew that they would need all their strength in the next few hours.

v39-44 On the arrival of daylight they saw that they were approaching a gap in the shore and the crew tried to steer the ship. Letting go the anchors and putting the sail up headed for the shore.

Their action failed, the boat was caught in the offshore currents and ran on to the rocks. With the front of the ship stuck in the rocks the waves now beat the back of the ship so it starts to breakup. The crew and passengers had no choice but to jump into the sea and try to swim to the shore.

The soldiers were concerned about their prisoners, if they escaped the soldiers would be punished, even death, so they proposed to kill the prisoners, but the centurion, because he wanted to protect Paul stopped them.

Just as God had promised, all the people on the ship made it to the land. In this passage we must note the trust and faith of Paul in God's promises, even though there ap-

peared no way out God was in charge of the situation. It also reminds us of the danger of ignoring the warnings of God, the captain and the centurion failed to believe the warnings God gave Paul. v11

Chapter 28

God had brought them to this island, to the Greeks anyone who did not speak Greek was a Barbarian, so the people of Malta were considered "barbarous." by Luke. The people showed great kindness to the passengers and crew, lighting fires and supplying cover etc.

v3-6 Paul did his share of collecting the wood for the fires, happy to be a "servant," a poisonous snake, a viper(adder) was hiding in the wood and attacks Paul. The people of Malta, when they saw this thought that this must be a terrible prisoner and he was being killed by god. Paul is not affected by the bit and now the people think he must be a "god."

Did Satan send the viper in an attempt to kill Paul? Or was it arranged by God to make the people of Malta listen to the message? As God's people we must be alert to every situation, and be able to know the source.

Paul and the party remained in Malta for three months and because the healing of the father of Publius by Paul and healing of others they were made most welcome.

Luke does not mention if they shared the Gospel but we must believe that they did not miss the opportunity.

v11-13 After three month they departed in a ship which had used the island for protection during the winter. We are not told why Luke chose to identify the ship "Castor and Pollux." In Greek mythology "Castor and Pollux" were the names of the twin sons of Zeus.

v14-15 The wind direction was perfect for the journey of 330 miles to Puteoli near Naples.

After a weeks rest they head for Rome. Word had already got to Rome that Paul was coming and some believers came to meet the party. Again we are not told how they knew Paul was coming.

Following the Appian Way road the Roman soldiers, the prisoners and Paul's party covered the 120 miles to Rome. The first group of believers meet Paul about forty three miles from Rome at the Forum of Appius, the second at the Three Taverns at thirty three miles. This gives Paul great encouragement.

v16 The centurion hands over Paul to the prison guards but he was not put into prison but placed in a house with a Roman guard.

v17-19 As soon as he could Paul meets with the Jewish leaders of the synagogues of Rome. He explains that his appeal to Caesar is not against the Jewish nation, he had not broken any laws but because of the behaviour of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem he was forced to appeal to Caesar. It is for the "hope of Israel" I am here.

v21,22 The Jewish Leaders from Jerusalem had not sent any information to the Roman Jews, presumably no charge had been sent to the Romans either. No visiting Jews had any words against Paul so the Jews of Rome were wanting to hear what Paul was teaching.

v23 On an arranged day Paul is allowed to open his prison house to visitors and there he opens the scriptures and the Word of God to the Jews of Rome.

v24,25 The result was that some believed, some did not, they were still arguing when they left Paul.

v26-29 Paul quotes Isaiah to them as they leave, Jesus also used this passage [Matt 13:13-15](#); [Mark 4:11-12](#); [Luke 8:10](#). It is easy to listen to a message, but much harder to actually hear and understand what was said.

t30,31 Paul is not put off, he spends two years preaching the Gospel to any who came to him in his 'prison' house.

During this time Paul wrote Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon.

He had Timothy with him, [Phil 1:1](#); [Phil 2:19](#); and also in [Col 4:10-14](#) and [Philemon v24](#) we are told that John Mark, Luke, Aristarchus, Epaphras, Justus and Demas were with him. Other visitors were Onesimus [Philemon 10-21](#); Epaphras [Phil 2:25-30](#) and [Phil 4:18](#). Tychicus took Paul's letters to Ephesians [Eph 6:21](#), Colossians and Philemon. [Col 4:7-9](#).