**The Book of Acts**

Theme of Acts:

There is not so much a single theme, as there are multiple themes or lines to the story, as this is an historical document.

The themes are mostly established in the first chapter.

I. The work of the Holy Spirit in establishing the Church. Acts 1:2, 1:4-5, 1:7, 1:16

Acts of the Apostles could very well be called Acts of the Holy Spirit.

II. The Kingdom of God. Acts 1:3, 1:6

III. The growth and development of the Church. 1:8

All of these themes are found even more so in Acts Ch 2

Suggested Book for the Class

[Acts of the Apostles, A Small Group Bible Study Guide](http://www.amazon.com/dp/0985010223/ref=rdr_ext_tmb) by [Ted LaFemina](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=rdr_ext_aut?_encoding=UTF8&index=books&field-author=Ted%20LaFemina)

Timeline

AD 30 Pentecost Acts 2

32 Church Scattered after Stephen martyred. Acts 8:1-3

33 or 34 Conversion of Saul/Paul Acts 9:1-22

about 37 First Gentiles baptized. Acts 10-11:18

42 or 43 Barnabas joins Paul in Antioch. Acts 11:22-24

45-47 Paul’s first missionary journey Acts 13-14

48 Council in Jerusalem. Acts 15Chapter 15 (14 years after Paul’s conversion)

48-52 Paul’s second missionary Journey (end fixed by Gallio’s

proconsulship) Acts 16-18:22

52-57 Paul’s third missionary journey Acts 18:23-Acts 21:16

57 Paul arrested in Jerusalem

57-59 Paul a prisoner in Caesarea

60-62 Paul a prisoner in Rome Book of Acts ends.

62 Probably freed. Went to Spain?

65 (?) Martyrdom in Rome

Luke/Acts is one long book, broken up into two parts, perhaps in part because it did not fit on a single scroll.

Luke: Jesus goes to Jerusalem.

Acts: Jesus goes out from Jerusalem (through his apostles)

Who is Theophilus? Is he, literally, a lover of God? Is he an actual person-a recent convert to whom Luke wrote? Is he a fictitious person—a creation to represent the Gentile audience of the book? Most likely, he was a real person named Theophilus, as he is addressed as “most excellent Theophilus.”

**Acts and Jesus**

Acts 1:1 All Jesus began to do and to teach. Here we see that Jesus is still a major character in Acts. Jesus continues to work in Acts.

Examples:

He works miracles: Acts 3:6,10,30, Acts 9:34, Acts 13:11, Acts 14:3.

He is seen at God’s right hand Acts 7:55-56.

He appears to Saul Acts 9:4-5.

He speaks to Ananias Acts 9:10-16.

He tells Peter to go to Cornelius’ house Acts 10:13-15.

He comforts Paul and Silas in prison Acts 18:9-10.

He sends Paul to preach to the Gentiles Acts 22:17-21.

He tells Paul he must go to Rome in chains Acts 23:11

Q: What do we learn from all this?

**I. Even more so, we see the Holy Spirit acting and controlling events in Acts.**  This is the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent.

Acts of the Apostles could very well be called Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:2 Instructions through the Holy Spirit.

1:4-5 Wait for the Holy Spirit.

1:7 Power from the Holy Spirit.

1:16 The Holy Spirit spoke the prophecies

2:1-4 The Holy Spirit falls on the apostles.

2:17-18 Pouring of the Holy Spirit prophesied in Joel.

4:8 Peter spoke, as he was filled by the Holy Spirit.

4:25 He spoke through David.

4:31 They were filled with the Holy Spirit and the house was shaken.

5:32 The Holy Spirit witnesses to the resurrection.

6:3-6 Those known to be full of the Holy Spirit chosen to lead.

7:55 Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit.

8:29 The Holy Spirit tells Philip to share with the Ethiopian Eunuch.

9:31 The Church strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit.

10:19 The Holy Spirit tells Peter to go with the three Gentile visitors.

10:44-47 The Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his house (confirming that salvation was for the Gentiles too).

11:28 The Holy Spirit tells Agabus about a famine in the Roman world.

13:2-4 The Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul for missionary work, and sends them off.

13:52 The disciples filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

15:28 The Holy Spirit influenced the decision of the Jerusalem Council.

16:7 The Spirit of Jesus prevents them from going to Bithyia.

20:22 Paul compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem.

20:23 The Holy Spirit warns Paul of danger.

20:28 The Holy Spirit makes and chooses elders.

21:11 The Holy Spirit tells Agabus how Paul will die.

Q: What does all this tell you?

**II. Acts and the Kingdom of God.**

Acts 1:3 What was Jesus talking about? The Kingdom of God.

OK. What, then, was he talking about? Acts 1:6 The disciples were sure confused about this!

Acts 2 The Kingdom comes, as prophesied again and again in the OT.

The Day of the Lord in the Old Testament is a day the Kingdom comes.

(Acts 2:17-21 esp. v. 20 TDOTL)

Acts 10 The Kingdom comes to the Gentiles.

Acts 8:12 Philip proclaims the Kingdom, 14:22 We are on our way into the kingdom of God, 19:8 He persuaded them about the kingdom of God., 20:25 Paul preached everywhere about the Kingdom of God, 28:23,31 Paul preached the kingdom of God.

**III. Acts as a story of the growth and development of the Church and the spread of the gospel.**

Acts 1:8 A scary vision. Yet, that is what they did.

Acts is not just a series of nice, unconnected stories. It is a record of a movement which, in the end, completely, absolutely, totally, forever, changed the world. It is hard for us to imagine how much they changed the future course of human (and eternal) history.

Acts Ch 3-7 They reach Jerusalem stage #1.

Then God asked the Jews to do something they were NOT inclined to do. To go to Samaria and the ends of the world required them to do things they were not at all comfortable doing. It broke every stereotype and preconceived notion about the specialness of the Jewish people they had.

Acts 8:4-5 Acts 8:2 A persecution breaks out and God scatters the church.

Philip preaches in Samaria.

Now the unclean half-Jewish Samaritans hear the word of God.

A Jewish Prayer: Thank you God that you did not make me a woman or a Samaritan!

In going from Galilee to Jerusalem, the Jews went around Samaria.

The Jews (including the apostles and the disciples) hated the Jews and did not think them worthy of the kingdom.

But Philip preaches in Samaria.

Acts 8:26-29

v. 26 An angel tells Philip to go.

v. 29 The Holy Spirit told him to go. Praise God an angel and the Holy Spirit intervened here, otherwise Philip would not have done this. Why?

The Ethiopian eunuch is probably a Jewish convert (not born Jewish).

He was barely more Jewish than a Samaritan.

Worse than that, he was a eunuch.

Eunuchs were “unclean.” Philip has to reach out to and hop in a chariot with an unclean person.

An angel told him to do it!!! Will you go and bring the gospel to “unclean” people? (Spanish speaker, homeless, gay person, old, young…)

Will you go to uncomfortable places and people?

We have completed stage 2: Judea and Samaria. But that is not all!

Acts 10 Now Gentiles will come into the church. God had said dozens of times, through Abraham ALL NATIONS will be blessed. But the church does not want to do this. They did not get it.

We can read the Bible our whole lives and NOT GET IT.

Acts 10:9-16 Peter has three visions.

v. 13 GOD says “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.

And Peter says to the God of the universe. “Surely not!!!”

Acts 10:19 The Holy Spirit tells Paul to go with Cornelius’ men.

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking.

The Holy Spirit interrupted his sermon in the middle!!!

Finally Acts 10:47-48 OK. I guess we better baptize Gentiles.

God sent Peter to an uncomfortable place. Aren’t you glad he went?

Acts 17:6 These men have caused trouble all over the world. (completing stage 4 o Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth)

Last episode.

Acts 28:1,4 The barbarians. These are not Jews. They are not half-Jewish Samaritans. They are not unclean Jewish converts. They are not civilized Greco-Roman converts. They are barbarians.

But what are these barbarians doing for a ship-load of dangerous criminals?

These barbarians showed unusual kindness. They built a fire, welcomed them, took them into their homes.

This is a sort of re-enactment of the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

The story of the good barbarians.

At the end of acts, the church had not yet reached the “barbarians.”

Acts 28 is a sort of foreshadowing of the church reaching, literally, all nations, daring great danger, crossing every barrier—language, economic, culture, prejudice.

What about you?

What is the moral of the story? God is sending us out.

God is empowering us with the Holy Spirit.

But when he says go into all the world—to the ends of the earth—he is quite serious.

Who do you hesitate to share with? A rich person? A Sikh person? A gay person?0

Who is the “barbarian” in your life?

Let us take the good news to the very ends of the earth, including Bakersfield, Tehachapi, Taft, Delano, McFarland, Shafter and, yes, to Merced.

Acts 1 Jesus makes last preparations for his disciples to carry on the work (Acts 1:8). How?

a. Teaching about the kingdom.

b. Sending the Holy Spirit to help them.

c. Giving them a vision/mission.

d. Getting them organized (in this case, choosing a twelfth apostle)

This is what we need to do to get about the mission.

Acts 1:1 In my former book…

Theophilus: Is he a guy named Theophilus or is he a guy who “loves God”?

1:3 What was Jesus’ concern at this point? The kingdom.

1:4 Wait in Jerusalem for Acts 2 to happen.

1:8 Luke’s Great Commission: A scary vision!!!!

The Roman Empire was an amalgam of an ancient polytheism, local gods, Greek philosophies (Pytharorean, Epicurean, Stoic, Neoplatonist), Gnosticism, Greek, Egyptian and Persian Mystery religions and Persian dualist religions.

Logically, it makes absolutely no sense that a Jewish movement, led mostly by poor, uneducated people, from a relatively insignificant province in the Roman empire, with a world view diametrically opposed to that of the Roman/Greek world, following a leader who was executed at a young age—one who never wrote anything and who never left a 100 mile radius of his place of birth, who did not even speak Greek could do what none of the barbarians could do—conquer Rome.

This is what we need today. The only hope for this world is for us to change the world all over again. We need a new revolution like that we find in Acts.

Logically, we should not be able to do it, but they did.

Why did the church change the world in the first through third centuries?

If we are from God, no one and nothing will be able to stop us.

What can we learn from this to apply to ourselves?

1. Early on it was the incomparable zeal and personal conviction of those who had personally known Jesus of Nazareth and those directly influenced by these witnesses. This was a Jesus movement. What do we learn from that?

2. Add to this the powerful truth-claims related to fulfilled prophecies, miracles and the resurrection. The movement was based on truth-claims which were supported by evidence and which made sense. What do we learn from that?

As the immediacy of the events faded and as these influences naturally were reduced somewhat as well, why did the church continue its exponential growth? These two alone were not enough for Christianity to conquer the Pagan religions and Greek philosophy.

3. Because of the obvious and inescapable moral/ethical superiority of the adherents to this growing Christian movement.

4. Because, after Origen, Christian theology was seen as intellectually on par with the Stoicism and neo-Platonism if its day, but with much to offer to the common person that these did not offer.

Christianity answered the answers that thinking people ask far better than any other world view out there.

5. Having been established as a movement with intellectual credentials, the church offered meaning, purpose and dignity for both poor and rich, for both the intellectual and the uneducated. Perhaps most significantly of all, it offered the same meaning and purpose and nearly the same dignity for both male and female—something that the mystery religions and the “true philosophy” absolutely did not offer. Many of the influential church members in the first three centuries were female and this is no accident.

6. Because it is the truth and God was behind this movement.

Acts 5:38-39 They were of God and no one was able to stop these men! This is just as true today.

Acts 1:9-11. The ascension. An angel tells them: He will come back the way he went. So, get about his business.

Q: What do you think it will be like?

Acts 1:13-26 Judas’ betrayal was prophesied (Psalm 69:25, 109:8).

Matthias chosen. They cast lots. Q: Is this something we should do?

Acts 2 The Church begins.

Some have described Acts 2 as the hub (ie hub of a wheel) of the Bible.

It is the essential turning point. It is the initiation of God’s final plan. Everything God had planned from the beginning is now in place.

There was before Pentecost, and there was after Pentecost.

Note Acts 2:17 In these last days…. We are living in the last days (Hebrews 1:2 In these last days….) There is no plan B. Premillenialists are wrong on this.

Salvation as once and for all been delivered to the saints (Jude 3). This is the start of “the last days!”

This is why there was a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

(Acts 1:8 You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem… and JTB Matt 3:11 He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit) It was a great fanfare for the greatest event in history—the offering of salvation to mankind. All of salvation history pointed to this momentous event. Notice, as predicted by Jesus in Matthew 16:19, Peter is given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Peter unlocks the door.

Peter: No, we are not drunk. This is the fulfillment of God’s prophecies about his kingdom.

Spoken of by Joel (Joel 2:28-32)

I told you that this great “Day of the Lord” will come with

v. 18 an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Well, it is here! The “last days” have begun.

v. 21 The plan of salvation of our God is now complete.

All nations!!!! (Isaiah 2)

This is a one-off event (except, of course, for Acts 10:44-48. This was essentially the equivalent for the Gentiles of what had happened for the Jews at Pentecost. Naturally, Peter made the connection and offered baptism to the Gentiles. How can we be sure of this? Look at Acts 11:15-17 “As he had come on us at the beginning.”)

Acts and the Holy Spirit

1. The miraculous pouring out of the Holy Spirit, as prophesied by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:11) Joel (Joel 2:28-32) and Jesus (Acts 1:8), . Acts 2 and Acts 10. This was a one-off (or two-off) event given by God as a declaration of the coming of the Kingdom of God to Jew and Gentile.

2. The promised gift of the Holy Spirit which is a deposit, guaranteeing our salvation until the coming of Jesus (Eph 1:13-14), which is received by the “one baptism” (Ephesians 4:4-5). Acts 2:36-41, Acts 5:32 (to those who obey him), Acts 19:1-5. This is the only aspect of the Holy Spirit which is ever promised to Christians in general. It is the one received upon obedience.

3. The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, given by the laying on of hands of the apostles. Acts 8:14-17, Acts 19:4-7, 2 Tim 1:6, Hebrews 2:4.

Some teach that the receipt of such gifts is the real sign of our salvation. This is not biblical. There is no general promise to believers that they will receive such miraculous gifts.

Acts 2:22-35 The first gospel sermon.

Outline:

1. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

2. Jesus did unprecedented signs, wonders and miracles.

“As you yourselves know.”

3. You killed him, but this was God’s plan.

4. Besides, God raised him from the dead!

5. Repent and be baptized into Christ.

(This is the Jesus Bible Study Series we use)

v. 25-35 Peter quotes OT prophecies predicting resurrection of Messiah.

Acts 2:36-41

v. 36 Do you understand that you crucified Christ?

You spit on him, mocked him, scourged him, beat him, and you pounded nails into his wrists and ankles.

You did this to God’s Son!

v. 36 But God was behind this whole plan.

What will you do about this?

v. 36 Who did we crucify? The Lord. The Messiah—Savior/Anointed One.

Q: Is Jesus your Savior? (very popular)

Is he you Lord? (not so popular)

If he is not Lord, he definitely is not Savior.

v. 37 Here is what you should do: You should say to God, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Is this you? Have you surrendered to God. Have you given your life to him?

Are you “All in?”

So, if you understand that you are responsible for the death of Jesus—that he died because of YOUR sin.

If you recognize that the only means of salvation is in Christ.

If you are willing, right here and now, to make him the Lord of your life.

Then what should you do?

Pray Jesus into your heart?

Say the Sinner’s prayer?

Ask for forgiveness?

Ask Jesus into your heart? NO!!!!!

v. 38 Two things:

Repent metanoeo Change of mind/change of understanding.

Be baptized baptizo Gr. be immersed.

Then God does two things:

Forgiven of sins

Receive the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:14 “who is a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance until the [final] redemption of those who are God’s possession.)

That is it! It is simple and not hard to figure out.

v. 39 Q: Who does this apply to?

A: For all people for all time.

v. 40 Don’t wait. Put this corrupt generation behind you. Repent and be baptized. Save yourself.

Luke sees salvation not as a thing for the future, but something that is real right now. We are not just saved from hell. We are saved from living a corrupt and meaningless life NOW.

v. 41 Three thousand were “added to their number.” To whose number? To the church.

The Holy Spirit has sounded the starting gun for people to enter the kingdom of God.

Have you joined that race? Let us call others to join us in the kingdom of God.

Acts 2:42-47 Clearly, the church in Jerusalem is intended by God (and by Luke) to serve as an example of the ideal church—a model church.

a. Great commitment to the Word of God.

b. Great worship.

c. Great fellowship/family/benevolence.

d. Great prayer.

e. Great growth.

Yet, the church in Jerusalem had its problems!!! (see Ch. 5 Ananias and Saphira and Ch. 6 Greek Jews)

Acts 3 and 4 A great follow-up to a great beginning.

Acts 3 is a sermon with same outline, more or less as Acts 2.

Clips: Acts 3:13-20 Boldness, call to repent. Similar outline. Quotes many OT prophecies.

Ch 4 4:3 They seized Peter and John and put them in jail.

4:7-13

Boldness of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (leading council of Saducees and Pharisees). We see their great boldness. Acts 4:13 They had been with Jesus….

Would people take note that you have been with Jesus? Have you been with Jesus?!!!

4:17-22 v. 20 “We cannot help but speaking about what we have seen and heard.

4:31-37 Another picture of the ideal church.

-shared everything, no needy person.

-sold possessions and laid them at the apostles’ feet. (including Barnabas)

-testified to the resurrection.

Q: What do you see in this church that we can grow in?

Acts 5.

5:13-14 more and more men and women believed.

The result of great growth is persecution.

5:18 Arrested “the apostles,” but an angel broke them out!

5:28-32 “you have filled Jerusalem with our teaching.” (They have now achieved step one of Jesus’ plan for them). 5:29 We must obey God, not man. Have we been persecuted lately? Hmmmm…..

Acts 6:1-6 The first problem in the church.

The problem. Many (most?) of those in the church in Jerusalem were “Greek” Jews—the diaspora. ie. they were not from Jerusalem, and presumably they had not jobs. It seems these new Christians decided to stay in Jerusalem because there was no church where they came from. They were living “on the dole.”

Can you see how this might have led to a problem? Who were the more “committed” Christians? The Greek-speaking ones. Who was supporting them? The Aramaic-speaking ones.

They were human….. Resentment developed. The “Hebraic” Christians began taking care of their own before the Greek ones.

Q: What should the evangelists in the church do? v.2 Ans: Evangelize.

Was it because it was “beneath” them to wait on tables? No!!!

Solution: v.3 Choose men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

Q: Who should be placed in leadership positions in the Church? The most talented? Q: How can we tell those who are most “full of the Spirit?”

v. 5-6 the first deacons?

6:7 More growth!

Acts 6:8-15 Greek speaking non-Christian Jews clearly jealous of the Christians. Yet, they cannot find any basis for charges against their spokesperson Stephen (like Daniel in Daniel 6), so they raise trumped up charges that he is speaking against the Law of Moses. Daniel 6:4-5

“They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

Hopefully, that is all your co-workers could find on you.

Ch 7 Stephen’s speech.

This is one of the boldest speeches in history. His outline:

At every single important point in Jewish history, the Jewish leaders have resisted those sent to them by God.

v. 9 brothers jealous of Joseph, betray him for 20 pieces of silver. (see the analogy to the Jews of Stephen’s day?)

v. 27, 35 (to Moses) “who made you our ruler”? (see the analogy to the Jews of Stephen’s day?)

v. 39 They refused to obey Moses (the one like Jesus v. 37), they rejected him and went back to Egypt. (see the analogy to the Jews of Stephen’s day?)

summary: v. 51-53 No wonder he was stoned. The first of many martyrs for the faith. (note: Martyr = witness)

Acts 8:1-4 Phase 2 begins. God forces the Church to begin doing what he had told them to do in Acts 1:8. I love v. 4

Skip Acts 8:5-25 Philip in Samaria. Here half-Jews (Samaritans) begin to be converted.

Acts 8:26-40 Ethiopian Eunuch baptized.

The Eunuch may have been a convert (proselyte) to Jerusalem. Even today, there is a significant black Jewish population in Ethiopia.

There are two kinds of proselytes in Rabbinic Judaism; *ger tzedek* (righteous proselytes, proselytes of righteousness, religious proselyte, devout proselyte) and *ger toshav* (resident proselyte, proselytes of the gate, limited proselyte, half-proselyte)

A "righteous proselyte" is a gentile who has converted to Judaism, is bound to all the doctrines and precepts of the Jewish religion, and is considered a full member of the Jewish people. The proselyte is circumcised as an adult (milah l'shem giur), if male, and immerses in a mikvah to formally effect the conversion.

A "gate proselyte" is a resident alien who lives in the Land of Israel and follows some of the customs. They are not required to be circumcised nor to comply with the whole of the Torah. They are bound only to conform to the Seven Laws of Noah (do not worship idols, do not blaspheme God's name, do not murder, do not commit fornication (immoral sexual acts), do not steal, do not tear the limb from a living animal, and do not fail to establish rule of law) to be assured of a place in the world to come. They could only enter the gate of the Gentiles at the temple.

Side note: Some teach that baptism includes sprinkling. OK, then why did they get down from the chariot, go into the water and then come back out of the water? (8:38)

Discussion Questions:

1. Would your friends and neighbors note that you had been with Jesus? How? Why?

2. What aspect of the ideal church (Acts 2:42-47, Acts 4:32-37) do you find particularly attractive to you? How might we/you improve to become more like this idea church?

Acts 9 The Conversion of Saul/Paul

9:1 Meanwhile…

9:2 Christianity is called “the Way” Christianity is not merely a religion—a list of prescribed rites and a list of dos and don’ts, it is a way of Life. It is a way of living.

Acts 9:1-19, Acts 22:3-21 and Acts 26:12-18.

This is truly one of the most remarkable personal transformations in history. Paul was an amazing man in his own right. A Hebrew of Hebrews.” “Pharisee of Pharisees” (Phil 3:5). He studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), the most famous Jewish Rabbi of his day. Paul was the most zealous man of his day (Phil 3:6 as for zeal, persecuting the church). Clearly, a man clearly of conviction. He was an extremely sincere Jew. A very persuasive speaker (Acts 9:22 He powerfully proved that Jesus was the Christ). Being from Tarsus (southeastern Turkey) he spoke good Greek.

We can see why God chose Saul.

Did he seem like a good candidate for conversion?

Would you have shared with Saul?

Q: Who would be the hardest imaginable person for you to share with?

Possibly he was actually open, despite all appearances. Why? Because he had personally witnessed the conviction of Stephen and others. Paul was attracted to “The Way.”

Actually, let’s read the account in Acts 22

Acts 22:6-7 About noon, suddenly (emphasizing how bright the light was.

This is when Paul became an apostle “abnormally born” (1 Cor 15:8) Because an apostle had to be a witness of the resurrection (the word apostle means witness)

22:7 Paul believed

22:8 Paul confessed Jesus as Lord

22:10-11 Paul has repented and begun obeying

So… When were his sins forgiven?

22:16 Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

What was it that made Paul great? (in addition to all the other things already mentioned)

What was his secret? Humility. I make myself a slave of all men (1 Cor 9:19). I am the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15).

Clearly, Luke sees the conversion of Saul/Paul as a key moment in Church history, and rightfully so. If Paul had not been converted, the history of the world would have been different. But we should remember that his history is not a complete one.

Other apostles went into Egypt (Mark) and into Mesopotamia and further east (Thomas), Peter went to Rome and John became an elder in Asia, but Luke does not tell this story.

Very roughly: Acts 1 Ministry of Jesus to the apostles.

Acts 2-12 Peter’s ministry to the Jews.

Acts 13-28 Paul’s ministry to Greeks.

Ch 10 Another key transition in Acts and in the history of the Church.

Phase III of Acts 1:8 commences with this event.

Cornelius a God-fearer. Probably a *ger toshav* (resident proselyte, proselytes of the gate, limited proselyte, half-proselyte).

Acts 10:1-3 You would think that Peter or another Christian would have shared with him.

Why did God choose Cornelius?

-Roman centurion

-God fearer: attended synagogue and modified his life so as to not offend the Jews

-Gifts to the poor

-Influence

-All of family feared God

-His heart to share God with others

10:9-20 Peter has a vision 3 times!!!! Peter, Kill and eat!

10:17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision. How thick could he be????

10:34-35 After several years and after 3 visions and after the Holy Spirit told him to go with the men, Peter is finally catching on.

Q: Are there any Scriptures that prophecy salvation for the gentiles?

[Isaiah 49:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isaiah%2049:6&version=NLT) He says, “You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me.

I will make you a light to the Gentiles,

and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

[Zechariah 2:11](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Zechariah%202:11&version=NLT) 11 Many nations will join themselves to the Lord on that day, and they, too, will be my people. I will live among you, and you will know that the Lord of Heaven’s Armies sent me to you.

Isaiah 11:10 The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations: the Gentiles will hope in him.

What about the entire book of Jonah!!!!

[Isaiah 56:3-7](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isaiah%2056:3-7&version=NLT), [Isaiah 60:1-3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isaiah%2060:1-3&version=NLT), [Jeremiah 16:19-21](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=jeremiah%2016:19-21&version=NLT), [Malachi 1:11](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=malachi%201:11&version=NLT) [Genesis 12:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=genesis%2012:3&version=NLT), [Psalm 22:27](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm%2022:27&version=NLT), [Isaiah 42:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isaiah%2042:4&version=NLT) and many, many more.

Q: Who are you prejudiced against? Who do you not share with? Who do you think would never be open?

Acts 11: Of course, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were happy to know that Gentiles were now being saved.

Not!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

## The Reaction

The events at Caesarea had scarcely been concluded before the news of this Jewish-Gentile alliance had spread to Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem, some sixty-five miles to the southeast. Note carefully the following:

“And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, ‘You went in to men uncircumcised, and did eat with them’” (Acts 11:2-3).

The term “contended” is from the Greek diakrino, which here signifies “to take a firm position against,”

Peter’s argument: Acts 11:15-19 What happened at Cornelius’ house is what happened to us at Pentecost. It worked!

Acts 11:19-30 The Church in Antioch. Antioch became an important center for Christianity for the next several centuries. Antioch was an ideal launch-pad because it had a large Jewish population. It was a cutting-edge church. More open to doing new things.

Acts 11:26 “First called Christians at Antioch.” (Christ is a Greek word from Chrestus)

Q: What were they called before this? “The Way”

Barnabas and Saul go to Antioch. God is preparing them for the First Missionary Journey.

Note: I am skipping Acts Ch 12

Acts 13 The first missionary journey. Acts 13:1-3 Chosen and sent by the Holy Spirit. Saul, Barnabas and John-Mark (who is probably the same Mark who wrote the book of Mark)

The date: About AD 44-45. Paul has been a Christian for perhaps ten years or so.

Went first to Cyprus, then to south-central Asia Minor

Aside: Luke and Archaeology.

I found myself brought into contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities, and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth. In fact, beginning with a fixed idea that the work was essentially a second century composition, and never relying on its evidence as trustworthy for first century conditions, I gradually came to find it a useful ally in some obscure and difficult investigations.

Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense; he fixes his mind on the idea and plan that rules in the evolution of history, and proportions the scale of his treatment to the importance of each incident. He seizes the important and critical events and shows their true nature at greater length, while he touches lightly or omits entirely much that was valueless for his purpose. In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.

Sir William Ramsay, St. Paul, the Traveler and the Roman Citizen, (Hodder and Stoughton, 1920

1. Sergius Paulus inscription. In Cyprus Acts 13:6-7 Inscription discovered by Sir William Ramsay in Rome 1887, mentions Sergius Paulus.

2. Acts 17:6 “city officials” in Thessalonika = politarchs Never mentioned in other written sources. People doubted Luke. Then an inscription was found in 1835 in Thessalonika listing six “politarchs”.

3. Acts 18:11-17 Gallio in Corinth. Inscription found at Delphi mentions Gallio.

4. Acts 19:22 Mentions Erastus sent to Macedonia (Corinth) Erastus Inscription in Corinth. AD 50 Dates Corinthians and Romans.

Discussion Questions:

1. Who would be the hardest person for you to share your faith with?

2. What is the most exciting/interesting/challenging moment for you in the Book of Acts so far?

3. How would the history of the world be different if Paul had not been converted? Use your imagination.

Back to Acts 13

Acts 13:4-12 On Cyprus

Acts 13:9 This is the first use of Paul. This is not like Simon who Jesus gave the name Peter to. Paul was his Greek/Roman name. Saul was his Jewish/Aramaic name. In the spirit of “becoming all things to all men, he began to use a name more familiar with the Greeks he was reaching out to.

Acts 13:13 On to Asia Minor. John Mark chickened out and went home.

v. 13-15 Paul’s pattern: Speak first to the Jews at the synagogue. Then, when rejected, go to the Gentiles.

Acts 13:16-41 The first (recorded) public sermon to the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch. This is for Paul what Acts 2:17-41 is for Peter. The outline is almost identical to Acts 2.

Let’s look at some of the O.T. Scriptures that Paul uses to preach to the Jews at this synagogue:

13:24-25 John the Baptist testifies that Jesus is Messiah.

13:27 When the Jews condemned Jesus it fulfilled prophecy (Isaiah 53, for example)

13:29 They did all written about him (Psalms 22, Isaiah 53, etc.)

13:30-35 But God raised Jesus from the dead, also as prophesied (using Isaiah 55:3, Psalms 16:10)

13:38-39 Salvation in and through Jesus declared.

13:44 The reaction was almost as amazing as in Acts 2.

The Jews were jealous. This was the pattern. Paul always went to the Jews first (Romans 1:16 First for the Jews, then for the Gentiles), but then preached to a principally Gentile audience.

Paul desperately wanted the Jews to be saved. Romans 9:1-5 then Romans 11:11-21.

Acts 14 In Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. The Jews stir up trouble and persecution ensues.

A funny scene in Acts 14:8-15 This was a really pagan place.

Acts 14:19-20 Paul is stoned and left for dead. Preaching the word will bring on persecution. V. 22 “We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.”

Acts 15 The Council in Jerusalem.

Judaizers began to influence the Church. Acts 15:1-2. Galatians 2:11-13 At one point, they strongly influenced even Peter and James (presumably well before Acts 15, while Paul was still in Antioch)

The issue? Jewish Christians were strongly persecuted by non-Christian Jews. It was tempting to compromise the freedom we have in Christ. Jewish Christians were still observing nearly all the Jewish traditions, such as Sabbath, kosher food, observance of Jewish festivals and so forth. They confused tradition with truth.

Questions:

Should Gentiles be circumcised?

Note: Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3), yet he refused to let Titus be circumcised (Galatians 2:3).

Q: Why did he have a different policy for the two?

In the first case, he did not want Timothy’s uncircumcision be a stumbling block. In the second case, people were demanding Titus be circumcised. Paul refused.

Should Gentile Christians observe kosher laws? Should they observe the Sabbath?

Acts 15:15-18 James quotes Amos 9:11-12.

The decision Acts 15:19-21: Gentiles were asked to avoid the most offensive acts to the Jews, which is to not eat food sacrificed to idols, strangled animals and blood.

This is a great example of Christians finding a reasonable compromise on debatable matters, taking into account both the sensitivities of certain   
“weak” brothers, but also the freedom we have in Christ. These principles are found in Romans 14:1-15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10.

On the one hand, disciples ought not to behave in ways on debatable matters that would offend the consciences of the “weaker” Christians.

But… On the other hand, the church needs to defend the Christian freedoms that we have.

Acts 15:36-41 Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement. What did they decide to do? Continue the work in the way that they felt God was calling them to do it. They split it up. Paul went east to Syria and Cilicia and Barnabas went west to Cyprus. They taught and strengthened the churches and served God and kept their friendship.

Why did they see things differently even though they were both great men of God?

Who was right?

What implications does this have for us today?

Barnabas was related to John mark.

Barnabas was a shepherd at heart.

Paul was about the work and fighting through challenges.

Paul needed reliable people to go on such dangerous missions.

Paul saw John Mark’s failings (Acts13:13). Both were right.

John Mark made good with Paul later: Col4:10, Philemon 23, 2 Tim4:11

**CH 16**

The second Missionary Journey Acts 16:1-18:22 Christianity comes to Greece.

Paul first returns to Derbe, Lystra and Iconium. Acts 16:5 And the churches grew in numbers….

Acts 16:3 Paul circumcises Timothy, as previously mentioned.

Acts 16:6-10 Paul’s vision of a Macedonian man. First Christian mission in Europe. Paul goes to Philippi, which was the first city without a significant Jewish population. (again we see the role of the Holy Spirit)

Paul begins his ministry by going to a place of prayer. This is where the “open” people would be.

Acts 16:13 No synagogue to visit. First convert is a woman.

Q: Why did Paul begin with women? (because they were who were there! Because women, on average, are more spiritual than men.)

Acts 16:16-40 Paul and Silas stripped, beaten, flogged and put in prison. (Because of a woman Paul healed from demon possession)

Q: Would you be willing to be publicly flogged and thrown into the darkest prison in order to help people to be saved?

Perhaps the strong reaction was in part because there were no Jews in this city, so Christianity had less protection. (supported by 16:20-21)

Acts 16:25 Singing and praying. Q: What would you have been doing?

16:33 Some use this as a proof-text for infant baptism.

Analogy: Last Christmas our whole family gathered together to sing Christmas Carols. Now, our infant granddaughter was there. What would you assume about her?

Interpretation: All those who were eligible for the kingdom of God—all of accountable age in the family were baptized.

16:37-40 Here Paul does something he did not normally do, which is defend himself from persecution.

Q: Why did Paul bring up his Roman citizenship **after** the fact of the beating and jailing? Maybe it would help protect the fledging church that he would have to leave behind. There is no doubt that this church survived and prospered. Paul writes to them later in Phillipians and says that they were close to his heart (Phil1:3-7).

**Acts 17**

In Thessalonica, Berea and Athens.

I. Thessalonica.

Thessalonica the capital and major port of the Roman province of Macedonia. The second largest city in Greece today. (Thessaloniki)

Acts 17:1-9 In Thessalonica. Unlike the Roman city Philippi, Thessalonica has a synagogue.

v. 2 He reasoned with them. Q: What form do you think this reasoning took?

(hint: given Acts 2, he probably appealed to OT prophecies, Jeremiah 31, etc.)

Also, note that God-fearers are at the synagogue. These were Greek converts to Judaism. Known as “proselytes of the gate.” Uncircumcised synagogue attenders. It appears that the most “open” group was these Greek converts to Judaism.

Jason (v. 5) was probably one of these Greek God-fearers.

Note: Acts 17:6 “city officials” in Greek is politarchs—a word that did not appear in ancient Roman or Greek documents. A mistake? No, as an inscription was found in Thessalonica bearing this title.

Note: Acts 17:6 In a sense, Jesus’ vision in Acts 1:8 is already being fulfilled. The whole world is being turned upside down.

II. Berea

The Thessalonian Jews chased Paul down to Berea.

Famously, the Bereans were of more noble character. V. 11-12

Discussion Questions:

1. Would you be willing to go through “many hardships” to enter the Kingdom of God?

2. Can you think of an area in which it is not necessarily sinful for you to do something, but you ought to forego that thing for the sake of the consciences of your fellow disciples?

Acts 17:16-34 Paul explains Christianity to Athenian intellectuals at the Areopagus. Jerusalem meets Athens.

Most visitors to Athens were extremely impressed with its architecture and its history of great learning and philosophy. Paul was not so impressed. In fact, he was “greatly distressed.” Are we “greatly distressed” at the worldliness around us? Athens was described by contemporaries as a “forest of idols.”

v. 18 Paul confronts the Epicureans and Stoics.

They are not very open. “babbler” v. 18 Some “sneered” v. 32

Epicureans: A philosophical pseudo-religion, founded by Epicurus in 307 BC.

Epicurus was an atomist which was the closest equivalent of an atheist at that time. A more accurate description would be deism which proposes a God/designer who does not interact with his creation (Newton, for example) He was a skeptic of God intervening in human affairs. The greatest “good” in Epicureanism is pleasure and the absence of pain, but most Epicureans were not hedonists (pleasure for pleasure’s sake), but rather preached a modest lifestyle, avoiding extremes. Epicureans might fit in well in today’s modern society, except for their emphasis on moderation.

Stoicism: A philosophy founded in the 3rd century BC by Zeno. Similar to Buddhism. It teaches detachment from emotion (thus stoicism). Its concept of God is found in nature/creation. They have been described as panentheists (God is in everything). This “God” is completely impersonal—kind of like the “Force” of Star Wars. To the Stoic, the best indication of the quality of one’s life is not his/her beliefs, but the way he lives his life. The ideal person is the sage—the virtuous and wise person.

Notice Paul in Acts 17:16-34

v. 17 he **reasoned** in the Synagogue in the market and with the Greek philosophers

v. 22-23 He found common ground. “I see that you are extremely religious in every respect.”

v. 24-28 He described a much superior world view/God to them

God is Creator. (v. 24, 28) He exists outside of Creation. (disproves Stoicism)

God is close by. (v. 27 he is not far from us) (disproves deism and Epicureanism)

God is personal and has given us a purpose. (v. 27)

God will bring everything into judgment. Evil will be defeated (disproves dualism) v. 30,31

Paul quotes from Aretas, a Stoic Philosopher. “For we are his offspring.”

Finally, 7/8 of the way through his treatise, he introduces Jesus.

He had to confront their idea of God before Jesus could make any sense to them.

Response:

Some mocked the idea of an afterlife.

Others were willing to hear more.

Some were converted.

**Acts Ch 18**

Paul in Corinth. Corinth, like Philippi, was a Roman colony. It was the commercial heart of Greece, being on the strait separating the Peleponnese Peninsula from Greece proper and at the hub of commerce and trade. It was also the center of Aphrodite worship, which was not a good thing, as she was the god of sexuality and of fertility. The Acropolis of Corinth was a temple to Aphrodite. Worship of Aphrodite meant participating in prostitution in the temple. The moral level of Corinth was very low. Yet, the church flourished there.

Acts 18:1-4, 18-19, 26 Pricilla and Aquila. This was a power couple of the Greek churches. They had been expelled from Rome when Emperor Claudius ordered the Jews to leave. AD 49. That and trial before Gallio (Acts 18:12-16) sets the date for Paul being in Corinth at AD 52-53.

Notice, in Acts 18:1-4 it is Aquila and Pricilla, but later it is Pricilla and Aquila.

Q: Why Pricilla and Aquila?

This seems to indicate that Pricilla was the stronger and more influential of the two.

Acts 18:5-8 Paul preaches to the Jews, is rejected, so goes to the Gentiles.

18:7 Titius Justius was a “worshipper of God” A proselyte. Probably a “Proselyte of Righteousness” One who was on the way to becoming a Jew and was circumcised.

18:8 Crispus the synagogue leader is converted. A powerful conversion! (aside: This is surely the same Crispus that Paul mentions in 1 Cor 1:14

18:9-11 Paul stayed in Corinth more than any other city other than Ephesus. 1-1/2 years.

18:12 This Gallio is a real person, as testified by an archaeological find which puts the date of Paul’s ministry at AD 51-53. [it is likely 1 Thessalonians was written during this time.] He was the brother of the famous philosopher Seneca—a man of “uncommon mildness.”

18:12-17 The Jews try to stir up a riot but Gallio refuses to take the case. He considers Christians as “Jews.” Instead they beat up Sosthenes who was probably the ringleader of the attempt to persecute the Christians.

Probably, this Sosthenes was later converted to Christianity 1 Cor 1:2

Acts 18:18-22 Paul completes the 2nd missionary journey, leaving Pricilla and Aquila in Ephesus, where he stayed very briefly.

He took a Nazirite vow (cut off his hair) in Cenchrea which is the port opposite Corinth from which he sailed. He probably did so in preparation for going to Jerusalem—so as to polish his credentials as a Jew. He also made this vow at the end of the 3rd missionary journey before Acts 21.

**Third Missionary Journey Acts 18:23- Acts 20:38**

Pisidian Antioch, Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia and Achaia (Greece)

Acts 18:24-28 (read v. 24-26) Apollos. A Jew of great learning from Alexandria which had a very large Jewish population, and which became, along with Antioch, Ephesus, Jerusalem and Rome, one of the five great centers of Christianity. Alexandria was the center of learning for the entire Greek world, with its universities and its great library. Throughout the 2nd and 3rd centuries the greatest Christian teachers came from Alexandria (Justin, Clement, Origen, etc.)

Apollos is like the very sincere, devoted and even well-educated “Christian” we meet today who has been teaching false doctrine. Specifically, he had an incorrect teaching about baptism. How should we treat him? With suspicion? Should we assume he has bad motives? Should we treat him as a non-Christian? Maybe we should apply the Golden Rule here.

Suggestion: If such religious people are treated with respect and some level of acceptance, but we “explain to him the way of God more adequately” then we will find out how sincere he or she truly is. Respect, kindness, patience, but also very strong conviction are the keys to what brought Apollos into the fold. Imagine how God could use you!!!!

**Acts 19 Paul in Ephesus**

Ephesus was the most important, powerful and influential church which was planted by Paul. He spent almost three years there. It seems the principle purpose of his 3rd missionary journey was to strengthen this church in the most influential city in the province of Asia.

Acts 19:1-7 An interesting encounter.

These people, like Apollos earlier (Acts 18:25) had only heard about the baptism of John. They may have been disciples of Apollos. How did Paul know there was a problem with their baptism doctrine? They were not aware that when we are baptized into Christ we receive the Holy Spirit.

v. 6 As mentioned earlier, this passage could be confusing. Explanation: They had received the Gift of the Holy Spirit (obviously, v. 2-5 and Acts 2:38) when they were baptized into Christ, but they had not received the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, which was only received when an apostle laid hands on them.

Acts 19:8-10 Paul starts a campus ministry at the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus. Paul appears to have started a ministry training academy there. Because of this wise decision, “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia head the word of the Lord.” What a great plan. Is this our vision? Paul is putting Acts 1:8 into practice in Asia.

Acts 19:17-20 and 23-41 Burning of the sorcery books and a little riot in Ephesus. Ephesus was famous for its fetishes—little scrolls with magic formulas on them. Known as “Ephesian writings” When Christianity comes to town, it will shake things up and certain sinful activities will lose their market. We should be having this effect and we should anticipate this, as well as some push-back.

Acts 19:23 Christianity called “the Way.” Why was it called this? Because Christianity is not a set of beliefs, but a way of life, and outsiders knew this.

The Way Acts 9:2, 19:9, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14,22

Acts 19:30 I like Paul’s fighting spirit.

A riot by those who supported the cult of Artemis of the Ephesians. The temple of Diana/Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. 137 m (450 ft) long by 69 m (225 ft) wide and 18 m (60 ft) high, with more than 127 columns

She was the goddess of the moon and of the hunt.

**Acts 20 Paul addresses the Ephesian elders.**

20:1-12 In Macedonia, Greece (Achaia), Macedonia (Philippi and Troas)

Note: With Acts 20:5 Luke begins to say “we”. This is when he became an eye witness.

Acts 20:7 Just in case you get a 7th Day Adventist who wants to argue with you.

Paul raises Eutychus.

20:13-16 Sails to Miletus (the port city near Ephesus)

Acts 20:17-38 is Luke’s most careful and thorough description of Paul’s ministry. It is Paul’s farewell address to the church he held most dear. It is a bit like Matthew 28:18-20 or Acts 1:3-8 for Jesus. We should pay very careful attention to this passage, which is one of the most important in the book.

20:18 You know how I lived in the province of Asia…. Q: How did Paul live? Let it challenge you. Imagine being able to say to those who know you, “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you.”

How did Paul live his life?

Gave up the right to a family and a career. 1 Cor 9:15

2 Cor 11:23-29 Endured incredible hardships.

Coll 1:28-29 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all the energy with which Christ so powerfully works in me.”

This is my goal: that at the end of my life I could say with a sincere face, “You know how I have lived.”

v. 19 I served the Lord with great humility… Imagine having served with such humility that you could look at those you had ministered to in the eyes and make this bold statement.

Is this what your ministry is like?

What does a life lived with that kind of humility look like?

How would you have to change in order to be able to say this?

v. 19 and with tears…. Note the passion of Paul for those he ministered to. Have you cried for them? What were these tears about?

Another glance at Paul’s ministry is in 1 Thess 2:1-12. Let us be challenged by this. Paul gave himself to those he was ministering to. Like a mother….. Like a father…. Sometimes we must minister like a mother, sometimes like a father.

v. 20-21 What did Paul preach? Repentance and faith. Which is harder to call people to????? Repentance or biblical faith?

iWhere did Paul preach? “publicly and from house to house.”

v. 22-24 Q: Why to Jerusalem? (because the Holy Spirit told him) What was he expecting there? (v. 23 prison and hardships)

Paul’s attitude: If that is where God is sending me, then so be it.

Paul wanted to preach to the powerful in Rome. The only plan he could think of was to go to Jerusalem and get himself arrested, so he could be sent to Rome in chains.

What would you be willing to do to see the gospel spread?

v. 24 I consider my life worth nothing. What was Paul holding on to? Nothing. All of his value came from God. How did it affect Paul to feel this way? Imagine how freeing it is to put your life totally in God’s hands. If only we could do this!!!!! Q: How can you move in a direction to be more like Paul in this? (1 Cor 9:19-23 as an example)

v. 25-27 How could Paul feel “innocent of the blood of all men.”? Had he literally shared with everyone? No! But he had made the most of every opportunity “to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”

Can you look at your family and make this declaration?

Can you look at your classmates or co-workers or neighbors and declare yourself before them to be “innocent of the blood of all men.”?

What part of God’s will do you hesitate to preach?

v. 28-35 advice to shepherds….

v. 28-31 Protect against false teaching

v. 33-35 Do not seek financial gain, and do not only hang out with the “sharp” but help the weak and the vulnerable.

v. 36-38 A final extremely emotional farewell.

**CH 21 On to Jerusalem**

A little note: Luke is saying “us” and “we” a lot here. Since Acts 16:11, but especially Acts 20:5, Luke is saying “we”. (also 27:1 and 28:1) He is a direct participant in all or nearly all the events of Acts 20-28. He is involved in bringing offerings to help the church in Jerusalem. This explains the increased vividness of details, especially with regard to the travels of the group.

Remember: A major theme of Luke is Jesus going to Jerusalem and a major theme of Acts is Jesus/the Church going out from Jerusalem. It is ironic, then, that Paul is returning near the end of his life to Jerusalem.

Interesting side notes:

Acts 21:8-9 Philip (of Ethiopian Eunuch and Samarian fame) had four daughters who prophesied. Prophetesses. Interesting.

21:10-14 Paul is determined to go to Jerusalem, knowing that his life is in grave danger. Why? He wants to get to Rome!

Acts 21:17-25 Paul agrees to mollify the Jewish critics. V. 23 He takes a Nazirite-like vow. This first group is Christian Jews. Later it will be non-Christian Jews who take it a step further and try to get Paul killed.

The issue he will face there is NOT that Paul is teaching Gentiles they do not have to obey the Law of Moses (at least supposedly…. Perhaps this is REALLY what the commotion is about but they are hiding behind the issue they are bringing up.)

The issue is that they are claiming Paul is telling Jewish Christians that they, too, should abandon obedience to the Law of Moses.

By the way, this is to some extent true in that Paul insisted Titus did not have to be circumcised, but Paul himself followed Jewish customs throughout his life.

James wanted Paul to refute the claims that he was teaching rejection of the law to Jews. This would probably have been a barrier to the continued evangelization of Jews who had not accepted Jesus as the Messiah yet and also a stumbling block for some Jewish brethren.

A Greek-speaking Jew from Asia starts a riot, falsely claiming that Paul had brought Gentiles into the court of the Jews at the temple.

There was a barrier separating the Court of the Gentiles from the inner parts of the Temple with warning notices on it threatening death to Gentiles who passed it. One such inscription was discovered in 1871 in a cemetery, and a portion of another in 1935 near St. Stephen’s Gate, in Jerusalem. The turmoil came about on the assumption that Paul had brought Trophimus into the Temple. Paul was dragged from the Temple itself into the Court of the Gentiles, which was overlooked by the garrison in the fortress of Antonia, to the northwest of the temple area.

Acts 21:40-22:21 Paul gives his defense before the Jews in Jerusalem (which includes perhaps the most detailed account of his conversion) He speaks to them in Aramaic.

**Acts 23 Paul’s defense before the Sanhedrin**

Ananias was the Jewish high priest from AD 47 to 58. slaps him: He apparently assumed that Paul was lying and tried to intimidate him.

**Ananias the son of Nedebaeus reigned as high priest from A.D. 48 to 58 or 59 and was known for his avarice and liberal use of violence. He was nominated High Priest in A.D. 48 by Herod Agrippa II and deposed about 10 years later. Josephus says he confiscated for himself the tithes given the ordinary priests and gave lavish bribes to Romans and also Jews (cf. Antiq. XX, 205-7 [ix.2], 213 [ix.4]). He was a brutal and scheming man, hated by Jewish nationalists for his pro-Roman policies. When the war with Rome began in A.D. 66, the nationalists burned his house (cf. Jos. War II, 426 [xvii.6]) and he was forced to flee to the palace of Herod the Great in the northern part of Jerusalem (ibid., 429 [xvii.6]). Ananias was finally trapped while hiding in an aqueduct on the palace grounds and was killed along with his brother Hezekiah (ibid., 441-42 [xvii.9]).**

The background information helps us understand why Ananias is quickly violent toward Paul and why Paul calls him a “white-washed wall.” Ananias was evil in the core, while pretending to be the holy high priest of the Jews.

Paul must have known that Ananias was High Priest. Many scholars believe that Paul’s reply must have been sarcastic to infer that Ananias could never be a true High Priest because of his hypocrisy.

Paul quotes Ex22:28 to prove that he would never insult a true ruler of the people. For the sake of tranquility, the Roman authorities would still allow the High Priest to be called ruler.

23:6 Paul, realizing that these guys are not open, and therefore not feeling the need to preach to them all that much, starts a fight between the Pharisees and Sadducees by saying “I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.”

The Sadducees use only the first five books (the Pentateuch/Torah) and are the priestly party. They deny the resurrection. This dispute had also come up before Jesus (Matthew 23:23-32)

23:11-25 A plot by the non-Christian Jews to kill Paul. The plot discovered. Paul escorted to Caesarea Maratima by 200 soldiers!!!

Discussion Question:

1. What would be a good strategy for sharing about Jesus to a Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh or Muslim who knows little if anything about the Bible?

**Acts 24 Paul preaches to Felix—to a pagan ruler.**

Paul before Felix, Festus and Herod Agrippa reminds of Matthew 10:17-20 “they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

Felix the Governor was procurator of Judaea from A.D. 52 -58 or 59 but had been a military prefect in Palestine before. The date of these events was about AD 57 or 58

Acts 24:1-9 Ananias behind all this. The lawyer Tertullus makes his case.

What a hypocrite!!! He gives totally insincere sucking-up sycophantic praises to Felix. “We just want to help you and make your job easier” Liar!!!

**Context**: Marcus Antonius Felix was the Roman procurator of the Judaea Province from 52-60 AD. Felix’s cruelty and licentiousness, coupled with his accessibility to bribes, led to a great increase of crime in Judaea. Tacitus on Felix: he “indulged in every kind of barbarity and lust.”

Felix coins

His charges are a mixture of

a. lies tried to desecrate the temple

b. half-truths stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world and

c. truths made to look worse than they really were. The “ringleader of this sect”

note the word sect had very negative connotations to the Romans as an unauthorized, rebellious and seditious religious group.

Now Christianity is being called a sect of the Nazarene. The word “sect” is the Greek word *haerisis*, translated into English would be heresy. What is the Jews basic argument? That Paul is teaching a heresy that is not allowed under Jewish and therefore Roman law.

This is how we will be treated by the likes of Tertullus.

Acts 24:10-21 Paul’s defense before Felix.

Q: What would you say if you had the opportunity to share and defend your faith before the governor of Judea?

Notice how different his defense is from that of Tertullus. His is a model of our sharing our faith with blatant non-believers, even in the face of persecution from hypocritical religious people.

a. His is respectful and thankful but does not give insincere praise.

b. He refutes the false charges by simply relating the facts, but not in an inflammatory style. He avoids all temptation to cut down Tertullus and Ananias, but prefers to let the truth speak for itself.

c. Where the charges are half-truths, he gives a more accurate description. (v. 14I follow a way, not a sect, for example)

d. Where the charges are true, he comes fully clean. There was nothing they could charge him with that he did not fully reveal himself.

e. He shows that what he is doing is fully in line with the Old Testament, and therefore the charge of heresy is totally false (v. 14-15, Daniel 12:2-3)

f. Most importantly, he shares the gospel with Felix!

v. 22-23 Always the politician (and hoping for a bribe, v 26), Felix refuses to give a decision.

Q: What does Felix think about Tertullus and Ananias versus Paul?

He presumably has nothing but contempt for the suck-up Tertullus but he has to be profoundly impressed with Paul’s sincerity, openness and honesty. People are not stupid.

24:24-27 Paul shares the gospel with Felix.

Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (Acts12:1 who died in AD 44) and sister of Herod Agrippa II. She had married King Aziz of Emesa but Felix had recently seduced her from him.

Is it any surprise then that Felix would fear the teachings about righteousness and also was waiting for a bribe? In the end, Felix never released Paul even though he had concluded that Paul was innocent. Thus was the state of affairs in Judea at the time - corruption at the highest levels. Felix was more content with comfort, pleasure, power and appearance than righteousness.

v. 25 Will there ever be a “convenient time” to repent of our sins and put our faith in Jesus? We need to point this out to people. 2 Cor 6:2 “Now is the day of salvation.”

“Indecision is a decision.”

**Acts Ch 25-26 Paul before Festus and Herod Agrippa**

Acts 25:11-12 A fateful moment. Paul appeals to Caesar. His 20+ year desire is about to be fulfilled (although not exactly the way he might have pictured it). He is going to Rome.

Would you be willing to go to prison in order to have the opportunity to share your faith in a foreign country?

Festus to Agrippa. I need to send him with a letter explaining the charges. Like Felix, he understands that Paul is completely innocent (except minor disputes about Jewish laws) You know all about the Jews. Help me out here!

Acts 26 A masterful defense of the Gospel, both to a religious person who knows the Bible and to a total pagan.

The scene:

Herod Agrippa is a client-king and the great grandson of Herod the Great who tried to kill Jesus. When this event occurred he was in an incestuous relationship with his full sister Bernice. Imagine the gall to appear in public, judging Paul, when he was living this kind of lifestyle.

His “buddy” is Festus with whom he shares control of the Jews.

Acts 25:23 Agrippa enters in great pomp.

Paul, the greatest living man at the time, enters, probably in chains.

26:2 Does Paul really feel fortunate to stand before Agrippa? YES!!! He is sharing his faith with a king. It was all worth it!!!

Paul: My life has always been exemplary and above reproach, as my enemies are fully aware.

v. 5-6 I am on trial because I love God. (a good reason for a Christian to be in trouble)

v. 6,8 I am on trial because I believe in the resurrection, as promised by God.

v. 7, 22-23 I am on trial for observing faithfully the Old Testament.

v. 9-18 Like you, Agrippa, I was not predisposed to believe in Jesus—far from it!

v. 20 The real reason I am on trial is because I preach repentance. “That is why the Jews seized me.”

Note, Paul is putting Herod Agrippa in this position.

v. 24 Festus: You are crazy!!!! When people have no logical response they turn to insults.

v. 25-27 Paul: What I am saying is true, and it is reasonable. If you do not believe me, just ask Agrippa. He will tell you.

Paul to Agrippa: Do you want to go to heaven? If you have read the prophets, surely you know that Jesus is the Messiah.

v. 28 Agrippa finally gets it. Paul is trying to convert me. Duhhh….

v. 29 A beautiful appeal. The prisoner says to the king, “I would not trade places with you for the world.”

Paul is going to Rome.

**acTS 27-28 pAUL REALIZES HIS dREAM. hE REACHES rOME**

Acts 27-28:16 After multiple miracles, Paul arrives in Rome

This part of Acts is amazing for its specificity. It names harbors, winds, and navigational issues. It mentions the names of the travelers, the advice of the captain and owner of the ship and the advice that Paul gave.

28:7-10 Publius: Tradition says that this Publius became a Christian and ended up being the first bishop of the church in Malta. He was bishop there for 3o years and then went to Athens where he was martyred in 125A.D.

28:21-22 It seems strange that the Jews in Rome had so little knowledge of the events in Judaea. Already in the reign of Claudius, an edict had been issued “that all Jews should leave Rome.” (Acts18:2, AD 49-50) This was alluded to by “the instigation of Chrestus” from Seutonius in “Life of Claudius” (xxv. 4) (Roman historian c. 75-160), secretary to Emperor Hadrian. Since Paul was a Pharisee by training it was quite possible that the Jews in Rome gave Paul a hearing out of respect for his background.

The story ends two years later, with Paul still in chains, in Rome. Presumably it is about this time (AD 62) that Luke wrote Luke and Acts. Otherwise, surely Luke would have completed his story with the death of Paul. It is commonly believed that Paul was actually freed and may have traveled to Spain, after which he returned to Rome, was rearrested and executed under Nero about AD 64-65, at the age of perhaps about 60 years old.