ACTS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



From Pentecost to Rome: the Holy Spirit,
the early church, and the gospel on the move

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Acts Bible Study

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Andrew Dominguez

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Acts Bible Study: A Verse-by-Verse Study

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of Acts. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

The first person who shared the gospel with me was a neighbor in Victorville, Pastor Jimmy Carter. I mowed his lawn, and he took me to church and led me to Christ. Years later I helped lead youth mission trips to Baja, Mexico, five years in a row, and got to pass that same message on. Acts is the story of ordinary people sharing Jesus, and every believer is part of that chain.

Acts is where the story of the church begins. The Gospels end with Jesus risen from the dead. Acts picks up right there and shows what happened next: a small group of frightened followers became bold witnesses who carried the Good News from Jerusalem all the way to Rome. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Acts. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand how He built His church. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66; James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in Acts. Acts is a history book. It tells us what happened, and it also teaches us. Some events in Acts happened once, at a turning point in God's plan, like the sound of a violent wind at Pentecost. Others show us a pattern we are meant to follow, like the believers devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42). Part of studying Acts well is asking which is which, and letting the rest of Scripture help us answer.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Acts is plain history, written by a careful man who said he had "followed all things carefully from the first" (Luke 1:3). This study takes Luke at his word: the

miracles happened, the speeches were given, and the journeys were made just as he describes them.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Greek, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- People and Places: in chapters that bring in many new names, a short list explaining the people, places, and terms.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live.
- Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works well for a small group or a Sunday school class. Here is how I suggest using it:

- Read the chapter's Scripture section before you meet. Most chapters take five to ten minutes to read.
- When you gather, read the Preview out loud, then work through the Study notes together, a few verses at a time. Have everyone keep a Bible open so you can check what you read, the way the Bereans did (17:11).
- Close with the Study Questions. The first question in each chapter is an easy one to get people talking. The middle questions come straight from the text, with the verses in parentheses. The last ones ask how the chapter applies to our own lives.
- At one chapter a week, the whole book takes about seven months. Some chapters, like 2, 7 and 13, are long, and a group may want to give them two weeks.
- Open and close each meeting in prayer. The first believers prayed together often (2:42; 4:24-31), and so should we.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Acts. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Acts

The book of Acts is the fifth book of the New Testament. It comes right after the four Gospels and right before Paul's letter to the Romans. Its full name in many Bibles is "The Acts of the Apostles," but a better name might be "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," because the Spirit is the one doing the work from start to finish. The apostles preach, travel, and suffer, but it is the Spirit who gives them power, opens doors, and closes them.

Jesus gave us the outline of the whole book in one verse, just before He went back to heaven:

Acts 1:8 (SLB)

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to ***the*** uttermost part of the earth."

That is exactly how the book unfolds. The church starts in Jerusalem (chapters 1 to 7), spreads through Judea and Samaria (chapters 8 to 12), and then reaches out to the Gentile world (Gentiles are people who are not Jewish), ending with Paul preaching in Rome, the capital of the empire (chapters 13 to 28).

Acts also has two main characters. The first half follows Peter, the apostle to the Jews. The second half follows Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. Their stories line up in ways that are hard to miss. Both heal a man lame from birth (3:1-10; 14:8-10). Both are miraculously set free from prison (12:6-11; 16:25-26). Both face down a sorcerer (8:18-24; 13:6-12). Both raise the dead (9:36-41; 20:9-12). God used the same Spirit and the same message through two very different men.

Acts has 28 chapters and 1,007 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: The Church in Jerusalem (chapters 1 to 7)

- Chapter 1: The Promise and the Ascension
- Chapter 2: Pentecost
- Chapter 3: Healing at the Beautiful Gate
- Chapter 4: Bold Before the Council
- Chapter 5: Ananias, Sapphira, and the Apostles on Trial
- Chapter 6: The Seven Chosen
- Chapter 7: Stephen's Defense

Part Two: The Church in Judea and Samaria (chapters 8 to 12)

- Chapter 8: The Church Scattered
- Chapter 9: The Conversion of Saul
- Chapter 10: Peter and Cornelius
- Chapter 11: The Gospel Reaches the Gentiles

- Chapter 12: Peter Set Free

Part Three: The Church to the Uttermost Part of the Earth (chapters 13 to 28)

- Chapters 13 and 14: Paul's first missionary journey
- 15:1 to 15:35: The Jerusalem Council
- 15:36 to 18:22: Paul's second missionary journey
- 18:23 to 21:16: Paul's third missionary journey and his return to Jerusalem
- 21:17 to 26:32: Paul's arrest and his defense before crowds, councils, governors, and a king
- Chapters 27 and 28: The voyage to Rome, the shipwreck, and Paul preaching in Rome

Background of the Book

Author: Acts does not name its author, but it opens by pointing back to "the first account" written to the same man, Theophilus (Acts 1:1; Luke 1:1-4). The early church agreed that both books were written by Luke, the "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14) who traveled with Paul. In several places Luke switches from "they" to "we" (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16), which tells us he was there for those parts of the story.

Who it was written to: Theophilus, whose name means "friend of God" (or loved by God). Luke calls him "most excellent" in his Gospel (Luke 1:3), a title used for high officials, so he may have been a Roman of some rank. Luke wrote so that he would "come to know the certainty concerning the words" he had been taught (Luke 1:4).

When it was written: Several dates have been proposed:

- Many conservative scholars date it around A.D. 60 to 62, because the book ends with Paul still under house arrest in Rome and says nothing about his death or about the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
- Most other scholars date it later, usually between A.D. 80 and 90, and a few date it as late as the early second century.

I hold the earlier date. If Paul had already been put to death, or the temple had already fallen, it is hard to believe Luke would leave either one out.

Time covered: About 30 years, from Jesus' ascension (around A.D. 30 to 33) to Paul's two years under house arrest in Rome (around A.D. 60 to 62).

Purpose: To show how the risen Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, built His church and carried the Good News from Jerusalem to Rome, just as He promised in Acts 1:8. Acts also shows that the Gospel is for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, and that nothing, not prison, not mobs, not shipwreck, can stop it.

The Holy Spirit in Acts

If you read Acts and only follow the people, you will miss the main character. The Spirit is mentioned more than fifty times in this book. He is the promise of the Father (1:4), the power for witness (1:8), and the one who fills, guides, sends, warns, and comforts the church.

Here are some of the things the Spirit does in Acts:

- He fills believers and gives them boldness to speak (2:4; 4:8; 4:31).
- He sends out missionaries (13:2-4).
- He guides where they go, and where they don't go (8:29; 16:6-7).
- He brings new groups into the church: Jews at Pentecost (2:4), Samaritans (8:17), Gentiles (10:44-45), and the disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus (19:6).
- He speaks through prophets and warns of what is ahead (11:28; 20:23; 21:11).
- He helps the church settle hard questions (15:28).

You might ask, "Is the Holy Spirit still doing this today?" The Spirit has not changed. Every believer receives Him when they put their faith in Christ (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13). Some of what we see in Acts happened at turning points in God's plan, and Bible teachers disagree about which gifts continue today and how. I point out those places as we come to them. What every believer can agree on is this: the same Spirit who gave Peter boldness at Pentecost lives in every believer now, and He still gives power to be a witness for Jesus.

Paul's Missionary Journeys

Paul made three missionary journeys in Acts, then a fourth trip to Rome as a prisoner. The dates below are approximate; scholars differ by a year or two.

First Journey (13:1-14:28), about A.D. 46 to 48: Paul and Barnabas, with John Mark for part of the way, sailed from Antioch in Syria to Cyprus, came to Perga in Pamphylia, then went into southern Galatia: Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. They then retraced their steps to strengthen the new churches.

Second Journey (15:36-18:22), about A.D. 49 to 52: Paul and Silas, later joined by Timothy and Luke, revisited the Galatian churches and then crossed into Europe: Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth, where Paul stayed a year and six months.

Third Journey (18:23-21:16), about A.D. 53 to 57: Paul spent about three years in Ephesus, then traveled through Macedonia and Greece, met the Ephesian elders at Miletus, and went up to Jerusalem.

Voyage to Rome (27:1-28:16), about A.D. 59 to 60: After two years in custody in Caesarea, Paul appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome by ship. The ship wrecked on Malta, and he reached Rome the following spring.

Chapter 1: The Promise and the Ascension

Scripture: Jesus Ascends to Heaven; Matthias Is Chosen

1:1-11 The first account indeed I composed, O Theophilus, concerning all things which Jesus began both to do and to teach, until ***the*** day when, having given orders through ***the*** Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen, He was taken up; to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many clear proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with them, He instructed them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the Father, "which," ***He said,*** "you heard from Me; for John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized with ***the*** Holy Spirit not many days after these." So then those who had come together were asking Him, saying, "Lord, are You at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not yours to know times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to ***the*** uttermost part of the earth." And having said these things, while they were looking, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him from their eyes. And as they were looking intently into heaven as He was going, then look, two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, "Galilean men, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you watched Him going into heaven."

1:12-26 Then they returned to Jerusalem from ***the*** mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, being a Sabbath's journey ***away***. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: both Peter and James and John and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James ***son*** of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas ***son*** of James. These all were steadfastly continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication, with ***the*** women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. And in these days Peter, having stood up in the midst of the disciples, said (and the crowd of names together was about a hundred and twenty), "Men, brothers, it was necessary for this Scripture to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold through ***the*** mouth of David concerning Judas, who became guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained the lot of this ministry. (Now this man indeed acquired a field out of the wages of unrighteousness, and having fallen headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his intestines gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem, so that that field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) For it has been written in ***the*** book of Psalms, 'Let his homestead become desolate, and let there not be one dwelling in it,' and, 'May another take his office.' Therefore it is necessary, of the men who accompanied us during all the time in which the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which He was taken up from us, ***for*** one of these to become a witness with us of His resurrection." And they put forward two: Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And having prayed, they said, "You, Lord, knower of the hearts of all, show which one of these two You have chosen to take the lot of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas turned aside to go to ***his*** own place." And they gave their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was counted together with the eleven apostles.

Chapter 1 Preview

Acts opens where the Gospel of Luke leaves off. Jesus is alive, and for forty days He shows Himself to His apostles and teaches them about the kingdom of God. Before He goes back to the Father, He gives them a promise and a job. The promise is the Holy Spirit. The job is to be His witnesses, starting in Jerusalem and going to the ends of the earth.

Then Jesus is taken up into heaven before their eyes, and two angels tell them He will come back the same way. The rest of the chapter shows the believers waiting and praying in an upper room, and choosing a man to take Judas' place among the twelve.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1 *The first account indeed I composed, O Theophilus, concerning all things which Jesus began both to do and to teach,*

Luke wrote this book. He calls his Gospel "the first account," and he writes both books to the same man, Theophilus. The name means "friend of God" (or loved by God). We don't know much about him. He may have been a Roman official, since Luke calls him "most excellent" in Luke 1:3, or he may have been a new believer who wanted to be sure of what he had been taught.

Notice the words "began both to do and to teach." Luke's Gospel told what Jesus began to do. Acts tells what Jesus kept on doing, now through His Spirit and His church. The story did not end at the empty tomb. It was just getting started.

1:2 *until **the** day when, having given orders through **the** Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen, He was taken up;*

An apostle is "one who is sent," a messenger sent out with the authority of the one who sent him. These men did not pick themselves. Jesus chose them and trained them for about three years.

Even Jesus, the Son of God, did His earthly ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. If He relied on the Spirit, how much more do we need Him?

1:3 *to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many clear proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God.*

The "many clear proofs" were real and physical. He ate with the disciples (Luke 24:41-43). He let them touch Him (Luke 24:39). He appeared to more than five hundred people at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). The resurrection was not a feeling or a vision. It was a fact, seen by many witnesses over forty days.

The number forty shows up often in Scripture as a time of testing or preparing: the flood, Moses on the mountain, Israel in the wilderness, and Jesus in the desert. Here it is a time of preparing the apostles. That Jesus spent those days speaking about the kingdom of God tells us what was on His heart right before He left.

1:4-5 *And being assembled together with them, He instructed them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the Father, "which," **He said,** "you heard from Me; for John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized with **the** Holy Spirit not many days after these."*

Jesus had already told them about "the promise of the Father" in Luke 24:49 and in John 14 to 16. The baptism with the Holy Spirit came about ten days later, at Pentecost (Acts 2).

Waiting is hard. These men were ready to go, but Jesus told them to wait. Sometimes God's first instruction to us is to stop and wait on Him. We cannot do His work without His power, and His timing is always right.

1:6 *So then those who had come together were asking Him, saying, "Lord, are You at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?"*

This is a fair question, and it tells us how the disciples were thinking. The Old Testament prophets promised that God would restore the kingdom to Israel, with the Messiah ruling from David's throne (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Amos 9:11). The disciples believed those promises, and so should we.

Some teach that the disciples were confused here and that God is finished with Israel. I don't believe that. Jesus does not correct the question. He does not say, "There will be no kingdom for Israel." He only tells them the timing is not theirs to know.

1:7 *And He said to them, "It is not yours to know times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority.*

This is the same thing He taught in Matthew 24:36: no one knows the day or the hour. The kingdom will be restored to Israel, but God has set the date, and He has not told us.

This is a warning for every generation. As I wrote in my study of Revelation, people have tried again and again to set dates for Christ's return, and every one of them has been wrong. Our job is not to calculate. Our job is the next verse.

1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to **the** uttermost part of the earth."*

This verse is the outline of the whole book. "You will receive power" when the Holy Spirit comes. Then "you will be witnesses to Me" in Jerusalem (chapters 1 to 7), in all Judea and Samaria (chapters 8 to 12), and to "the uttermost part of the earth" (chapters 13 to 28).

A witness tells what he has seen and heard. The Greek word for witness is "martus," which later gave us the English word "martyr," because so many of these witnesses died for their testimony. Jesus did not say, "You will do witnessing." He said, "You will be witnesses to Me." It is who we are, not only something we do. The power comes from the Spirit. The message is about Jesus. And the field is the whole world, starting right where we live.

1:9 *And having said these things, while they were looking, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him from their eyes.*

Luke 24:50-51 tells us this happened near Bethany, on the Mount of Olives, while Jesus was blessing them.

This is called the Ascension. Jesus did not fade away or turn into a spirit. He went up bodily, in the same resurrected body the disciples had touched. In Scripture, a cloud often shows God's glory and presence, like the cloud that led Israel in the wilderness and the cloud at the Transfiguration (Luke 9:34-35). Jesus went back to the Father, where He now sits at His right hand and speaks to the Father on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25).

1:10-11 *And as they were looking intently into heaven as He was going, then look, two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, "Galilean men, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you watched Him going into heaven."*

The two men "in white clothing" were angels, like the two at the empty tomb (Luke 24:4). Their promise is that this same Jesus "will come in the same manner as you watched Him going into heaven." He left bodily, so He will return bodily. He left visibly, so He will return visibly. He left in the clouds, so He will return with the clouds. Revelation 1:7 says every eye will see Him, and Revelation 19:11 shows Him coming from heaven on a white horse. Zechariah 14:4 even says His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, the same place He left from.

I believe the angels are speaking of His Second Coming, when He returns to the earth at the end of the Tribulation, the time of great trouble on the earth (Matthew 24:21, 29-30), and comes to rule. Before that, as I explained in my study of Revelation, I believe He will come for His church and take us to be with Him before the Tribulation begins (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Whatever view a reader holds on the timing, the angels' point is plain: don't stand around looking up. He is coming back, so get to work.

1:12 *Then they returned to Jerusalem from **the** mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, being a Sabbath's journey **away**.*

The Jewish teachers of that day limited how far a person could walk on the Sabbath, about two thousand cubits, a little over half a mile. Luke uses "a Sabbath's journey" simply to show how close the Mount of Olives is to the city.

Luke 24:52 tells us they went back "with great joy." They had just watched their Lord leave, yet they were full of joy. They knew He was alive, and they knew He had kept every promise so far.

1:13 *And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: both Peter and James and John and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James **son** of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas **son** of James.*

We don't know for sure whose house "the upper room" was in. Some believe it was the same room as the Last Supper, or the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where the church later met (Acts 12:12). Scripture doesn't tell us.

These are the same men named in Luke 6:14-16, minus Judas Iscariot. Simon "the Zealot" may have once belonged to the Zealots, a group of Jewish nationalists who wanted to overthrow Rome by force. Matthew had been a tax collector working for Rome. In Christ, men who would have been enemies became brothers.

1:14 *These all were steadfastly continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication, with **the** women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*

This is the last time Mary, the mother of Jesus, is named in the Bible, and she is right where she should be: praying with the church.

Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him during His ministry (John 7:5). Something changed them, and 1 Corinthians 15:7 tells us what: the risen Jesus appeared to James. His brother James later led the church in Jerusalem and wrote the letter of James, and his brother Jude wrote the letter of Jude. Nothing convinces a skeptic like meeting the risen Lord.

1:15-17 *And in these days Peter, having stood up in the midst of the disciples, said (and the crowd of names together was about a hundred and twenty), "Men, brothers, it was necessary for this Scripture to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold through **the** mouth of David concerning Judas, who became guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained the lot of this ministry.*

This is the same Peter who denied Jesus three times. Jesus restored him (John 21:15-19), and now he leads.

Judas was "numbered with us" and shared in the ministry. That is a sobering thought. A man can be close to Jesus, hear His teaching, see His miracles, and still not belong to Him. Being near the things of God is not the same as knowing God.

1:18-19 *(Now this man indeed acquired a field out of the wages of unrighteousness, and having fallen headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his intestines gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem, so that that field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)*

Luke adds this note for his readers. "Akeldama" means "Field of Blood" in Aramaic, the everyday language of the Jews at that time.

Matthew 27:3-8 says Judas hanged himself and that the chief priests bought the field with the money he threw back. These accounts do not contradict each other. The priests bought the field

with Judas' money, so in a real sense it was his purchase. Many believe Judas hanged himself, and then the rope or branch gave way and his body fell. Scripture gives us two views of the same terrible end.

1:20 *For it has been written in **the** book of Psalms, 'Let his homestead become desolate, and let there not be one dwelling in it,' and, 'May another take his office.'*

Peter quotes two psalms, Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8. David wrote these about those who betrayed and attacked him, and Peter sees them fulfilled in Judas, who betrayed the Son of David.

Peter's point is that Judas' betrayal did not catch God by surprise, and that his place among the twelve should be filled. God's plan was not ruined by one man's sin.

Old Testament links: Psalm 69:25 (quoted); Psalm 109:8 (quoted)

1:21-22 *Therefore it is necessary, of the men who accompanied us during all the time in which the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which He was taken up from us, **for** one of these to become a witness with us of His resurrection."*

These qualifications tell us something about the twelve apostles. They held a unique office. They were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and resurrection, and their testimony became the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). Revelation 21:14 says the names of the twelve apostles are written on the foundations of the New Jerusalem. No one today can meet these qualifications.

1:23 *And they put forward two: Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.*

This is the only place either man is named in Scripture. Both had followed Jesus faithfully for years without ever being mentioned. God sees the faithful people the world never hears about.

1:24-25 *And having prayed, they said, "You, Lord, knower of the hearts of all, show which one of these two You have chosen to take the lot of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."*

Before they chose, they prayed. They did not ask God to bless their choice. They asked Him to show them His.

Judas "turned aside to go to his own place." That is a quiet but heavy phrase. Judas chose his own way, and he went where that choice led. Jesus called him "the son of destruction" in John 17:12.

1:26 *And they gave their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was counted together with the eleven apostles.*

Casting lots was a common way in the Old Testament to let God decide a matter (Leviticus 16:8; Proverbs 16:33). The priests used it, and it was not gambling. It was trusting God with the result after doing everything they could to obey His Word.

This is the last time lots are used in the Bible to make a decision. After Pentecost, the believers are led by the Holy Spirit living in them. Some ask why Matthias is never mentioned again, and

whether the apostles should have waited for Paul. Scripture never says they were wrong. Luke tells us plainly that Matthias "was counted together with the eleven apostles," and that the twelve were complete when the Spirit came.

Chapter 1 Summary

Jesus spent forty days after His resurrection proving He was alive and teaching about the kingdom of God. He promised the Holy Spirit, gave His followers their mission to be His witnesses to the whole earth, and was taken up into heaven. Two angels promised He would return the same way He left.

The believers went back to Jerusalem and gave themselves to prayer. Peter, restored after his denial, led them in choosing Matthias to replace Judas, so the twelve would be complete when the Spirit came.

People and Places in Chapter 1

Theophilus (1:1): The man Luke wrote both his Gospel and Acts to. His name means "friend of God" (or loved by God). He may have been a Roman official or a new believer.

The Mount of Olives (1:12): A hill just east of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley. Jesus ascended from here, and Zechariah 14:4 says the Lord's feet will stand on it when He returns.

The Upper Room (1:13): The room in Jerusalem where the apostles were staying and praying while they waited for the Spirit.

Judas Iscariot (1:16-20, 25): One of the twelve, who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and then died in the field bought with that money.

Akeldama (1:19): An Aramaic name meaning "Field of Blood," the field where Judas died.

Matthias (1:23, 26): A follower of Jesus from the time of John's baptism, chosen by lot to take Judas' place among the twelve apostles.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. Have you ever had to wait for something you really wanted? What was the hardest part?

2. How long did Jesus show Himself to the apostles after His resurrection, and what did He talk about? (1:3)

3. What did Jesus tell the apostles to wait for in Jerusalem? (1:4-5)

4. What question did the disciples ask Jesus, and how did He answer? (1:6-7)

5. Where did Jesus say His followers would be His witnesses? (1:8)

6. What did the two angels promise about Jesus' return? (1:11)

7. What were the believers doing while they waited in the upper room? (1:14)

8. What did a man need in order to replace Judas as an apostle? (1:21-22)

9. Jesus said His followers would be His witnesses. Who is in your "Jerusalem," the people closest to you who need to hear about Him?

10. How does knowing Jesus will return bodily and visibly change the way you want to live this week?

Chapter 2: Pentecost

Scripture: The Holy Spirit Comes; Peter's Sermon; The First Church

2:1-13 And when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled, they were all with one accord together. And suddenly ***there*** came out of heaven a sound as of a rushing violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And ***there*** appeared to them tongues being distributed, as of fire, and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with ***the*** Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other tongues, just as the Spirit was giving them to speak forth. Now ***there*** were Jews dwelling in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation of those under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together and was confounded, because each one was hearing them speaking in his own language. And they were all amazed and were marveling, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how do we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and those inhabiting Mesopotamia, both Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, both Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya that ***are*** around Cyrene, and the visiting Romans, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them speaking in our own tongues the great things of God." And they were all amazed and were perplexed, saying one to another, "What would this mean?" But others, mocking, were saying, "They are filled with new wine."

2:14-36 But Peter, having stood up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke forth to them, "Jewish men and all you who inhabit Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my declarations. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is ***the*** third hour of the day; but this is that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel: 'And it will be in the last days, says God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams; and even upon My male slaves and upon My female slaves in those days I will pour out of My Spirit, and they will prophesy. And I will give wonders in heaven above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of ***the*** Lord comes. And it will be ***that*** everyone who calls upon the name of ***the*** Lord will be saved.' Israelite men, hear these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves also know, this ***One***, delivered up by the determined plan and foreknowledge of God, you took, and through lawless hands, having crucified ***Him***, you killed; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible ***for*** Him to be held by it. For David says concerning Him, 'I was foreseeing the Lord before me continually, because He is at my right ***hand***, that I may not be shaken. Because of this my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced, and moreover my flesh also will dwell in hope; because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor will You give Your Holy One to see decay. You have made known to me paths of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence.' Men, brothers, it is permitted to speak with boldness to you concerning the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is among us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn to him with an oath that out of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit upon his throne, having foreseen ***this***, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was

not left to Hades, nor did His flesh see decay. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we all are witnesses. Therefore, having been exalted by the right ***hand*** of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right ***hand***, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."' Therefore let all ***the*** house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

2:37-47 And having heard ***this***, they were pierced in the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "What shall we do, men, brothers?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all those far off, as many as ***the*** Lord our God will call to Himself." And with many other words he was testifying and exhorting, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." So then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and ***there*** were added on that day about three thousand souls. And they were steadfastly continuing in the teaching of the apostles and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those believing were together and had all things in common; and they were selling the possessions and the goods and dividing them to all, as anyone had need. And every day, steadfastly continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were partaking of food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to the church every day those who were being saved.

Chapter 2 Preview

Ten days after Jesus ascended, the promise came. On the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell on the believers with the sound of a violent wind and tongues like fire. They began speaking in languages they had never learned, and a crowd of Jews from all over the world heard the wonderful works of God in their own languages.

Peter, the man who had denied Jesus less than two months before, stood up and preached the first sermon of the church. He showed from the Scriptures that Jesus, the man they crucified, was raised from the dead and is both Lord and Christ. About three thousand people believed that day. The chapter ends with a picture of the first church: learning, praying, eating together, sharing, and growing every day.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1 *And when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled, they were all with one accord together.*

"When the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled." Pentecost was one of the three great feasts when Jewish men came to Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16). In the Old Testament it is called the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15-21). The name Pentecost comes from the Greek word for "fiftieth,"

because it fell fifty days after Passover. It was a harvest festival, when the first loaves from the wheat harvest were offered to God.

God's timing is perfect. Jesus died at Passover, as the Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). Now the Spirit came at Pentecost, the feast of firstfruits, and the first great harvest of souls came in.

They had been praying and waiting, just as Jesus told them.

2:2-3 *And suddenly **there** came out of heaven a sound as of a rushing violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And **there** appeared to them tongues being distributed, as of fire, and it sat upon each one of them.*

Luke is careful with his words. It was not a wind but a sound "as of a rushing violent wind." It was not fire but something that looked "as of fire." In both Hebrew and Greek, the same word can mean breath, wind, or spirit (John 3:8). Luke uses a related word here. Fire often shows God's presence in Scripture, like the burning bush and the pillar of fire. John the Baptist had said Jesus would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). Notice the fire rested on "each one" of them. The Spirit was not given only to the apostles but to every believer in the room.

2:4 *And they were all filled with **the** Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other tongues, just as the Spirit was giving them to speak forth.*

A "tongue" here means a language. The next verses make that plain.

What Jesus promised in 1:5 had now happened. The Spirit who had come upon certain people for certain tasks in the Old Testament now lived in every believer. This is a turning point in history. From this day on, the church is the dwelling place of God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).

2:5 *Now **there** were Jews dwelling in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation of those under heaven.*

These "devout men" were Jews by birth and converts to Judaism who had come for the feast. Many had been born and raised in other countries, scattered by earlier exiles and by trade, and they spoke the languages of the places they lived. Some had come back to live in Jerusalem. God had gathered an international crowd for this exact day.

2:6-8 *And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together and was confounded, because each one was hearing them speaking in his own language. And they were all amazed and were marveling, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how do we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?*

Galileans were seen as plain, uneducated country people with a strong accent (Matthew 26:73). How could they speak all these languages?

This tells us plainly what the gift of tongues was at Pentecost. These were real human languages, understood by people who spoke them from birth. It was not unknown speech. The miracle was in the speaking, and the people heard their own native languages.

2:9-11 *Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and those inhabiting Mesopotamia, both Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, both Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya that **are** around Cyrene, and the visiting Romans, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them speaking in our own tongues the great things of God."*

Luke lists the nations represented, starting in the east (Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia), moving through Judea and Asia Minor, down to Egypt and North Africa, across to Rome, and ending with Crete and Arabia. Both Jews by birth and "proselytes" were there. A proselyte was a Gentile who had converted to Judaism, been circumcised, and taken up the Law of Moses.

What did they hear? "The great things of God." At the Tower of Babel, God confused man's language and scattered the nations because of their pride (Genesis 11:1-9). At Pentecost, God gave languages to gather people from the nations to Himself. Babel divided. Pentecost united. And Revelation 7:9 shows the finish: a great crowd from every nation, tribe, people and tongue, standing before the throne.

2:12-13 *And they were all amazed and were perplexed, saying one to another, "What would this mean?" But others, mocking, were saying, "They are filled with new wine."*

"What would this mean?" is the right question, and Peter is about to answer it.

This is the way it has always been. When God moves, some people ask honest questions, and some people make fun of what they don't understand. We should not be surprised when the same thing happens today.

2:14-15 *But Peter, having stood up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke forth to them, "Jewish men and all you who inhabit Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my declarations. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is **the** third hour of the day;*

First, Peter answered the mockers. The daylight hours were counted from sunrise, about 6 a.m., so the third hour was about 9 in the morning. On a feast day, devout Jews would not eat or drink until after the morning time of prayer.

Think about who is speaking. Seven weeks earlier, Peter was too afraid to admit to a servant girl that he knew Jesus. Now he stands before thousands and boldly preaches Christ. That is what the Holy Spirit does in a person.

2:16-18 *but this is that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel: 'And it will be in the last days, says God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams; and even upon My male slaves and upon My female slaves in those days I will pour out of My Spirit, and they will prophesy.*

Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came on a few chosen people: prophets, priests, kings, and judges. Moses once said he wished all the Lord's people were prophets (Numbers 11:29). At Pentecost, that wish came true. The Spirit is now given to every believer, regardless of age, sex, or social standing.

"The last days" began at Pentecost. The New Testament treats the whole time between Christ's first coming and His return as the last days (Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 John 2:18). We are living in them now.

Bible teachers do not all read this the same way. Some believe Pentecost fulfilled every word of Joel 2:28-32, and others believe Pentecost was only like what Joel saw, with the whole promise still waiting for Israel. I believe Pentecost was a first fulfillment, and the full fulfillment comes when Jesus returns and Israel is restored, so God's promise to Israel in Joel still stands.

Old Testament links: Joel 2:28-29 (quoted)

2:19-21 *And I will give wonders in heaven above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of **the** Lord comes. And it will be **that** everyone who calls upon the name of **the** Lord will be saved.'*

Some of Joel's words were fulfilled at Pentecost. Others were not. The sun did not go dark that morning. I believe these signs in the sky are still future. Jesus spoke of the same signs right before His return (Matthew 24:29-30), and Revelation 6:12 describes the sun becoming black and the moon like blood when the sixth seal is opened, one of the judgments John saw in his vision of the end times. Pentecost was the start of Joel's prophecy, and the Day of the Lord, the time of God's judgment on the world during the Tribulation and at Christ's return, will finish it.

In the meantime, the offer stands: "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." Paul quotes the same verse in Romans 10:13. That is the heart of Peter's message, and the heart of ours.

Old Testament links: Joel 2:30-32 (quoted)

2:22 *Israelite men, hear these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves also know,*

Now Peter turns to Jesus, "a man attested to you by God." These things happened right there among them, "just as you yourselves also know." Peter did not ask them to believe in something that happened far away. They had seen it with their own eyes.

2:23 *this **One**, delivered up by the determined plan and foreknowledge of God, you took, and through lawless hands, having crucified **Him**, you killed;*

This is one of the most important verses in Acts. Jesus was "delivered up by the determined plan and foreknowledge of God." The cross was not an accident. God planned it before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20).

But in the same breath Peter says the men who did it were guilty. God's plan did not take away their responsibility. Scripture holds both of these truths together: God is in full control, and people are fully responsible for what they choose. We may not be able to fully explain how both

are true, but the Bible teaches both, and so we believe both. "Lawless hands" here means the hands of men without the Law, the Roman soldiers who carried out the execution.

2:24 *whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible **for** Him to be held by it.*

Jesus is the One "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death." This is the turning point of every sermon in Acts. Men killed Jesus, but God raised Him. Death could not keep the Author of life (Acts 3:15). Jesus had no sin of His own, so death had no claim on Him.

2:25-28 *For David says concerning Him, 'I was foreseeing the Lord before me continually, because He is at my right **hand**, that I may not be shaken. Because of this my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced, and moreover my flesh also will dwell in hope; because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor will You give Your Holy One to see decay. You have made known to me paths of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence.'*

Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11. Hades is the Greek word for the place of the dead, the same as Sheol in Hebrew. David trusted that God would not leave him there.

Peter is building a case from Scripture, the way a lawyer builds a case in court. He uses the Bible his listeners already believed to show them who Jesus is.

Old Testament links: Psalm 16:8-11 (quoted)

2:29-31 *Men, brothers, it is permitted to speak with boldness to you concerning the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is among us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn to him with an oath that out of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit upon his throne, having foreseen **this**, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left to Hades, nor did His flesh see decay.*

Peter explains the psalm. David could not have been talking only about himself, because David died, was buried, and his tomb was "among us to this day." Everyone in Jerusalem knew where David's tomb was. His body had decayed.

God's oath to David is found in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 and Psalm 132:11. "Christ" comes from the Greek word that translates the Hebrew "Messiah"; both mean "Anointed One." Jesus' body was not left in the grave, and it never decayed.

Old Testament links: Psalm 16:10 (quoted); Psalm 132:11 (quoted); 1 Kings 2:10 (alluded to); 2 Samuel 7:12-13 (alluded to)

2:32-33 *This Jesus God has raised up, of which we all are witnesses. Therefore, having been exalted by the right **hand** of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you now see and hear.*

The 120 believers had seen the risen Jesus. They were living proof.

Then Peter ties it all together. The sound, the fire, and the languages were proof that Jesus is alive and reigning in heaven. The Spirit's coming is the evidence of the Son's ascension.

Old Testament links: Joel 2:28 (alluded to)

2:34-35 *For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right **hand**, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."'*

Peter quotes one more Psalm, Psalm 110:1. Jesus used this same verse to show that the Messiah is more than a son of David (Luke 20:41-44). He is David's Lord.

Jesus is seated now, and He is waiting until His enemies are put under His feet. That day is coming. Revelation 19 shows Him riding out to defeat every enemy, and 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 says the last enemy to be destroyed is death itself.

Old Testament links: Psalm 110:1 (quoted)

2:36 *Therefore let all **the** house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."*

"Lord" means He is God, with full authority over everything. "Christ" means He is the promised Messiah, the King of Israel. The crowd had rejected Him and handed Him over to death. God reversed their verdict. Peter does not soften it. He puts the truth plainly in front of them, because they could not be saved until they saw their sin.

2:37 *And having heard **this**, they were pierced in the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "What shall we do, men, brothers?"*

They were "pierced in the heart." The Holy Spirit convicted them, just as Jesus said He would (John 16:8).

This is what real conviction looks like. It does not stop at feeling bad. It leads to a question: what do I do now? Peter's sermon was not clever or polished. It was true, it was full of Scripture, and it was about Jesus. That is the kind of preaching the Spirit uses.

2:38 *And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

"Repent" means to change your mind and turn around. These people had rejected Jesus. Now they had to turn from that and turn to Him. Baptism was the public step that showed they had changed sides. In that day, being baptized in the name of Jesus meant openly identifying with the man the city had just crucified. It was not a small thing.

This verse plainly links repentance and baptism with forgiveness, and Christians have read it in different ways. I want to be honest about what it says. I also believe we must let the rest of Scripture help us understand it. Throughout Acts, forgiveness comes through faith in Jesus. Peter himself says everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness (10:43). Paul says everyone who believes is freed (13:38-39). The jailer is told, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be

saved" (16:31). In Acts 10, the Gentiles receive the Spirit before they are baptized. I believe salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9), and that baptism is the first step of obedience that follows saving faith. It is not optional, and in the early church it came right away. But it is the believer's response to God's grace, not the thing that earns it.

2:39 *For the promise is to you and to your children and to all those far off, as many as **the** Lord our God will call to Himself."*

The promise of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit was not just for that crowd. It was for their children and for people far away, which would include the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:13, 17). It is for "as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." God calls, and people respond. That promise reaches all the way to you and me today.

2:40 *And with many other words he was testifying and exhorting, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."*

Luke tells us Peter said much more than what is written here. "Perverse" means crooked or twisted. It is the same word the Greek Old Testament uses about Israel in Deuteronomy 32:5. This was the generation that had rejected its Messiah, and Peter urged each person to step out of it and be rescued. Salvation is personal. Each one had to decide for himself.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 32:5 (alluded to)

2:41 *So then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and **there** were added on that day about three thousand souls.*

Notice the order: first they received the message, then they were baptized.

Three thousand people in one day, from one sermon, preached by a fisherman. When God gave the Law at Sinai, about three thousand people died because of the golden calf (Exodus 32:28). At Pentecost, about three thousand people were given life. As Paul wrote, the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

2:42 *And they were steadfastly continuing in the teaching of the apostles and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers.*

This verse shows us what the first church did. They were "steadfastly continuing in" four things.

"The teaching of the apostles." They wanted to learn. Today we have the apostles' teaching in the New Testament. "Fellowship." The Greek word is "koinonia," meaning sharing life together. "The breaking of the bread." This likely includes both shared meals and the Lord's Supper, which they took to remember Jesus' death (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). "The prayers." They prayed together, often and on purpose.

This is still the pattern for a healthy church today. A church that does these four things faithfully will grow, because God grows it.

2:43 *And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.*

The word "fear" here means a holy fear, a deep respect for God. People knew God was at work. These miracles confirmed the apostles' message, the same way Jesus' miracles had confirmed His (Hebrews 2:3-4).

Christians today hold different views on whether the sign gifts, such as tongues, healings, and miracles, continue in the same way. Some believe they ended with the apostles once the New Testament was complete. Others believe they continue today. Many hold a middle view: God still heals and works miracles when He chooses, but the apostles held a unique place. Faithful believers hold each of these views. What every view agrees on is that God has not changed, and that He still answers prayer.

2:44-45 *And all those believing were together and had all things in common; and they were selling the possessions and the goods and dividing them to all, as anyone had need.*

Having "all things in common" was not forced. No one made them do it. It was voluntary love, and Acts 5:4 makes that clear when Peter tells Ananias his land was his own to keep or sell. Many of these new believers had come from far away for the feast and stayed on in Jerusalem to learn, so the needs were real. When God's Spirit fills people, they become generous. They see their things as tools to bless others. That is a challenge to every one of us.

2:46-47 *And every day, steadfastly continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were partaking of food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to the church every day those who were being saved.*

The first believers did not leave Judaism. They still worshiped at the temple, because Jesus is the Messiah the temple pointed to. But they also gathered in homes. Big gatherings and small gatherings both mattered.

Notice who added to the church: "the Lord." The church grows because God saves people. Our part is to be faithful in the things of verse 42, to love each other, and to tell others about Jesus. God does the rest.

Chapter 2 Summary

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came on the believers just as Jesus promised. They spoke in real languages they had never learned, and Jews from many nations heard about God's mighty deeds in their own languages.

Peter preached that Jesus, whom the people crucified, was raised from the dead by God and is now both Lord and Christ, and that He had poured out the Spirit. The crowd was convicted and asked what to do. About three thousand repented, believed, and were baptized. The new church devoted itself to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer, and the Lord added to their number every day.

People and Places in Chapter 2

Pentecost (2:1): The Feast of Weeks, a harvest festival held fifty days after Passover. One of three feasts when Jewish men came to Jerusalem.

Joel (2:16-21): An Old Testament prophet who foretold the outpouring of God's Spirit on all mankind and the signs before the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:28-32).

David (2:25-35): Israel's great king and a prophet. Peter uses two of his psalms (16 and 110) to show that the Messiah would rise from the dead and sit at God's right hand.

Proselytes (2:10): Gentiles who had converted to Judaism, been circumcised, and taken up the Law of Moses.

The Nations (2:9-11): Jews and converts from across the known world, from Parthia in the east to Rome in the west and Egypt and Libya in the south.

I have tried to speak a language I did not know, and I failed at it. On our trips to Baja, the language barrier was real. That makes Acts 2 even more amazing to me. God made sure everyone heard the gospel in their own language.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. Have you ever tried to speak or understand a language you didn't know? What was it like?

2. What did the believers hear and see when the Holy Spirit came? (2:2-3)

3. How did the crowd know the believers were speaking real languages? (2:6-8)

4. What did some people in the crowd accuse the believers of, and how did Peter answer? (2:13-15)

5. Which Old Testament prophet did Peter quote, and what had he promised? (2:16-18)

6. According to Peter, who was responsible for Jesus' death, and what was God's part in it? (2:23)

7. What did the people ask when they were "pierced in the heart," and how did Peter answer? (2:37-38)

8. What four things did the first believers devote themselves to? (2:42)

9. The Spirit turned a fearful Peter into a bold witness. Where do you need that kind of boldness right now?

10. Which of the four marks of the early church in verse 42 is strongest in your life, and which needs the most growth?

Chapter 3: Healing at the Beautiful Gate

Scripture: A Lame Man Healed; Peter Preaches in Solomon's Portico

3:1-10 Now Peter and John were going up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth ***hour***. And a certain man, being lame from his mother's womb, was being carried, whom they were placing every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those going into the temple; who, having seen Peter and John about to enter into the temple, was asking alms. And Peter, having looked intently at him, with John, said, "Look at us." And he was giving heed to them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have; but what I have, this I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise up and walk." And having taken him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened. And leaping up, he stood and was walking, and he entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. And they were recognizing him, that this was the one who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

3:11-26 Now as the lame man who had been healed was holding on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch called Solomon's, greatly amazed. And Peter, having seen ***it***, answered the people, "Israelite men, why do you marvel at this? Or why do you look intently at us, as if by our own power or godliness we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release ***Him***. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a man, a murderer, to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised up from ***the*** dead, of which we are witnesses. And on the faith of His name, this ***man*** whom you see and know, His name has strengthened; and the faith which ***is*** through Him has given him this complete soundness before you all. And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as also your rulers ***did***. But God has thus fulfilled the things which He foretold through ***the*** mouth of all His prophets, ***that*** the Christ ***would*** suffer. Repent therefore and turn again, so that your sins may be blotted out, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must indeed receive until ***the*** times of restoration of all things, of which God spoke through ***the*** mouth of all His holy prophets from ***the*** age. For Moses indeed said to the fathers, '***The*** Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers; Him you shall listen to in all things, whatever He may speak to you. And it will be ***that*** every soul which does not listen to that prophet will be utterly destroyed from among the people.' And indeed all the prophets from Samuel and those in succession, as many as have spoken, also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His servant Jesus, sent Him, blessing you in turning away each ***of you*** from your wickednesses."

Chapter 3 Preview

Peter and John go up to the temple to pray and meet a man who has been lame since birth, begging at the gate. He asks for money. Peter gives him something far better: healing in the name of Jesus Christ. The man jumps up, walks into the temple, and praises God.

A crowd gathers, and Peter uses the moment to preach. He tells the people that this man was healed by faith in the name of Jesus, the very Jesus they had rejected. Peter calls them to repent so that their sins may be wiped away, and he points ahead to the day when God will send Jesus back and restore all things, just as the prophets promised.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1 *Now Peter and John were going up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth* ***hour****.*

Counting from sunrise, "the ninth hour" was about 3 in the afternoon. This was the time of the evening sacrifice, when many Jews came to the temple to pray.

Peter and John had been partners for years. They were fishing partners (Luke 5:10), and Jesus sent them together to prepare the Passover (Luke 22:8). Now they serve together again. The apostles still kept the regular times of prayer. Being filled with the Spirit did not make them careless about praying. It made them more faithful.

3:2 *And a certain man, being lame from his mother's womb, was being carried, whom they were placing every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those going into the temple;*

Acts 4:22 tells us this man was more than forty years old. He had never walked a single step in his life.

The gate was a good place to beg. People coming to worship were often thinking about giving to the poor, which the Law commanded (Deuteronomy 15:7-11). Scripture doesn't tell us exactly which gate this was. Many believe it was the large bronze gate on the east side that led into the Court of the Women.

Jesus taught in the temple many times, and this man may well have been sitting at that gate during those years. Yet God chose this day to heal him, so that the healing would point the whole crowd to the risen Christ.

3:3-5 *who, having seen Peter and John about to enter into the temple, was asking alms. And Peter, having looked intently at him, with John, said, "Look at us." And he was giving heed to them, expecting to receive something from them.*

He expected a few coins. He had no idea what was coming. That is often how God works with us. We come to Him asking for small things, and He has something far greater in mind (Ephesians 3:20).

3:6 *But Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have; but what I have, this I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise up and walk."*

The early church did not have much money, but it had power. Peter did not heal by his own power or his own name. He spoke "in the name of Jesus," meaning by Jesus' authority, as His representative. A name in Scripture stands for the person himself. The authority belonged to Jesus.

This verse makes me ask a hard question. Many churches today have plenty of silver and gold. Do we still have what Peter had? Money can feed a man for a day. Only Jesus can change his life forever.

3:7-8 *And having taken him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened. And leaping up, he stood and was walking, and he entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God.*

Luke was a doctor (Colossians 4:14), and he notes exactly what was healed: feet and ankles strengthened. This healing was complete and instant. A man who had never walked did not need to learn how. He did not need therapy. He leaped.

Isaiah 35:6 says that in the days of the Messiah, "the lame will leap like the deer." Here it is, right at the temple gate. And the man knew where the credit belonged. He praised God.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 35:6 (alluded to)

3:9-10 *And all the people saw him walking and praising God. And they were recognizing him, that this was the one who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*

There was no question who this man was or what had happened to him. Everyone in the city had walked past him. That is why this miracle opened such a door for the Gospel. A changed life is hard to argue with.

3:11 *Now as the lame man who had been healed was holding on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch called Solomon's, greatly amazed.*

A portico was a long covered walkway lined with columns. Solomon's portico ran along the east side of the temple court. Jesus had walked and taught there (John 10:23), and the early believers met there often (Acts 5:12).

Picture this man, clinging to the two apostles, not wanting to let go. He had been healed, and he wanted to stay close to the men who had brought him the name of Jesus.

3:12 *And Peter, having seen **it**, answered the people, "Israelite men, why do you marvel at this? Or why do you look intently at us, as if by our own power or godliness we had made him walk?*

Peter would not take the credit. He could have built a following around himself that day. Instead he turned every eye away from himself and toward Jesus. That is the mark of a true servant of

God. In Acts 14:14-15, Paul and Barnabas did the same thing when the people of Lystra tried to worship them.

3:13 *The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release* ***Him****.*

Peter is careful to say that this is the same God Israel had always worshiped. Faith in Jesus was not a new religion. Jesus was the fulfillment of the old promises.

The title "servant" points back to Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12, where the Servant of the Lord suffers for the sins of the people and is then lifted up and greatly exalted. Luke 23:13-22 shows how Pilate wanted to let Him go.

Old Testament links: Exodus 3:6 (alluded to)

3:14-15 *But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a man, a murderer, to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised up from* ***the*** *dead, of which we are witnesses.*

The murderer they asked for was Barabbas (Luke 23:18-19).

Look at the contrast. They asked for a man who took life, and they killed the One who gives life. "Author of life" can also be translated "Prince of life." Jesus is the source of all life (John 1:4), and yet they killed Him. But death could not hold Him.

3:16 *And on the faith of His name, this* ***man*** *whom you see and know, His name has strengthened; and the faith which* ***is*** *through Him has given him this complete soundness before you all.*

Even the faith came "through Him." Faith is not a power we make up on our own. It is trust placed in Jesus, and it rests on what He has done. The power was in the One trusted, not in the strength of the faith. A little faith in a great Savior does great things.

3:17-18 *And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as also your rulers* ***did****. But God has thus fulfilled the things which He foretold through* ***the*** *mouth of all His prophets,* ***that*** *the Christ* ***would*** *suffer.*

Then Peter softens his tone. To have "acted in ignorance" means they did not fully understand who Jesus was. Jesus Himself prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Ignorance did not make them innocent. But it did mean there was still room for mercy. Paul said the same about himself: he was shown mercy because he acted ignorantly in unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13). And God used even their sin to fulfill what all the prophets had said: that "The Christ would suffer." The cross was always God's plan.

3:19 *Repent therefore and turn again, so that your sins may be blotted out, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*

To repent is to change your mind. To turn again is to turn around and come back to God. Both go together.

"Blotted out" is a picture of erasing writing from a page. In that day, ink on papyrus could be sponged off, and writing scratched into a wax tablet could be smoothed over, as if it had never been there. That is what God does with the sins of those who turn to Him (Isaiah 43:25; Psalm 103:12). The record is gone.

Then come "times of refreshing" from the presence of the Lord. God's forgiveness brings rest and new life to the soul, like cool water on a hot day.

3:20-21 *and He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must indeed receive until **the** times of restoration of all things, of which God spoke through **the** mouth of all His holy prophets from **the** age.*

This is a key passage about the future. Jesus is in heaven now. He will stay there until the appointed time, and then He will come back. When He does, He will restore all things, just as the prophets promised. The Old Testament prophets spoke of a day when Israel would be gathered back, the Messiah would reign from Jerusalem, and the whole earth would be at peace (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:1-10; Ezekiel 37:21-28; Amos 9:11-15).

Peter connects Christ's return with Israel turning to Him. Paul teaches the same thing in Romans 11:25-27: a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, and then "all Israel will be saved." I believe God still has a future for the nation of Israel, and that this restoration will come when Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation to set up His kingdom on earth, as Revelation 20 describes.

3:22-23 *For Moses indeed said to the fathers, '**The** Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers; Him you shall listen to in all things, whatever He may speak to you. And it will be **that** every soul which does not listen to that prophet will be utterly destroyed from among the people.'*

Peter quotes Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. The Jews were waiting for this Prophet (John 1:21; 6:14). Peter says Jesus is that Prophet. Like Moses, Jesus delivered His people, spoke God's words face to face, and brought a covenant. But Jesus is far greater than Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6). The warning is serious. To refuse to listen to Jesus is to refuse God.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 18:15 (quoted); Deuteronomy 18:19 (quoted); Leviticus 23:29 (alluded to)

3:24 *And indeed all the prophets from Samuel and those in succession, as many as have spoken, also foretold these days.*

It was not only Moses. Samuel anointed David, and God's promise to David pointed to the Messiah (2 Samuel 7:12-16). From that time on, prophet after prophet looked ahead to Jesus. The whole Old Testament points to Him (Luke 24:27, 44).

3:25 *You are sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed.'*

Peter reminds his Jewish listeners of who they are. They were the heirs of God's promises, including the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 22:18).

That "seed" is ultimately Christ (Galatians 3:16). God's plan was always to bless the whole world through Abraham's descendant. The Jews were given the promise first, and through Jesus that blessing would go out to every nation, just as Acts 1:8 said.

Old Testament links: Genesis 22:18 (quoted); Genesis 12:3 (quoted)

3:26 *To you first, God, having raised up His servant Jesus, sent Him, blessing you in turning away each* ***of you*** *from your wickednesses."*

Israel had the first opportunity to hear and receive the Messiah (Romans 1:16).

This is how Peter ends his sermon. The greatest blessing is not money, health, or even a healed body like the man at the gate. The greatest blessing is being turned away from our sin and back to God. That blessing is still offered to everyone who will receive it.

Chapter 3 Summary

Peter and John healed a man who had been lame from birth, in the name of Jesus Christ. The man leaped and praised God, and a crowd gathered in Solomon's portico.

Peter gave all the credit to Jesus. He told the people they had disowned the Holy and Righteous One and killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. Peter called them to repent and return to God so their sins would be wiped away, and he pointed to the day when Jesus will return from heaven and restore all things, as the prophets promised.

People and Places in Chapter 3

The Beautiful Gate (3:2, 10): A gate of the temple where the lame man begged. Its exact location is not certain; many believe it was the great bronze gate on the east side, leading into the Court of the Women.

Solomon's portico (3:11): A long covered walkway with columns along the east side of the temple court. Jesus taught here, and the early church gathered here.

Pilate (3:13): Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea who sentenced Jesus to be crucified even though he wanted to release Him.

Barabbas (3:14): A murderer and rebel the crowd asked Pilate to release instead of Jesus (Luke 23:18-19).

The Prophet Like Moses (3:22-23): The coming Prophet Moses promised in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. Peter shows that Jesus is that Prophet.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. Think of a time you asked for something small and received something much better. What happened?

2. What time of day did Peter and John go to the temple, and why? (3:1)

3. What did the lame man expect from Peter and John, and what did he receive? (3:3-6)

4. What did the man do right after he was healed? (3:8)

5. How did Peter answer the crowd's amazement? Who did he give credit to? (3:12-13)

6. What did Peter say made the man well? (3:16)

7. What did Peter tell the people to do so their sins would be wiped away? (3:19)

8. What will happen when God sends Jesus back from heaven? (3:20-21)

9. Peter said, "what I have, this I give to you." What has God given you that you can share with someone who needs it?

10. Peter refused to take credit for what God did. In what areas of your life are you tempted to take the credit that belongs to God?

Chapter 4: Bold Before the Council

Scripture: Peter and John Arrested; The Believers Pray; All Things in Common

4:1-22 And while they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from ***the*** dead. And they laid hands on them and put ***them*** in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed; and the number of the men became about five thousand. And it came to pass on the next day ***that*** their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and as many as were of high-priestly descent. And having placed them in the midst, they were inquiring, "In what power or in what name did you do this?" Then Peter, having been filled with ***the*** Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we today are being examined concerning a good deed ***done*** to a sick man, by what ***means*** this ***man*** has been saved, let it be known to you all and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from ***the*** dead, in Him this ***man*** stands before you sound. This is the stone which was treated with contempt by you, the builders, which has become ***the*** head of ***the*** corner. And ***there*** is not salvation in any other; for neither is ***there*** another name under heaven which has been given among men by which we must be saved." Now seeing the boldness of Peter and John, and having perceived that they were unlettered and ordinary men, they were marveling; and they were recognizing them, that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say against ***it***. But having commanded them to go outside the Council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do to these men? For indeed, that a notable sign has come to pass through them ***is*** evident to all those inhabiting Jerusalem, and we are not able to deny ***it***. But so that it may not spread further among the people, let us threaten them with a threat to speak no longer in this name to any man." And having called them, they commanded them not to speak at all nor to teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answering said to them, "Whether it is righteous before God to listen to you rather than to God, you judge; for we are not able not to speak the things which we have seen and heard." And having further threatened ***them***, they let them go, finding nothing ***as to*** how they might punish them, on account of the people, because all were glorifying God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing had taken place was more than forty years old.

4:23-31 And having been let go, they came to their own ***people*** and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And having heard ***it***, they lifted up ***their*** voice to God with one accord and said, "Master, You ***are*** the God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that ***is*** in them, who through ***the*** mouth of Your servant David said, 'Why did ***the*** nations rage, and ***the*** peoples devise vain things? The kings of the earth took ***their*** stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.' For truly there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with ***the*** nations and ***the*** peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your plan determined beforehand to happen. And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to Your slaves to speak

Your word with all boldness, in that You stretch out Your hand for healing, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place in which they were assembled was shaken; and they were all filled with ***the*** Holy Spirit, and were speaking the word of God with boldness.

4:32-37 And of the multitude of those who had believed, the heart and the soul was one; and not one was saying that anything of his possessions was his own, but all things were common to them. And with great power the apostles were giving the testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. For neither was anyone needy among them; for as many as were owners of lands or houses, selling ***them***, were bringing the proceeds of the things being sold and were laying ***them*** at the feet of the apostles; and distribution was being made to each, as anyone had need. And Joses, who was surnamed Barnabas by the apostles (which is, being translated, Son of Encouragement), a Levite, a Cypriot by birth, having a field, sold ***it*** and brought the money and laid ***it*** at the feet of the apostles.

Chapter 4 Preview

The healing at the Beautiful Gate and Peter's sermon get the attention of the temple leaders. Peter and John are arrested and held overnight, but the message has already done its work: the number of believing men grows to about five thousand.

The next day the two fishermen stand before the Sanhedrin, the same Council that condemned Jesus. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter tells them plainly that the lame man was healed by the name of Jesus, the stone they rejected, and that there is salvation in no other name. The Council threatens them and lets them go. The believers respond with prayer, not for safety, but for boldness, and the place where they are gathered is shaken. The chapter closes with the church sharing everything it has, and with a man named Barnabas.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1-2 *And while they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from* ***the*** *dead.*

"The captain of the temple" was the officer in charge of keeping order in the temple, second in rank to the high priest.

The Sadducees were a powerful Jewish party made up mostly of wealthy priestly families. They controlled the temple. They held the five books of Moses above all other Scripture and rejected the traditions of the Pharisees, and they did not believe in the resurrection, angels, or spirits (Acts 23:8). So they were "greatly disturbed" that the apostles were proclaiming "in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." Every time the apostles said "God raised Him," they were saying the Sadducees were wrong.

4:3 *And they laid hands on them and put **them** in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.*

The two men went to the temple at about 3 in the afternoon (3:1). By the time the healing, the crowd, and the sermon were over, the day was almost gone. Later Jewish law forbade trials at night, and it was likely already the custom, so they waited until morning. Jesus had warned them this would happen (Luke 21:12).

4:4 *But many of those who had heard the word believed; and the number of the men became about five thousand.*

The leaders could lock up the messengers, but they could not lock up the message (2 Timothy 2:9).

The Greek word Luke uses here means men, not people in general, so the full number of believers, counting women and children, was likely much larger. Just weeks earlier, there were about 120.

4:5-6 *And it came to pass on the next day **that** their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and as many as were of high-priestly descent.*

These "rulers and elders and scribes" made up the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high council of about seventy members, plus the high priest who led it. It ruled on religious matters and many civil matters, under Roman oversight. The scribes were experts in the Law of Moses.

Annas had been high priest years earlier, and he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest at that time (John 18:13). Annas still held great power, and people still called him high priest. We know nothing certain about John and Alexander. This was the same group that had condemned Jesus only a few weeks before.

4:7 *And having placed them in the midst, they were inquiring, "In what power or in what name did you do this?"*

They did not deny the miracle. They couldn't. The man was standing right there (4:14). Their question was about authority. Who gave these uneducated fishermen the right to do this in the temple? Without knowing it, they gave Peter the perfect opening.

4:8-10 *Then Peter, having been filled with **the** Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we today are being examined concerning a good deed **done** to a sick man, by what **means** this **man** has been saved, let it be known to you all and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from **the** dead, in Him this **man** stands before you sound.*

Jesus had promised that when His followers were brought before rulers, the Spirit would give them the words to say (Luke 12:11-12). Here that promise comes true.

Peter's answer is sharp. He told the most powerful men in the nation to their faces that they had killed the Messiah and God had overruled them. Only weeks before, he was afraid of a servant girl.

4:11 *This is the stone which was treated with contempt by you, the builders, which has become* ***the*** *head of* ***the*** *corner.*

Peter quotes Psalm 118:22. The cornerstone was the most important stone in a building. Everything else was lined up with it.

The builders were the religious leaders, the men who were supposed to build up God's people. They looked at Jesus and threw Him away as useless. God took that rejected stone and made it the foundation of everything. Jesus Himself applied this verse to these same leaders (Luke 20:17), and Peter used it again later (1 Peter 2:7).

Old Testament links: Psalm 118:22 (quoted)

4:12 *And* ***there*** *is not salvation in any other; for neither is* ***there*** *another name under heaven which has been given among men by which we must be saved."*

This is one of the clearest verses in the Bible about salvation. There is only one way to be saved, and it is through Jesus Christ. Not through religion, good works, or another teacher. Jesus said the same thing. He is "the way and the truth and the life," and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

Some people say this is narrow. It is. But it is also wide open. The door is narrow because there is only one Savior, and it is open because anyone, from any nation, can come through it. That is not unloving. If there is only one cure for a deadly disease, the loving thing is to tell everyone where to find it.

4:13 *Now seeing the boldness of Peter and John, and having perceived that they were unlettered and ordinary men, they were marveling; and they were recognizing them, that they had been with Jesus.*

Calling them "unlettered and ordinary men" does not mean they could not read. It means they had never studied under the rabbis in the religious schools. They were fishermen.

The Council was "recognizing them, that they had been with Jesus." That is the best thing that can be said about any believer. The confidence, the knowledge of Scripture, and the boldness all pointed back to one thing: these men had spent time with Jesus. People should be able to say the same about us.

4:14-17 *And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say against **it**. But having commanded them to go outside the Council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do to these men? For indeed, that a notable sign has come to pass through them **is** evident to all those inhabiting Jerusalem, and we are not able to deny **it**. But so that it may not spread further among the people, let us threaten them with a threat to speak no longer in this name to any man."*

They could not deny the miracle, yet they still would not believe. Their problem was not a lack of evidence. It was their hearts. Jesus said that some people will not be persuaded "if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). So instead of repenting, they tried to stop the message from spreading.

4:18-20 *And having called them, they commanded them not to speak at all nor to teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answering said to them, "Whether it is righteous before God to listen to you rather than to God, you judge; for we are not able not to speak the things which we have seen and heard."*

The Bible teaches us to respect and obey those in authority (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). But when men command us to disobey God, we must obey God. This is not rebellion. It is faithfulness. The apostles did not riot or fight. They simply refused to be silent, and they accepted whatever came next. They had seen the risen Jesus. How could they keep quiet?

4:21-22 *And having further threatened **them**, they let them go, finding nothing **as to** how they might punish them, on account of the people, because all were glorifying God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing had taken place was more than forty years old.*

The leaders were afraid of the people more than they were afraid of God. Luke mentions the man's age to show how great the miracle was. He had been lame for over forty years, his whole life. Everyone knew him, and everyone knew he was now walking.

4:23-24 *And having been let go, they came to their own **people** and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And having heard **it**, they lifted up **their** voice to God with one accord and said, "Master, You **are** the God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that **is** in them,*

Their first stop after being released was "their own people," the church, their family.

They did not panic or make plans to hide. They prayed. They began by calling God "Master," the one with absolute authority. They reminded themselves that He made heaven, earth, the sea, and everything in them. When we face threats, the first thing we need to remember is how big our God is.

Old Testament links: Exodus 20:11 (alluded to)

4:25-26 *who through **the** mouth of Your servant David said, 'Why did **the** nations rage, and **the** peoples devise vain things? The kings of the earth took **their** stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.'*

The believers were praying Scripture, using Psalm 2:1-2. That is a good pattern for us. When we don't know how to pray, we can pray God's own words back to Him. Psalm 2 goes on to say that God laughs at those who plot against Him, and that He has installed His King on Zion. The opposition is real, but it is useless.

Old Testament links: Psalm 2:1-2 (quoted)

4:27-28 *For truly there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with **the** nations and **the** peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your plan determined beforehand to happen.*

The believers apply the psalm to what had just happened. Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee who mocked Jesus during His trial (Luke 23:6-12). Jews and Gentiles, rulers and crowds, all joined together against Him.

And yet they did only "whatever Your hand and Your plan determined beforehand to happen." This is the same truth Peter preached in 2:23. The enemies of Jesus did exactly what they wanted to do, and they were guilty for it. At the same time, God was in control, and they accomplished only what He had planned. Scripture holds both together. That gave the believers great comfort. If God was in control at the cross, He was in control of the threats they now faced.

Old Testament links: Psalm 2:2 (fulfilled)

4:29-30 *And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to Your slaves to speak Your word with all boldness, in that You stretch out Your hand for healing, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."*

Notice the word "slaves." The Greek word means a bond-servant, a slave who belonged fully to his master. That is how they saw themselves.

They did not ask God to remove the threats. They did not ask for safety or for their enemies to be punished. They asked for boldness to keep doing the very thing they were told to stop doing. This is one of the most powerful prayers in the Bible, and it is a model for persecuted believers all over the world today.

4:31 *And when they had prayed, the place in which they were assembled was shaken; and they were all filled with **the** Holy Spirit, and were speaking the word of God with boldness.*

God answered right away, and He answered exactly what they asked for. The shaking showed that God had heard. These believers had already been filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, and here they are filled again. I believe the Spirit comes to live in a believer once, when he believes (Ephesians 1:13). But we need to be filled again and again, as we face new challenges and yield to Him (Ephesians 5:18). The result of being filled is always the same in Acts: bold witness for Jesus.

4:32 *And of the multitude of those who had believed, the heart and the soul was one; and not one was saying that anything of his possessions was his own, but all things were common to them.*

This is the second time Luke describes this (2:44-45). It was not a law or a system. It was love. They still owned things, but they did not hold on to them. They saw everything as belonging to God and available to meet a brother's need. Unity in the church does not come from everyone agreeing on everything. It comes from everyone belonging to the same Lord.

4:33 *And with great power the apostles were giving the testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.*

The center of the apostles' message was always the resurrection. The Council had told them to stop. They did not stop. They spoke "with great power." And "great grace," God's undeserved favor, was on the whole church. Power in the message and grace in the people go together.

4:34-35 *For neither was anyone needy among them; for as many as were owners of lands or houses, selling **them**, were bringing the proceeds of the things being sold and were laying **them** at the feet of the apostles; and distribution was being made to each, as anyone had need.*

God had told Israel that if they obeyed Him, there would be no poor among them (Deuteronomy 15:4). In the early church, that came true, not because of a law, but because the Spirit filled people's hearts with love. Laying the money "at the feet of the apostles" showed they trusted the apostles to give it out fairly, and that they were giving it to God, not putting themselves on display. The next chapter will show what happens when someone gives to be seen.

4:36-37 *And Joses, who was surnamed Barnabas by the apostles (which is, being translated, Son of Encouragement), a Levite, a Cypriot by birth, having a field, sold **it** and brought the money and laid **it** at the feet of the apostles.*

Luke gives us one example. Joses (a form of the name Joseph) was "a Levite, a Cypriot by birth," from the island of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean.

A Levite was from the tribe of Levi, the tribe that served in the temple. In the Old Testament, the Levites were not given land of their own (Numbers 18:20-24), but by this time some did own property. Barnabas lived up to his name. He will later stand up for Saul when no one else trusts him (9:27), encourage the new Gentile church in Antioch (11:22-24), and travel with Paul on his first missionary journey. Every church needs a Barnabas. Every one of us can be one.

Chapter 4 Summary

Peter and John were arrested by the temple leaders and the Sadducees for preaching the resurrection in Jesus, but about five thousand men believed. Before the Sanhedrin, Peter, filled with the Spirit, boldly declared that the lame man was healed by the name of Jesus, the rejected stone, and that there is salvation in no other name. The Council could not deny the miracle, so they threatened the apostles and let them go.

The church responded by praying for boldness, and God shook the place where they were gathered and filled them again with the Spirit. The believers were of one heart and soul, sharing their possessions so no one was in need. Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, gave the money from his field as an example of this love.

People and Places in Chapter 4

The Sadducees (4:1): A Jewish party made up mostly of wealthy priestly families who controlled the temple. They did not believe in the resurrection, angels, or spirits.

The Captain of the temple guard (4:1): The officer in charge of the temple police, second only to the high priest in authority over the temple.

The Sanhedrin (4:5-6, 15): The Jewish high council of about seventy members led by the high priest, the same Council that condemned Jesus.

Annas and Caiaphas (4:6): Annas was a former high priest who still held great power. Caiaphas, his son-in-law, was the high priest at the time.

Herod (4:27): Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, who mocked Jesus during His trial and sent Him back to Pilate.

Barnabas (4:36-37): Joses (a form of Joseph), a Levite from Cyprus, called "Son of Encouragement" by the apostles. He gave the money from a field to the church and later became Paul's partner in ministry.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been told to stop doing something you knew was right? How did you handle it?

2. Why were the Sadducees so upset with Peter and John? (4:1-2)

3. How many men believed after Peter's sermon? (4:4)

4. What question did the Council ask Peter and John, and how did Peter answer? (4:7-10)

5. What does Peter say about salvation in verse 12? (4:12)

6. What did the Council notice about Peter and John, and what did they conclude? (4:13)

7. How did Peter and John respond when they were ordered not to speak in Jesus' name? (4:19-20)

8. What did the believers ask God for in their prayer? (4:29-30)

9. The Council was "recognizing them, that they had been with Jesus." What would people notice about you that shows you have been with Jesus?

10. When you face pressure or opposition for your faith, do you tend to pray for safety or for boldness? How can this chapter change the way you pray?

Chapter 5: Ananias, Sapphira, and the Apostles on Trial

Scripture: Ananias and Sapphira; Signs and Wonders; The Apostles Arrested and Freed; Gamaliel's Advice

5:1-11 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a property, and kept back ***some*** of the proceeds, his wife also being aware ***of it***, and having brought a certain portion, he laid ***it*** at the feet of the apostles. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart ***for*** you to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back ***some*** of the proceeds of the land? While it remained, did it not remain yours? And having been sold, was it not in your own authority? Why ***is it*** that you put this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." And Ananias, hearing these words, having fallen down, breathed his last. And great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the younger ***men***, having arisen, wrapped him up, and having carried ***him*** out, they buried ***him***. And it came to pass, after an interval of about three hours, ***that*** his wife came in, not knowing what had come to pass. And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." Then Peter said to her, "Why ***is it*** that it was agreed together by you to test the Spirit of ***the*** Lord? Look, the feet of those who buried your husband ***are*** at the door, and they will carry you out." And immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last; and the young men, having come in, found her dead, and having carried ***her*** out, they buried ***her*** beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all those who heard these things.

5:12-16 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in the porch of Solomon. And of the rest no one was daring to join them, but the people were magnifying them; and all the more were believers in the Lord being added, multitudes both of men and women, so that they were even bringing out the sick throughout the streets and placing ***them*** on beds and mats, so that when Peter came, at least the shadow might overshadow some of them. And the multitude also from the surrounding cities was coming together into Jerusalem, bringing sick ***people*** and those being tormented by unclean spirits, who were all being healed.

5:17-26 But the high priest, having risen up, and all those with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy, and they laid their hands on the apostles and put them in public custody. But an angel of ***the*** Lord during the night opened the doors of the prison, and having brought them out, said, "Go, and standing, speak in the temple to the people all the declarations of this life." And having heard ***this***, they entered into the temple at dawn and were teaching. Now the high priest having come, and those with him, they called together the Council, even all the senate of the sons of Israel, and sent to the prison house for them to be brought. But the officers having come did not find them in the prison; and having returned, they reported, saying, "We found the prison house indeed shut with all security and the guards standing outside before the doors; but having opened ***them***, we found no one inside." Now when the priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were perplexed concerning them, ***as to*** what this might become. And a certain one, having come, reported to them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in the prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people."

Then the captain, having gone with the officers, brought them, not with force, for they were afraid of the people, lest they be stoned.

5:27-32 And having brought them, they set ***them*** in the Council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "Did we not command you with a command not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring upon us the blood of this man." But Peter and the apostles answering said, "It is necessary to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you put to death, having hanged ***Him*** on a tree. Him God exalted by His right ***hand as*** Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these declarations, and also the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those obeying Him."

5:33-42 And having heard ***this***, they were furious, and were taking counsel to kill them. But a certain ***one***, having stood up in the Council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law honored by all the people, commanded ***them*** to put the apostles outside for a short while. And he said to them, "Israelite men, take heed to yourselves concerning these men, what you are about to do. For before these days Theudas rose up, saying that he himself was somebody, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves; who was killed, and all, as many as were persuaded by him, were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man, Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the registration, and drew away many people after him; he also perished, and all, as many as were persuaded by him, were scattered. And now I say to you, withdraw from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is from men, it will be overthrown; but if it is from God, you are not able to overthrow it, lest you even be found fighting against God." And they were persuaded by him; and having called in the apostles ***and*** having beaten ***them***, they commanded ***them*** not to speak in the name of Jesus, and released them. So then they were departing from ***the*** presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to be dishonored for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching the gospel ***that*** Jesus ***is*** the Christ.

Chapter 5 Preview

Chapter 4 ended with a beautiful picture of the early church. Believers were sharing what they had, and Barnabas sold a field and laid the money at the apostles' feet. Chapter 5 opens with a couple who wanted the same praise Barnabas received, without the same heart. What happens to them is one of the most sobering stories in the New Testament.

Then the scene moves outside the church. The apostles keep healing and preaching, the crowds keep growing, and the religious leaders throw them in jail again. An angel sets them free, they are arrested a second time, and they stand before the Council. Peter tells them plainly that he will obey God rather than men. A respected teacher named Gamaliel gives the Council some cautious advice, and the apostles walk out beaten but rejoicing.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1-2 *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a property, and kept back **some** of the proceeds, his wife also being aware **of it**, and having brought a certain portion, he laid **it** at the feet of the apostles.*

Notice the word "But" that opens the chapter in most translations. Luke wants us to set this couple right next to Barnabas at the end of chapter 4. Barnabas gave everything from a sold field. Ananias and Sapphira brought part of theirs as if it were the whole amount.

Luke tells us his wife Sapphira was "also being aware of it." This was not one person's sudden mistake. It was a plan the two of them agreed on together. The sin was not keeping some of the money. The sin was pretending to give it all so they would look as generous as Barnabas.

5:3-4 *But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart **for** you to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back **some** of the proceeds of the land? While it remained, did it not remain yours? And having been sold, was it not in your own authority? Why **is it** that you put this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."*

Peter asks Ananias why he let Satan fill his heart "to lie to the Holy Spirit." Then in verse 4 he says, "You have not lied to men but to God." Put those two statements side by side and you see something important: lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. This is one of the clearest places in Scripture showing that the Holy Spirit is not just a force or an influence. He is God.

Peter also makes it plain that Ananias was under no obligation. Giving in the early church was free and voluntary. Nobody was forced to sell anything. Ananias could have kept every penny and been honest about it. What God judged was the lie, not the size of the gift.

5:5-6 *And Ananias, hearing these words, having fallen down, breathed his last. And great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the younger **men**, having arisen, wrapped him up, and having carried **him** out, they buried **him**.*

Peter did not pray against Ananias or pronounce a curse. God acted. Burial in that culture usually happened the same day.

The "great fear" Luke describes is not panic. It is a deep respect for how holy God is. You might ask, "Why would God be so severe here, when people lie in church every day and nothing happens?" I believe it is because this was the very beginning of the church. Just as God judged Achan when Israel first entered the Promised Land (Joshua 7), and Nadab and Abihu when the priesthood first began (Leviticus 10:1-2), He showed at the start of the church that He will not be mocked. He doesn't usually judge that quickly today, but His holiness has not changed.

5:7-10 *And it came to pass, after an interval of about three hours,* ***that*** *his wife came in, not knowing what had come to pass. And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." Then Peter said to her, "Why* ***is it*** *that it was agreed together by you to test the Spirit of* ***the*** *Lord? Look, the feet of those who buried your husband* ***are*** *at the door, and they will carry you out." And immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last; and the young men, having come in, found her dead, and having carried* ***her*** *out, they buried* ***her*** *beside her husband.*

Peter gave Sapphira a chance to tell the truth. God gave her an opening, and she chose to stand by the lie. To "test the Spirit of the Lord" means to push Him and see how far you can go before He responds.

Scripture doesn't tell us whether Ananias and Sapphira were true believers. Some teachers believe they were saved people who were taken home early as discipline (compare 1 Corinthians 11:30). Others believe their hearts had never truly been changed. Luke doesn't settle the question, and I don't think we should be too quick to settle it either. What Luke does make clear is that God takes honesty in His church seriously.

5:11 *And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all those who heard these things.*

This is the first time the word "church" appears in Acts in many translations. The SLB, like the King James Version, already has it once at 2:47, where "the Lord was adding to the church every day those who were being saved." The Greek word, ekklesia, means an assembly, a gathering of people who have been called together. It comes from words meaning "called out," and God's people are called out by Him. It is fitting that the first time the church is named in many translations, it comes right after God has shown how pure He wants His called-out people to be.

For us today, this is a call to be real. God isn't looking for people who look spiritual on Sunday. He is looking for people who are honest with Him and with each other.

5:12-13 *And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in the porch of Solomon. And of the rest no one was daring to join them, but the people were magnifying them;*

Signs point to something beyond themselves, and wonders cause people to stand in awe. These miracles pointed to Jesus and confirmed that the apostles' message came from Him.

Solomon's portico was a long covered porch along the east side of the temple courts. This is the same place where Peter preached after healing the lame man (3:11). After what happened to Ananias and Sapphira, nobody was joining the church casually. People respected the believers, but they knew this was not something to play with.

5:14-16 *and all the more were believers in the Lord being added, multitudes both of men and women, so that they were even bringing out the sick throughout the streets and placing* ***them*** *on beds and mats, so that when Peter came, at least the shadow might overshadow some of them. And the multitude also from the surrounding cities was coming together into Jerusalem, bringing sick* ***people*** *and those being tormented by unclean spirits, who were all being healed.*

Fear of God did not stop the church from growing. It purified it. Luke also makes a point of mentioning women, which shows they were counted as full members of God's family from the start.

Notice what the text says about Peter's shadow and what it doesn't. It says the people hoped for this. It doesn't say Peter's shadow had power of its own. The crowds from the towns around Jerusalem show the Gospel beginning to spread out from Jerusalem, just as Jesus said it would in 1:8. The power was always God's, never Peter's.

5:17-18 *But the high priest, having risen up, and all those with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy, and they laid their hands on the apostles and put them in public custody.*

The high priest and his associates, the party of the Sadducees, were "filled with jealousy." The Sadducees were a group of wealthy, priestly Jewish leaders who controlled the temple. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead or in angels (23:8). So every time the apostles preached that Jesus rose from the dead, they were attacking the Sadducees' beliefs and drawing the crowds away from them.

Back in chapter 4 they only arrested Peter and John. This time they went after all of the apostles.

5:19-20 *But an angel of* ***the*** *Lord during the night opened the doors of the prison, and having brought them out, said, "Go, and standing, speak in the temple to the people all the declarations of this life."*

Think about how a rescue by "an angel of the Lord" must have looked to the Sadducees, a group that didn't even believe angels existed. God's timing here speaks for itself.

The angel didn't tell the apostles to run and hide. He told them to go right back to the temple and keep speaking to the people "all the declarations of this life." The Gospel isn't just a set of ideas. It is life itself, eternal life found in Jesus (John 14:6). God freed them so they could go back to doing the very thing that got them arrested.

5:21-23 *And having heard **this**, they entered into the temple at dawn and were teaching. Now the high priest having come, and those with him, they called together the Council, even all the senate of the sons of Israel, and sent to the prison house for them to be brought. But the officers having come did not find them in the prison; and having returned, they reported, saying, "We found the prison house indeed shut with all security and the guards standing outside before the doors; but having opened **them**, we found no one inside."*

The Council, which Luke also calls "all the senate of the sons of Israel," was the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of about seventy elders, priests, and scribes, led by the high priest. It was the highest Jewish court of that day.

Notice the locked doors and the guards still at their posts. Nobody had broken out. God simply took them out.

5:24-26 *Now when the priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were perplexed concerning them, **as to** what this might become. And a certain one, having come, reported to them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in the prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." Then the captain, having gone with the officers, brought them, not with force, for they were afraid of the people, lest they be stoned.*

The officers brought the apostles back "not with force" because they feared being stoned. The religious leaders were more worried about the crowd than about God. That is a dangerous place to be. When we care more about what people think than what God thinks, we will make bad decisions every time.

5:27-28 *And having brought them, they set **them** in the Council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "Did we not command you with a command not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring upon us the blood of this man."*

The command "not to teach in this name" goes back to 4:18. Notice the high priest won't even say the name of Jesus. He calls Him "this name" and "this man."

The charge that they wanted "to bring upon us the blood of this man" is an interesting one. When Jesus stood before Pilate, the crowd shouted that His blood would be on them and their children (Matthew 27:25). Now the leaders didn't want that responsibility. The apostles had filled Jerusalem with their teaching, and the leaders felt the guilt pressing in.

5:29-32 *But Peter and the apostles answering said, "It is necessary to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you put to death, having hanged **Him** on a tree. Him God exalted by His right **hand as** Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these declarations, and also the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those obeying Him."*

"It is necessary to obey God rather than men." This is the heart of the whole chapter. Christians are called to respect and obey those in authority (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). But when a human authority commands us to disobey God, our first loyalty is to Him.

Then Peter preached the Gospel to the very men who had condemned Jesus. The phrase "having hanged Him on a tree" points back to Deuteronomy 21:23 and the curse on anyone hanged on a tree (see Galatians 3:13). Even here, standing before His enemies, Peter offers them forgiveness.

The apostles saw the risen Jesus with their own eyes, and the Holy Spirit confirms their witness. Obeying God here means responding to Him in faith, the obedience that comes from believing (Romans 1:5).

5:33-35 *And having heard **this**, they were furious, and were taking counsel to kill them. But a certain **one**, having stood up in the Council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law honored by all the people, commanded **them** to put the apostles outside for a short while. And he said to them, "Israelite men, take heed to yourselves concerning these men, what you are about to do.*

"Furious" translates a Greek word that means to be sawn in two. They were so angry they could not contain themselves. The Pharisees were a group of Jewish teachers who were strict about keeping the Law of Moses and the traditions built around it. Unlike the Sadducees, they did believe in the resurrection and in angels.

Gamaliel was one of the most honored rabbis of his day, and we learn later that the apostle Paul studied under him (22:3).

5:36-37 *For before these days Theudas rose up, saying that he himself was somebody, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves; who was killed, and all, as many as were persuaded by him, were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man, Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the registration, and drew away many people after him; he also perished, and all, as many as were persuaded by him, were scattered.*

The census was the Roman registration for taxes, and Judas of Galilee led a revolt against it. Gamaliel's point was simple: movements built around a man fall apart when the man is gone. The Jewish historian Josephus also writes about a Theudas and about Judas the Galilean. The Theudas Josephus describes seems to come some years after Gamaliel spoke, so many scholars believe Gamaliel was talking about a different, earlier Theudas. It was a common name, and Luke has proven to be a careful historian over and over.

5:38-39 *And now I say to you, withdraw from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is from men, it will be overthrown; but if it is from God, you are not able to overthrow it, lest you even be found fighting against God."*

Gamaliel's advice was wise, but it was not faith. Gamaliel didn't say the apostles were right. He just took a wait-and-see approach. History has given the answer he was waiting for. Two thousand years later the church of Jesus Christ is still here, on every continent. Rulers and empires have tried to stamp it out, and every one of them has failed. Jesus said the gates of Hades would not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:18).

5:40-41 *And they were persuaded by him; and having called in the apostles **and** having beaten **them**, they commanded **them** not to speak in the name of Jesus, and released them. So then they were departing from **the** presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to be dishonored for His name.*

The Council took Gamaliel's advice only partly. They didn't kill the apostles, but they flogged them. Flogging was a brutal beating with a whip. The Law of Moses limited it to forty lashes (Deuteronomy 25:3), and the custom was to stop at thirty-nine so they wouldn't break the Law by accident (2 Corinthians 11:24).

This is one of the most amazing verses in Acts. The apostles didn't complain or feel sorry for themselves. They counted it an honor. Jesus told them this would happen (Matthew 5:11-12; John 15:20). This is the same spirit we see in the faithful believers of Revelation, who "did not love their life until death" (Revelation 12:11).

5:42 *And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching the gospel **that** Jesus **is** the Christ.*

The Council's orders changed nothing. To preach "that Jesus is the Christ" is to preach Him as the promised Messiah.

Notice the two places they ministered: the temple, a public place, and homes, a private place. The early church met both in large gatherings and in small ones. That is still a good pattern for us today. Our faith is meant to be lived out in public and around our own kitchen tables.

Chapter 5 Summary

Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit to look more generous than they were, and God judged them on the spot. Great fear came over the church, and yet the church kept growing as the apostles healed many people. The Sadducees jailed the apostles, but an angel set them free to go right back to preaching. Brought before the Council, Peter declared, "It is necessary to obey God rather than men." Gamaliel advised caution, and the apostles were beaten and released, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' name.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been tempted to make yourself look better than you really are? What happened?

2. What was the real sin of Ananias and Sapphira? (5:3-4)

3. What do Peter's words in 5:3-4 teach us about who the Holy Spirit is?

4. Why do you think God judged this sin so quickly at the beginning of the church?

5. Who set the apostles free from prison, and what were they told to do? (5:19-20)

6. What did Peter and the apostles say when they were ordered to stop teaching about Jesus? (5:29)

7. What advice did Gamaliel give the Council, and why? (5:38-39)

8. How did the apostles respond after they were flogged? (5:41)

9. Is there an area in your life where you are tempted to obey people rather than God?

10. What would it look like for you to share Jesus both in public and "from house to house" this week?

Chapter 6: The Seven Chosen

Scripture: The Seven Chosen to Serve; Stephen Seized

6:1-7 Now in these days, when the disciples were multiplying, there arose a grumbling of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily ministry. And the twelve, having called near the multitude of the disciples, said, "It is not pleasing ***for*** us, having left the word of God, to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men being well attested, full of ***the*** Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we will appoint over this need; but we will steadfastly continue in prayer and in the ministry of the word." And the word was pleasing before all the multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of ***the*** Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor and Timon and Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and having prayed, they laid hands on them. And the word of God was increasing, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was being multiplied exceedingly, and a great crowd of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

6:8-15 And Stephen, full of faith and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. But certain ones arose of those from the synagogue which is called of the Freedmen, and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men, saying, "We have heard him speaking blasphemous declarations against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and having come upon ***him***, they seized him and brought ***him*** to the Council. And they set up false witnesses, saying, "This man does not stop speaking blasphemous declarations against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him saying that this Jesus the Nazarene will overthrow this place and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us." And all those sitting in the Council, having looked intently at him, saw his face as ***the*** face of an angel.

Chapter 6 Preview

The church faced a new kind of problem in chapter 6. The threat in chapters 4 and 5 came from the outside. This time it came from the inside: a complaint that some widows were being left out when food was handed out. The apostles handled it wisely. They had the church choose seven men full of the Spirit to take care of the need, so the apostles could keep praying and teaching God's Word.

One of those seven was Stephen. He did great wonders among the people, and when men from a certain synagogue argued with him, they couldn't stand up to the wisdom God gave him. So they lied about him and dragged him before the Council. The chapter ends with Stephen standing there, his face shining like the face of an angel.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1 *Now in these days, when the disciples were multiplying, there arose a grumbling of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily ministry.*

Growth is a blessing, but it always brings new problems. The Hellenists were Jews who had grown up outside the land of Israel, in the wider Greek-speaking world. They mainly spoke Greek and lived with Greek culture around them, though they were still Jews. Many had moved back to Jerusalem later in life. The native Hebrews were Jews from the land of Israel who spoke Aramaic and held on more closely to Jewish customs. Even among believers in Jesus, there were differences in language and culture.

A widow in that culture often had no income and no one to care for her. The church had taken on the job of feeding them (see Deuteronomy 14:29; James 1:27). Scripture doesn't say anyone was doing this on purpose. It may have been an honest oversight, but it hurt real people, and it threatened to divide the church.

This is the third attack on the church in Acts. In chapter 4 Satan tried threats from the outside. In chapter 5 he tried deceit from the inside with Ananias and Sapphira. Now he tries division, setting one group of believers against another. Satan's methods haven't changed much. Many churches today are never shut down by persecution, but they are torn apart by complaining and hurt feelings. Paul tells us to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). That takes work, and it takes humility on every side.

6:2-4 *And the twelve, having called near the multitude of the disciples, said, "It is not pleasing **for** us, having left the word of God, to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men being well attested, full of **the** Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we will appoint over this need; but we will steadfastly continue in prayer and in the ministry of the word."*

The apostles weren't saying that serving food was beneath them. Jesus Himself washed His disciples' feet (John 13:1-15). They were saying that God had given them a specific job, and if they spent all their time running a food program, the teaching of God's Word would suffer.

Even a job handing out food required spiritual men. In God's eyes, there is no such thing as unspiritual work in His church.

The apostles' choice to "steadfastly continue in prayer and in the ministry of the word" is a good word for pastors and church leaders today. Prayer and the teaching of Scripture are not extras. They are the main work. And it is a good word for the rest of us too: every believer has a part to play, and when each one does their part, the whole body is healthy (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

6:5-6 *And the word was pleasing before all the multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of* ***the*** *Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor and Timon and Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and having prayed, they laid hands on them.*

Philip, the second man named, is the one we will follow in chapter 8. Nicolas, the last man named, was "a proselyte of Antioch." A proselyte was a Gentile, a non-Jew, who had converted to Judaism. So even before the Gospel went out to the Gentiles in chapter 10, a man who was born a Gentile was helping to lead the church.

All seven men have Greek names. That doesn't prove they were all Hellenists, since many Jews had Greek names, but it does suggest the church chose men from the very group that felt overlooked. That was wise and gracious. Instead of arguing, the church put people in charge who understood the problem.

Some early Christian writers connected this Nicolas with the Nicolaitans that Jesus rebukes in Revelation 2:6 and 2:15. Scripture never makes that connection, and I don't believe we should assume it. Luke gives no hint that Nicolas did anything wrong.

Laying on of hands was a way of publicly setting someone apart for a task and showing the church's blessing on them (see Numbers 27:18-23; 1 Timothy 4:14).

These seven men are often called the first deacons. The Greek word for "serve" in verse 2 comes from the same word that later gives us "deacon" (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). Luke doesn't actually call them deacons, but I believe this is where the pattern for that kind of service in the church began.

6:7 *And the word of God was increasing, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was being multiplied exceedingly, and a great crowd of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.*

Luke gives us another progress report. Handling the problem well didn't slow the church down. It sped it up.

"A great crowd of the priests" is a surprising detail. These were most likely ordinary priests who served in the temple, not the high priest's family. These were the men who offered the sacrifices every day. Now they were coming to believe that Jesus was the final sacrifice, the one those sacrifices pointed to all along (Hebrews 10:11-14).

6:8 *And Stephen, full of faith and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.*

Stephen was chosen to wait on tables, but God was not finished with him. Stephen is a good reminder that faithfulness in small things often leads to greater things (Luke 16:10). Don't despise the job God has given you today. He may be getting you ready for something you can't see yet.

6:9-10 *But certain ones arose of those from the synagogue which is called of the Freedmen, and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he was speaking.*

A synagogue was a local Jewish meeting place for prayer and the reading of Scripture. The Freedmen were most likely Jews who had once been slaves, or whose parents had been, and had been set free. Cyrene and Alexandria were cities in North Africa. Cilicia and Asia were Roman regions in what is now Turkey.

Cilicia is worth noticing. The apostle Paul was from Tarsus, the main city of Cilicia (21:39). Scripture doesn't say Saul was in this synagogue, but since he appears at Stephen's death in the next chapter, it is possible he was among the men who argued with Stephen.

Jesus promised His followers that He would give them words and wisdom their opponents could not resist (Luke 21:15). Here we see that promise kept.

6:11-12 *Then they secretly induced men, saying, "We have heard him speaking blasphemous declarations against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and having come upon* ***him****, they seized him and brought* ***him*** *to the Council.*

When they couldn't win the argument, they changed tactics. Blasphemy means speaking against God in a way that dishonors Him. It was a capital crime under the Law (Leviticus 24:16).

The scribes were experts in copying and teaching the Law of Moses. The common people had been on the apostles' side until now (2:47; 5:13). This is the first time we see the crowd turn against the believers.

This is exactly what happened to Jesus. When His enemies couldn't find a real charge against Him, they brought in false witnesses (Matthew 26:59-61). If you follow Jesus, don't be surprised when people twist your words.

6:13-14 *And they set up false witnesses, saying, "This man does not stop speaking blasphemous declarations against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him saying that this Jesus the Nazarene will overthrow this place and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us."*

"This holy place" means the temple. Like most good lies, this one had a little truth twisted inside it. Jesus did predict that the temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24:1-2), and that happened in A.D. 70 when the Romans burned it. Jesus also said that if they destroyed "this temple," He would raise it up in three days, but He was talking about His own body (John 2:19-21). Stephen probably taught that Jesus is greater than the temple and that He fulfilled the Law. That isn't the same as speaking against them. Stephen will answer both of these charges in his long speech in chapter 7.

6:15 *And all those sitting in the Council, having looked intently at him, saw his face as* ***the*** *face of an angel.*

Scripture doesn't explain exactly what they saw. It may have been a calm, peaceful look in the middle of a hostile room. It may have been an actual glow, like Moses' face when he came down

from the mountain after being with God (Exodus 34:29-35). Either way, God put His mark on Stephen in front of the very men who were about to judge him.

That detail fits the false charge perfectly. They accused Stephen of speaking against Moses, and God gave him a face that shone like Moses' face.

Think about what Stephen was facing. He knew how this same Council had treated Jesus, and he knew what the penalty for blasphemy was. Yet he stood there in peace. That kind of peace doesn't come from us. It comes from the Holy Spirit filling a person who belongs to Jesus. Jesus promised His followers a peace the world can't give (John 14:27), and here we see it on a man's face. If you are facing something frightening today, the same Spirit who filled Stephen lives in every believer. He can give you that same peace.

Chapter 6 Summary

As the church grew, the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the daily food distribution. The apostles asked the church to choose seven men full of the Spirit and wisdom to handle it, so they could stay focused on prayer and the Word. The church kept growing, and many priests came to faith. Stephen, one of the seven, did great wonders, and his opponents couldn't answer his wisdom. They brought in false witnesses and took him before the Council, where his face looked like the face of an angel.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been part of a group where someone felt left out? How was it handled?
2. What was the complaint that came up in the church? (6:1)
3. What qualities did the seven men need to have? (6:3)
4. What did the apostles want to devote themselves to, and why does that matter? (6:4)
5. What happened to the church after this problem was solved? (6:7)
6. How did Stephen's opponents respond when they couldn't win the argument? (6:10-11)
7. How is what happened to Stephen similar to what happened to Jesus?
8. What did the Council see when they looked at Stephen? (6:15)
9. Is there a "small" job God has given you that you have been tempted to take lightly?
10. What is one practical way you can help make sure no one in your church feels overlooked?

Chapter 7: Stephen's Defense

Scripture: Stephen's Speech to the Council; The Stoning of Stephen

7:1-8 And the high priest said, "Are these things then so?" And he said, "Men, brothers and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred, and come into a land which I will show you.' Then, having gone out from ***the*** land of ***the*** Chaldeans, he dwelt in Haran; and from there, after his father died, He removed him into this land in which you now dwell. And He did not give him an inheritance in it, not even a foot's length; and He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when he had no child. And God spoke thus: that his seed will be a sojourner in a foreign land, and they will enslave it and mistreat ***it*** four hundred years. 'And the nation to which they will be in slavery I will judge,' said God, 'and after these things they will come out and serve Me in this place.' And He gave him a covenant of circumcision; and thus he fathered Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac ***fathered*** Jacob, and Jacob the twelve patriarchs.

7:9-16 And the patriarchs, having become jealous of Joseph, sold ***him*** into Egypt; and God was with him, and rescued him out of all his tribulations, and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he appointed him ruler over Egypt and all his house. Now a famine came upon all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great tribulation; and our fathers were not finding sustenance. But Jacob, having heard that there was grain in Egypt, sent out our fathers the first ***time***; and at the second ***time*** Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became evident to Pharaoh. And Joseph, having sent, called for Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five souls in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers; and they were carried over into Shechem and were placed in the tomb which Abraham bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor of Shechem.

7:17-29 But as the time of the promise which God had sworn to Abraham was drawing near, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until another king arose who did not know Joseph. This ***man***, having dealt treacherously with our race, mistreated our fathers, making ***them*** expose their infants so that they would not be kept alive. At that time Moses was born, and he was beautiful to God; and he was brought up three months in the house of his father. And when he had been exposed, the daughter of Pharaoh took him up and brought him up for herself as a son. And Moses was instructed in all ***the*** wisdom of ***the*** Egyptians, and he was mighty in words and in deeds. And when a time of forty years was being fulfilled for him, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the sons of Israel. And having seen a certain one being wronged, he defended ***him*** and carried out vengeance for the one being oppressed, having struck down the Egyptian. And he was supposing ***that*** his brothers understood that God through his hand is giving them salvation; but they did not understand. And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling, and urged them to peace, saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you wrong one another?' But the one wronging the neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'Who appointed you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me in the same way you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' And Moses fled at this word, and became a sojourner in ***the*** land of Midian, where he fathered two sons.

7:30-36 And when forty years had been fulfilled, an angel of ***the*** Lord appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire of a bush. And Moses, having seen ***it***, marveled at the sight; and as he was approaching to look closely, ***there*** came a voice of ***the*** Lord to him: 'I ***am*** the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' And Moses, having become terrified, was not daring to look closely. And the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandal of your feet, for the place in which you stand is holy ground. Having seen, I have seen the mistreatment of My people who ***are*** in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them; and now come, I will send you to Egypt.' This Moses, whom they denied, saying, 'Who appointed you ruler and judge?', this one God sent ***as*** ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. This one led them out, having done wonders and signs in ***the*** land of Egypt and in ***the*** Red Sea and in the wilderness forty years.

7:37-43 This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, '***The*** Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers; Him you shall listen to.' This is the one who was in the assembly in the wilderness with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received living oracles to give to us; to whom our fathers were not willing to become obedient, but they pushed ***him*** away, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who brought us out from ***the*** land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.' And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven, just as it has been written in ***the*** book of the prophets: 'Did you offer Me slain beasts and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? And you took up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of your god Remphan, the figures which you made to worship them; and I will remove you beyond Babylon.'

7:44-50 The tabernacle of the testimony was among our fathers in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses commanded ***him*** to make it according to the figure which he had seen; which also our fathers, having received ***it*** in turn, brought in with Joshua in the taking possession of the nations, whom God drove out from ***the*** face of our fathers, until the days of David; who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house. But the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, just as the prophet says: 'Heaven ***is*** My throne, and the earth ***is*** a footstool for My feet. What kind of house will you build for Me, says ***the*** Lord, or what ***is*** the place of My rest? Did not My hand make all these things?'

7:51-53 You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and in ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers ***did***, you also ***do***. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold concerning the coming of the Righteous One, of whom you have now become betrayers and murderers, you who received the law by ordinances of angels, and did not keep ***it***."

7:54-60 And hearing these things, they were furious in their hearts, and were gnashing their teeth at him. But he, being full of ***the*** Holy Spirit, having looked intently into heaven, saw ***the*** glory of God, and Jesus standing at ***the*** right ***hand*** of God; and he said, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at ***the*** right ***hand*** of God." And having cried out with a loud voice, they stopped their ears and rushed upon him with one accord; and having cast ***him*** out of

the city, they were stoning ***him***. And the witnesses laid aside their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul. And they were stoning Stephen as he was calling upon ***the Lord*** and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And having knelt down, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And having said this, he fell asleep.

Chapter 7 Preview

Stephen stands before the Council accused of speaking against Moses, the Law, and the temple. His answer is the longest speech in the book of Acts. At first it may look like a simple history lesson, walking from Abraham to Joseph to Moses to David and Solomon. But Stephen is making a point the whole time. God was never limited to one building or one piece of land, and Israel had a long history of rejecting the very men God sent to rescue them.

At the end, Stephen turns the charge around. It wasn't Stephen who disobeyed the Law; it was the Council, who betrayed and murdered the Righteous One. The leaders are enraged. Stephen looks up and sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God. They drag him out of the city and stone him, and he dies praying for them. Standing nearby, holding their coats, is a young man named Saul.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1 *And the high priest said, "Are these things then so?"*

The high priest's question meant, "Did you say these things about the temple and the Law, or not?" This was most likely Caiaphas, the same high priest who presided over Jesus' trial (Matthew 26:57). Stephen was standing in the same room, before the same men, facing the same kind of false charges Jesus faced.

7:2-4 *And he said, "Men, brothers and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred, and come into a land which I will show you.' Then, having gone out from* ***the*** *land of* ***the*** *Chaldeans, he dwelt in Haran; and from there, after his father died, He removed him into this land in which you now dwell.*

Stephen opens respectfully and starts at the very beginning of Israel's story. Mesopotamia is the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, in what is now Iraq. Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 11:31).

Here is Stephen's first point, and it answers the charge about the temple: God met Abraham in a pagan land, far from Israel, long before there was any temple. God's presence has never been locked inside one building.

Stephen says God called Abraham while he was still in Ur. Genesis 12:1 records the call in Haran, but Genesis 15:7 and Nehemiah 9:7 both say God brought Abraham out of Ur. It seems God called Abraham first in Ur and then again in Haran.

Old Testament links: Genesis 12:1 (quoted); Genesis 11:31-32 (alluded to); Genesis 15:7 (alluded to)

7:5-8 *And He did not give him an inheritance in it, not even a foot's length; and He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when he had no child. And God spoke thus: that his seed will be a sojourner in a foreign land, and they will enslave it and mistreat* ***it*** *four hundred years. 'And the nation to which they will be in slavery I will judge,' said God, 'and after these things they will come out and serve Me in this place.' And He gave him a covenant of circumcision; and thus he fathered Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac* ***fathered*** *Jacob, and Jacob the twelve patriarchs.*

Abraham lived his whole life in the Promised Land as a stranger, trusting God for what he couldn't see (Hebrews 11:8-10).

The four hundred years come from Genesis 15:13-14. Exodus 12:40 gives the time in Egypt as 430 years. Stephen, like Genesis 15:13, uses the rounded number.

Circumcision was the physical sign that a man belonged to God's covenant people (Genesis 17:9-14). The twelve patriarchs were the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Stephen is showing the Council that he knows and honors their history. He is not speaking against Moses or the fathers. He loves them.

Old Testament links: Genesis 15:13 (quoted); Genesis 15:14 (quoted); Genesis 17:8 (alluded to); Genesis 12:7 (alluded to); Genesis 21:4 (alluded to); Genesis 17:10 (alluded to)

7:9-10 *And the patriarchs, having become jealous of Joseph, sold* ***him*** *into Egypt; and God was with him, and rescued him out of all his tribulations, and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he appointed him ruler over Egypt and all his house.*

Now Stephen introduces his second point, and Joseph's story (Genesis 37) is the first example of a pattern Stephen will keep returning to: God sends a deliverer, and his own people reject him. Joseph's brothers rejected him, but God used him to save the very family that betrayed him. The Council would have missed the point at first, but it is hard for us to miss. Jesus was rejected by His own people (John 1:11), and God used His rejection to bring salvation to the world.

Old Testament links: Genesis 39:2 (alluded to); Genesis 37:28 (alluded to); Genesis 45:8 (alluded to); Genesis 41:41 (alluded to)

7:11-16 *Now a famine came upon all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great tribulation; and our fathers were not finding sustenance. But Jacob, having heard that there was grain in Egypt, sent out our fathers the first* ***time****; and at the second* ***time*** *Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became evident to Pharaoh. And Joseph, having sent, called for Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five souls in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers; and they were carried over into Shechem and were placed in the tomb which Abraham bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor of Shechem.*

Stephen is summing up Genesis 42 to 46. Stephen says Jacob's family numbered seventy-five (7:14). Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5 in our Hebrew-based Bibles say seventy. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, says seventy-five in those places, counting some of Joseph's descendants. Stephen, likely a Greek-speaking Jew, quoted the number from the Greek version his listeners knew. Both are correct counts made in different ways.

Genesis tells us Abraham bought a cave at Machpelah near Hebron (Genesis 23), while Jacob bought land at Shechem from the sons of Hamor (Genesis 33:19), where Joseph was later buried (Joshua 24:32). Stephen appears to be summing up both burial places in one short sentence. Bible teachers have offered several explanations for this. What matters most for Stephen's point is that the fathers of Israel were buried in the land, waiting for God's promise, and Shechem was in Samaria, a region the Council looked down on.

Old Testament links: Joshua 24:32 (alluded to); Genesis 33:19 (alluded to); Genesis 50:13 (alluded to); Genesis 42:1-2 (alluded to); Genesis 46:6 (alluded to); Genesis 46:27 (alluded to)

7:17-19 *But as the time of the promise which God had sworn to Abraham was drawing near, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until another king arose who did not know Joseph. This* ***man****, having dealt treacherously with our race, mistreated our fathers, making* ***them*** *expose their infants so that they would not be kept alive.*

Stephen is drawing on Exodus 1:8-22. Notice again that God's people were living outside the Promised Land, in a pagan nation, and God was still at work among them, keeping His promise to Abraham right on schedule.

Old Testament links: Exodus 1:8 (quoted); Exodus 1:10 (alluded to); Exodus 1:22 (alluded to); Exodus 1:7 (alluded to)

7:20-22 *At that time Moses was born, and he was beautiful to God; and he was brought up three months in the house of his father. And when he had been exposed, the daughter of Pharaoh took him up and brought him up for herself as a son. And Moses was instructed in all* ***the*** *wisdom of* ***the*** *Egyptians, and he was mighty in words and in deeds.*

The story of Moses' birth is told in Exodus 2:1-10. Egypt was one of the most advanced nations in the world at that time. God placed Moses in Pharaoh's own house so he would be ready to lead. Here Stephen is plainly honoring Moses. He is answering the charge that he spoke against Moses by showing that he holds Moses in the highest respect.

Old Testament links: Exodus 2:2 (alluded to); Exodus 2:5 (alluded to); Exodus 2:10 (alluded to)

7:23-25 *And when a time of forty years was being fulfilled for him, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the sons of Israel. And having seen a certain one being wronged, he defended* ***him*** *and carried out vengeance for the one being oppressed, having struck down the Egyptian. And he was supposing* ***that*** *his brothers understood that God through his hand is giving them salvation; but they did not understand.*

Exodus 2:11-12 tells of Moses striking down the Egyptian. Stephen's key line is verse 25: Moses was "supposing that his brothers understood that God through his hand is giving them salvation; but they did not understand." Here is the pattern again. God sent a deliverer, and Israel didn't recognize him. Stephen's listeners would soon realize he wasn't just talking about Moses.

Old Testament links: Exodus 2:11-12 (alluded to)

7:26-29 *And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling, and urged them to peace, saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you wrong one another?' But the one wronging the neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'Who appointed you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me in the same way you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' And Moses fled at this word, and became a sojourner in **the** land of Midian, where he fathered two sons.*

Midian lay east of Egypt (Exodus 2:15-22). The man God had chosen to deliver Israel was rejected by the very people he came to help, and he spent the next forty years in the wilderness.

The question "Who appointed you ruler and judge over us?" comes from Exodus 2:14, where one Hebrew threw it back at Moses.

Old Testament links: Exodus 2:14 (quoted); Exodus 2:15 (alluded to); Exodus 18:3-4 (alluded to); Exodus 2:13 (alluded to)

7:30-34 *And when forty years had been fulfilled, an angel of **the** Lord appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire of a bush. And Moses, having seen **it**, marveled at the sight; and as he was approaching to look closely, **there** came a voice of **the** Lord to him: 'I **am** the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' And Moses, having become terrified, was not daring to look closely. And the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandal of your feet, for the place in which you stand is holy ground. Having seen, I have seen the mistreatment of My people who **are** in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them; and now come, I will send you to Egypt.'*

Stephen is retelling Exodus 3. He has been accused of speaking against "this holy place," the temple. Now he points out that God called a bush in the desert holy ground. Wherever God shows up is holy. God isn't bound to a building in Jerusalem.

Old Testament links: Exodus 3:2 (quoted); Exodus 3:5 (quoted); Exodus 3:6 (quoted); Exodus 3:7-10 (quoted); Exodus 3:3-4 (alluded to); Exodus 2:24 (alluded to)

7:35-36 *This Moses, whom they denied, saying, 'Who appointed you ruler and judge?', this one God sent **as** ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. This one led them out, having done wonders and signs in **the** land of Egypt and in **the** Red Sea and in the wilderness forty years.*

Now Stephen's point gets sharper. The man they rejected is the man God chose. Stephen's listeners knew exactly how the story went. What they didn't see yet was that they were repeating it. Jesus was also rejected by His people, and God raised Him up and made Him "both Lord and Christ" (2:36).

Stephen quotes Exodus 2:14 a second time: "Who appointed you ruler and judge?"

Old Testament links: Exodus 2:14 (quoted); Exodus 7:3 (alluded to); Numbers 14:33 (alluded to)

7:37-38 *This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, '**The** Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers; Him you shall listen to.' This is the one who was in the assembly in the wilderness with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received living oracles to give to us;*

Moses' promise comes from Deuteronomy 18:15. Peter already applied this promise to Jesus in 3:22-23. Moses himself pointed forward to someone greater who was coming. So when Stephen preached Jesus, he wasn't speaking against Moses. He was doing exactly what Moses told Israel to do: listen to the Prophet God would raise up.

The word for "assembly" here is the same Greek word translated "church" elsewhere, ekklesia, meaning an assembly or gathering, from words meaning "called out." Israel was God's called-out people in the wilderness. Moses received "living oracles" to pass on to them, meaning the Law, God's words that give life to those who obey them. Stephen is affirming that the Law came from God. He has no quarrel with it.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 18:15 (quoted)

7:39-41 *to whom our fathers were not willing to become obedient, but they pushed **him** away, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who brought us out from **the** land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.' And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.*

Stephen is pointing to Exodus 32, and his point is clear. The ones who truly broke the Law of Moses were Israel's own fathers, who were worshiping a golden calf while God was handing Moses the Law.

Old Testament links: Exodus 32:1 (quoted); Exodus 32:23 (quoted); Exodus 32:4 (alluded to); Numbers 14:4 (alluded to); Exodus 32:6 (alluded to); Psalm 106:19 (alluded to)

7:42-43 *But God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven, just as it has been written in **the** book of the prophets: 'Did you offer Me slain beasts and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? And you took up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of your god Remphan, the figures which you made to worship them; and I will remove you beyond Babylon.'*

"The host of heaven" means the sun, moon, and stars. When people keep choosing idols, God eventually gives them over to what they have chosen (Romans 1:24-28).

Stephen quotes Amos 5:25-27. While Israel went through the motions of worshiping the Lord, they were carrying along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Remphan. Moloch was a Canaanite god associated with child sacrifice. Remphan appears to have been a star god. The idolatry that started at Mount Sinai continued for centuries and ended with God sending Israel into exile.

Amos says "beyond Damascus." Stephen says "beyond Babylon." Amos was warning the northern kingdom, which was taken to Assyria, beyond Damascus. Judah was later taken even farther, to Babylon. Stephen seems to be summing up the whole story of Israel's exile in one phrase.

Old Testament links: Amos 5:25-27 (quoted)

7:44-47 *The tabernacle of the testimony was among our fathers in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses commanded* ***him*** *to make it according to the figure which he had seen; which also our fathers, having received* ***it*** *in turn, brought in with Joshua in the taking possession of the nations, whom God drove out from* ***the*** *face of our fathers, until the days of David; who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house.*

Now Stephen answers the temple charge directly. The tabernacle was a portable tent where God met with Israel, built exactly according to the pattern God showed Moses (Exodus 25:8-9, 40). It was God's idea, and it moved with the people.

David's request is in 2 Samuel 7:1-2, and Solomon's building is in 1 Kings 6. Look at how long Israel worshiped God without a temple. From Abraham to Solomon is around a thousand years. God was with His people the whole time.

Old Testament links: Psalm 132:5 (alluded to); Exodus 25:40 (alluded to); Exodus 26:30 (alluded to); 2 Samuel 7:2 (alluded to); Exodus 25:9 (alluded to); 1 Kings 6:14 (alluded to)

7:48-50 *But the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, just as the prophet says: 'Heaven* ***is*** *My throne, and the earth* ***is*** *a footstool for My feet. What kind of house will you build for Me, says* ***the*** *Lord, or what* ***is*** *the place of My rest? Did not My hand make all these things?'*

Stephen quotes Isaiah 66:1-2. This was Stephen's whole point about the temple. He wasn't speaking against it. Even Solomon admitted at the temple's dedication that heaven itself can't contain God, much less a house (1 Kings 8:27). The problem was that the Council had made an idol out of the building. They trusted in the temple more than in the God of the temple. Jesus, the true dwelling place of God with man (John 1:14), was standing among them, and they rejected Him. Today, God's Spirit dwells in His people, the church (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). And one day, in the New Jerusalem, there will be no temple at all, because the Lord God and the Lamb are its temple (Revelation 21:22).

Old Testament links: Isaiah 66:1-2 (quoted)

7:51-53 *You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and in ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers* ***did****, you also* ***do****. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold concerning the coming of the Righteous One, of whom you have now become betrayers and murderers, you who received the law by ordinances of angels, and did not keep* ***it****."*

Here Stephen stops telling history and speaks directly to the men in front of him. "Stiff-necked" means stubborn, like an ox that won't bend its neck to the yoke. God used that very word for Israel after the golden calf (Exodus 33:5). "Uncircumcised in heart" means they had the outward

sign of the covenant but not the inner reality (Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 9:26). They were proud of circumcision, and Stephen tells them their hearts were no different from pagan hearts.

"The Righteous One" is Jesus. They received the Law "by ordinances of angels" (see Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2), and yet they didn't keep it. The men accusing Stephen of breaking the Law were the true lawbreakers.

Stephen was not condemning the Jewish people as a whole. He was a Jew, the apostles were Jews, and thousands of Jews had already believed. He was calling out the leaders in front of him, the same way the Old Testament prophets did. God has not given up on Israel (Romans 11:1-2, 25-27).

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 10:16 (alluded to); Exodus 33:5 (alluded to)

7:54-56 *And hearing these things, they were furious in their hearts, and were gnashing their teeth at him. But he, being full of **the** Holy Spirit, having looked intently into heaven, saw **the** glory of God, and Jesus standing at **the** right **hand** of God; and he said, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at **the** right **hand** of God."*

Gnashing teeth is a picture of raw rage. Two things stand out in what Stephen saw. First, "Son of Man" was the name Jesus used for Himself most often, taken from Daniel 7:13-14. Outside the Gospels, this is the only place in the New Testament where someone calls Jesus "the Son of Man." Revelation 1:13 and 14:14 describe One "like a son of man," and Hebrews 2:6-9 applies the "son of man" of Psalm 8 to Jesus. Jesus told this same Council at His trial that they would see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power (Matthew 26:64). Now Stephen tells them he sees it.

Second, elsewhere Jesus is usually described as seated at God's right hand (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:3). Here He is standing. Scripture doesn't tell us why. Many believe Jesus stood to welcome His first martyr home. Others see Him standing as a witness or advocate, testifying for Stephen in heaven's court while an earthly court condemned him. I find both encouraging. The Council rejected Stephen, but heaven stood up for him.

Old Testament links: Daniel 7:13 (alluded to); Psalm 110:1 (alluded to)

7:57-58 *And having cried out with a loud voice, they stopped their ears and rushed upon him with one accord; and having cast **him** out of the city, they were stoning **him**. And the witnesses laid aside their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul.*

They didn't want to hear another word. The Law required that blasphemers be stoned outside the camp (Leviticus 24:14), so they took him outside the city walls. Under Roman rule the Jewish leaders did not have the right to carry out an execution on their own (John 18:31). That is why they needed Pilate to crucify Jesus. What happened to Stephen looks less like a legal sentence and more like a mob that lost control.

This is the first time we meet the man who would become the apostle Paul. The witnesses were the ones who threw the first stones (Deuteronomy 17:7). Saul was watching over their coats and approving of what they did (8:1; 22:20). He had no idea that the Jesus Stephen saw in heaven would meet him on the road to Damascus.

7:59-60 *And they were stoning Stephen as he was calling upon **the Lord** and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And having knelt down, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And having said this, he fell asleep.*

On the cross Jesus said, "Father, into Your hands I will commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). Stephen prays the same prayer, but he prays it to Jesus. He knew Jesus is God, and that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Again Stephen sounds just like his Savior, who prayed for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). That is what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit. Stephen's last words were not words of anger, but forgiveness.

Scripture often uses sleep to describe the death of a believer (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16). It doesn't mean the soul goes unconscious; Stephen asked Jesus to receive his spirit, and He did. The picture of sleep means death is not the end for God's people. Their bodies rest until the day of resurrection, when Christ comes for His church and "the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Stephen's name comes from the Greek word stephanos, which means "crown," the victor's crown given to the winner of a race. Stephen was the first Christian martyr, and Jesus promises "the crown of life" to those who are faithful until death (Revelation 2:10). We also see the souls of martyrs under the altar in Revelation 6:9-11, waiting for God to make things right. Stephen was the first of many who would give their lives for the testimony of Jesus.

Chapter 7 Summary

Accused of speaking against Moses, the Law, and the temple, Stephen walked the Council through Israel's history. He showed that God met His people long before there was a temple, and that Israel had a pattern of rejecting the deliverers God sent, from Joseph to Moses to the prophets. He honored Moses and the Law, but he declared that the Council had betrayed and murdered the Righteous One. Enraged, they stoned him outside the city. Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he died praying for his killers while a young man named Saul looked on.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. If you had to tell the story of your life in a few minutes, which moments would you include?

2. What was Stephen accused of, and how did his speech answer those charges? (6:13-14; 7:1-53)

3. Where did God first appear to Abraham, and why does that matter for Stephen's point? (7:2)

4. What pattern does Stephen show in the stories of Joseph and Moses? (7:9, 7:25, 7:35)

5. What did Moses say God would raise up for Israel? (7:37)

6. Where does Stephen say God does not dwell? (7:48-50)

7. What did Stephen see just before he died? (7:55-56)

8. Who was watching over the coats of the men who stoned Stephen? (7:58)

9. How are Stephen's last words similar to the words of Jesus on the cross? (7:59-60)

10. Is there someone you need to forgive, the way Stephen forgave the men who killed him?

11. How does Stephen's vision of Jesus encourage you when you face opposition for your faith?

Chapter 8: The Church Scattered

Scripture: Saul Ravages the Church; Philip in Samaria; Simon the Magician; The Ethiopian Official

8:1-3 And Saul was consenting to his killing. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church which ***was*** in Jerusalem; and all were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he was delivering ***them*** to prison.

8:4-8 Therefore those who had been scattered went about preaching the word ***as*** the gospel. And Philip, having gone down to a city of Samaria, was proclaiming the Christ to them. And the crowds with one accord were giving heed to the things being spoken by Philip, in their hearing and seeing the signs which he was doing. For from many of those having unclean spirits, they were coming out, crying with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. And ***there*** was great joy in that city.

8:9-13 Now a certain man named Simon was formerly in the city practicing sorcery and amazing the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was someone great, to whom they all were giving heed, from small to great, saying, "This ***man*** is the great power of God." And they were giving heed to him because for a long time he had amazed them with the magic arts. But when they believed Philip preaching the gospel, the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, both men and women. And Simon himself also believed; and having been baptized, he was steadfastly continuing with Philip; and observing miracles and signs being done, he was amazed.

8:14-25 Now the apostles in Jerusalem, having heard that Samaria has received the word of God, sent Peter and John to them, who, having come down, prayed for them that they might receive ***the*** Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; but they had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they were laying their hands on them, and they were receiving ***the*** Holy Spirit. And Simon, having seen that through the laying on of the hands of the apostles the Holy Spirit is given, offered them money, saying, "Give me also this authority, so that on whomever I lay my hands, he may receive ***the*** Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver be with you for destruction, because you thought to acquire the gift of God through money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray earnestly to God, if perhaps the intent of your heart will be forgiven you. For I see you being in ***the*** gall of bitterness and ***the*** bond of unrighteousness." And answering, Simon said, "You yourselves pray earnestly to the Lord on my behalf, so that nothing of what you have spoken may come upon me." So they, having solemnly testified and having spoken the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and they preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

8:26-40 And an angel of ***the*** Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Rise up and go toward ***the*** south, on the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. And having risen up, he went. And

look, a man, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace the queen of ***the*** Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning, and sitting in his chariot he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and be joined to this chariot." And having run up, Philip heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you indeed understand what you are reading?" And he said, "For how could I be able, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip, having come up, to sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture which he was reading was this: "As a sheep He was led to slaughter, and as a lamb before the one shearing it ***is*** silent, so He does not open His mouth. In His humiliation His judgment was taken away; and who will describe His generation? For His life is taken away from the earth." And answering Philip, the eunuch said, "I beg you, concerning whom does the prophet say this? Concerning himself, or concerning some other ***man***?" And Philip, having opened his mouth and having begun from this Scripture, preached Jesus ***as*** the gospel to him. And as they were going along the road, they came upon some water; and the eunuch says, "Look, water! What hinders me from being baptized?" And Philip said, "If you believe from all your heart, it is permitted." And answering, he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he commanded the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, ***the*** Spirit of ***the*** Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer; for he was going on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus; and passing through, he was preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

Chapter 8 Preview

Stephen's death opened the floodgates. A great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, led by Saul, and the believers scattered. But instead of silencing the church, the persecution spread it. Everywhere the believers went, they preached the Word. This is the turning point of the book. Up to now the Gospel has stayed in Jerusalem. Now, just as Jesus said in 1:8, it goes out to Judea and Samaria.

Philip, one of the seven from chapter 6, carries the Gospel to Samaria, and many believe, including a magician named Simon. Peter and John come down from Jerusalem, and the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit. Simon tries to buy that power with money and is sharply rebuked. Then an angel sends Philip to a desert road, where he meets an official from Ethiopia reading Isaiah. Philip tells him about Jesus, baptizes him, and the man goes home rejoicing.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1 *And Saul was consenting to his killing. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church which* ***was*** *in Jerusalem; and all were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

Luke wants us to know that the young man holding the coats wasn't just standing by. He approved. Later, as the apostle Paul, he would confess this with deep regret (22:20; 1 Timothy 1:13).

Judea was the region around Jerusalem. Samaria was the region just north of it. Look back at Jesus' words in 1:8. He said His followers would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, then "in all Judea and Samaria," and then to the ends of the earth. The church had been slow to leave Jerusalem. God used persecution to move them out.

Scripture doesn't say why the apostles stayed. They may have felt called to keep leading the church in Jerusalem. It is also possible the persecution was aimed mostly at the Hellenistic believers like Stephen, whom the leaders saw as speaking against the temple.

8:2 *And devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him.*

Stephen died with heaven opened before him, and still the believers grieved deeply. Christians are not told never to grieve. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). It is right to weep when someone we love goes home to the Lord, even while we know they are with Him.

Scripture doesn't tell us who these devout men were. They may have been believers, or they may have been godly Jews who were sickened by what was done to Stephen. Either way, burying a man the Council had just stoned took courage.

8:3 *But Saul was ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he was delivering* ***them*** *to prison.*

The word Luke uses for "ravaging" was used of a wild animal tearing apart its prey. Paul later said he persecuted the Way to the death (22:4) and voted against believers when they were put to death (26:10).

Saul did all of this believing he was serving God (Philippians 3:6). That should give us pause. Sincerity is not enough. A person can be sincere and sincerely wrong. And yet keep reading. God was about to take the worst persecutor of the church and make him its greatest missionary. Nobody is beyond the reach of God's grace.

8:4-5 *Therefore those who had been scattered went about preaching the word* ***as*** *the gospel. And Philip, having gone down to a city of Samaria, was proclaiming the Christ to them.*

Verse 4 is one of my favorite verses in Acts. The enemy meant the persecution to stamp out the church, and God used it to scatter seed across the land. The people doing the preaching here weren't apostles. They were ordinary believers. Every one of them was a witness. That is still God's plan for us.

This is Philip from the seven in 6:5, not the apostle Philip, since the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. He is later called "Philip the evangelist" (21:8).

The Samaritans were a mixed people. When Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., it moved foreigners into the land, and they intermarried with the Israelites who remained (2 Kings 17:24-41). The Samaritans accepted only the five books of Moses and worshiped on Mount Gerizim instead of in Jerusalem (John 4:20). Jews and Samaritans had hated

each other for centuries. For a Jewish believer to preach Christ in Samaria was crossing a line most Jews would never cross.

8:6-8 *And the crowds with one accord were giving heed to the things being spoken by Philip, in their hearing and seeing the signs which he was doing. For from many of those having unclean spirits, they were coming out, crying with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. And* ***there*** *was great joy in that city.*

The miracles confirmed the message, just as they had for the apostles. Wherever the Gospel truly takes hold, joy follows. Remember that Jesus Himself had already sown seed in Samaria when He spoke to the woman at the well, and many Samaritans believed in Him then (John 4:39-42). Philip was reaping a harvest Jesus had planted.

8:9-11 *Now a certain man named Simon was formerly in the city practicing sorcery and amazing the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was someone great, to whom they all were giving heed, from small to great, saying, "This* ***man*** *is the great power of God." And they were giving heed to him because for a long time he had amazed them with the magic arts.*

Magic here means sorcery, using occult powers or tricks to amaze people. Scripture is clear that sorcery is sin (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Galatians 5:20). Revelation lists sorcerers among those outside God's kingdom (Revelation 21:8; 22:15). Simon had a hold on the whole city, but Philip's message was about to break it.

8:12-13 *But when they believed Philip preaching the gospel, the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, both men and women. And Simon himself also believed; and having been baptized, he was steadfastly continuing with Philip; and observing miracles and signs being done, he was amazed.*

Notice the order. They believed first, then they were baptized. Baptism is the believer's public step of obedience after putting their faith in Jesus.

Notice what amazed Simon: the power. Simon had been the one doing the amazing, and now he saw something far greater than his tricks.

Was Simon truly saved? Scripture says he "believed," but the rest of the story raises serious doubt. Peter will tell him that his heart is not right before God and that he is in the bond of unrighteousness (8:21-23). Many Bible teachers believe Simon's faith was only on the surface, a belief in the miracles rather than in Christ, like the people in John 2:23-25 whom Jesus did not entrust Himself to. Others believe he was a true but immature believer who fell into serious sin. I lean toward the first view, but Luke doesn't tell us how Simon's story ended.

8:14-17 *Now the apostles in Jerusalem, having heard that Samaria has received the word of God, sent Peter and John to them, who, having come down, prayed for them that they might receive* ***the*** *Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; but they had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they were laying their hands on them, and they were receiving* ***the*** *Holy Spirit.*

This is unusual. Normally in the New Testament, a person receives the Holy Spirit the moment they believe (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13). So why the delay here? I believe God was doing something special at a turning point. For centuries Jews and Samaritans had been enemies with rival places of worship. If the Samaritans had received the Spirit apart from the apostles, there could easily have been two churches, a Jewish one and a Samaritan one. By waiting until Peter and John came from Jerusalem, God showed everyone that the Samaritans were part of the one church, with the same Spirit, under the same apostles. It is worth remembering that Jesus gave Peter "the keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19), and Peter is present each of the first three times a new group is brought in: Jews at Pentecost (chapter 2), Samaritans here, and Gentiles in chapter 10.

Some Christians see this passage as a pattern for a second experience of the Spirit after salvation. Others, like me, see it as a one-time event confirming that a new group had come into the church. Godly believers have held both views.

John is the same John who once wanted to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village (Luke 9:51-56). Now he was laying hands on Samaritans and praying for them to receive the Holy Spirit. That is what Jesus does in a person's heart.

8:18-19 *And Simon, having seen that through the laying on of the hands of the apostles the Holy Spirit is given, offered them money, saying, "Give me also this authority, so that on whomever I lay my hands, he may receive* ***the*** *Holy Spirit."*

Luke says Simon "saw" something happen. Scripture doesn't say exactly what, but it must have been something outward, perhaps the same kinds of signs seen at Pentecost. Simon wanted to buy God's power so he could use it the way he had used his magic: to impress people and make money. His name is where we get the word "simony," which means buying or selling church offices or spiritual things.

8:20-23 *But Peter said to him, "May your silver be with you for destruction, because you thought to acquire the gift of God through money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray earnestly to God, if perhaps the intent of your heart will be forgiven you. For I see you being in* ***the*** *gall of bitterness and* ***the*** *bond of unrighteousness."*

Peter's answer is strong. God's gifts can't be bought. They are gifts. Salvation itself is "not from yourselves; the gift is of God" (Ephesians 2:8-9), freely given by grace and never earned.

The "if perhaps" doesn't mean God might refuse to forgive a truly repentant heart. It shows how serious Simon's sin was and that it would take true repentance, not just words.

Gall was a bitter, poisonous plant. Simon was poisoned on the inside and still a slave to sin. That is a hard thing to say to a man who had just been baptized, but it was the truth he needed to hear.

8:24-25 *And answering, Simon said, "You yourselves pray earnestly to the Lord on my behalf, so that nothing of what you have spoken may come upon me." So they, having solemnly testified and having spoken the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and they preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.*

Simon seems more worried about the consequences than about his sin. He doesn't pray himself, and he doesn't say he is sorry. Scripture doesn't tell us what became of Simon after this. Some early Christian writers told stories about him, but those come from outside the Bible, and I won't build anything on them.

The two Jewish apostles who once may have walked around Samaria to avoid it were now going village to village to share the Good News with Samaritans.

8:26 *And an angel of **the** Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Rise up and go toward **the** south, on the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert.*

Gaza was an old Philistine city near the Mediterranean coast in the southwest of Israel. Luke adds, "This is desert." The road ran through a lonely stretch of wilderness.

Think about this for a moment. Philip was in the middle of a revival in Samaria, with crowds believing and being baptized. And God told him to leave and go to an empty desert road. It didn't make sense. But Philip went. Sometimes God moves us away from where things are exciting to reach just one person. That one person matters to God.

8:27-28 *And having risen up, he went. And look, a man, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace the queen of **the** Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning, and sitting in his chariot he was reading the prophet Isaiah.*

The Ethiopia of the Bible was not the same as the modern country of Ethiopia. It was the ancient kingdom of Kush, south of Egypt, in what is now Sudan. "Candace" was not a personal name; it was the title of the queen mother who ruled there, the way "Pharaoh" was the title of Egypt's king.

A eunuch was a man who had been castrated. Eunuchs often served as trusted officials in royal courts. Under the Law of Moses a eunuch could not enter the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:1). But God promised through Isaiah that a day would come when eunuchs who held fast to His covenant would have a name better than sons and daughters (Isaiah 56:3-5). That day had come.

This man had traveled more than a thousand miles to worship in Jerusalem. He was hungry for God, and God sent Philip to meet him.

8:29-31 *And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and be joined to this chariot." And having run up, Philip heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you indeed understand what you are reading?" And he said, "For how could I be able, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip, having come up, to sit with him.*

In those days people usually read out loud, even when reading alone. That is how Philip could hear what he was reading. I love the humility of this powerful official. He didn't pretend to understand what he didn't. That is the right heart for studying God's Word. We need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes, and God often uses other believers to help us understand (Ephesians 4:11-12).

8:32-35 *Now the passage of the Scripture which he was reading was this: "As a sheep He was led to slaughter, and as a lamb before the one shearing it **is** silent, so He does not open His mouth. In His humiliation His judgment was taken away; and who will describe His generation? For His life is taken away from the earth." And answering Philip, the eunuch said, "I beg you, concerning whom does the prophet say this? Concerning himself, or concerning some other **man**?" And Philip, having opened his mouth and having begun from this Scripture, preached Jesus **as** the gospel to him.*

The passage is Isaiah 53:7-8. The eunuch's question is the right one, and it is the question many Jewish readers have asked about Isaiah 53.

Isaiah prophesied about seven hundred years before Jesus was born. Even scholars who date these chapters later agree they were written centuries before Him; the Great Isaiah Scroll among the Dead Sea Scrolls, copied over a century before Jesus, contains all of Isaiah 53. The chapter describes His suffering and death in detail: despised and rejected, pierced for our transgressions, silent before His accusers, bearing the sins of many. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), and He is the Lamb we see on the throne in Revelation (Revelation 5:6-12). Philip didn't have to look far to find Jesus. He is the center of all Scripture (Luke 24:27).

Old Testament links: Isaiah 53:7-8 (quoted)

8:36-38 *And as they were going along the road, they came upon some water; and the eunuch says, "Look, water! What hinders me from being baptized?" And Philip said, "If you believe from all your heart, it is permitted." And answering, he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he commanded the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.*

The eunuch asked what was keeping him from being baptized. In verse 37 Philip gives the answer: "If you believe from all your heart, it is permitted." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," and he was ready to obey right away.

The SLB includes verse 37, as the King James Version does. Most modern translations leave it out of the text or put it in a footnote, because it is not found in the earliest manuscripts of Acts. Whether or not Luke wrote verse 37, it fits the rest of Acts well: faith comes first, and then baptism follows as the believer's public confession.

Many believers see the words "went down into the water" and "came up out of the water" as pointing to baptism by immersion, a picture of being buried with Christ and raised to new life (Romans 6:3-4). Other Christians baptize by pouring or sprinkling. What matters most is that this man believed in Jesus and obeyed Him.

8:39-40 *And when they came up out of the water,* ***the*** *Spirit of* ***the*** *Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer; for he was going on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus; and passing through, he was preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.*

The eunuch had come to Jerusalem looking for God and was going home with Jesus in his heart. Tradition says he brought the Gospel back to his homeland, but Scripture doesn't tell us. What we do know is that the Gospel was now moving toward "the uttermost part of the earth" (1:8).

Azotus was the old Philistine city of Ashdod, about twenty miles north of Gaza. Caesarea was a large port city built by Herod the Great and the Roman capital of the province. Philip seems to have settled there, because about twenty years later Paul stays at his house in Caesarea, where Philip lives with his four daughters (21:8-9).

God took Philip from a crowd to one man, and then from one man to a whole coastline. Whether God sends us to many or to one, the job is the same: tell them about Jesus.

Chapter 8 Summary

After Stephen's death, a great persecution led by Saul scattered the believers, but everywhere they went they preached the Word. Philip took the Gospel to Samaria, where many believed and were baptized, including a magician named Simon. Peter and John came from Jerusalem, and when they laid hands on the Samaritans, they received the Holy Spirit. Simon tried to buy that power and was rebuked. An angel then sent Philip to a desert road, where he explained Isaiah 53 to an Ethiopian official. The man believed in Jesus, was baptized, and went home rejoicing.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. Have you ever had something hard happen that God later used for good?
2. What did the believers do when they were scattered from Jerusalem? (8:4)
3. Who were the Samaritans, and why was it significant for Philip to preach there?
4. Why do you think God waited until Peter and John came before the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit? (8:14-17)
5. What did Simon want to buy, and how did Peter respond? (8:18-23)
6. Why would God send Philip away from a city-wide revival to a desert road? (8:26)
7. What question did Philip ask the Ethiopian official, and how did he answer? (8:30-31)
8. What passage was the official reading, and who was it about? (8:32-35)
9. Who has God used to help you understand His Word? Who could you help?

10. Is there one person God may be sending you to this week?

Chapter 9: The Conversion of Saul

Scripture: Saul on the Road to Damascus; Ananias; Saul Preaches; Aeneas and Tabitha

9:1-9 But Saul, still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, having gone to the high priest, requested from him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, so that if he found any being of the Way, both men and women, he might bring ***them*** bound to Jerusalem. And as he was traveling, it came about ***that*** he was drawing near to Damascus; and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And having fallen on the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ***It is*** hard for you to kick against goads." And trembling and astonished, he said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" And the Lord ***said*** to him, "Rise up and enter into the city, and it will be told to you what you must do." And the men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing indeed the voice but seeing no one. And Saul rose up from the ground, and with his eyes opened, he was seeing no one; and leading him by the hand, they brought ***him*** into Damascus. And he was three days without seeing, and he neither ate nor drank.

9:10-19 Now ***there*** was a certain disciple in Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Look, I ***am here***, Lord." And the Lord ***said*** to him, "Having risen up, go to the street which is called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas ***one*** named Saul, of Tarsus; for look, he is praying, and he saw in a vision a man named Ananias having come in and having put a hand on him, so that he may see again." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man, how many evils he did to Your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all those calling on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for this ***man*** is a vessel of choice to Me, to carry My name before Gentiles and kings and ***the*** sons of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for the sake of My name." And Ananias went away and entered into the house; and having laid his hands on him, he said, "Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, so that you may see again and be filled with ***the*** Holy Spirit." And immediately ***something*** like scales fell from his eyes, and he saw again at once; and having risen up, he was baptized; and having taken food, he regained strength. And Saul was with the disciples in Damascus some days.

9:20-25 And immediately in the synagogues he was proclaiming the Christ, that He is the Son of God. And all those hearing were amazed and were saying, "Is this not the one who ravaged those calling on this name in Jerusalem, and had come here for this, that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul was being empowered all the more, and was confounding the Jews who dwell in Damascus, proving that this ***One*** is the Christ. Now when many days were being fulfilled, the Jews plotted together to kill him; but their plot became known to Saul. And they were watching the gates both by day and by night, so that they might kill him; but the disciples, having taken him by night, let him down through the wall, having lowered ***him*** in a basket.

9:26-31 And having arrived in Jerusalem, Saul was trying to be joined to the disciples; and all were afraid of him, not believing that he is a disciple. But Barnabas, having taken hold of him, brought ***him*** to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them, coming in and going out in Jerusalem, and speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, he was both speaking and debating with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him. But the brothers, having learned ***of it***, brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. So then the churches throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

9:32-35 And it came about ***that*** Peter, passing through all ***places***, came down also to the saints who dwell in Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, lying on a mat for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you; rise up and make ***your bed*** for yourself." And immediately he rose up. And all those dwelling in Lydda and Sharon saw him, who turned to the Lord.

9:36-43 Now in Joppa ***there*** was a certain female disciple named Tabitha, which translated is called Dorcas; she was full of good works and charitable deeds which she was doing. And it came about in those days ***that*** she became sick and died; and having washed ***her***, they laid her in an upper room. And Lydda being near to Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter is in it, sent two men to him, imploring ***him*** not to delay to come through to them. And Peter, having risen up, went with them; whom, having arrived, they brought up into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and garments, as many as Dorcas was making while she was with them. But Peter, having put them all outside and having bent the knees, prayed; and having turned to the body, he said, "Tabitha, rise up." And she opened her eyes, and having seen Peter, she sat up. And having given her ***his*** hand, he raised her up; and having called the saints and the widows, he presented her living. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. And it came about ***that*** he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Chapter 9 Preview

Chapter 9 tells one of the most important stories in all of church history. Saul, the man who stood by and approved of Stephen's death, sets out to arrest every believer he can find. On the road to Damascus he meets the risen Jesus face to face, and his life is turned completely around. The man who came to destroy the church becomes the one God chooses to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The chapter then returns to Peter. As he travels among the churches, God works through him to heal a paralyzed man named Aeneas and to raise a beloved woman named Tabitha from the dead. By the end of the chapter Peter is staying in Joppa, right where God wants him for what comes next.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-2 *But Saul, still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, having gone to the high priest, requested from him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, so that if he found any being of the Way, both men and women, he might bring* ***them*** *bound to Jerusalem.*

Luke picks up where he left Saul in 8:3. Saul is still "breathing out threats and murder" against the disciples. This was not a passing anger. It was a settled mission.

Damascus was a major city in Syria, roughly 150 miles northeast of Jerusalem, and it had a large Jewish population. The fact that there were already believers there tells us how fast the Gospel was spreading after the believers were scattered (8:4). Notice what the believers are called: those "of the Way." This is one of the earliest names for the Christian faith (19:9; 19:23; 24:14). It fits, because Jesus called Himself "the way" (John 14:6).

9:3-4 *And as he was traveling, it came about* ***that*** *he was drawing near to Damascus; and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And having fallen on the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"*

Later Paul tells us it was about noon and the light was brighter than the sun (22:6; 26:13).

Look closely at that question. Saul had never laid a hand on Jesus. He was arresting men and women in the church. But Jesus asks, "why are you persecuting Me?" Jesus is so joined to His people that what is done to them is done to Him (Matthew 25:40). If you belong to Christ, you are never suffering alone. He takes it personally.

9:5-6 *And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.* ***It is*** *hard for you to kick against goads." And trembling and astonished, he said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" And the Lord* ***said*** *to him, "Rise up and enter into the city, and it will be told to you what you must do."*

The answer must have shaken him to the core: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul had been sure Jesus was a false teacher who was dead and buried. Now he learned that Jesus was alive and speaking to him from heaven.

Jesus did not give Saul the whole plan right then. That is often how God leads us. He gives us the next step, not the whole map. Saul, the man who was used to being in charge, now had to obey and wait.

9:7 *And the men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing indeed the voice but seeing no one.*

God made sure there were witnesses that something real happened, but the message itself was for Saul.

9:8-9 *And Saul rose up from the ground, and with his eyes opened, he was seeing no one; and leading him by the hand, they brought **him** into Damascus. And he was three days without seeing, and he neither ate nor drank.*

The proud Pharisee who had marched toward Damascus with letters of authority had to be led into the city by the hand.

We aren't told everything that went on in Saul's mind during those three days, but we can be sure he was thinking and praying (verse 11). Everything he had believed about Jesus was wrong. God sometimes has to stop us in our tracks before He can rebuild us. Saul's blindness was not only a judgment. It was a time of quiet, where God was getting him ready.

9:10-12 *Now **there** was a certain disciple in Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Look, I **am here**, Lord." And the Lord **said** to him, "Having risen up, go to the street which is called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas **one** named Saul, of Tarsus; for look, he is praying, and he saw in a vision a man named Ananias having come in and having put a hand on him, so that he may see again."*

This is not the same Ananias who lied to the Holy Spirit in chapter 5. Later Paul describes him as a devout man by the standard of the Law, well spoken of by all the Jews in the city (22:12).

The Lord gave Ananias very specific directions. Straight Street was a main road running east to west through Damascus. Tarsus was a leading city in the region of Cilicia, in the southeast of modern-day Turkey. God was working on both ends.

9:13-14 *But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man, how many evils he did to Your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all those calling on Your name."*

I appreciate Ananias here. He wasn't arguing with God out of pride. He was afraid, and he told the Lord exactly how he felt. We can do the same. God is not offended when we bring Him our honest fears. Notice too that believers are called "saints" (holy ones). In the Bible, a saint is not a super-Christian. It is every person who belongs to God.

9:15-16 *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for this **man** is a vessel of choice to Me, to carry My name before Gentiles and kings and **the** sons of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for the sake of My name."*

Saul was "a vessel of choice" to the Lord, and everything the Lord said here came true. Paul preached to Gentiles all over the Roman world, stood before governors and King Agrippa (chapters 24 to 26), and as a rule went to the Jews first wherever there was a synagogue.

Then the Lord said something sobering. He would show Saul "how many things he must suffer" for His name. The man who caused so much suffering would now suffer for the same name. Paul later listed some of what he went through: beatings, stoning, shipwreck, hunger, and danger everywhere (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Following Jesus is not a promise of an easy life. It is a promise that He will be with us through all of it.

9:17 *And Ananias went away and entered into the house; and having laid his hands on him, he said, "Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, so that you may see again and be filled with* ***the*** *Holy Spirit."*

Ananias obeyed and called him "Saul, brother." Think about those two words. Days earlier Saul was coming to drag Ananias off in chains. Now Ananias welcomes him as family. That is what the Gospel does. It turns enemies into brothers.

Saul's three days of waiting before he was filled with the Spirit were unusual. God was dealing with a man who had been His enemy, and He chose to send Saul to another believer first. Luke does not present this as a pattern for every believer.

Ananias was not an apostle. He was an ordinary disciple. God can use any believer who is willing to obey.

9:18-19 *And immediately* ***something*** *like scales fell from his eyes, and he saw again at once; and having risen up, he was baptized; and having taken food, he regained strength. And Saul was with the disciples in Damascus some days.*

Saul's order is worth noticing. He met the risen Lord and believed, and then he was baptized right away. Baptism was his public step of obedience, showing everyone that he now belonged to Jesus. Later, in 22:16, Ananias tells him to be baptized and "wash away your sins," calling on His name. The washing there is tied to calling on the Lord in faith. And the man who came to Damascus to put believers in chains now sits at their table.

9:20-22 *And immediately in the synagogues he was proclaiming the Christ, that He is the Son of God. And all those hearing were amazed and were saying, "Is this not the one who ravaged those calling on this name in Jerusalem, and had come here for this, that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul was being empowered all the more, and was confounding the Jews who dwell in Damascus, proving that this* ***One*** *is the Christ.*

Saul wasted no time. The very first thing he preached was the truth he had fought against.

"Christ" comes from the Greek word that translates the Hebrew "Messiah"; both mean "Anointed One." Saul knew the Old Testament deeply. Now that his eyes were opened, he could see Jesus on every page, and he used those Scriptures to show that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

9:23-25 *Now when many days were being fulfilled, the Jews plotted together to kill him; but their plot became known to Saul. And they were watching the gates both by day and by night, so that they might kill him; but the disciples, having taken him by night, let him down through the wall, having lowered* ***him*** *in a basket.*

In Galatians 1:17-18, Paul tells us that after his conversion he went away into Arabia and then returned to Damascus, and three years later went up to Jerusalem. So the "many days" here likely covers that time.

Paul mentions this same escape in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33. The hunter had become the hunted. The man who arrived in Damascus with letters of authority left it hidden in a basket.

9:26-27 *And having arrived in Jerusalem, Saul was trying to be joined to the disciples; and all were afraid of him, not believing that he is a disciple. But Barnabas, having taken hold of him, brought* ***him*** *to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.*

Can you blame the disciples for being afraid of him? They had seen what he did to Stephen and to their families.

Then Barnabas stepped in. We first met him in 4:36, where his name is explained as "Son of Encouragement." He lived up to that name. Every church needs someone willing to take a risk on a new believer and vouch for him. Ask yourself who in your life might need you to be that person.

9:28-30 *And he was with them, coming in and going out in Jerusalem, and speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, he was both speaking and debating with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him. But the brothers, having learned* ***of it****, brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.*

The Hellenistic Jews were Greek-speaking Jews, many of whom had grown up outside Israel. They were the same group that had argued with Stephen and then had him killed (6:9). Now Saul stood where Stephen once stood, and they tried to kill him too.

Caesarea was the seaport on the coast, and Tarsus was Saul's hometown. Saul drops out of the story for a while here. We will see him again in 11:25, when Barnabas goes looking for him.

9:31 *So then the churches throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*

This verse is a summary, and it is a beautiful one.

Notice the order. The church had peace, but it did not get lazy. It kept walking in reverence for God and leaning on the Spirit. Peace and growth came together. Also notice the places: Judea and Samaria, just as Jesus said in 1:8. The plan was unfolding step by step. The fiercest persecutor had become a preacher, and the churches had rest.

9:32-35 *And it came about* ***that*** *Peter, passing through all* ***places****, came down also to the saints who dwell in Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, lying on a mat for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you; rise up and make* ***your bed*** *for yourself." And immediately he rose up. And all those dwelling in Lydda and Sharon saw him, who turned to the Lord.*

Luke now turns back to Peter. Lydda was a town about twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem on the road toward the coast.

Notice Peter's words: "Jesus the Christ heals you." Peter did not take any credit. He made it clear who was doing the healing. Sharon was the fertile coastal plain nearby. The miracle was not the goal. People turning to the Lord was the goal. That is always the purpose of God's mighty works in Acts.

9:36-38 *Now in Joppa **there** was a certain female disciple named Tabitha, which translated is called Dorcas; she was full of good works and charitable deeds which she was doing. And it came about in those days **that** she became sick and died; and having washed **her**, they laid her in an upper room. And Lydda being near to Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter is in it, sent two men to him, imploring **him** not to delay to come through to them.*

In Joppa, a seaport on the Mediterranean coast (modern Jaffa, part of Tel Aviv), lived a disciple named Tabitha. Her Greek name was Dorcas. Both names mean "gazelle." She was known for what she did for others.

Lydda was only about ten to twelve miles from Joppa. The believers had heard what God did through Peter in Lydda, and they had hope.

9:39-41 *And Peter, having risen up, went with them; whom, having arrived, they brought up into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and garments, as many as Dorcas was making while she was with them. But Peter, having put them all outside and having bent the knees, prayed; and having turned to the body, he said, "Tabitha, rise up." And she opened her eyes, and having seen Peter, she sat up. And having given her **his** hand, he raised her up; and having called the saints and the widows, he presented her living.*

What a picture of a life well spent. Her legacy was not money or fame. It was coats and dresses that kept poor widows warm.

Peter sent everyone out of the room, very much like what he watched Jesus do with Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:40-41). And notice that Peter prayed first. The power belonged to God, not to Peter.

9:42-43 *And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. And it came about **that** he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain Simon, a tanner.*

The detail about Simon the tanner is easy to skip, but it matters. A tanner worked with the skins of dead animals. Under the Law, touching dead animals made a person ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 11:39-40), so many Jews looked down on tanners. Peter staying in this man's house shows that God was already loosening some of Peter's old ideas about what was clean and unclean. Chapter 10 will take that lesson much further.

Chapter 9 Summary

Saul set out for Damascus to arrest believers and met the risen Jesus on the road. Blinded for three days, he was visited by Ananias, regained his sight, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and was baptized. He began preaching right away that Jesus is the Son of God and the Christ, escaped plots against his life in Damascus and Jerusalem, and was sent home to Tarsus. Meanwhile the church

enjoyed a season of peace and growth. Peter healed Aeneas in Lydda and raised Tabitha from the dead in Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

People and Places in Chapter 9

Damascus (9:2): An ancient city in Syria, roughly 150 miles northeast of Jerusalem, with a large Jewish community. It is still one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world.

The Way (9:2): One of the earliest names for the Christian faith and its followers, used several times in Acts (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

Tarsus (9:11): Saul's hometown, a leading city in Cilicia in the southeast of modern-day Turkey, known for its learning.

Hellenistic Jews (9:29): Jews who spoke Greek and had often grown up outside the land of Israel.

Lydda (9:32): A town on the road from Jerusalem to the coast, known today as Lod.

Joppa (9:36): An old seaport on the Mediterranean coast, today called Jaffa. This is the same port Jonah sailed from when he ran from God (Jonah 1:3).

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. Has there ever been a moment in your life that changed the direction of everything that came after it?

2. What did Saul ask the high priest for, and why? (9:1-2)

3. Whom did Jesus say Saul was persecuting? What does that tell us about how Jesus sees His church? (9:4-5)

4. Why was Ananias afraid to go to Saul, and how did the Lord answer him? (9:13-16)

5. What did Saul begin to preach right after his conversion? (9:20-22)

6. How did Barnabas help Saul in Jerusalem? (9:26-27)

7. What words did Peter use when he healed Aeneas, and who received the credit? (9:34)

8. How was Tabitha remembered, and what would you like to be remembered for? (9:36-39)

9. Is there someone you have written off as "too far gone" for God to reach? How does Saul's story change the way you see that person?

10. Who might need you to be a Barnabas for them this week?

Chapter 10: Peter and Cornelius

Scripture: Cornelius' Vision; Peter's Vision; Peter at Caesarea; The Gentiles Receive the Spirit

10:1-8 Now ***there*** was a certain man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of the cohort called Italian, devout and fearing God with all his household, both doing many charitable deeds for the people and praying to God continually. He saw clearly in a vision, about ***the*** ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him and saying to him, "Cornelius!" And he, having looked intently at him and having become afraid, said, "What is it, lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your charitable deeds went up as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and summon Simon, who is called Peter. He is lodging with a certain Simon, a tanner, whose house is by ***the*** sea. He will tell you what you must do." And when the angel who was speaking to Cornelius had departed, having called two of his household servants and a devout soldier of those steadfastly attending him, and having related all things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

10:9-16 Now on the next day, as those ***men*** were journeying and drawing near to the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about ***the*** sixth hour. And he became very hungry and was wanting to eat; but while they were preparing, a trance fell upon him, and he sees heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him like a great sheet, bound by four corners and being let down upon the earth, in which were all the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the creeping things and the birds of heaven. And a voice came to him, "Having risen up, Peter, kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And a voice ***came*** again a second time to him, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." And this happened three times; and the vessel was taken up again into heaven.

10:17-23 Now while Peter was perplexed in himself as to what the vision which he had seen might be, then look, the men who had been sent from Cornelius, having inquired for the house of Simon, stood at the gateway. And having called out, they were asking whether Simon, who is called Peter, is lodging here. And while Peter was pondering over the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are seeking you. But having risen up, go down and go with them, doubting nothing, because I have sent them." And Peter, having gone down to the men who had been sent from Cornelius to him, said, "Look, I am ***he*** whom you seek. What ***is*** the cause for which you are here?" And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous man and one fearing God, and well testified to by the whole nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear declarations from you." So having invited them in, he lodged ***them***. And on the next day Peter went out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went with him.

10:24-33 And on the next day they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius was expecting them, having called together his relatives and close friends. And as it came about ***that*** Peter entered, Cornelius, having met him, fell at his feet and worshiped ***him***. But Peter raised him up, saying, "Rise up; I myself also am a man." And talking with him, he entered, and he finds many gathered together. And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to be joined to or to come near to a foreigner; and to me God has shown to call no man common or

unclean. Therefore also I came without objection, having been summoned. So I ask, for what reason did you summon me?" And Cornelius said, "Four days ago until this hour I was fasting, and at the ninth hour praying in my house; and look, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and he says, 'Cornelius, your prayer was heard, and your charitable deeds were remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and call for Simon, who is called Peter. He is lodging in ***the*** house of Simon, a tanner, by ***the*** sea; who, having come, will speak to you.' So at once I sent to you, and you did well, having come. Now therefore we are all present before God to hear all the things commanded you by God."

10:34-43 And Peter, having opened his mouth, said, "In truth I grasp that God is not one who shows partiality, but in every nation the one fearing Him and working righteousness is acceptable to Him. The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace ***as*** the gospel through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), you yourselves know: the declaration which came throughout all Judea, having begun from Galilee after the baptism which John proclaimed: Jesus who ***was*** from Nazareth, how God anointed Him with ***the*** Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all those being oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did, both in the region of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they killed, having hanged ***Him*** on a tree. This ***One*** God raised up on the third day, and gave Him to become manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen beforehand by God, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He rose out of ***the*** dead. And He commanded us to proclaim to the people and to solemnly testify that He is the One appointed by God ***as*** judge of ***the*** living and ***the*** dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness, that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

10:44-48 While Peter was still speaking these declarations, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word. And the believers of ***the*** circumcision, as many as had come with Peter, were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit has been poured out even upon the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and magnifying God. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone hinder the water, so that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we also ***have***?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to remain some days.

Chapter 10 Preview

Chapter 10 is a turning point in the book of Acts. Up to now the Gospel has gone to Jews and to Samaritans, who were half Jewish and kept the books of Moses. Now God opens the door to the Gentiles, people who are not Jewish at all. He does it by preparing two men at the same time: a Roman army officer named Cornelius in Caesarea and the apostle Peter in Joppa.

God gives each man a vision. He teaches Peter that he must not call any person common or unclean. When Peter preaches Jesus in Cornelius' house, the Holy Spirit falls on everyone listening before Peter can even finish. The Gentiles are brought into the church on the same footing as the Jews: by faith in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1-2 *Now **there** was a certain man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of the cohort called Italian, devout and fearing God with all his household, both doing many charitable deeds for the people and praying to God continually.*

Caesarea was a city on the Mediterranean coast built by Herod the Great and named in honor of Caesar Augustus. It was the Roman capital of the province of Judea and the home of the Roman governor, so it was full of soldiers. One of them was Cornelius, a centurion "of the cohort called Italian." A centurion was a Roman officer who commanded about a hundred soldiers. A cohort was a larger unit of several hundred men.

Men like Cornelius were often called God-fearers. They worshiped the God of Israel and followed much of His teaching, but they had not become full converts to Judaism through circumcision (those full converts were called proselytes). Cornelius was a sincere seeker. But as we'll see, he still needed to hear about Jesus to be saved (11:14).

10:3-6 *He saw clearly in a vision, about **the** ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him and saying to him, "Cornelius!" And he, having looked intently at him and having become afraid, said, "What is it, lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your charitable deeds went up as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and summon Simon, who is called Peter. He is lodging with a certain Simon, a tanner, whose house is by **the** sea. He will tell you what you must do."*

The ninth hour of the day was about three o'clock in the afternoon, the regular time of afternoon prayer at the temple (3:1).

His "prayers and your charitable deeds went up as a memorial before God," the angel said. In other words, God had noticed.

The angel did not preach the Gospel to Cornelius. God gave that job to a man. God has chosen to spread the Good News through people like you and me. Angels can point the way, but the message of salvation is carried by believers.

10:7-8 *And when the angel who was speaking to Cornelius had departed, having called two of his household servants and a devout soldier of those steadfastly attending him, and having related all things to them, he sent them to Joppa.*

Cornelius didn't wait. Joppa was about thirty miles south along the coast. When God speaks to us, the right response is to obey quickly, just as Cornelius did.

10:9-10 *Now on the next day, as those **men** were journeying and drawing near to the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about **the** sixth hour. And he became very hungry and was wanting to eat; but while they were preparing, a trance fell upon him,*

The sixth hour was about noon. Houses in that part of the world had flat roofs that people used as a quiet place to rest and pray.

God's timing here is perfect. While Cornelius' men were on the road, God was preparing Peter's heart. God often works on both sides of a meeting long before the two people come together, just as He did with Saul and Ananias in chapter 9.

10:11-13 *and he sees heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him like a great sheet, bound by four corners and being let down upon the earth, in which were all the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the creeping things and the birds of heaven. And a voice came to him, "Having risen up, Peter, kill and eat."*

For a faithful Jew like Peter, this was shocking. The Law of Moses divided animals into clean and unclean (Leviticus 11). Clean animals could be eaten. Unclean animals could not. This sheet held both kinds mixed together, and God was telling him to eat.

10:14-16 *But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And a voice **came** again a second time to him, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." And this happened three times; and the vessel was taken up again into heaven.*

Peter's answer, "By no means, Lord," contradicts itself. You can't really say "Lord" and "no" in the same breath. Yet how often do we do the same thing?

Three times Peter had denied the Lord before the crucifixion. Three times the Lord asked him, "Do you love Me?" (John 21:15-17). Now three times God repeats this lesson. God is patient with us when we are slow to understand.

Old Testament links: Ezekiel 4:14 (alluded to)

10:17-20 *Now while Peter was perplexed in himself as to what the vision which he had seen might be, then look, the men who had been sent from Cornelius, having inquired for the house of Simon, stood at the gateway. And having called out, they were asking whether Simon, who is called Peter, is lodging here. And while Peter was pondering over the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are seeking you. But having risen up, go down and go with them, doubting nothing, because I have sent them."*

Here we see the Holy Spirit speaking and directing as a Person. He says, "I have sent them." The Spirit is not just a force. He is God, and He was leading this whole event.

10:21-23 *And Peter, having gone down to the men who had been sent from Cornelius to him, said, "Look, I am **he** whom you seek. What **is** the cause for which you are here?" And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous man and one fearing God, and well testified to by the whole nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear declarations from you." So having invited them in, he lodged **them**. And on the next day Peter went out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went with him.*

Peter did something remarkable when he invited them in and gave them lodging. A Jew giving a room to Gentiles was a big step. The lesson of the vision was already starting to sink in. In 11:12 we learn that six brothers from Joppa went along. These men would serve as witnesses to what God was about to do.

10:24-26 *And on the next day they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius was expecting them, having called together his relatives and close friends. And as it came about* ***that*** *Peter entered, Cornelius, having met him, fell at his feet and worshiped* ***him****. But Peter raised him up, saying, "Rise up; I myself also am a man."*

Cornelius was so sure God was going to speak that he filled his house with people to hear it. That is a good example for us. When we know the Gospel is coming, we should bring others along.

Peter refused the worship that belongs only to God. In Revelation 19:10 and 22:8-9, even an angel refuses John's worship and tells him to worship God. No servant of God, however great, should receive worship.

10:27-29 *And talking with him, he entered, and he finds many gathered together. And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to be joined to or to come near to a foreigner; and to me God has shown to call no man common or unclean. Therefore also I came without objection, having been summoned. So I ask, for what reason did you summon me?"*

The Law of Moses did not actually forbid a Jew from visiting a Gentile. That rule came from Jewish tradition, built up over many years to keep people away from anything unclean. Peter now understood that the vision was not only about food. It was about people.

10:30-33 *And Cornelius said, "Four days ago until this hour I was fasting, and at the ninth hour praying in my house; and look, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and he says, 'Cornelius, your prayer was heard, and your charitable deeds were remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and call for Simon, who is called Peter. He is lodging in* ***the*** *house of Simon, a tanner, by* ***the*** *sea; who, having come, will speak to you.' So at once I sent to you, and you did well, having come. Now therefore we are all present before God to hear all the things commanded you by God."*

What a wonderful attitude Cornelius had. He understood that they were not just gathered before Peter. They were gathered "before God." He wanted to hear everything the Lord had commanded, not just the parts he liked. Every time we open God's Word, that should be our posture too.

10:34-35 *And Peter, having opened his mouth, said, "In truth I grasp that God is not one who shows partiality, but in every nation the one fearing Him and working righteousness is acceptable to Him.*

Peter now understood that God "is not one who shows partiality." God does not favor one race or nation over another when it comes to salvation.

This verse does not mean a person can be saved by being good enough, apart from Jesus. If that were true, Cornelius would not have needed Peter at all. It means God gladly receives people from every nation who seek Him, and He will make sure they hear the truth about His Son. Cornelius was seeking, and God sent him the Gospel.

10:36-38 *The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace **as** the gospel through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), you yourselves know: the declaration which came throughout all Judea, having begun from Galilee after the baptism which John proclaimed: Jesus who **was** from Nazareth, how God anointed Him with **the** Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all those being oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him.*

Peter then gave a short summary of the life of Jesus. God sent His word to Israel, "preaching peace as the gospel through Jesus Christ," and Peter adds right away, "He is Lord of all." Not just Lord of the Jews. Lord of everyone, including the Romans in that room.

These Gentiles had likely heard rumors about Jesus. Now they were hearing the truth from a man who walked with Him.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 61:1 (alluded to)

10:39-41 *And we are witnesses of all things which He did, both in the region of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they killed, having hanged **Him** on a tree. This **One** God raised up on the third day, and gave Him to become manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen beforehand by God, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He rose out of **the** dead.*

The phrase "having hanged Him on a tree" connects to Deuteronomy 21:23 and Galatians 3:13. Jesus took the curse that belonged to us.

The chosen witnesses "ate and drank with Him" after He rose. That detail matters. The risen Jesus was not a ghost or a vision. He had a real body that could eat a meal (Luke 24:39-43).

10:42-43 *And He commanded us to proclaim to the people and to solemnly testify that He is the One appointed by God **as** judge of **the** living and **the** dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness, that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."*

Jesus is the One appointed by God "as judge of the living and the dead." Every person who has ever lived will stand before Him one day (John 5:22; Revelation 20:11-12).

Then Peter gets to the heart of the message. Look at those words "everyone who believes." Not everyone who is Jewish, and not everyone who has done enough good works. Forgiveness comes through faith in Jesus. This is the same Gospel for Jew and Gentile alike, and it is the same Gospel for us today.

10:44-46 *While Peter was still speaking these declarations, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word. And the believers of **the** circumcision, as many as had come with Peter, were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit has been poured out even upon the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and magnifying God. Then Peter answered,*

Peter never even got to the end of his sermon.

Peter later says this was "the same gift" the apostles received at Pentecost (11:15-17). Just as God gave the Spirit with a visible sign to the Jews in chapter 2, and, it seems, to the Samaritans in chapter 8, He now does the same for the Gentiles. I believe God did this so no one could ever argue

that Gentile believers were second-class members of the church. God Himself confirmed it in front of six Jewish witnesses.

Notice too what came first. They believed and received the Spirit, and baptism came afterward. They were not saved by being baptized. They were saved by faith, and baptism followed as their act of obedience.

10:47-48 *"Can anyone hinder the water, so that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we also **have**?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to remain some days.*

Peter's question makes sense. If God had already accepted them, who could keep them out?

Baptism came right after their salvation, as a public sign that they now belonged to Jesus and to His church. Peter, who once would not eat with Gentiles, now stayed in a Gentile home. The wall that had stood between Jew and Gentile was coming down (Ephesians 2:14).

Chapter 10 Summary

God sent an angel to Cornelius, a God-fearing Roman centurion in Caesarea, and told him to send for Peter. At the same time God gave Peter a vision of a sheet full of clean and unclean animals, teaching him not to call any person unclean. Peter went to Cornelius' house and preached Jesus: His life, His death, His resurrection, and forgiveness of sins for everyone who believes. While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles, and they spoke in tongues and praised God. Peter had them baptized, and the door of the Gospel was opened wide to the Gentile world.

People and Places in Chapter 10

Caesarea (10:1): A seaport built by Herod the Great and named for Caesar Augustus. It was the Roman capital of Judea and the home of the Roman governor.

Centurion (10:1): A Roman officer who commanded about a hundred soldiers.

God-fearer (10:2): A Gentile who worshiped the God of Israel and followed much of His teaching but had not become a full convert to Judaism.

Proselyte (2:10; 6:5): A Gentile who became a full convert to Judaism, including circumcision for men.

Clean and Unclean (10:14): Categories in the Law of Moses that marked which animals could be eaten and what made a person fit to take part in worship (Leviticus 11).

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. Have you ever had your mind changed about a person once you got to know them?
2. How does Luke describe Cornelius? What did he still need? (10:1-2; 11:14)

3. What did Peter see in his vision, and what did the voice tell him? (10:11-15)

4. Why did Peter refuse to let Cornelius worship him? (10:25-26)

5. How did Peter come to understand the meaning of the vision? (10:28)

6. According to Peter, who receives forgiveness of sins? (10:43)

7. What happened while Peter was still speaking, and why did it amaze the Jewish believers? (10:44-46)

8. Why do you think God gave the Holy Spirit before the Gentiles were baptized?

9. Are there people you have been quietly treating as "unclean" or not worth reaching? What would it look like to change that?

10. Who in your life could you invite to hear the Gospel, the way Cornelius gathered his family and friends?

Chapter 11: The Gospel Reaches the Gentiles

Scripture: Peter Reports to Jerusalem; The Church at Antioch; Relief for Judea

11:1-18 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter went up to Jerusalem, those of ***the*** circumcision were contending with him, saying, "You went in to men having uncircumcision and ate with them!" But Peter, having begun, was explaining ***it*** to them in order, saying, "I was in ***the*** city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision: a certain vessel descending like a great sheet, being let down by four corners out of heaven; and it came as far as me. Having looked intently into it, I was observing ***it***, and I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the creeping things and the birds of heaven. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Having risen up, Peter, kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for anything common or unclean has never entered into my mouth.' But a voice answered me a second time out of heaven, 'What God has cleansed, you must not call common.' And this happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. And look, immediately three men stood at the house in which I was, having been sent from Caesarea to me. And the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. And these six brothers also went with me, and we entered into the house of the man. And he related to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying to him, 'Send men to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter, who will speak declarations to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, even as also upon us at ***the*** beginning. And I remembered the declaration of ***the*** Lord, how He was saying, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized with ***the*** Holy Spirit.' If then God gave them the same gift as also to us, having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I ***to be*** able to hinder God?" And having heard these things, they became silent, and they were glorifying God, saying, "Then God has given to the Gentiles also the repentance to life."

11:19-26 So then those who had been scattered from the tribulation that came about over Stephen passed through as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews only. But ***there*** were some of them, men, Cypriots and Cyrenians, who, having entered into Antioch, were speaking to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus ***as*** the gospel. And ***the*** hand of ***the*** Lord was with them, and a great number, having believed, turned to the Lord. And the word concerning them was heard in the ears of the church which ***was*** in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go through as far as Antioch; who, having come and having seen the grace of God, rejoiced, and was exhorting all with purpose of heart to remain with the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of ***the*** Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large crowd was added to the Lord. And Barnabas went out to Tarsus to seek Saul; and having found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about ***that*** for a whole year they were gathered together in the church and taught a large crowd; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

11:27-30 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus, having risen up, signified through the Spirit that a great famine was going to be over all the inhabited earth; which also came about under Claudius Caesar. And the disciples,

according as anyone was prospering, each of them determined to send for ministry to the brothers dwelling in Judea; which they also did, having sent ***it*** to the elders by ***the*** hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Chapter 11 Preview

News travels fast, and the news that Gentiles had received the word of God reached Jerusalem before Peter did. Some of the Jewish believers were upset that Peter had gone into a Gentile home and eaten with them. Peter answers them by simply telling what happened, step by step, and he ends with a question no one can argue with: who was he to stand in God's way?

The second half of the chapter moves north to Antioch in Syria. There, believers who had been scattered by persecution begin preaching to Greeks, and a large number turn to the Lord. Barnabas comes to help, brings Saul from Tarsus, and the church grows so much that the disciples are first called "Christians." The chapter closes with that young church sending relief to the believers in Judea during a famine.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1-3 *Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter went up to Jerusalem, those of* ***the*** *circumcision were contending with him, saying, "You went in to men having uncircumcision and ate with them!"*

You would think this news would be cause for celebration. Instead, "those of the circumcision were contending with him." These were Jewish believers who felt strongly that the Law of Moses, including circumcision, still had to be kept. We will meet this group again in chapter 15.

Notice what bothered them. It was not so much that Peter preached to Gentiles. It was that he went into their house and ate with them. Sharing a meal was a sign of fellowship and acceptance. To these men, Peter had crossed a line. Sometimes religious people are more upset about who sits at the table than about whether people are being saved.

11:4-10 *But Peter, having begun, was explaining* ***it*** *to them in order, saying, "I was in* ***the*** *city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision: a certain vessel descending like a great sheet, being let down by four corners out of heaven; and it came as far as me. Having looked intently into it, I was observing* ***it****, and I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the creeping things and the birds of heaven. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Having risen up, Peter, kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for anything common or unclean has never entered into my mouth.' But a voice answered me a second time out of heaven, 'What God has cleansed, you must not call common.' And this happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven.*

Peter didn't get defensive. He was "explaining it to them in order."

Peter's approach is a good model for us. When other believers question us, we don't need to argue or attack. We can simply tell the truth of what God has done and let the facts speak. Luke repeats

this whole story a second time in Acts because it is so important. When the Bible repeats something, it wants us to pay attention.

It is also worth noticing that Peter, the leading apostle, did not pull rank. He didn't say, "I'm an apostle, so you have to accept what I did." He answered to the church and explained himself. Leaders in God's church are not above being questioned. Peter shows us humility, and he shows us that a good answer starts with what God has done, not with our own authority.

11:11-14 *And look, immediately three men stood at the house in which I was, having been sent from Caesarea to me. And the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. And these six brothers also went with me, and we entered into the house of the man. And he related to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying to him, 'Send men to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter, who will speak declarations to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.'*

Notice the detail "These six brothers also went with me." Peter had brought witnesses, and they were standing right there with him in Jerusalem.

The words "will be saved" tell us something important. Cornelius was a good, devout, generous man who prayed to God. But he still needed to hear the message about Jesus in order to be saved. Being religious is not the same as being saved. Salvation comes through hearing and believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:14-17).

11:15-17 *And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, even as also upon us at **the** beginning. And I remembered the declaration of **the** Lord, how He was saying, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized with **the** Holy Spirit.' If then God gave them the same gift as also to us, having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I **to be** able to hinder God?"*

When Peter says "at the beginning," he means Pentecost. The word of the Lord he remembered is recorded in 1:5.

Peter's conclusion is simple. If God accepted them, Peter had no right to reject them. Notice again that the gift came to those who believed. Faith is the key that opens the door, for Jew and Gentile alike.

11:18 *And having heard these things, they became silent, and they were glorifying God, saying, "Then God has given to the Gentiles also the repentance to life."*

This is a big moment. The leaders of the Jerusalem church agreed that Gentiles could be saved without first becoming Jews. Notice the phrase "God has given" repentance. Repentance is something we do: we turn from sin to God. But here it is also called a gift from God. Both are true. God opens the door and draws us, and we must walk through it. Scripture holds these two truths together, and so should we.

11:19-21 *So then those who had been scattered from the tribulation that came about over Stephen passed through as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews only. But **there** were some of them, men, Cypriots and Cyrenians, who, having entered into Antioch, were speaking to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus **as** the gospel. And **the** hand of **the** Lord was with them, and a great number, having believed, turned to the Lord.*

Luke now takes us back to the persecution that began with Stephen's death (8:1-4). Phoenicia was the coastal region north of Israel, in modern Lebanon, and Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean.

Cyrene was a city in North Africa, in modern Libya. The men who first preached to the Greeks were not apostles. Their names aren't even recorded. They were ordinary believers who shared what they knew. A great number, "having believed, turned to the Lord." Faith and repentance go together.

What Satan meant for harm, God used for good. The persecution was supposed to stamp out the church. Instead it scattered the seed of the Gospel all over the region. Joseph said something similar to his brothers: what they meant for evil, God meant for good (Genesis 50:20).

Antioch was the perfect place for this to happen. It was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, a busy center of trade where people from many nations lived side by side. It was also known for its loose morals and its pagan temples. If the Gospel could take root there, it could take root anywhere. And it did. Antioch would soon become the home church that sent Paul out on all three of his missionary journeys.

11:22-24 *And the word concerning them was heard in the ears of the church which **was** in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go through as far as Antioch; who, having come and having seen the grace of God, rejoiced, and was exhorting all with purpose of heart to remain with the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of **the** Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large crowd was added to the Lord.*

Sending Barnabas to Antioch was a wise choice. Barnabas was from Cyprus himself (4:36), so he understood people who had grown up among Gentiles.

When Barnabas saw "the grace of God," he rejoiced. He didn't look for problems. He looked for God at work, and he found it. Luke describes Barnabas as "a good man," full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. That is about the best thing anyone could say about a believer.

11:25-26 *And Barnabas went out to Tarsus to seek Saul; and having found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about **that** for a whole year they were gathered together in the church and taught a large crowd; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

The work in Antioch grew so large that Barnabas needed help. Some years had passed since Saul was sent home in 9:30.

Barnabas once again opened a door for Saul. He could have kept the leadership in Antioch for himself. Instead he went and found the man God had called to the Gentiles.

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." The word means "those who belong to Christ" or "Christ's people." It may have started as a nickname from outsiders, but it stuck. It is only used three times in the New Testament (11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). When people saw these believers, they thought of Christ. That is still the goal for each of us. Can people tell by how you live whose you are?

11:27-28 *Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus, having risen up, signified through the Spirit that a great famine was going to be over all the inhabited earth; which also came about under Claudius Caesar.*

Claudius was the Roman emperor from A.D. 41 to 54.

In the early church, prophets were believers through whom the Holy Spirit gave messages for the church, sometimes about future events and often for encouragement and strengthening (1 Corinthians 14:3). Their words were always to be tested against Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21). Agabus shows up again in 21:10-11, where he warns Paul about being bound in Jerusalem. His prophecy here was specific and it came true, which is the test of a true prophet (Deuteronomy 18:22). Historians record serious food shortages in different parts of the empire during Claudius' reign, and the Jewish historian Josephus describes a severe famine in Judea in the mid to late A.D. 40s.

11:29-30 *And the disciples, according as anyone was prospering, each of them determined to send for ministry to the brothers dwelling in Judea; which they also did, having sent* ***it*** *to the elders by* ***the*** *hand of Barnabas and Saul.*

The disciples in Antioch didn't just hear the prophecy and worry. They acted. They gave according to what they had. Nobody was forced, and nobody was left out.

This is the first time "elders" are mentioned in the church in Acts. Elders were the spiritual leaders who cared for and oversaw a local church. Think about what is happening here. A mostly Gentile church is sending money to help a Jewish church that, only a short time before, questioned whether Gentiles could even be saved. That is the Gospel at work. Love crosses the lines that people draw.

Chapter 11 Summary

Peter returned to Jerusalem and faced criticism for eating with Gentiles. He explained everything that happened in Joppa and Caesarea, and the church glorified God for granting the Gentiles repentance that leads to life. Meanwhile, believers scattered by persecution preached in Antioch, and many Greeks believed. Barnabas was sent to help, and he brought Saul from Tarsus to teach with him for a year. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. When the prophet Agabus foretold a famine, the church in Antioch sent relief to the believers in Judea by Barnabas and Saul.

People and Places in Chapter 11

Those of the circumcision (11:2): Jewish believers who held that Gentile believers should keep the Law of Moses, including circumcision.

Antioch (11:19): A large city in Syria on the Orontes River, one of the leading cities of the Roman Empire. It became the home base for Paul's missionary journeys.

Phoenicia (11:19): The coastal region north of Israel, home to the cities of Tyre and Sidon, in modern Lebanon.

Cyrene (11:20): A city in North Africa, in modern Libya, with a large Jewish community. Simon, who carried Jesus' cross, was from Cyrene (Luke 23:26).

Christian (11:26): "One who belongs to Christ." The name was first given to the disciples in Antioch.

Elders (11:30): Spiritual leaders who oversee and care for a local church.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been criticized for doing something you knew was right? How did you respond?

2. Why were the Jewish believers in Jerusalem upset with Peter? (11:2-3)

3. How did Peter answer his critics? (11:4-17)

4. What did the angel tell Cornelius that Peter would bring him? (11:14)

5. How did the church respond once they heard Peter's account? (11:18)

6. Who first preached to the Greeks in Antioch, and what was the result? (11:20-21)

7. How does Luke describe Barnabas? Which of those qualities would you most like to grow in? (11:23-24)

8. What does the name "Christian" mean, and how can your life reflect it? (11:26)

9. How did the church in Antioch respond to the news of a coming famine? (11:29-30)

10. Is there a group of believers who are different from you that you could help or encourage this week?

Chapter 12: Peter Set Free

Scripture: James Killed and Peter Imprisoned; Peter's Rescue; The Death of Herod

12:1-5 Now about that time Herod the king put forth his hands to mistreat some of those from the church. And he killed James the brother of John with a sword. And having seen that it is pleasing to the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (Now ***those*** were the days of Unleavened ***Bread***.) Whom also, having seized ***him***, he put in prison, having delivered ***him*** to four squads of four soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was being kept in the prison; but fervent prayer was being made by the church to God for him.

12:6-11 And when Herod was about to bring him out, on that night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards before the door were keeping the prison. And look, an angel of ***the*** Lord stood by, and a light shone in the cell; and having struck the side of Peter, he raised him up, saying, "Rise up quickly." And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he says to him, "Put your cloak around yourself and follow me." And having gone out, he was following him; and he did not know that what was happening through the angel is true, but he was thinking he was seeing a vision. And having passed through a first guard and a second, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which was opened to them by itself; and having gone out, they went on through one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And Peter, having come to himself, said, "Now I know truly that ***the*** Lord has sent out His angel and delivered me out of ***the*** hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."

12:12-19 And having realized ***this***, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark, where many were gathered together and praying. And when Peter knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. And having recognized the voice of Peter, from joy she did not open the gateway, but having run in, she reported that Peter was standing before the gateway. And they said to her, "You are raving." But she was insisting that it was so. And they were saying, "It is his angel." But Peter was continuing to knock; and having opened ***it***, they saw him and were amazed. And having motioned to them with his hand to be silent, he related to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and to the brothers." And having gone out, he went to another place. Now when day came, ***there*** was no small disturbance among the soldiers ***over*** what then had become ***of*** Peter. And Herod, having searched for him and not having found ***him***, having examined the guards, commanded ***them*** to be led away. And having gone down from Judea to Caesarea, he was staying ***there***.

12:20-25 Now Herod was furiously angry with ***the*** Tyrians and Sidonians; and with one accord they came to him, and having persuaded Blastus, who ***was*** over the bedchamber of the king, they were asking for peace, because their region was nourished from the royal ***land***. And on an appointed day Herod, having put on royal apparel and having sat on the judgment seat, was delivering a public address to them. And the populace was crying out, "***The*** voice of a god and not of a man!" And immediately an angel of ***the*** Lord struck him, because he did not give the glory to

God; and having become eaten by worms, he breathed his last. But the word of God was growing and being multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, having fulfilled the ministry, having taken along with ***them*** also John, who was called Mark.

Chapter 12 Preview

In chapter 12 persecution comes from a new direction. This time it isn't the Sanhedrin. It is King Herod, a ruler with the power of Rome behind him. He kills the apostle James with the sword and throws Peter into prison, planning to put him on trial after the Passover. The church can't fight a king, so they do the one thing they can: they pray.

God answers in a way no one expected. An angel walks Peter right out of a guarded prison, and the believers praying for him can't believe it when he knocks at the door. The chapter ends with Herod, the proud king who attacked God's people, struck down by an angel of the Lord. Kings rise and fall, but "the word of God was growing and being multiplied."

Chapter 12 Study

12:1-2 *Now about that time Herod the king put forth his hands to mistreat some of those from the church. And he killed James the brother of John with a sword.*

"About that time" ties these events loosely to the famine relief of 11:27-30. Herod died in A.D. 44, so what Luke tells here likely happened shortly before Barnabas and Saul's visit. This Herod is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great (who tried to kill the baby Jesus in Matthew 2). Rome gave him rule over Judea from about A.D. 41 until his death in A.D. 44. He worked hard to keep the Jewish leaders happy.

James was one of the twelve and one of the three closest to Jesus, along with Peter and John. He was the first of the apostles to die for his faith. Years earlier, James and John had asked to sit at Jesus' right and left in His kingdom, and Jesus told them they would drink the cup He would drink (Mark 10:38-39). For James, that word came true here.

Luke gives James' death only one verse. It can feel strange that God rescued Peter but let James die. Scripture doesn't tell us why. What we do know is that both men were in God's hands, and both were faithful. Whether God delivers us from death or through death, He is still good and still in control.

12:3-4 *And having seen that it is pleasing to the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (Now **those** were the days of Unleavened **Bread**.) Whom also, having seized **him**, he put in prison, having delivered **him** to four squads of four soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.*

Herod was a politician. He did what made him popular, and he saw that killing James "is pleasing to the Jews." The days of Unleavened Bread were the week-long feast that followed the Passover, when Jerusalem would be full of pilgrims.

A squad was four soldiers, so sixteen men took turns watching one fisherman. Herod may have heard that Peter had escaped from prison once before (5:19), and he wasn't taking any chances.

12:5 *So Peter was being kept in the prison; but fervent prayer was being made by the church to God for him.*

Look at the word "but." On one side were a king, a prison, and sixteen soldiers. On the other side was a church on its knees. The word "fervent" means earnest, with real effort and feeling. These were not casual prayers. They had already lost James. They prayed like Peter's life depended on it, because it did.

When we face something too big for us, prayer is not the last resort. It is the first and best thing we can do.

12:6-7 *And when Herod was about to bring him out, on that night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards before the door were keeping the prison. And look, an angel of* ***the*** *Lord stood by, and a light shone in the cell; and having struck the side of Peter, he raised him up, saying, "Rise up quickly." And his chains fell off from his hands.*

Peter was likely facing execution the next morning, and he was sound asleep. That is the peace of God that goes beyond understanding (Philippians 4:7). Peter may also have remembered that Jesus told him he would one day be old (John 21:18).

12:8-9 *And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he says to him, "Put your cloak around yourself and follow me." And having gone out, he was following him; and he did not know that what was happening through the angel is true, but he was thinking he was seeing a vision.*

The angel gave Peter simple instructions. God did the impossible part. He removed the chains. But He left the possible part to Peter. Peter still had to get dressed and walk.

Peter had seen a vision on a rooftop in Joppa some time before, so you can see why he thought this was another one.

12:10-11 *And having passed through a first guard and a second, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which was opened to them by itself; and having gone out, they went on through one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And Peter, having come to himself, said, "Now I know truly that* ***the*** *Lord has sent out His angel and delivered me out of* ***the*** *hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."*

When Peter came to himself, he could say, "Now I know truly." He understood this was not luck or a careless guard. It was the Lord. When God delivers us, we should be quick to give Him the credit.

12:12-14 *And having realized **this**, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark, where many were gathered together and praying. And when Peter knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. And having recognized the voice of Peter, from joy she did not open the gateway, but having run in, she reported that Peter was standing before the gateway.*

It was the middle of the night, and they were still praying. This is the same John Mark who would later travel with Barnabas and Saul, and who was Barnabas' cousin (Colossians 4:10).

Luke includes this small, human moment. Peter, who just walked through an iron gate that opened by itself, was now stuck outside a gate that a joyful servant girl forgot to open.

12:15-16 *And they said to her, "You are raving." But she was insisting that it was so. And they were saying, "It is his angel." But Peter was continuing to knock; and having opened **it**, they saw him and were amazed.*

Why would they say, "It is his angel"? Some Jews of that time believed each person had a guardian angel who might appear in their likeness. Jesus spoke of little ones whose angels see the face of the Father (Matthew 18:10). Scripture does not tell us much more than that, and we should be careful not to build too much on it.

Here is a group of believers praying for Peter's release, and when God answers, they can't believe it. Before we judge them, we should ask ourselves how often we pray without really expecting God to answer. Yet God answered them anyway. He is faithful even when our faith is weak.

12:17 *And having motioned to them with his hand to be silent, he related to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and to the brothers." And having gone out, he went to another place.*

Again, Peter gave the credit to the Lord.

This James is not the apostle James who had just been killed. It is James the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19). He did not believe in Jesus during His ministry (John 7:5), but after the resurrection Jesus appeared to him (1 Corinthians 15:7). He became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (15:13; 21:18) and wrote the letter of James.

Luke doesn't say where Peter went. After chapter 15, Peter drops out of the book of Acts, and the focus turns to Paul.

12:18-19 *Now when day came, **there** was no small disturbance among the soldiers **over** what then had become **of** Peter. And Herod, having searched for him and not having found **him**, having examined the guards, commanded **them** to be led away. And having gone down from Judea to Caesarea, he was staying **there**.*

Under Roman practice, a guard who lost a prisoner could face the punishment that prisoner was supposed to receive.

Herod took human lives to cover his embarrassment. That tells us everything about his heart, and it sets up what happens next.

You might ask, "Why didn't God save the guards too?" Scripture doesn't tell us. What we see is the difference between two kingdoms. Herod's kingdom ran on fear and blame, and innocent men paid the price for his anger. God's kingdom runs on grace, and the only innocent Man who ever lived paid the price for us. Herod's cruelty here shows us the kind of king he was. The rest of the chapter shows us the kind of King God is.

12:20-21 *Now Herod was furiously angry with **the** Tyrians and Sidonians; and with one accord they came to him, and having persuaded Blastus, who **was** over the bedchamber of the king, they were asking for peace, because their region was nourished from the royal **land**. And on an appointed day Herod, having put on royal apparel and having sat on the judgment seat, was delivering a public address to them.*

Tyre and Sidon were two Phoenician port cities on the coast north of Israel. A chamberlain like Blastus was a trusted official in charge of the king's private rooms. Tyre and Sidon depended on the king's country for food, and this was true as far back as Solomon, who sent wheat and oil to Hiram, king of Tyre (1 Kings 5:11).

12:22-23 *And the populace was crying out, "**The** voice of a god and not of a man!" And immediately an angel of **the** Lord struck him, because he did not give the glory to God; and having become eaten by worms, he breathed his last.*

Herod accepted their praise. He did not correct them. Compare that with Peter in 10:26, who lifted Cornelius off the floor and said, "I myself also am a man," or with Paul and Barnabas in 14:14-15, who tore their robes when people tried to worship them.

Herod was struck down because he "did not give the glory to God." God will not share His glory with anyone (Isaiah 42:8). Earlier in the chapter an angel set Peter free. Now an angel of the Lord strikes down the king who persecuted him. The Jewish historian Josephus also records Herod Agrippa's sudden death at Caesarea during a festival, after the crowd hailed him as a god, with several days of terrible pain in his stomach before he died.

Pride is dangerous. When people praise us, the right response is to point them to God. Herod lived in a palace, wore royal robes, and had the crowd at his feet, and none of it could keep him alive one more day once God said, "Enough." Peter, a fisherman in chains, was safe because God was guarding him. Real security is never found in power or position. It is found only in belonging to the Lord.

12:24-25 *But the word of God was growing and being multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, having fulfilled the ministry, having taken along with **them** also John, who was called Mark.*

In spite of all this, the word of God "was growing and being multiplied." Look at the contrast. At the start of the chapter Herod was killing apostles and the church was in danger. At the end,

Herod is dead and God's word is still spreading. Every ruler who has tried to stop God's word has failed. Herod is in the grave, and the Gospel he tried to silence is still being preached today.

The mission Barnabas and Saul fulfilled was the famine relief of 11:30. This sets the stage for chapter 13, when the church in Antioch sends Barnabas and Saul out on the first missionary journey.

Chapter 12 Summary

King Herod Agrippa I killed the apostle James with the sword and arrested Peter, planning to bring him out for trial after the Passover. The church prayed fervently. On the night before his trial, an angel woke Peter, his chains fell off, and he walked out past the guards and through the iron gate. He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where the believers at first could not believe it was really him. Herod executed the guards and went to Caesarea, where he accepted the crowd's praise as a god and was struck down by an angel of the Lord. Through it all, the word of the Lord kept growing.

People and Places in Chapter 12

Herod Agrippa I (12:1): Grandson of Herod the Great. He ruled Judea from about A.D. 41 until his death at Caesarea in A.D. 44.

James, the brother of John (12:2): One of the twelve apostles and a son of Zebedee. He was the first apostle to be martyred.

Days of Unleavened Bread (12:3): The seven-day feast that followed Passover, remembering Israel's exit from Egypt (Exodus 12:15-20).

James, the Lord's brother (12:17): A half-brother of Jesus who became a leader of the Jerusalem church and wrote the letter of James.

Tyre and Sidon (12:20): Port cities in Phoenicia, north of Israel, in modern Lebanon.

John Mark (12:12; 12:25): Son of Mary of Jerusalem and cousin of Barnabas. He traveled with Barnabas and Saul.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. Have you ever prayed for something and then been surprised when God answered?

2. Who was the first apostle to die for his faith, and who ordered his death? (12:1-2)

3. Why did Herod arrest Peter? (12:3)

4. What was the church doing while Peter was in prison? (12:5)

5. How could Peter sleep the night before his trial? What does that teach you about trusting God? (12:6)

6. What part of Peter's rescue did God do, and what part did Peter have to do? (12:7-10)

7. How did the believers at Mary's house react when Rhoda said Peter was at the gate? (12:13-16)

8. Why was Herod struck down by the angel of the Lord? (12:21-23)

9. How do you handle praise from others? What would it look like to point that praise to God?

10. What situation in your life right now needs the kind of fervent prayer the church gave for Peter?

Chapter 13: The First Missionary Journey

Scripture: Barnabas and Saul Sent Out; Cyprus; Paul's Sermon at Pisidian Antioch; Turning to the Gentiles

13:1-3 Now ***there*** were in Antioch, in the church that was ***there***, some prophets and teachers: both Barnabas and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart now for Me both Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and having prayed and having laid their hands on them, they sent ***them*** away.

13:4-12 So these, having been sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And having arrived in Salamis, they were proclaiming the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John ***as*** an assistant. And having passed through the island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, whose name ***was*** Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This ***man***, having called for Barnabas and Saul, sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who ***is*** also Paul, having been filled with ***the*** Holy Spirit, and having looked intently at him, said, "O full of all deceit and all villainy, son of ***the*** devil, enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of ***the*** Lord? And now look, ***the*** hand of the Lord ***is*** upon you, and you will be blind, not seeing the sun for a season." And immediately a mist and darkness fell upon him, and going about, he was seeking ***people*** to lead ***him*** by the hand. Then the proconsul, having seen what had happened, believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

13:13-41 And having set sail from Paphos, those around Paul came to Perga of Pamphylia; but John, having departed from them, returned to Jerusalem. And they, having passed through from Perga, came to Antioch of Pisidia; and having gone into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, they sat down. And after the reading of the law and of the prophets, the synagogue rulers sent to them, saying, "Men, brothers, if ***there*** is among you a word of exhortation for the people, speak." And Paul, having risen up and having motioned with his hand, said, "Men, Israelites, and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and exalted the people during the sojourn in ***the*** land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. And for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. And having destroyed seven nations in ***the*** land of Canaan, He divided their land to them by lot. And after these things, for about four hundred and fifty years, He gave ***them*** judges until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of ***the*** tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And having removed him, He raised up David for them as king, to whom also He said, having testified, 'I have found David the ***son*** of Jesse, a man according to My heart, who will do all My wishes.' From the seed of this ***man***, according to promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior, Jesus, John having first proclaimed, before ***the*** face of His coming, a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was fulfilling his course, he was saying, 'Whom do you suppose me to be? I am not ***He***. But look, He is coming after me, the sandal of whose feet I

am not worthy to untie.' Men, brothers, sons of ***the*** family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation was sent. For those dwelling in Jerusalem and their rulers, not having known this ***One*** and the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, having judged ***Him***, fulfilled ***them***. And having found no cause of death, they asked Pilate that He be killed. And when they had finished all the things written about Him, having taken ***Him*** down from the tree, they laid ***Him*** in a tomb. But God raised Him out of ***the*** dead, who appeared for many days to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we preach to you the promise made to the fathers ***as*** the gospel, that God has fulfilled this to us their children, having raised up Jesus, as it has also been written in the second psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.' And that He raised Him up out of ***the*** dead, no longer about to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: 'I will give you the holy ***things*** of David, the sure ***things***.' Therefore He also says in another ***psalm***, 'You will not give Your Holy One to see corruption.' For David, having served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was added to his fathers and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up did not see corruption. Therefore let it be known to you, men, brothers, that through this ***One*** forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; and from all things from which you were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, by this ***One*** everyone who believes is justified. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: 'See, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; for I am working a work in your days, a work in which you will by no means believe, even if anyone declares ***it*** to you.'"

13:42-52 And as ***they*** were going out from the synagogue of the Jews, the Gentiles were begging that these declarations be spoken to them on the next Sabbath. And when the synagogue had been dismissed, many of the Jews and of the worshiping proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were persuading them to continue in the grace of God. And on the coming Sabbath almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of God. But the Jews, having seen the crowds, were filled with jealousy, and were contradicting the things spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. And Paul and Barnabas, having spoken boldly, said, "It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken to you first; but since you thrust it away and judge yourselves not worthy of eternal life, look, we are turning to the Gentiles. For thus the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you for a light of ***the*** Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to ***the*** uttermost part of the earth.'" And the Gentiles, hearing ***this***, were rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being carried through all the region. But the Jews incited the worshiping and prominent women and the leading ***men*** of the city, and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their district. But they, having shaken off the dust of their feet against them, went to Iconium. And the disciples were being filled with joy and ***the*** Holy Spirit.

Chapter 13 Preview

Up to this point the Gospel has spread mostly because believers were scattered by persecution. In chapter 13 something new happens. A local church, praying and fasting, hears the Holy Spirit set apart two men and sends them out on purpose. This is the start of what we call Paul's first missionary journey, which most scholars date to about A.D. 46 to 48.

From here on, Saul (now called Paul) becomes the main character of Acts. We follow him and Barnabas to the island of Cyprus and then into the highlands of Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. We also hear the first full sermon Luke records from Paul. It is a walk through Israel's history that ends at the cross and the empty tomb, and it offers forgiveness to anyone who believes.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1 *Now **there** were in Antioch, in the church that was **there**, some prophets and teachers: both Barnabas and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*

The church at Antioch in Syria had become the second home base of the Gospel after Jerusalem (11:19-26). The list of five "prophets and teachers" tells a story. Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus. Niger is a Latin word meaning "black," which may mean Simeon came from Africa. Cyrene, Lucius' home, was in North Africa. Manaen had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, the Herod Antipas who beheaded John the Baptist. Saul was a former Pharisee from Tarsus. God built this church's leadership out of very different men, and the Gospel held them together.

13:2 *And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart now for Me both Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

Notice what they were doing when the Holy Spirit spoke. They weren't planning a mission strategy; they were worshiping. God often gives direction to people who are already busy seeking Him. The Spirit speaks as a Person here ("Set apart now for Me"), which reminds us the Holy Spirit is not a force but God Himself. Scripture doesn't tell us how He spoke. It may have been through one of the prophets named in verse 1. Saul had been told years earlier that he would be sent to the Gentiles (9:15). Now the time had come.

13:3 *Then, having fasted and having prayed and having laid their hands on them, they sent **them** away.*

Laying on of hands didn't give them a new gift or make them apostles. It showed that the whole church stood behind them and was sending them in God's name. This is a good pattern for us. Missionaries aren't lone rangers. They are sent by a praying church, and that church keeps them in prayer after they leave.

13:4-5 *So these, having been sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And having arrived in Salamis, they were proclaiming the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John **as** an assistant.*

Luke is careful to say they were "sent out by the Holy Spirit." The church sent them, and the Spirit sent them; both are true. Seleucia was the port city of Antioch, and Cyprus was Barnabas' home island. Salamis lay on its east coast. Preaching first in the Jewish synagogues became Paul's usual pattern (17:2): to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16). The John who went as their helper was John Mark, Barnabas' cousin (Colossians 4:10).

13:6-8 *And having passed through the island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, whose name **was** Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This **man**, having called for Barnabas and Saul, sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.*

Paphos was the seat of Roman government on Cyprus. The name Bar-Jesus means "son of Joshua" or "son of Jesus." A proconsul was the Roman governor of a province. Satan doesn't sit still when someone with influence is about to hear the Gospel.

13:9-11 *But Saul, who **is** also Paul, having been filled with **the** Holy Spirit, and having looked intently at him, said, "O full of all deceit and all villainy, son of **the** devil, enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of **the** Lord? And now look, **the** hand of the Lord **is** upon you, and you will be blind, not seeing the sun for a season." And immediately a mist and darkness fell upon him, and going about, he was seeking **people** to lead **him** by the hand.*

This is the first time Luke calls Saul by the name Paul. Saul was his Hebrew name, after Israel's first king. Paul was his Roman name, and from now on, as he moves into the Gentile world, that is the name Luke uses. These are strong words, but Elymas was deliberately twisting "the straight ways of the Lord." The blindness was "for a season." It was judgment, but there was mercy in it too. Paul himself had once been struck blind on the road to Damascus, and that blindness led to his salvation.

13:12 *Then the proconsul, having seen what had happened, believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*

Notice what amazed the proconsul: not only the miracle, but "the teaching of the Lord." The sign got his attention, but it was the message that won him. The same is true today. God may use many things to open a door, but people are saved by hearing and believing the Gospel. Here, at the start of the journey, a high Roman official comes to faith. The Gospel was not only for the poor and powerless; it was for governors too.

13:13 *And having set sail from Paphos, those around Paul came to Perga of Pamphylia; but John, having departed from them, returned to Jerusalem.*

Perga in Pamphylia was near the southern coast of Asia Minor. Notice the change: it's now "those around Paul." Paul has taken the lead. Scripture doesn't tell us why John Mark left. It may have been homesickness, fear of the hard road ahead, or some disagreement. Whatever the reason, Paul saw it as desertion (15:38). The good news is that this wasn't the end of Mark's story. Years later Paul would call him "useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). Failure doesn't have to be final.

13:14-15 *And they, having passed through from Perga, came to Antioch of Pisidia; and having gone into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, they sat down. And after the reading of the law and of the prophets, the synagogue rulers sent to them, saying, "Men, brothers, if **there** is among you a word of exhortation for the people, speak."*

Antioch in Pisidia lay north of Perga, up in the mountains. This is a different Antioch from the one in Syria where they started. A normal synagogue service included readings from the Law (the five books of Moses) and the Prophets. Afterward, the synagogue officials (the leaders who ran the service) could invite a visiting teacher to speak. Paul was ready. God had opened a door, and Paul walked through it.

13:16-20 *And Paul, having risen up and having motioned with his hand, said, "Men, Israelites, and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and exalted the people during the sojourn in **the** land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. And for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. And having destroyed seven nations in **the** land of Canaan, He divided their land to them by lot. And after these things, for about four hundred and fifty years, He gave **them** judges until Samuel the prophet.*

Paul spoke to two groups: the "Men, Israelites," and those "who fear God." The God-fearers were Gentiles who worshiped Israel's God but had not fully converted to Judaism. Paul starts where his listeners are, with their own history. His point is simple: from the beginning, it was God who acted. Israel's history is the story of His grace.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 7:1 (alluded to); Judges 2:16 (alluded to); Joshua 14:1 (alluded to); Deuteronomy 4:37 (alluded to); Exodus 6:6 (alluded to)

13:21-23 *And afterward they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of **the** tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And having removed him, He raised up David for them as king, to whom also He said, having testified, 'I have found David the **son** of Jesse, a man according to My heart, who will do all My wishes.' From the seed of this **man**, according to promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior, Jesus,*

It's interesting that Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul and who was also from Benjamin (Philippians 3:5), mentions King Saul. David is "a man according to My heart" (13:22; see 1 Samuel 13:14). Then Paul comes to his main point, the Savior from David's line. Everything in Israel's history was leading to Him.

The words "I have found David" come from Psalm 89:20, where God says, "I have found David My servant; with the oil of My holiness I have anointed him."

Old Testament links: 1 Samuel 13:14 (quoted); Psalm 89:20 (quoted); 1 Samuel 10:21 (alluded to); 2 Samuel 7:12 (alluded to); 1 Samuel 8:10 (alluded to)

13:24-25 *John having first proclaimed, before **the** face of His coming, a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was fulfilling his course, he was saying, 'Whom do you suppose me to be? I am not **He**. But look, He is coming after me, the sandal of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'*

John the Baptist knew his place. Some people in the synagogue may have heard of John, since his followers had spread out beyond Judea (19:1-7). Paul uses John as a witness. The greatest prophet of that generation pointed away from himself and to Jesus. That is the job of every believer: to point people to Christ, not to ourselves.

13:26-29 *Men, brothers, sons of **the** family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation was sent. For those dwelling in Jerusalem and their rulers, not having known this **One** and the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, having judged **Him**, fulfilled **them**. And having found no cause of death, they asked Pilate that He be killed. And when they had finished all the things written about Him, having taken **Him** down from the tree, they laid **Him** in a tomb.*

Paul includes both the "sons of the family of Abraham" and the God-fearers; the message is for all of them. Notice the irony in Jerusalem. The rulers didn't understand the prophets they heard read every Sabbath, and in condemning Jesus they fulfilled those very prophecies. Paul says they took Him down from "the tree," a word that recalls Deuteronomy 21:23.

13:30-31 *But God raised Him out of **the** dead, who appeared for many days to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people.*

"But God raised Him out of the dead." Those few words change everything. Men did their worst, and God overturned it. Paul points to eyewitnesses. The resurrection wasn't a private vision. It was seen by many people over many days (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). Our faith rests on something that happened in history.

13:32-33 *And we preach to you the promise made to the fathers **as** the gospel, that God has fulfilled this to us their children, having raised up Jesus, as it has also been written in the second psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.'*

Paul applies Psalm 2:7 to the resurrection. This doesn't mean Jesus became God's Son at that moment; He has always been the Son. It means the resurrection publicly declared who He was (Romans 1:4). God put His stamp of approval on Jesus by raising Him from the dead.

Old Testament links: Psalm 2:7 (quoted)

13:34-35 *And that He raised Him up out of **the** dead, no longer about to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: 'I will give you the holy **things** of David, the sure **things**.' Therefore He also says in another **psalm**, 'You will not give Your Holy One to see corruption.'*

Jesus was raised, "no longer about to return to corruption." Lazarus was raised too, but he died again. Jesus rose never to die again. Paul's two quotations come from Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10. Peter used the same psalm at Pentecost (2:25-31). The blessings promised to David are sure because David's greater Son is alive forever.

Old Testament links: Psalm 16:10 (quoted); Isaiah 55:3 (quoted)

13:36-37 *For David, having served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was added to his fathers and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up did not see corruption.*

Paul makes the same argument Peter made. David's body decayed, so Psalm 16 couldn't have been about David himself. It was about the One God raised. There's a lesson for us in this phrase about David too: he served "the purpose of God in his own generation." We can't serve every generation. We can serve ours. God has placed each of us in this time on purpose.

Old Testament links: 1 Kings 2:10 (alluded to); Psalm 16:10 (alluded to)

13:38-39 *Therefore let it be known to you, men, brothers, that through this **One** forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; and from all things from which you were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, by this **One** everyone who believes is justified.*

This is the heart of the sermon. Paul says that everyone who believes is "justified," declared right with God. The Law could show people their sin, but it could never remove it. Faith in Jesus does what the Law never could. This is the same truth Paul would later write out in detail in Romans and Galatians. Salvation is by grace, through faith, in Christ alone.

13:40-41 *Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: 'See, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; for I am working a work in your days, a work in which you will by no means believe, even if anyone declares **it** to you.'"*

Paul ends with a warning from Habakkuk 1:5. In Habakkuk's day, God warned that He was about to do something His people wouldn't believe even if they were told: He would use the Babylonians to judge them. God was doing a new and amazing work in their own day, and they could miss it by scoffing. A sermon full of good news still has to end with a call to respond. The same message that saves those who believe stands as a warning to those who refuse it.

Old Testament links: Habakkuk 1:5 (quoted)

13:42-43 *And as **they** were going out from the synagogue of the Jews, the Gentiles were begging that these declarations be spoken to them on the next Sabbath. And when the synagogue had been dismissed, many of the Jews and of the worshiping proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were persuading them to continue in the grace of God.*

A proselyte was a Gentile who had fully converted to Judaism. Notice what Paul and Barnabas urged them to do: "continue in the grace of God." They didn't tell them to try harder to keep the Law. They told them to keep resting in what God had freely given.

13:44-45 *And on the coming Sabbath almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of God. But the Jews, having seen the crowds, were filled with jealousy, and were contradicting the things spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*

The jealousy here is worth noticing. It's sad but true: sometimes religious people are the first to oppose the Gospel, especially when it starts reaching people they think are outsiders. Jealousy blinds us. We should be glad whenever anyone comes to hear about Jesus.

13:46 *And Paul and Barnabas, having spoken boldly, said, "It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken to you first; but since you thrust it away and judge yourselves not worthy of eternal life, look, we are turning to the Gentiles.*

It was necessary for God's word to go to the Jews first. That was God's plan and His faithfulness to His promises. Notice who passed judgment: the hearers judged themselves. Paul told them, "you thrust it away and judge yourselves not worthy of eternal life." God didn't shut them out; they shut the door themselves. This turning was local, in Pisidian Antioch. In the very next city, Paul goes straight back to the synagogue (14:1).

13:47 *For thus the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you for a light of **the** Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to **the** uttermost part of the earth.'"*

In Isaiah 49:6, God speaks to His Servant, and in Isaiah the Servant is the Messiah. Paul applies it to himself and Barnabas because they carry the Messiah's light. Taking the Gospel to the Gentiles wasn't Paul's new idea. It was God's plan all along, written in Israel's own Scriptures. Jesus said the same in Acts 1:8.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 49:6 (quoted)

13:48 *And the Gentiles, hearing **this**, were rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*

This verse plainly says that God appointed people to eternal life and that those people believed. Earlier, in verse 46, it says the ones who rejected the message judged themselves unworthy. Scripture holds both truths side by side: God is sovereign in salvation, and people are responsible for how they respond. I don't believe we have to choose one and throw out the other. God's choosing doesn't make our believing any less real, and our believing doesn't make His choosing any less His.

13:49-50 *And the word of the Lord was being carried through all the region. But the Jews incited the worshiping and prominent women and the leading **men** of the city, and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their district.*

"The worshiping and prominent women" were likely Gentile women who worshiped at the synagogue and were married to powerful men. When the Gospel spreads, opposition usually follows. It's not a sign of failure. Often it's a sign the message is getting through.

13:51-52 *But they, having shaken off the dust of their feet against them, went to Iconium. And the disciples were being filled with joy and **the** Holy Spirit.*

Jesus told His disciples to shake the dust off their feet when a town refused their message (Luke 9:5; 10:11). It was a sign that they had done their part and the responsibility now belonged to the hearers. Luke ends the chapter with a surprising line: the disciples left behind were "being filled with joy and the Holy Spirit." Their teachers were gone and they faced persecution, yet they were full of joy. That joy didn't come from their circumstances. It came from the Spirit living in them.

Chapter 13 Summary

The church at Antioch, while worshiping and fasting, was told by the Holy Spirit to send out Barnabas and Saul. On Cyprus, a Roman governor believed after a magician who opposed the Gospel was struck blind. At Antioch in Pisidia, Paul preached his first recorded sermon, tracing Israel's history to Jesus, the promised Son of David whom God raised from the dead, and offering forgiveness and justification to everyone who believes. Many Gentiles believed with joy, while jealous opponents drove the missionaries out of the region.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. Have you ever felt God leading you to do something new? How did you know it was Him?

2. What were the leaders of the church at Antioch doing when the Holy Spirit spoke to them? (13:2)

3. What happened to Elymas the magician, and how did the proconsul respond? (13:11-12)

4. Who left the missionary team at Perga, and where did he go? (13:13)

5. According to Paul, what did God do that proved Jesus was who He said He was? (13:30-37)

6. What does Paul say everyone who believes in Jesus receives that the Law of Moses could never give? (13:38-39)

7. Why did Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch? (13:46-47)

8. Verse 46 says some judged themselves unworthy, and verse 48 says those appointed to eternal life believed. What do these two verses together teach about God's part and our part in salvation? (13:46, 48)

9. How could the new believers be filled with joy right after their teachers were driven out of town? (13:52)

10. Is there someone you know who might be open to hearing about Jesus, like Sergius Paulus? What step can you take this week to share with them?

Chapter 14: Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe

Scripture: Iconium; The Lame Man at Lystra; Paul Stoned; The Return to Antioch

14:1-7 Now it came about in Iconium ***that*** they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews and spoke in this way, so that a great multitude both of Jews and of Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up and made the souls of the Gentiles evil against the brothers. So then they stayed a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, and granting signs and wonders to be done through their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided; and some were with the Jews, and some with the apostles. And when ***there*** came about a rush both of the Gentiles and of Jews with their rulers to mistreat and to stone them, having become aware ***of it***, they fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; and there they were preaching the gospel.

14:8-18 And a certain man in Lystra, powerless in the feet, was sitting, being lame from ***the*** womb of his mother, who had never walked. This ***man*** was hearing Paul speaking; who, having looked intently at him and having seen that he has faith to be saved, said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet!" And he was leaping up and was walking. And the crowds, having seen what Paul did, lifted up their voice in Lycaonian, saying, "The gods, having become like men, have come down to us!" And they were calling Barnabas Zeus, and Paul Hermes, because he was the leading speaker. And the priest of the Zeus who is before their city, having brought bulls and wreaths to the gates, was wanting to sacrifice with the crowds. But the apostles Barnabas and Paul, having heard ***it***, having torn their garments, sprang into the crowd, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like nature with you, preaching the gospel to you, to turn from these futile things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things in them, who in the generations gone by allowed all the nations to go in their ways. And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, doing good, giving us rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." And saying these things, they scarcely restrained the crowds from sacrificing to them.

14:19-20 But Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds and having stoned Paul, they were dragging ***him*** outside the city, having supposed him to have died. But when the disciples had surrounded him, having risen up, he entered into the city. And on the next day he went out with Barnabas to Derbe.

14:21-28 And having preached the gospel ***to*** that city and having made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting ***them*** to continue in the faith, and ***saying*** that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. And having appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. And having passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And having spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. And from there they sailed to Antioch, from where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. And having arrived and having gathered the

church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened to the Gentiles a door of faith. And they stayed there no little time with the disciples.

Chapter 14 Preview

Paul and Barnabas continue their first missionary journey through the region of Galatia, in the heart of Asia Minor. In Iconium the Gospel divides a city. In Lystra a man lame from birth is healed, and the crowd tries to worship the missionaries as gods. Within days that same crowd stones Paul and leaves him for dead.

Yet Paul gets up and keeps going. On the way home, he and Barnabas retrace their steps to strengthen the new believers, appoint elders, and warn them that the road into God's kingdom runs through hardship. The chapter ends back in Antioch in Syria, where the two men report how God had "opened to the Gentiles a door of faith."

Chapter 14 Study

14:1-2 *Now it came about in Iconium **that** they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews and spoke in this way, so that a great multitude both of Jews and of Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up and made the souls of the Gentiles evil against the brothers.*

Iconium was about ninety miles east of Pisidian Antioch, and Paul and Barnabas did what they usually did: they went to the synagogue first. God uses the message, but He also uses how we deliver it. Paul spoke with conviction and clarity. Unbelief is rarely content to stay quiet. It often works to pull others away too.

14:3 *So then they stayed a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, and granting signs and wonders to be done through their hands.*

Here is something we might not expect. Because of the opposition, they stayed "a long time." Persecution didn't drive them out right away; it made them dig in. Notice the order. The message comes first, and the miracles confirm it. Signs were God's way of putting His stamp on the Gospel His servants preached (Hebrews 2:3-4).

14:4 *But the multitude of the city was divided; and some were with the Jews, and some with the apostles.*

This is one of only two places in Acts where Barnabas is called an apostle (see also 14:14). The word means "one who is sent." Barnabas wasn't one of the twelve, but he and Paul had been sent out by the Holy Spirit and the church (13:2-4). The Gospel still divides people. Jesus said it would (Luke 12:51). No one can stay neutral about Him forever.

14:5-7 *And when **there** came about a rush both of the Gentiles and of Jews with their rulers to mistreat and to stone them, having become aware **of it**, they fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; and there they were preaching the gospel.*

Lystra and Derbe were cities of Lycaonia. Fleeing here wasn't cowardice. Jesus told His followers that when they were persecuted in one city, they should flee to the next (Matthew 10:23). There is a time to stand and a time to move on, and wisdom knows the difference. And notice what they did when they arrived: "they were preaching the gospel." They changed their location, not their message.

14:8 *And a certain man in Lystra, powerless in the feet, was sitting, being lame from **the** womb of his mother, who had never walked.*

Luke stacks up the details so we understand there is no doubt about this man's condition. He had never taken a step in his life. This healing echoes Peter's healing of the lame man at the temple gate in chapter 3. God was doing through Paul exactly what He had done through Peter, showing that the same Spirit was at work in both.

14:9-10 *This **man** was hearing Paul speaking; who, having looked intently at him and having seen that he has faith to be saved, said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet!" And he was leaping up and was walking.*

Scripture doesn't tell us how Paul saw that the man "has faith to be saved." Perhaps it was in the man's face, or perhaps the Spirit showed him. The Greek word for saved is also used for being made well, so here it likely means both. Faith came from hearing the message (Romans 10:17). A man who had never walked didn't need to learn how. God gave him the strength and the skill in the same moment.

14:11-12 *And the crowds, having seen what Paul did, lifted up their voice in Lycaonian, saying, "The gods, having become like men, have come down to us!" And they were calling Barnabas Zeus, and Paul Hermes, because he was the leading speaker.*

Paul and Barnabas didn't understand the local language, so at first they didn't know what was happening. Zeus was the chief of the Greek gods, and Hermes was the messenger of the gods, which is why Paul, "the leading speaker," was called Hermes. There was an old story from this region about Zeus and Hermes visiting in disguise and being turned away by everyone except one poor old couple. The people of Lystra may not have wanted to make the same mistake twice.

14:13 *And the priest of the Zeus who is before their city, having brought bulls and wreaths to the gates, was wanting to sacrifice with the crowds.*

Imagine how this would have tempted a man who wanted fame. The crowd was ready to treat them as gods. But a true servant of God refuses glory that belongs only to Him. Herod accepted that kind of praise in 12:21-23, and it cost him his life.

14:14-15 *But the apostles Barnabas and Paul, having heard **it**, having torn their garments, sprang into the crowd, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like nature with you, preaching the gospel to you, to turn from these futile things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things in them,*

Tearing their robes was a Jewish sign of grief and horror at blasphemy. They didn't want worship. They wanted these people to turn from "these futile things," their idols, to "the living God." Notice how Paul preaches to pagans. He doesn't start with Moses and the prophets, as he did in the synagogue. He starts with creation, something they can see every day.

Old Testament links: Exodus 20:11 (alluded to); Psalm 146:6 (alluded to)

14:16-17 *who in the generations gone by allowed all the nations to go in their ways. And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, doing good, giving us rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."*

God permitting the nations to go their own ways doesn't mean He approved of their idolatry. It means He was patient and held back His full judgment (17:30). Yet He never left Himself "without witness, doing good." Every harvest and every meal was a message from the one true God. Paul says the same thing in Romans 1:20: creation shows God's power and nature so clearly that people are without excuse. Creation can't save anyone, but it points to the God who can.

14:18 *And saying these things, they scarcely restrained the crowds from sacrificing to them.*

Old habits and old beliefs don't let go easily. That's still true today. People may hear the truth and still want to go back to what they've always known. It took more than one sermon to turn a city away from idols. We shouldn't be discouraged when the people we share with don't change overnight.

14:19 *But Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds and having stoned Paul, they were dragging **him** outside the city, having supposed him to have died.*

Antioch was more than a hundred miles away. The same people who wanted to worship Paul now stoned him. How quickly a crowd can turn. That's why we should never build our lives on people's praise. Paul later remembered this day: "once I was stoned" (2 Corinthians 11:25). He also wrote of bearing on his body "the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17), which may include the scars from Lystra.

14:20 *But when the disciples had surrounded him, having risen up, he entered into the city. And on the next day he went out with Barnabas to Derbe.*

Scripture doesn't say whether Paul had actually died and was raised, or whether he was left for dead and God revived him. Either way, it was the hand of God. A man who has just been stoned does not normally get up and walk anywhere. And notice where he went: back into the city that had just tried to kill him. Somewhere in that small crowd of disciples may have been a young man named Timothy, whose home was Lystra (16:1).

14:21-22 *And having preached the gospel **to** that city and having made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting **them** to continue in the faith, and **saying** that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.*

From Derbe, the shortest way home ran through the Taurus Mountains and Paul's hometown of Tarsus. Instead, they turned back through the very cities where they had been attacked. Why? To strengthen the new disciples and tell them the truth. Paul never promised an easy life to new believers. He promised a sure one. Hardship isn't a sign that God has left us. It's part of the road every believer walks until Jesus returns.

14:23 *And having appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

Elders were spiritual leaders who would shepherd and teach the new believers after the missionaries left (Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1-3). They appointed more than one elder in each church, and that they prayed and fasted just as the church at Antioch had before sending them out (13:3). Paul and Barnabas couldn't stay to protect these churches. But they knew who could.

14:24-26 *And having passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And having spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. And from there they sailed to Antioch, from where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled.*

Perga was a city they had only passed through before (13:13), and Attalia was its port. Antioch in Syria was where it all started. The journey had lasted perhaps two years and covered well over a thousand miles by land and sea. The work God had given them to do was finished.

14:27 *And having arrived and having gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened to the Gentiles a door of faith.*

Notice the wording: "all that God had done with them." They didn't tell what they had done for God; they told what God had done with them. The church that sent them out in prayer deserved to hear how God answered. Missionary reports still build the faith of the church today.

14:28 *And they stayed there no little time with the disciples.*

The long stay in Antioch was a time to rest, teach, and be refreshed among the people who loved them. But trouble was coming. In the next chapter, men from Judea would arrive and teach that Gentile believers had to be circumcised to be saved. Many scholars believe Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians, to these very churches, during this time.

Chapter 14 Summary

Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium, where many believed but the city was divided and a plot to stone them forced them to flee. In Lystra, God healed a man lame from birth, and the crowd tried to worship Paul and Barnabas as Zeus and Hermes. Paul pointed them instead to the living God who made all things and shows His goodness through rain and harvest. Soon afterward, Paul

was stoned and left for dead, but he got up and went on to Derbe. On the way home the two men strengthened the new churches, appointed elders, and then reported to the church in Antioch how God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been praised one day and criticized the next? How did it affect you?

2. How did the Lord confirm the message Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium? (14:3)

3. Why did Paul and Barnabas leave Iconium, and what did they keep doing when they arrived in the next region? (14:5-7)

4. What did Paul see in the lame man before he healed him? (14:9)

5. Why did the crowd in Lystra call Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes, and how did the two men respond? (14:11-15)

6. According to Paul, how has God shown Himself to every nation? (14:17)

7. What did Paul do after he was stoned and left for dead? (14:19-20)

8. What did Paul and Barnabas tell the new believers about hardship? (14:22)

9. Why do you think it matters that the churches had elders after the missionaries left? (14:23)

10. Who in your life might need to be strengthened and encouraged in their faith this week? What could you do for them?

Chapter 15: The Jerusalem Council

Scripture: The Question of Circumcision; The Council's Decision; The Letter to the Gentiles; Paul and Barnabas Part Ways

15:1-5 And certain ones, having come down from Judea, were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you are not able to be saved." So when no small dissension and debate had come about for Paul and Barnabas with them, they appointed Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them to go up to the apostles and elders, to Jerusalem, about this question. So then, having been sent forward by the church, they were passing through Phoenicia and Samaria, relating in detail the conversion of the Gentiles; and they were bringing great joy to all the brothers. And having arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some of those from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command ***them*** to keep the law of Moses."

15:6-21 And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter. And when ***there*** had been much debate, Peter, having risen up, said to them, "Men, brothers, you know that from early days God chose among us for the Gentiles to hear through my mouth the word of the gospel and to believe. And God, the knower of hearts, bore witness to them, having given them the Holy Spirit, even as also to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, having purified their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why are you testing God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But through the grace of ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ we believe ***that we*** are saved in the same manner as they also." And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul relating how many signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. And after they were silent, James answered, saying, "Men, brothers, hear me. Simeon has related how God first visited to take out of ***the*** Gentiles a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it has been written: 'After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it upright, so that the remnant of men may seek out the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom My name has been called upon them, says ***the*** Lord, who does all these things.' Known from eternity to God are all His works. Therefore I judge not to trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but to write to them to abstain from the pollutions of the idols and the sexual immorality and the strangled ***thing*** and the blood. For Moses from generations of old has in every city those who proclaim him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

15:22-35 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to send men chosen from among them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, having written through their hand these things: "The apostles and the elders and the brothers, to the brothers from among the Gentiles throughout Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying ***that you must*** be circumcised and keep the law, to whom we gave no instructions, it seemed good to us, having become of one accord, to send chosen

men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have handed over their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, and they themselves ***are*** reporting the same things through word ***of mouth***. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden except these necessary things: to abstain from things sacrificed to idols and blood and what ***is*** strangled and sexual immorality. Keeping yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." So then they, having been sent off, came to Antioch; and having gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. And having read ***it***, they rejoiced at the encouragement. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brothers with many words and strengthened ***them***. And having spent a time ***there***, they were sent away in peace from the brothers to the apostles. But it seemed good to Silas to remain there. But Paul and Barnabas were staying in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord ***as*** the gospel, with many others also.

15:36-41 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Having turned back now, let us visit our brothers in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, ***to see*** how they are." And Barnabas determined to take along John, who is called Mark. But Paul was thinking ***it*** fitting not to take along this ***one***, who had withdrawn from them from Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. So ***there*** came about a sharp disagreement, so that they were separated from one another, and Barnabas, having taken Mark, sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul, having chosen Silas, went out, having been committed by the brothers to the grace of God. And he was passing through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Chapter 15 Preview

This chapter may be the most important turning point in the book of Acts. Gentiles have been coming to faith in Jesus in large numbers. Now a hard question has to be answered: does a Gentile have to become a Jew, by being circumcised and keeping the Law of Moses, in order to be saved?

Some men from Judea said yes. Paul and Barnabas said no. The church in Jerusalem gathered to settle it, and most scholars date this meeting to about A.D. 49. Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James all speak, and the answer comes back clear: we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, Jews and Gentiles alike. The chapter ends on a more personal note, with a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas that sends them in two directions.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1 *And certain ones, having come down from Judea, were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you are not able to be saved."*

Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14). These men weren't saying Gentiles shouldn't believe in Jesus. They were saying faith in Jesus wasn't enough; you had to add the Law. That is the danger. Any message that says "Jesus plus something" is no longer the Gospel. Paul called it "a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6-9).

15:2 *So when no small dissension and debate had come about for Paul and Barnabas with them, they appointed Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them to go up to the apostles and elders, to Jerusalem, about this question.*

This wasn't a minor disagreement about style or tradition. The heart of the Gospel was at stake, and Paul would not give an inch (Galatians 2:5). It's worth noticing how the church solved the conflict: not by splitting off, but by going together to the leaders of the church and seeking God's answer as one body.

15:3 *So then, having been sent forward by the church, they were passing through Phoenicia and Samaria, relating in detail the conversion of the Gentiles; and they were bringing great joy to all the brothers.*

Phoenicia was the coastal region north of Israel. The churches there and in Samaria had been planted by believers scattered after Stephen's death (8:1-5; 11:19). They had no problem rejoicing that Gentiles were being saved. They knew what it was to be outsiders welcomed by grace.

15:4-5 *And having arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some of those from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command* ***them*** *to keep the law of Moses."*

The Pharisees were the strict Jewish party known for careful keeping of the Law and the traditions of the elders. These men had truly believed in Jesus. They loved God's Law, and they couldn't yet see how it fit with God's grace. The question was now out in the open.

15:6 *And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter.*

The phrase "to see about this matter" is a good model for us. When the church faces a hard question, its leaders should come together, take time, listen, and look carefully at what God has said and done. They didn't vote on feelings or tradition. They looked for God's will.

15:7 *And when* ***there*** *had been much debate, Peter, having risen up, said to them, "Men, brothers, you know that from early days God chose among us for the Gentiles to hear through my mouth the word of the gospel and to believe.*

The council didn't rush; they let everyone speak. Peter is talking about Cornelius, the Roman centurion in Caesarea (Acts 10). Peter, the apostle to the Jews, was the first one God sent to the Gentiles. He couldn't argue against it. He had seen it with his own eyes.

15:8-9 *And God, the knower of hearts, bore witness to them, having given them the Holy Spirit, even as also to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, having purified their hearts by faith.*

Notice what Peter is saying. God had already answered the question. Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit, just as the Jewish believers had at Pentecost, before anyone baptized or

circumcised them (10:44-48). If God accepted them by faith alone, who were they to require more?

15:10 *Now therefore, why are you testing God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*

A yoke was the wooden frame placed on oxen to pull a load. Peter is honest. No Jew had ever kept the Law perfectly. If the Law couldn't save the Jews, why load it on the Gentiles? Jesus offered a different yoke, one that is easy and light (Matthew 11:28-30).

15:11 *But through the grace of **the** Lord Jesus Christ we believe **that we** are saved in the same manner as they also."*

This verse sums up the whole chapter. Peter could have said the Gentiles are saved the same way the Jews are. Instead, he turned it around: we Jews are saved the same way the Gentiles are, by grace. No one has an advantage. No one adds anything. Everyone who is saved, from Abraham to today, is saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). This is the last time Peter speaks in the book of Acts, and it's a fitting final word.

15:12 *And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul relating how many signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.*

Barnabas is named first here. The Jerusalem church had known and trusted him for years (4:36-37; 9:27). Their testimony added weight to Peter's. The same God who had confirmed His work with Cornelius had confirmed it again across Cyprus and Galatia. Sometimes the best thing a heated meeting can do is stop talking and listen to what God has been doing.

15:13-14 *And after they were silent, James answered, saying, "Men, brothers, hear me. Simeon has related how God first visited to take out of **the** Gentiles a people for His name.*

This is James the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19), not the apostle James, who had been killed by Herod (12:2). He had become a leading elder of the church in Jerusalem. He refers to Peter by his Hebrew name, Simeon. The phrase "to take out of the Gentiles a people for His name" is striking. Israel had always been called God's people. Now God was gathering a people for His name from the nations as well.

15:15-17 *And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it has been written: 'After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it upright, so that the remnant of men may seek out the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom My name has been called upon them, says **the** Lord, who does all these things.'*

James quotes Amos 9:11-12. In Amos, this comes after God's judgment on Israel, and it ends with Israel restored to its land (Amos 9:14-15). I believe James is saying that the Gentiles coming to God now fits the plan the prophets saw. The rebuilding of David's house began with the resurrection of David's Son, Jesus, and it will be completed when He returns to reign. God's work among the Gentiles doesn't cancel His promises to Israel. It is part of the same plan.

Some teachers believe the church is the rebuilt tent of David and that Amos 9 is completely fulfilled today, but I take Amos plainly, as I explained above: God's promise to Israel still stands.

Old Testament links: Amos 9:11-12 (quoted); Jeremiah 12:15 (alluded to)

15:18 *Known from eternity to God are all His works.*

Taking in the Gentiles was no surprise to God and no change of plan. He had promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3). What was new to the Jerusalem church was very old to God.

15:19 *Therefore I judge not to trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,*

In other words, James says, don't put extra burdens on new Gentile believers. Don't make it harder for people to come to God than God Himself has made it. James wasn't acting as a pope or giving an order alone. He was summing up what the whole council had heard, and the rest agreed (15:22, 25).

15:20 *but to write to them to abstain from the pollutions of the idols and the sexual immorality and the strangled* ***thing*** *and the blood.*

These four things were not conditions for salvation, since the council had just settled that salvation is by grace. Three of them had to do with food that was especially offensive to Jews: meat offered to idols, meat from animals strangled without draining the blood, and eating blood itself (Leviticus 17:10-14). Fornication, meaning sexual immorality of every kind, was common in pagan temple worship. These four guidelines helped Jewish and Gentile believers sit at the same table and share fellowship in the same church. Unlike the food rules, the one on sexual immorality was never only about fellowship. Sexual immorality is forbidden to every believer in every age (1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

15:21 *For Moses from generations of old has in every city those who proclaim him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."*

James' reason is practical. There were Jewish communities all over the Roman world. If Gentile believers carelessly did things deeply offensive to Jews, it would put up walls and hurt the witness of the Gospel among them. Paul later taught the same idea: freedom in Christ should be used in love, not in a way that makes a brother stumble (1 Corinthians 8:9-13; Romans 14:13-21).

15:22 *Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to send men chosen from among them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,*

Sending trusted men from Jerusalem in person was wise. No one could say Paul and Barnabas had twisted the council's decision. Silas will become an important figure in the rest of Acts. He becomes Paul's partner on the second missionary journey (15:40). His Roman name was Silvanus (1 Thessalonians 1:1).

15:23-24 *having written through their hand these things: "The apostles and the elders and the brothers, to the brothers from among the Gentiles throughout Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying **that you must** be circumcised and keep the law, to whom we gave no instructions,*

The letter begins warmly and then speaks plainly about the trouble. The church admitted the problem came from its own people. That kind of honesty is rare, and it's needed in the church today.

15:25-26 *it seemed good to us, having become of one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have handed over their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The church in Jerusalem knew what Barnabas and Paul had suffered in Galatia. This letter not only settled a doctrinal question; it publicly honored the men who had been attacked over it. Unity in the truth and love for the people go together.

15:27-29 *We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, and they themselves **are** reporting the same things through word **of mouth**. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden except these necessary things: to abstain from things sacrificed to idols and blood and what **is** strangled and sexual immorality. Keeping yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."*

Here is one of the most remarkable phrases in Acts: "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." The council knew that the Spirit had been leading them, through Peter's testimony, the reports of God's work, and the words of Scripture. Notice the tone of the letter's close. It is not a threat. It is a loving word from one family to another.

15:30-31 *So then they, having been sent off, came to Antioch; and having gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. And having read **it**, they rejoiced at the encouragement.*

Imagine the relief. Gentile believers who had been told they weren't really saved now heard from the leaders in Jerusalem that they were brothers, fully accepted by grace. The truth of the Gospel always brings joy and freedom.

15:32-33 *And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brothers with many words and strengthened **them**. And having spent a time **there**, they were sent away in peace from the brothers to the apostles.*

Prophets in the New Testament church spoke for God to build up, encourage, and comfort believers (1 Corinthians 14:3). Encouragement is a gift the church never outgrows. These two men traveled a long way, and part of their whole job was simply to strengthen other believers.

15:34 *But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.*

The SLB includes verse 34, as the King James Version does. Most modern translations leave it out of the text or put it in a footnote, because the earliest Greek manuscripts do not have it. Many scholars believe a copyist added it later to explain how Silas was still there in verse 40, after verse 33 says he and Judas were sent back. Silas may have gone back to Jerusalem and later returned, or he may have stayed. Either way, Paul found him when he needed a partner.

15:35 *But Paul and Barnabas were staying in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord **as** the gospel, with many others also.*

Notice the phrase "with many others." Antioch had many teachers by now. The church had grown strong enough that it no longer depended on one or two men. This is what healthy ministry looks like: leaders who raise up other leaders. It may also have been during this time that Peter visited Antioch and Paul confronted him for pulling back from eating with Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14).

15:36 *And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Having turned back now, let us visit our brothers in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, **to see** how they are."*

Paul had the heart of a shepherd, not only an evangelist. He wanted to know that the churches were growing, not only that they had been started. This was the beginning of what we call the second missionary journey.

15:37-38 *And Barnabas determined to take along John, who is called Mark. But Paul was thinking **it** fitting not to take along this **one**, who had withdrawn from them from Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.*

Both men had a point. Barnabas, whose name means "Son of Encouragement" (4:36), was willing to give his cousin a second chance. Paul remembered Mark leaving at Perga (13:13) and was concerned about the work and the hardships ahead. He had been stoned in Lystra. He needed partners he could count on.

15:39 *So **there** came about a sharp disagreement, so that they were separated from one another, and Barnabas, having taken Mark, sailed away to Cyprus.*

Luke doesn't hide it. Two godly men, who had risked their lives together, couldn't agree. This is the last time Barnabas is mentioned in Acts. Scripture doesn't tell us who was right. I believe God used both men. The Gospel now went out in two directions instead of one. And Mark, under Barnabas' care, grew into a faithful servant. Paul later spoke warmly of Mark and asked for him (Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11), and Paul later named Barnabas alongside himself (1 Corinthians 9:6). The break was real, but it wasn't permanent.

15:40-41 *But Paul, having chosen Silas, went out, having been committed by the brothers to the grace of God. And he was passing through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

Silas was a good choice. He was a respected leader from Jerusalem, so he could confirm the council's letter, and he was a Roman citizen like Paul (16:37). Syria and Cilicia were Paul's home region. Disagreements in the church are painful, but they don't stop God's work. Grace carried both teams forward.

Chapter 15 Summary

When men from Judea taught that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved, the church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. There the apostles and elders met. Peter reminded them that God had given the Holy Spirit to Gentiles by faith, and declared that Jews and Gentiles alike are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Paul and Barnabas reported God's work among the Gentiles, and James showed from the prophet Amos that this was God's plan all along. The council sent a letter to the Gentile churches lifting the burden of the Law and asking them to avoid four practices that would hurt fellowship with Jewish believers. Afterward, Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply over John Mark and separated, Barnabas sailing to Cyprus with Mark and Paul setting out with Silas.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been part of a disagreement in a church or a family that was handled well? What made the difference?

2. What were the men from Judea teaching the believers in Antioch? (15:1)

3. How did the church in Antioch decide to settle the dispute? (15:2)

4. What event did Peter point to as proof that God accepted the Gentiles? (15:7-9)

5. According to Peter, how are Jews and Gentiles both saved? (15:11)

6. How did James use the prophet Amos to support the council's decision? (15:15-18)

7. What four things were the Gentile believers asked to avoid, and why? (15:20, 29)

8. What is the danger of adding anything to faith in Jesus as a requirement for salvation?

9. Why did Paul and Barnabas separate, and how did God use both of them afterward? (15:37-41)

10. Is there a relationship in your life that needs a second chance, like John Mark received? What could you do this week to take a step toward it?

Chapter 16: The Second Missionary Journey

Scripture: Timothy Joins Paul; The Macedonian Call; Lydia; The Slave Girl; The Philippian Jailer

16:1-5 And he came to Derbe and Lystra. And look, a certain disciple was there named Timothy, ***the*** son of a certain believing Jewish woman, but of a Greek father, who was well attested by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this ***one*** to go out with him, and having taken ***him***, he circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places; for they all knew his father, that he was a Greek. And as they were traveling through the cities, they were delivering to them the decrees to keep, which had been decided by the apostles and the elders who ***were*** in Jerusalem. So then the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number every day.

16:6-10 And having passed through Phrygia and the Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia, having come to Mysia, they were attempting to go toward Bithynia, and the Spirit did not allow them. And having passed by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul during the night: a certain Macedonian man was standing, pleading with him and saying, "Having crossed over into Macedonia, help us!" And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go out to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

16:11-15 So having set sail from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the following ***day*** to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a colony. And we were in this city, staying some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the city by a river, where it was customary ***for*** prayer to be; and having sat down, we were speaking to the women who had come together. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of ***the*** city of Thyatira, worshiping God, was listening; whose heart the Lord opened to pay attention to the things being spoken by Paul. And when she had been baptized, and her household, she pleaded ***with us***, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, having entered into my house, remain." And she prevailed upon us.

16:16-24 Now it came about, as we were going to ***the place of*** prayer, ***that*** a certain slave girl having a spirit of Python met us, who was bringing much profit to her masters by fortune-telling. She, having followed after Paul and us, was crying out, saying, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to us a way of salvation." And this she was doing for many days. But Paul, having been greatly annoyed and having turned, said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out from her." And it came out that very hour. But her masters, having seen that the hope of their profit had gone out, having taken hold of Paul and Silas, dragged ***them*** into the marketplace before the rulers. And having brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men, being Jews, are greatly disturbing our city, and they proclaim customs which are not lawful for us to accept or to practice, being Romans." And the crowd rose up together against them, and the magistrates, having torn off their garments, were commanding ***them*** to beat ***them*** with rods. And having laid many blows on them, they threw ***them*** into prison, having charged the jailer to

keep them securely; who, having received such a charge, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

16:25-34 Now about midnight Paul and Silas, praying, were singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. And suddenly ***there*** came about a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and the chains of all were loosed. And the jailer, having become awake and having seen the doors of the prison opened, having drawn a sword, was about to kill himself, supposing the prisoners to have escaped. But Paul called out with a loud voice, saying, "Do no harm to yourself, for we are all here!" And having asked for lights, he rushed in, and having become terrified, he fell down before Paul and Silas. And having brought them outside, he said, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?" And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all those in his house. And having taken them in that hour of the night, he washed ***them*** from the blows; and he was baptized, he and all his ***people***, immediately. And having brought them up into his house, he set a table ***before them***, and he rejoiced with ***his*** whole household, having believed in God.

16:35-40 And when day had come, the magistrates sent the rod-bearers, saying, "Release those men." And the jailer reported these words to Paul: "The magistrates have sent that you may be released. Now therefore, having gone out, go in peace." But Paul said to them, "Having beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Romans, they threw ***us*** into prison; and now are they throwing us out secretly? No indeed! But having come themselves, let them bring us out." And the rod-bearers reported these declarations to the magistrates, and they were afraid, having heard that they were Romans. And having come, they pleaded with them, and having brought ***them*** out, they were asking ***them*** to go out from the city. And having gone out of the prison, they went in to Lydia; and having seen the brothers, they encouraged them and went out.

Chapter 16 Preview

After the Jerusalem Council settled the question of whether Gentiles had to keep the Law of Moses, Paul set out again. This is the start of what we call his second missionary journey, which most scholars date to about A.D. 49 or 50. Silas is now his partner, and young Timothy joins them in Lystra.

Then something unusual happens. The Holy Spirit closes one door after another, until Paul receives a vision of a man from Macedonia calling for help. For the first time, the Gospel crosses into Europe. In the city of Philippi we meet three very different people: a businesswoman named Lydia, a slave girl held by an evil spirit, and a Roman jailer. Each one is changed by Jesus. Along the way Paul and Silas are beaten and thrown in prison, and they answer with hymns at midnight.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1-2 *And he came to Derbe and Lystra. And look, a certain disciple was there named Timothy, **the** son of a certain believing Jewish woman, but of a Greek father, who was well attested by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium.*

Paul returned to Derbe and Lystra, the cities he and Barnabas had reached on the first journey (Acts 14). Lystra is where Paul had been stoned and left for dead. He went back anyway. That tells us something about his love for those young believers.

From 2 Timothy 1:5 we learn Timothy's mother was Eunice and his grandmother was Lois, both women of faith. Timothy "was well attested by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium." Before Paul ever chose him, the local church already knew his character. That is still a good pattern for choosing leaders today.

16:3 *Paul wanted this **one** to go out with him, and having taken **him**, he circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places; for they all knew his father, that he was a Greek.*

Paul circumcised Timothy "because of the Jews" in that region. You might ask, "Didn't Paul just win the argument that circumcision is not required?" Yes, he did. But that ruling was about salvation. Gentiles did not need to be circumcised to be saved. Timothy's case was different. He had a Jewish mother, and everyone knew his father was Greek. An uncircumcised son of a Jewish mother would have closed synagogue doors before Paul even opened his mouth.

Paul gave up a freedom so that nothing would get in the way of the Gospel. He describes this attitude in 1 Corinthians 9:20: to the Jews he became as a Jew, so he might win Jews. Compare Titus in Galatians 2:3, whom Paul refused to circumcise because there the issue was salvation itself.

16:4-5 *And as they were traveling through the cities, they were delivering to them the decrees to keep, which had been decided by the apostles and the elders who **were** in Jerusalem. So then the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number every day.*

The "decrees" were the decisions of the Jerusalem Council, the letter from the apostles and elders (15:23-29).

Notice how sound teaching and growth go together. The Gentile believers now knew they were fully accepted without carrying the Law of Moses. That brought joy, and joy is contagious. A church that understands grace grows.

16:6-8 *And having passed through Phrygia and the Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia, having come to Mysia, they were attempting to go toward Bithynia, and the Spirit did not allow them. And having passed by Mysia, they came down to Troas.*

Asia here means the Roman province of Asia, the western part of modern Turkey, where Ephesus was. Bithynia lay to the north, and Troas was a port city on the coast.

Scripture doesn't tell us how the Spirit stopped them. It may have been a prophetic word, an illness, or some outward circumstance. What we do know is that a closed door from God is just as much guidance as an open one. Paul was not sitting still waiting for directions. He was moving, and God steered him as he moved. It is easier to steer a car that is rolling than one that is parked.

Many Bibles read "the Spirit of Jesus" here. The SLB follows manuscripts that simply say "the Spirit." Either way, Scripture calls Him "the Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9), one of the many places that show the Holy Spirit and Jesus working as one.

16:9-10 *And a vision appeared to Paul during the night: a certain Macedonian man was standing, pleading with him and saying, "Having crossed over into Macedonia, help us!" And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go out to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

Look closely at verse 10. The story suddenly says "we." Up to now Luke wrote about "they." Most scholars believe this is where Luke, the author of Acts, joined Paul's team. These "we" sections show up again later in the book, and they mean we are reading an eyewitness account.

Macedonia was a region in northern Greece, so the Gospel was about to enter Europe for the first time. The man in the vision asked for help. People rarely know that what they need most is Jesus, but God knows.

16:11-12 *So having set sail from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the following **day** to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a colony. And we were in this city, staying some days.*

Samothrace is an island, and Neapolis was the port that served Philippi. A colony was a city settled by retired Roman soldiers and treated as a little piece of Rome. Its citizens had Roman rights and were proud of it. That detail matters later in this chapter.

The trip took two days. Later, going the other way, it took five (20:6). God gave the wind at their backs when He was sending them.

16:13 *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the city by a river, where it was customary **for** prayer to be; and having sat down, we were speaking to the women who had come together.*

The phrase "where it was customary for prayer to be" suggests Philippi did not have a synagogue. Jewish tradition required ten Jewish men to form one, so a small group of worshipers might gather by the water instead.

Paul had seen a man in his vision, but the first people he met in Europe were women at a prayer meeting. God's call does not always look the way we expect. Paul didn't argue with it. He sat down and shared the Gospel with whoever was there.

16:14 *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of **the** city of Thyatira, worshiping God, was listening; whose heart the Lord opened to pay attention to the things being spoken by Paul.*

Lydia was from Thyatira, a city in the province of Asia known for its dyes, and later home to one of the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2:18-29. She sold purple fabrics, which were expensive and worn by the wealthy. She was "worshiping God," meaning she was a Gentile who worshiped the God of Israel but had not become a full convert to Judaism.

The key phrase is "whose heart the Lord opened." Paul spoke, Lydia listened, and God did the work inside her. Both are true at once. Paul had to preach and Lydia had to respond, yet it was the Lord who opened her heart. We share the Gospel faithfully and trust God to do what only He can do.

16:15 *And when she had been baptized, and her household, she pleaded **with us**, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, having entered into my house, remain." And she prevailed upon us.*

Lydia was baptized "and her household." In that culture a household included family members and servants. The text doesn't tell us their ages. I believe the pattern in Acts is that people heard, believed, and then were baptized. Lydia's household likely heard the same message she did.

Her faith showed itself right away in hospitality. Her house became the meeting place of the first church in Philippi (16:40). Years later Paul wrote the Philippians a letter full of joy and thanks for their generosity. It started here, at a riverside, with one open heart.

16:16-18 *Now it came about, as we were going to **the place of** prayer, **that** a certain slave girl having a spirit of Python met us, who was bringing much profit to her masters by fortune-telling. She, having followed after Paul and us, was crying out, saying, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to us a way of salvation." And this she was doing for many days. But Paul, having been greatly annoyed and having turned, said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out from her." And it came out that very hour.*

A "spirit of Python" was a spirit that let the slave girl tell fortunes. In Greek stories Python was the serpent tied to the famous oracle at Delphi, so the name was used for fortune-telling spirits.

What she said was true. So why did Paul stop her? Because the source was a demon. Satan sometimes mixes truth into his work so people will trust the messenger. If Paul had let her go on, the people of Philippi would have linked the Gospel with a fortune teller. Jesus also silenced demons who announced who He was (Mark 1:34).

Paul had no power of his own. The authority was "in the name of Jesus Christ."

16:19-21 *But her masters, having seen that the hope of their profit had gone out, having taken hold of Paul and Silas, dragged **them** into the marketplace before the rulers. And having brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men, being Jews, are greatly disturbing our city, and they proclaim customs which are not lawful for us to accept or to practice, being Romans."*

Notice what the owners really cared about. A girl had been set free from a demon, and all they could see was lost income.

Their charges did not mention money. They played on pride and prejudice. Philippi was a Roman colony, and the crowd was quick to turn on outsiders. When the Gospel touches someone's wallet, opposition often follows. We see the same thing in Ephesus in Acts 19.

16:22-24 *And the crowd rose up together against them, and the magistrates, having torn off their garments, were commanding **them** to beat **them** with rods. And having laid many blows on them, they threw **them** into prison, having charged the jailer to keep them securely; who, having received such a charge, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

Beating with rods was a Roman punishment, carried out by officers called lictors. Paul later mentions being beaten with rods three times (2 Corinthians 11:25).

The inner cell was the darkest and most secure part of the jail. The stocks held their legs apart, which would have been painful on top of the wounds from the beating. There was no trial and no chance to defend themselves.

16:25 *Now about midnight Paul and Silas, praying, were singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*

They were bleeding, in the dark, with their feet locked down, and they worshiped. And "the prisoners were listening to them."

Praise is not just something we do when life is good. Paul and Silas praised God because He was still worthy, even in a prison cell. People are always watching how believers handle suffering. The other prisoners had probably never heard anyone sing in that place.

16:26-28 *And suddenly **there** came about a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and the chains of all were loosed. And the jailer, having become awake and having seen the doors of the prison opened, having drawn a sword, was about to kill himself, supposing the prisoners to have escaped. But Paul called out with a loud voice, saying, "Do no harm to yourself, for we are all here!"*

This was not a normal earthquake. Normal earthquakes do not unfasten chains. God did this.

Under Roman practice, a guard who lost his prisoners could face the same penalty they would have faced. He would rather die by his own hand than in shame.

Why didn't the prisoners run? Scripture doesn't say. Maybe they were stunned. Maybe after hearing the hymns, they sensed God was at work. Either way, Paul cared more about the jailer's life than his own freedom.

16:29-30 *And having asked for lights, he rushed in, and having become terrified, he fell down before Paul and Silas. And having brought them outside, he said, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?"*

The jailer asked the most important question anyone can ask: "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?"

He may have heard the slave girl's shouting about "a way of salvation" in the streets for days. He had certainly heard the hymns at midnight. Now he had seen God's power. Hours earlier he had locked these men in stocks. Now he was on his knees in front of them.

16:31 *And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

Paul's answer is the Gospel in one sentence. Not "do these works." Not "keep the Law." Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). "You and your household" does not mean the jailer's faith would save his family automatically. It means the same offer was open to every one of them, and the next verses show that each one heard the word and believed.

16:32-34 *And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all those in his house. And having taken them in that hour of the night, he washed **them** from the blows; and he was baptized, he and all his **people**, immediately. And having brought them up into his house, he set a table **before them**, and he rejoiced with **his** whole household, having believed in God.*

Paul and Silas didn't stop at a one-line answer. They explained the Gospel to everyone in the house.

Look at the order: they heard the word, they believed, and they were baptized. Baptism followed faith. And look at the change in this man. The hands that locked Paul in stocks were now washing his wounds. That is what new life in Christ looks like.

16:35-36 *And when day had come, the magistrates sent the rod-bearers, saying, "Release those men." And the jailer reported these words to Paul: "The magistrates have sent that you may be released. Now therefore, having gone out, go in peace."*

Why release them now? Maybe the earthquake scared the magistrates. Maybe they thought a beating and a night in jail were enough for two troublemakers.

16:37 *But Paul said to them, "Having beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Romans, they threw **us** into prison; and now are they throwing us out secretly? No indeed! But having come themselves, let them bring us out."*

Roman citizens had legal protection. They could not be beaten without a trial. Why didn't Paul say so the day before? Scripture doesn't tell us. He may have tried and been shouted down in the uproar. What matters is why he spoke now. This was not wounded pride. The church in Philippi was brand new. If the city leaders publicly admitted they had wronged Paul and Silas, the young believers would be safer after the missionaries left.

16:38-40 *And the rod-bearers reported these declarations to the magistrates, and they were afraid, having heard that they were Romans. And having come, they pleaded with them, and having brought **them** out, they were asking **them** to go out from the city. And having gone out of the prison, they went in to Lydia; and having seen the brothers, they encouraged them and went out.*

The magistrates were afraid because they had broken Roman law.

Paul and Silas did leave, but not in a hurry. The men who had just been beaten were the ones doing the encouraging. Notice the story shifts back to "they." Luke seems to have stayed behind in Philippi.

Chapter 16 Summary

Paul began his second missionary journey with Silas and added Timothy at Lystra. After the Holy Spirit closed doors in Asia and Bithynia, a vision called him to Macedonia, and the Gospel entered Europe. In Philippi, the Lord opened Lydia's heart, Paul cast a fortune-telling spirit out of a slave girl, and Paul and Silas were beaten and jailed. At midnight they prayed and sang, God shook the prison, and the jailer and his household believed in the Lord Jesus and were saved. The Gospel reached a businesswoman, a slave girl held by an evil spirit, and a Roman jailer.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. Has God ever closed a door in your life that later turned out to be a blessing?

2. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy, when he had just argued that Gentiles did not need circumcision? (16:3; 15:1-11)

3. How did the Holy Spirit guide Paul's team during this journey? (16:6-10)

4. What does it mean that "the Lord opened" Lydia's heart? (16:14)

5. The slave girl was saying true things. Why did Paul cast the spirit out of her? (16:16-18)

6. What were the real reasons the owners of the slave girl had Paul and Silas arrested? (16:19-21)

7. What were Paul and Silas doing at midnight in prison, and who was listening? (16:25)

8. What question did the jailer ask, and how did Paul answer him? (16:30-31)

9. What changes do you see in the jailer after he believed? (16:33-34)

10. How do you usually respond when you suffer for doing what is right? What would it look like for you to praise God in your own "midnight" moment?

Chapter 17: Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens

Scripture: Thessalonica; Berea; Athens; Paul at the Areopagus

17:1-9 And having traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where the synagogue of the Jews was. And according to the custom of Paul, he went in to them, and for three Sabbaths he was reasoning with them from the Scriptures, opening and setting forth that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from ***the*** dead, and that this is the Christ, Jesus, whom I proclaim to you. And some of them were persuaded and joined themselves to Paul and to Silas, and of the worshiping Greeks a great multitude, and of the leading women not a few. But the unbelieving Jews, having become jealous, and having taken certain wicked men of the marketplace loiterers, and having gathered a crowd, were setting the city in an uproar; and having come upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them to the populace. But not having found them, they were dragging Jason and certain brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These who have upset the inhabited earth have come here also, whom Jason has received; and these all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying ***that*** another is king, Jesus." And they troubled the crowd and the city authorities, who were hearing these things. And having taken the security from Jason and the rest, they released them.

17:10-15 And the brothers immediately sent away both Paul and Silas during the night to Berea, who, having arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures every day ***to see*** if these things might be so. So then many of them believed, and of the prominent Greek women and of men not a few. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there also, stirring up the crowds. And then immediately the brothers sent Paul away to go as toward the sea; but both Silas and Timothy were remaining there. And those conducting Paul brought him as far as Athens; and having received a command for Silas and Timothy that they should come to him as quickly as possible, they departed.

17:16-21 Now while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he was seeing the city full of idols. So then he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and with those worshiping, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. And some of the Epicurean and of the Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, "What would this seed-picker want to say?" And others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign deities," because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection ***as*** the gospel to them. And having taken hold of him, they brought ***him*** to Mars' Hill (Areios pagos), saying, "Are we able to know what this new teaching ***is*** which is spoken by you? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; therefore we want to know what these things might mean." Now all ***the*** Athenians and the visiting foreigners were spending their time in nothing other than to tell something and to hear ***something*** newer.

17:22-34 And Paul, having stood in ***the*** midst of Mars' Hill, said, "Men, Athenians, I see you as very religious in all things. For passing through and observing your objects of worship, I found also an altar on which had been inscribed, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Whom therefore you

worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is He served by hands of men, as needing anything, He Himself giving to all life and breath and all things. And He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined ***the*** times appointed beforehand and the boundaries of their dwelling, to seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel for Him and find ***Him***; and yet He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and are, as also some of the poets among you have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, being offspring of God, we ought not to think the Divine to be like gold or silver or stone, an engraving of ***the*** art and imagination of man. So then God, having overlooked the times of ignorance, now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has set a day in which He is about to judge the inhabited earth in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed, having provided assurance to all, having raised Him from ***the*** dead." And having heard of a resurrection of ***the*** dead, some were mocking, but others said, "We will hear you again concerning this." And so Paul went out from ***the*** midst of them. But some men, having joined themselves to him, believed, among whom also ***were*** Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Chapter 17 Preview

Paul and Silas leave Philippi and travel west along the Roman road into the heart of Macedonia. In Thessalonica many believe, but jealous opponents start a riot and accuse the missionaries of turning the world upside down. In Berea, Paul finds people who check everything he says against the Scriptures. Then Paul goes on alone to Athens, the most famous center of learning in the ancient world.

In Athens, Paul is grieved by a city full of idols. He reasons in the synagogue and the marketplace, and the philosophers bring him before the Areopagus. There he gives one of the most important sermons in Acts: a message to people who knew nothing of the Bible. He starts with the God who made the world and ends with the resurrection of Jesus and a coming day of judgment.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1 *And having traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where the synagogue of the Jews was.*

Paul and Silas, and probably Timothy, traveled along the Via Egnatia, the great Roman road across Macedonia. Thessalonica was about a hundred miles from Philippi. It was the capital of the province of Macedonia and an important port.

Paul often passed through smaller towns to reach the larger cities. From a strong church in a major city, the Gospel could spread through the whole region. Paul later told the Thessalonians that from them "the word of the Lord has sounded forth" in every place (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

17:2-3 *And according to the custom of Paul, he went in to them, and for three Sabbaths he was reasoning with them from the Scriptures, opening and setting forth that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from* ***the*** *dead, and that this is the Christ, Jesus, whom I proclaim to you.*

Going to the synagogue first was Paul's custom. He was not just telling stories. He was proving his case from the Old Testament.

Many Jews of that day expected a conquering king, not a suffering servant. So Paul showed them passages like Isaiah 53 and Psalm 16. Jesus did the same thing with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25-27). The Old Testament points to Jesus. When we share our faith, we should do what Paul did and let the Scriptures do the talking.

17:4 *And some of them were persuaded and joined themselves to Paul and to Silas, and of the worshiping Greeks a great multitude, and of the leading women not a few.*

The "worshiping Greeks" were Gentiles who worshiped the God of Israel. The Gospel was reaching all kinds of people. Paul's letters to this church show that most of its members were Gentiles who had "turned to God from the idols" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Luke says Paul was there three Sabbaths, but Paul's letters suggest he may have stayed longer, long enough to work at his trade and to receive gifts from Philippi more than once (Philippians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:9). The three weeks may describe his time in the synagogue before he moved on to other places in the city.

17:5-6 *But the unbelieving Jews, having become jealous, and having taken certain wicked men of the marketplace loiterers, and having gathered a crowd, were setting the city in an uproar; and having come upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them to the populace. But not having found them, they were dragging Jason and certain brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These who have upset the inhabited earth have come here also,*

Jason seems to have been Paul and Silas' host. The mob's charge is famous: "These who have upset the inhabited earth have come here also." The King James says "turned the world upside down." They meant it as an insult, but it was a great compliment. A handful of believers with no army and no money were changing the Roman world. I pray the same could be said of the church today.

17:7 *whom Jason has received; and these all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying* ***that*** *another is king, Jesus."*

Claiming that "another is king, Jesus" was a dangerous charge. Thessalonica owed a lot to Rome, and any hint of disloyalty to the emperor could bring trouble on the whole city.

The charge twisted the truth, but it was not entirely wrong. Jesus is King. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians are full of teaching about His return (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 2). His kingdom does not come by rebellion against Rome, but one day every ruler will answer to Him (Revelation 19:16). Christians obey earthly authorities (Romans 13:1), but our first loyalty belongs to Jesus.

17:8-9 *And they troubled the crowd and the city authorities, who were hearing these things. And having taken the security from Jason and the rest, they released them.*

The "security" was likely a bond or a sum of money. This probably meant Jason promised that Paul would leave and there would be no more trouble.

Jason paid a price for opening his home to the Gospel. Paul later wrote of how Satan "hindered" him from coming back to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:18). This pledge may be part of what kept him away.

17:10 *And the brothers immediately sent away both Paul and Silas during the night to Berea, who, having arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews.*

Berea was a town about fifty miles southwest. Paul and Silas had just escaped a riot, and as soon as they arrived they went right back to preaching in the synagogue. Paul did not let opposition stop him.

17:11 *Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures every day* ***to see*** *if these things might be so.*

This is one of the best verses in the Bible for how we should study. The Bereans were open, but they were not gullible. They didn't just accept what Paul said because he was an apostle. They checked it against God's Word, every day. If they did that with Paul, we should certainly do it with any pastor or teacher today, including me. Open your Bible and check what you hear.

17:12 *So then many of them believed, and of the prominent Greek women and of men not a few.*

Honest study of the Scriptures leads to faith. God's Word holds up when we test it. Faith doesn't require us to turn off our minds. The Bereans used theirs, and they believed.

17:13-14 *But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there also, stirring up the crowds. And then immediately the brothers sent Paul away to go as toward the sea; but both Silas and Timothy were remaining there.*

The Jews of Thessalonica traveled about fifty miles just to stop Paul. Opposition to the Gospel can be very determined.

It seems Paul was the main target, so he left, and the others stayed to strengthen the new believers.

17:15 *And those conducting Paul brought him as far as Athens; and having received a command for Silas and Timothy that they should come to him as quickly as possible, they departed.*

Athens was a long journey to the south. From 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 we learn that Timothy did come to Athens, and Paul then sent him back to Thessalonica to strengthen the church there.

17:16 *Now while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he was seeing the city full of idols.*

Athens was the cultural center of the Greek world. It had famous temples, statues, and schools of philosophy. Many visitors came to admire its beauty.

Paul saw what others missed. Behind the art and architecture were people worshiping false gods. It grieved him and stirred him up. When we look at our own cities, do we see only buildings and culture, or do we see people who need Jesus?

17:17 *So then he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and with those worshiping, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.*

The marketplace, called the agora, was the center of public life in Athens. People gathered there to buy, sell, and argue about ideas.

Paul went where the people were. He didn't wait for the Athenians to come to a meeting. He talked with them where they lived and worked. That is still how the Gospel spreads best.

17:18 *And some of the Epicurean and of the Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, "What would this seed-picker want to say?" And others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign deities," because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection **as** the gospel to them.*

The Epicureans taught that the gods, if they existed, were far away and uninterested in people, and that the goal of life was a calm, pleasant life free from pain and fear. The Stoics taught that a divine reason runs through everything, and that the wise person accepts whatever happens with self-control and without strong emotion.

Some called Paul a "seed-picker," a word first used of a bird that picks up seeds, and then of someone who picks up scraps of ideas. Others thought he was promoting "foreign deities," because he preached "Jesus and the resurrection." Some think they heard "Resurrection" (in Greek, Anastasis) as the name of a goddess alongside Jesus.

17:19-21 *And having taken hold of him, they brought **him** to Mars' Hill (Areios pagos), saying, "Are we able to know what this new teaching **is** which is spoken by you? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; therefore we want to know what these things might mean." Now all **the** Athenians and the visiting foreigners were spending their time in nothing other than to tell something and to hear **something** newer.*

The name Areopagus means "hill of Ares," the Greek god of war (the Romans called him Mars, so it is also called Mars' Hill). The name also referred to the council that met there, which oversaw matters of religion and teaching in Athens.

Luke adds a dry comment in verse 21 about the Athenian love "to tell something and to hear something newer." They loved ideas the way some people love the latest news. But curiosity is not the same thing as seeking the truth.

17:22-23 *And Paul, having stood in **the** midst of Mars' Hill, said, "Men, Athenians, I see you as very religious in all things. For passing through and observing your objects of worship, I found also an altar on which had been inscribed, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Whom therefore you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.*

When Paul called the Athenians "very religious," he was not flattering them, and he was not mocking them. He was starting where they were.

The Athenians were so worried about missing a god that they built an altar "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." Paul used it as his opening.

This is a lesson for us. Paul found a point of contact in their own culture. He didn't start with the Old Testament, because they didn't know it. He started with something they could see, and he led them from there to the true God.

17:24-25 *The God who made the world and all things in it, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is He served by hands of men, as needing anything, He Himself giving to all life and breath and all things.*

Imagine saying that God "does not dwell in temples made with hands" while standing in sight of the Parthenon and the great temples of Athens.

The Athenians brought gifts to their gods as if the gods needed them. The true God needs nothing from us. Everything we have, including every breath, is a gift from Him. We don't keep God alive. He keeps us alive.

17:26-27 *And He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined **the** times appointed beforehand and the boundaries of their dwelling, to seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel for Him and find **Him**; and yet He is not far from each one of us.*

God made every nation "from one blood," that is, from one man, Adam. The Athenians were proud of their culture and looked down on outsiders as barbarians. Paul told them every person comes from the same ancestor. There is one human race.

The phrase "feel for Him" pictures someone feeling around in the dark. But God is not hiding. He placed us where we are so we might look for Him.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 32:8 (alluded to)

17:28 *For in Him we live and move and are, as also some of the poets among you have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'*

Paul knew Greek literature, and he quoted their own poets to show that even their own writers sensed that people come from God.

Quoting a pagan poet was not the same as agreeing with everything that poet believed. Paul took a line that happened to be true and used it to point to the God of the Bible.

17:29 *Therefore, being offspring of God, we ought not to think the Divine to be like gold or silver or stone, an engraving of **the** art and imagination of man.*

Paul's argument is simple. It makes no sense for the children to make the Father. The idols all over Athens were made by men. Living people cannot come from lifeless statues.

17:30-31 *So then God, having overlooked the times of ignorance, now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has set a day in which He is about to judge the inhabited earth in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed, having provided assurance to all, having raised Him from **the** dead."*

God overlooked "the times of ignorance." This does not mean God excused sin or that ignorant people are automatically saved (Romans 1:18-20 says creation leaves all people without excuse). It means God was patient and did not yet bring final judgment. But now that the truth has been made known, He commands all people everywhere to repent.

The "man whom He has appointed" is Jesus. The resurrection is God's guarantee that judgment is coming. The same Jesus who rose will return to judge the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; Revelation 20:11-15).

Old Testament links: Psalm 96:13 (alluded to)

17:32-33 *And having heard of a resurrection of **the** dead, some were mocking, but others said, "We will hear you again concerning this." And so Paul went out from **the** midst of them.*

Why did some sneer? Greek thinking generally looked down on the body. Many hoped to be free of the body after death, not to get it back. A man rising from the grave sounded foolish to them (1 Corinthians 1:23).

The reply "We will hear you again concerning this" may have been polite interest, or it may have been a polite way to end the conversation. The resurrection is always the dividing line. Without it, Christianity is just another philosophy (1 Corinthians 15:14). With it, everything changes.

17:34 *But some men, having joined themselves to him, believed, among whom also **were** Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.*

Some say Paul's sermon in Athens was a failure because no large church appears there. I disagree. People believed, including a member of the city's leading council. Paul preached Christ crucified and risen, and God brought fruit. Our job is to be faithful. The results belong to God.

Chapter 17 Summary

In Thessalonica, Paul reasoned from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer and rise, and many believed, but a jealous mob drove him out and accused the believers of upsetting the world. In Berea, people received the word eagerly and checked the Scriptures daily. In Athens, Paul was grieved by the city's idols and preached to the philosophers at the Areopagus, starting from their altar to an unknown god. He proclaimed the God who made all things, who needs nothing from

us, who commands all people to repent, and who has proved coming judgment by raising Jesus from the dead. Some mocked, but some believed.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. When someone tells you something about God or the Bible, how do you check whether it is true?

2. What did Paul prove to the Jews of Thessalonica from the Scriptures? (17:2-3)

3. What charge did the mob bring against Jason and the other brothers? (17:6-7)

4. Why does Luke call the Bereans "more noble"? (17:11)

5. What did Paul feel when he saw the city of Athens, and what did he do about it? (17:16-17)

6. How did Paul use the altar "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" to begin his message? (17:23)

7. What does Paul teach about God in verses 24-29?

8. What does God command all people everywhere to do, and why? (17:30-31)

9. How did the people respond when Paul spoke of the resurrection? (17:32-34)

10. What "idols" do people in your community trust today, and how could you start a conversation with them about the true God?

Chapter 18: Corinth

Scripture: Paul at Corinth; Paul Before Gallio; Return to Antioch; Apollos

18:1-11 Now after these things, Paul, having departed from Athens, came to Corinth. And having found a certain Jew named Aquila, of Pontus by birth, who had recently come from Italy, and Priscilla his wife, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome, he came to them; and because he was of the same trade, he was staying with them and was working; for they were tentmakers by trade. And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath, and was persuading both Jews and Greeks. And when both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, solemnly testifying to the Jews ***that*** Jesus ***is*** the Christ. But when they were opposing and blaspheming, having shaken out the garments, he said to them, "Your blood ***be*** upon your head; I ***am*** clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." And having moved from there, he came to ***the*** house of a certain ***man*** named Justus, who worshiped God, whose house was adjoining the synagogue. And Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed in the Lord with all his household; and many of the Corinthians, hearing, were believing and were being baptized. And the Lord said to Paul in the night through a vision, "Do not fear, but keep speaking, and do not be silent; because I am with you, and no one will set upon you to harm you; because I have many people in this city." And he stayed a year and six months, teaching among them the word of God.

18:12-17 But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and led him to the judgment seat, saying, "This ***man*** persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." But when Paul was about to open ***his*** mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If indeed then it were some wrong or wicked crime, O Jews, according to reason I would have borne with you. But if it is a question about a word and names and the law among you, you will see ***to it*** yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of these things." And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks, having seized Sosthenes the synagogue ruler, were beating ***him*** before the judgment seat. And none of these things was a concern to Gallio.

18:18-23 And Paul, having remained yet many days, having taken leave of the brothers, was sailing away to Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shaved the head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow. And he came to Ephesus and left them there; but he himself, having entered into the synagogue, reasoned with the Jews. And when they were asking ***him*** to remain a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, having said, "I must by all means keep the coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return to you again, God willing." And he set sail from Ephesus. And having landed at Caesarea, having gone up and having greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. And having spent some time ***there***, he went out, passing through the Galatian region and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

18:24-28 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus, being mighty in the Scriptures. This ***man*** had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. And having heard him, Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and expounded to him the way of God more

accurately. And when he was wanting to pass through into Achaia, the brothers, having encouraged ***him***, wrote to the disciples to welcome him; who, having arrived, greatly helped those who had believed through the grace. For he was powerfully refuting the Jews publicly, showing through the Scriptures Jesus to be the Christ.

Chapter 18 Preview

Paul leaves Athens and arrives in Corinth, a rich, busy, and famously immoral city. There he meets Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple who make tents like he does, and they become lifelong friends and partners in ministry. When the synagogue rejects his message, Paul turns to the Gentiles, and the Lord speaks to him in a vision: do not be afraid, for I have many people in this city. Paul stays a year and a half.

When Paul's opponents bring him before the Roman governor Gallio, the case is thrown out. Paul then returns to Antioch, ending his second journey, and soon sets out on a third. The chapter closes with Apollos, a gifted speaker who knew only the baptism of John until Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1 *Now after these things, Paul, having departed from Athens, came to Corinth.*

Corinth was about fifty miles west of Athens. It sat on a narrow strip of land between two seas, with a port on each side. Ships and goods passed through it from east and west, and it was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia (southern Greece).

Corinth was wealthy, crowded, and known all over the world for immorality. Its name had even become a word for loose living. Paul came here alone, and later he told the Corinthians he came "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). God often does His greatest work through people who feel weak.

18:2 *And having found a certain Jew named Aquila, of Pontus by birth, who had recently come from Italy, and Priscilla his wife, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome, he came to them;*

Pontus was on the southern coast of the Black Sea.

The Roman historian Suetonius mentions this expulsion and connects it to disturbances among the Jews in Rome. Most scholars date it to about A.D. 49. Some think those disturbances were over preaching about Christ. Either way, God used a Roman emperor's order to bring Aquila and Priscilla to Corinth right when Paul needed friends.

Luke doesn't say whether they were already believers when Paul met them. They may have been, since he never mentions their conversion.

18:3 *and because he was of the same trade, he was staying with them and was working; for they were tentmakers by trade.*

The word "tentmakers" may also mean leatherworkers. Jewish teachers were expected to learn a trade so they would not have to make money from teaching the Law.

Paul worked with his hands so he would not be a burden to the churches and so no one could say he preached for money (1 Corinthians 9:12-15; 2 Thessalonians 3:8). He also taught that those who preach the Gospel have a right to be supported (1 Corinthians 9:14). He chose to give up that right for the sake of the Gospel. There is no shame in a minister working a regular job.

18:4-5 *And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath, and was persuading both Jews and Greeks. And when both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, solemnly testifying to the Jews* ***that*** *Jesus* ***is*** *the Christ.*

Why was Paul "pressed in the spirit, solemnly testifying to the Jews" when Silas and Timothy arrived? It seems they brought a gift from the churches in Macedonia (2 Corinthians 11:9; Philippians 4:15), so Paul could stop making tents and preach full time. Many Bibles follow manuscripts that say here that Paul gave himself fully to the word.

They also brought news. Timothy's good report about the faith of the Thessalonians led Paul to write 1 Thessalonians from Corinth (1 Thessalonians 3:6).

18:6 *But when they were opposing and blaspheming, having shaken out the garments, he said to them, "Your blood* ***be*** *upon your head; I* ***am*** *clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."*

Shaking out the garments was a way of saying, "I am done here, and I'm not responsible for what you do with this." It echoes Ezekiel 33, where the watchman who warns the people is free of guilt if they refuse to listen. Paul had done his part. He had faithfully warned them. What they did with the message was their responsibility. This was a decision about Corinth, not a final rejection of the Jewish people. In the very next city, Paul went back to the synagogue first (18:19).

18:7-8 *And having moved from there, he came to* ***the*** *house of a certain* ***man*** *named Justus, who worshiped God, whose house was adjoining the synagogue. And Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed in the Lord with all his household; and many of the Corinthians, hearing, were believing and were being baptized.*

Titius Justus lived right next door to the synagogue. That must have made for some uncomfortable Sabbaths.

Something remarkable happened when the synagogue leader himself believed. Paul baptized Crispus personally (1 Corinthians 1:14). Notice the order once again: they heard, they believed, then they were baptized.

18:9-10 *And the Lord said to Paul in the night through a vision, "Do not fear, but keep speaking, and do not be silent; because I am with you, and no one will set upon you to harm you; because I have many people in this city."*

Even Paul got afraid. He had been beaten in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica and Berea, and mocked in Athens. He may have been wondering if Corinth would be the same. Jesus met him in that fear.

"I have many people in this city." Many of these people had not yet believed. Jesus already called them His. God knew who would respond to the Gospel, and He sent Paul to preach so they could hear and believe. God's knowledge doesn't make our preaching unnecessary. It is the reason we can preach with confidence.

18:11 *And he stayed a year and six months, teaching among them the word of God.*

A year and six months was one of Paul's longest stays anywhere. The church in Corinth had many problems, as his letters to them show, but it was a real church, and it grew. Some scholars believe Paul also wrote 2 Thessalonians during this time.

18:12-13 *But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and led him to the judgment seat, saying, "This **man** persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."*

A proconsul was the Roman governor of a province. Gallio was the brother of the famous philosopher Seneca. An inscription found at Delphi helps date his time as governor to about A.D. 51 or 52. This is one of the most helpful dates we have for the timeline of Paul's life.

By "contrary to the law," Paul's accusers likely meant that Paul's teaching was not the Jewish religion, which Rome allowed, but something new outside it.

18:14-15 *But when Paul was about to open **his** mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If indeed then it were some wrong or wicked crime, O Jews, according to reason I would have borne with you. But if it is a question about a word and names and the law among you, you will see **to it** yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of these things."*

Gallio's refusal was a very important decision. He treated the Christian faith as a dispute inside Judaism, which Rome protected. This ruling may have helped give the Gospel room to spread in the Roman world in the years that followed. God kept His promise from verse 10. No one harmed Paul.

18:16-17 *And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks, having seized Sosthenes the synagogue ruler, were beating **him** before the judgment seat. And none of these things was a concern to Gallio.*

The judgment seat, called the bema, was a raised platform where officials heard cases. Its remains can still be seen in Corinth today.

Scripture doesn't say exactly who beat Sosthenes. A man named Sosthenes is later called "our brother" in 1 Corinthians 1:1. If it is the same man, then God turned a beaten synagogue leader into a fellow worker of Paul.

18:18 *And Paul, having remained yet many days, having taken leave of the brothers, was sailing away to Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shaved the head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow.*

Cenchrea was Corinth's eastern port. Paul's vow was likely a Nazirite-type vow, a special vow of devotion to God described in Numbers 6, during which a person did not cut his hair. Luke doesn't tell us why Paul made it. It may have been a vow of thanks for God's protection in Corinth. Some ask why Paul, who taught freedom from the Law, would make a vow like this. The answer is that the Law could not save anyone, but a Jewish believer was still free to keep Jewish customs as an act of devotion, as long as he did not trust in them for salvation.

18:19-21 *And he came to Ephesus and left them there; but he himself, having entered into the synagogue, reasoned with the Jews. And when they were asking* ***him*** *to remain a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, having said, "I must by all means keep the coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return to you again, God willing." And he set sail from Ephesus.*

Ephesus was the leading city of the province of Asia. This is the region where the Holy Spirit had earlier stopped Paul from preaching (16:6). Now the door was opening.

Notice the words "God willing." Paul made plans, but he held them loosely and put them under God's will (James 4:13-15). And God did will it. Paul came back and stayed for more than two years (Acts 19).

The SLB, like the King James Version, includes Paul's words "I must by all means keep the coming feast in Jerusalem." Most modern translations leave them out, because the earliest manuscripts do not have them.

18:22 *And having landed at Caesarea, having gone up and having greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.*

The words "having gone up" usually mean going up to Jerusalem, which sits high in the hills. Most scholars believe Paul visited the church in Jerusalem here. Antioch in Syria was the church that had sent him out. This ends Paul's second missionary journey, about A.D. 52.

18:23 *And having spent some time* ***there****, he went out, passing through the Galatian region and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.*

This begins Paul's third missionary journey.

Paul never forgot the churches he had planted. He went back to them again and again. Starting churches matters, but so does strengthening them. New believers need ongoing teaching and encouragement, and every church needs someone who cares enough to come back.

18:24-25 *Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus, being mighty in the Scriptures. This **man** had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.*

Alexandria, in Egypt, was a great center of learning, with a large Jewish community. "Mighty in the Scriptures" means Apollos knew the Old Testament well.

Apollos seems to have known that John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, and he preached that faithfully. What he lacked was fuller teaching about what happened after John's ministry, likely including Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and baptism in the name of Jesus.

18:26 *And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. And having heard him, Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.*

I love how they handled this. They didn't correct him in public or embarrass him. They took him aside, likely into their home. And Apollos, as gifted as he was, was humble enough to learn from a tentmaking couple. Priscilla is named first here, as she often is. Both she and her husband taught Apollos. God uses husbands and wives who serve Him together.

18:27-28 *And when he was wanting to pass through into Achaia, the brothers, having encouraged **him**, wrote to the disciples to welcome him; who, having arrived, greatly helped those who had believed through the grace. For he was powerfully refuting the Jews publicly, showing through the Scriptures Jesus to be the Christ.*

The phrase "through the grace" is worth noticing. The Corinthians believed through grace. Salvation, from first to last, is God's gift (Ephesians 2:8).

Achaia here means Corinth, where Apollos built on Paul's work. Paul later wrote, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing it to grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6). Paul and Apollos were not rivals. Each did the job God gave him.

Chapter 18 Summary

In Corinth, Paul worked as a tentmaker with Aquila and Priscilla and preached in the synagogue until he was rejected, then turned to the Gentiles. The synagogue leader Crispus believed, and many Corinthians believed and were baptized. The Lord told Paul not to be afraid, because He had many people in that city, and Paul stayed a year and a half. The Roman governor Gallio refused to hear the case against Paul. Paul then traveled to Ephesus, Jerusalem, and Antioch, ending his second journey, and began his third. In Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila taught the gifted preacher Apollos the way of God more accurately, and he went on to strengthen the believers in Corinth.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been afraid to talk about your faith? What helped you?

2. How did Paul support himself in Corinth, and why did he choose to work? (18:3; 1 Corinthians 9:12-15)

3. What did Paul do when the Jews in the synagogue resisted him? (18:6)

4. Who was Crispus, and what happened to him and his household? (18:8)

5. What did the Lord tell Paul in the vision, and what did He promise? (18:9-10)

6. Why did Gallio refuse to judge the case against Paul? (18:14-15)

7. What did Apollos do well, and what was he missing? (18:24-25)

8. How did Priscilla and Aquila correct Apollos, and what can we learn from the way they did it? (18:26)

9. What does Paul's phrase "I planted, Apollos watered" teach about working together in ministry? (1 Corinthians 3:6)

10. Is there someone in your life who needs encouragement or gentle teaching, the way Apollos did? How could you help?

Chapter 19: Ephesus

Scripture: Disciples of John at Ephesus; The Hall of Tyrannus; Miracles and Magic Books; The Riot at Ephesus

19:1-7 And it came about, while Apollos was in Corinth, ***that*** Paul, having passed through the upper parts, came to Ephesus; and having found certain disciples, he said to them, "Did you receive ***the*** Holy Spirit, having believed?" And they said to him, "But we did not even hear whether ***there*** is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into the baptism of John." And Paul said, "John indeed baptized ***with*** a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in the One coming after him, that is, in the Christ, Jesus." And having heard ***this***, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid the hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they were speaking in tongues and prophesying. And all the men were about twelve.

19:8-10 And having entered into the synagogue, he was speaking boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading ***them of*** the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when some were being hardened and were disbelieving, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, having withdrawn from them, he separated the disciples, reasoning every day in the lecture hall of a certain Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all those dwelling in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

19:11-20 And God was doing miracles of no ordinary ***kind*** through the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were carried from his skin to the sick, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out from them. But some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists attempted to name the name of the Lord Jesus over those having the evil spirits, saying, "We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul proclaims." And ***there*** were some, seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, who were doing this. But the evil spirit, answering, said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I am acquainted with; but you, who are you?" And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaping on them and having overpowered them, prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who were dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. And many of those who had believed were coming, confessing and declaring their practices. And many of those who had practiced the magic arts, having brought the books together, were burning ***them*** before all; and they counted up their prices and found ***it to be*** fifty thousand ***pieces*** of silver. Thus with might the word of the Lord was growing and prevailing.

19:21-22 Now when these things were fulfilled, Paul purposed in the spirit, having passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, having said, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." And having sent into Macedonia two of those ministering to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed for a time in Asia.

19:23-41 And about that time ***there*** came about no small disturbance concerning the Way. For a certain ***man*** named Demetrius, a silversmith, making silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; having gathered these together, and also the workmen in such

things, he said, "Men, you know that from this business is our prosperity. And you see and hear that not only of Ephesus but of almost all Asia, this Paul, having persuaded ***them***, has turned away a considerable crowd, saying that those made through hands are not gods. And not only is this trade of ours in danger of coming into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Artemis ***is in danger of*** being reckoned as nothing, and also her magnificence is about to be brought down, whom all Asia and the inhabited earth worship." And having heard ***this*** and having become full of rage, they were crying out, saying, "Great ***is*** Artemis of ***the*** Ephesians!" And the whole city was filled with confusion; and they rushed with one accord into the theater, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, traveling companions of Paul. And when Paul was wanting to go in to the populace, the disciples were not allowing him. And some of the Asiarchs also, being friends to him, having sent to him, were urging ***him*** not to venture himself into the theater. So then some were crying out one thing and some another; for the assembly was confused, and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together. And they put forward Alexander out of the crowd, the Jews pushing him forward. And Alexander, having motioned with the hand, was wanting to make a defense to the populace. But having recognized that he is a Jew, one voice arose from all, crying out for about two hours, "Great ***is*** Artemis of ***the*** Ephesians!" And the town clerk, having quieted the crowd, says, "Men, Ephesians, for what man is there who does not know that the city of ***the*** Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great goddess Artemis and of the ***thing*** fallen from heaven? Therefore, these things being undeniable, it is necessary for you to be quieted and to do nothing rash. For you have brought these men, ***who are*** neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of your goddess. If then Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a matter against anyone, court days are held, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges against one another. But if you are seeking anything concerning other matters, it will be settled in the lawful assembly. For indeed we are in danger of being accused of insurrection concerning today, there being no cause ***for it***, concerning which we will not be able to give an account of this commotion." And having said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

Chapter 19 Preview

Paul keeps his promise and returns to Ephesus, the great city of the province of Asia. He finds about twelve disciples who know only the baptism of John, and when they believe in Jesus and are baptized, the Holy Spirit comes on them. Paul then teaches for more than two years, and the word of the Lord spreads through the whole province.

God does extraordinary miracles through Paul. Seven sons of a Jewish priest try to use the name of Jesus like a magic spell and are badly beaten by an evil spirit. Many who practiced magic burn their books in public. Then the silversmiths, whose business depended on the goddess Artemis, start a riot that fills the city's great theater. The town clerk finally calms the crowd. Through it all, the Lord protects His church.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1 *And it came about, while Apollos was in Corinth, **that** Paul, having passed through the upper parts, came to Ephesus; and having found certain disciples,*

The "upper parts" were the inland region of Asia Minor. This trip to Ephesus was the return Paul had promised "God willing" (18:21).

Ephesus was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire and the leading city of the province of Asia. It was a major port and the home of the famous temple of Artemis. Later, Jesus addressed His first letter in Revelation to this church (Revelation 2:1-7).

19:2 *he said to them, "Did you receive **the** Holy Spirit, having believed?" And they said to him, "But we did not even hear whether **there** is a Holy Spirit."*

Paul's question tells us he expected the Spirit to be given when a person believes. Something seemed missing in these men, so he asked. Their answer probably doesn't mean they had never heard of the Spirit at all, since the Old Testament speaks of Him and John the Baptist promised that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). It likely means they had not heard that the Spirit had been poured out.

19:3-4 *And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into the baptism of John." And Paul said, "John indeed baptized **with** a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in the One coming after him, that is, in the Christ, Jesus."*

John's baptism looked forward. It prepared people for the Messiah. These men had stopped there. They had repented and were waiting, but they did not yet know that the One John pointed to had come, died, risen, and sent His Spirit.

Like Apollos in the last chapter, they were sincere but incomplete. Unlike Apollos, they don't seem to have known clearly about Jesus.

19:5 *And having heard **this**, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.*

Notice again the order: they heard about Jesus, they believed, and then they were baptized.

Was this a second baptism? I believe John's baptism and Christian baptism were different. John's baptism was a sign of repentance in preparation. Baptism in the name of Jesus is the believer's public step of faith in the Savior who has already come. These men were not repeating what they had done. They were taking the step that John's baptism pointed to.

"Into the name of the Lord Jesus" means by His authority and into belonging to Him. It does not mean the words spoken at a baptism must be only this phrase. Jesus Himself gave the words in Matthew 28:19.

19:6 *And when Paul had laid the hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they were speaking in tongues and prophesying.*

Why didn't the Spirit come when they first believed, as Paul's question suggested He normally does? I believe this was one of the special moments in Acts when God confirmed a new group was brought into the one church. It happened with the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2), with the Samaritans (Acts 8), with the Gentiles at Cornelius' house (Acts 10), and here with followers of John the Baptist. Each time, God gave clear proof that these people were part of the same body, with the same Spirit. Ephesus would become a key center of the church, and God made it clear these disciples were fully joined to it.

I believe the tongues here were real languages given by the Spirit, like those at Pentecost (2:6-11). Whether the gift of tongues continues today is a question believers disagree on. Some believe the sign gifts ended with the apostles and the completion of Scripture. Others believe all the gifts continue in the church today. Others are open to the gifts but cautious about how they are practiced. Faithful believers hold each of these views, and it is not a matter of salvation.

19:7 *And all the men were about twelve.*

Luke gives a rough number, and Scripture doesn't tell us whether the number twelve has any special meaning here. I don't think we should read too much into it. What matters is that these men moved from an incomplete faith to a full faith in Jesus.

19:8 *And having entered into the synagogue, he was speaking boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading* ***them of*** *the things concerning the kingdom of God.*

Three months was a long time for Paul to stay in a synagogue. The Jews in Ephesus had invited him to stay the first time he passed through (18:20), and he had a good hearing for a while.

"The kingdom of God" was the center of Jesus' preaching and of Paul's too. It is God's rule through Jesus the King. It is present now in the lives of believers, and it will come in fullness when Jesus returns to reign on the earth (Revelation 20:4-6; 11:15).

19:9 *But when some were being hardened and were disbelieving, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, having withdrawn from them, he separated the disciples, reasoning every day in the lecture hall of a certain Tyrannus.*

"The Way" was an early name for the Christian faith (9:2; 24:14). Jesus called Himself "the way" (John 14:6), and the believers followed Him as a way of life.

We don't know who Tyrannus was. He may have been a teacher who owned a lecture hall. Some ancient manuscripts add that Paul taught there from the fifth hour to the tenth, that is, about 11 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon, during the midday rest when the hall would be empty. If so, Paul worked at his trade in the morning and taught in the heat of the day.

19:10 *And this continued for two years, so that all those dwelling in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*

How could "all those dwelling in Asia" hear in two years? People came to Ephesus from all over the province for business and travel, heard the Gospel, and took it home. Paul's coworkers also went out. Epaphras, for example, seems to have brought the Gospel to Colossae (Colossians 1:7). Most likely the other churches of Asia named in Revelation 2 and 3 began during this time.

Paul stayed in one city, but the Gospel went everywhere. Training believers to carry the message is how a whole region is reached.

19:11-12 *And God was doing miracles of no ordinary **kind** through the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were carried from his skin to the sick, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out from them.*

The handkerchiefs and aprons were likely the sweat-rags and work aprons Paul used in his tentmaking.

Luke calls these "miracles of no ordinary kind." Even in the book of Acts, they were unusual. Ephesus was a center of magic and the occult, and God showed His power was greater than all of it. The power was not in the cloth, and it was not in Paul. God did it.

I would be careful with ministries today that sell "anointed" cloths or similar items. Scripture records what God did here. It never tells us to make a practice of it, and it certainly never tells us to sell it.

19:13-14 *But some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists attempted to name the name of the Lord Jesus over those having the evil spirits, saying, "We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul proclaims." And **there** were some, seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, who were doing this.*

Scripture doesn't tell us more about Sceva. He may have been from a priestly family, or he may have given himself the title to impress people. Either way, his sons treated the name of Jesus like a magic formula. They didn't know Jesus. They only knew His name worked for Paul.

19:15-16 *But the evil spirit, answering, said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I am acquainted with; but you, who are you?" And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaping on them and having overpowered them, prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.*

This is a serious warning. The demon knew Jesus and knew Paul. It did not know these men, because they did not belong to Jesus. The name of Jesus is not a spell. Its power is for those who know Him and come under His authority. Saying the right words without a real relationship with Christ is empty (Matthew 7:21-23).

19:17 *And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who were dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.*

The failed exorcism did more for the Gospel than any success could have. People saw that Jesus was not a tool to be used. He is Lord, to be respected and obeyed.

19:18-19 *And many of those who had believed were coming, confessing and declaring their practices. And many of those who had practiced the magic arts, having brought the books together, were burning **them** before all; and they counted up their prices and found **it to be** fifty thousand **pieces** of silver.*

These people had already believed. Some believers were still holding on to their old ways in secret. Now they brought them into the light.

A silver coin was about a day's wage for a worker, so fifty thousand pieces of silver was a huge sum.

Notice they didn't sell the books. They burned them. They didn't want anyone else to be harmed by them. Real repentance costs something. Is there anything in our lives that we know we should get rid of, but we keep because of its value? These believers show us the way.

19:20 *Thus with might the word of the Lord was growing and prevailing.*

This is one of Luke's summary statements that mark the progress of the Gospel through Acts (6:7; 9:31; 12:24). In a city soaked in magic and idolatry, God's Word won out.

19:21 *Now when these things were fulfilled, Paul purposed in the spirit, having passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, having said, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."*

The phrase "purposed in the spirit" may mean Paul decided in his own spirit, or that the Holy Spirit guided his decision. Either way, Rome now comes into view. From here to the end of Acts, Paul is headed to Jerusalem and then to Rome. He planned to take a gift from the Gentile churches to the poor believers in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). He did reach Rome, though not in the way he expected. He arrived as a prisoner.

19:22 *And having sent into Macedonia two of those ministering to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed for a time in Asia.*

It was during this time in Ephesus that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:8-10). He told the Corinthians, "a great and effective door has opened to me, and many are opposing." The next scene shows both were true.

19:23-25 *And about that time **there** came about no small disturbance concerning the Way. For a certain **man** named Demetrius, a silversmith, making silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; having gathered these together, and also the workmen in such things, he said, "Men, you know that from this business is our prosperity.*

The "silver shrines of Artemis" were likely small models of her temple, sold to worshipers and visitors.

Artemis was a goddess worshiped all over Asia. The Romans called her Diana. Her temple in Ephesus was counted among the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Once again, as in Philippi (16:19), the Gospel touched people's money, and trouble followed.

19:26-27 *And you see and hear that not only of Ephesus but of almost all Asia, this Paul, having persuaded **them**, has turned away a considerable crowd, saying that those made through hands are not gods. And not only is this trade of ours in danger of coming into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Artemis **is in danger of** being reckoned as nothing, and also her magnificence is about to be brought down, whom all Asia and the inhabited earth worship."*

Demetrius' complaint is a great testimony to how far the Gospel had spread. Even Paul's enemies admitted it.

Demetrius wrapped his concern about money in religious and civic pride. He talked about the goddess, but his first concern was profit.

19:28-29 *And having heard **this** and having become full of rage, they were crying out, saying, "Great **is** Artemis of **the** Ephesians!" And the whole city was filled with confusion; and they rushed with one accord into the theater, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, traveling companions of Paul.*

The theater in Ephesus was enormous. Its ruins still stand today, and most estimates say it could seat about 25,000 people. It was the natural place for a large public gathering.

19:30-31 *And when Paul was wanting to go in to the populace, the disciples were not allowing him. And some of the Asiarchs also, being friends to him, having sent to him, were urging **him** not to venture himself into the theater.*

Asiarchs were wealthy leading men of the province, connected with the public life and festivals of the region.

Paul was ready to face the mob, but wise friends held him back. It is good to have people around us who will tell us no. Paul's courage was real, but in that moment, going in would only have made things worse. It is worth noticing that some of the most powerful men in Asia were Paul's friends. The Gospel had reached every level of society.

19:32-34 *So then some were crying out one thing and some another; for the assembly was confused, and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together. And they put forward Alexander out of the crowd, the Jews pushing him forward. And Alexander, having motioned with the hand, was wanting to make a defense to the populace. But having recognized that he is a Jew, one voice arose from all, crying out for about two hours, "Great **is** Artemis of **the** Ephesians!"*

Most of the crowd didn't even know why they had come together. That is how mobs work.

Why did the Jews put Alexander forward? They probably wanted to make clear that they were not part of Paul's group. But to the crowd, Jews and Christians were the same, since both refused to worship idols.

Some wonder whether this is the same Alexander the coppersmith who did Paul harm (2 Timothy 4:14). Scripture doesn't say, and the name was common.

19:35-37 *And the town clerk, having quieted the crowd, says, "Men, Ephesians, for what man is there who does not know that the city of **the** Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great goddess Artemis and of the **thing** fallen from heaven? Therefore, these things being undeniable, it is necessary for you to be quieted and to do nothing rash. For you have brought these men, **who are** neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of your goddess.*

The town clerk was the chief official of the city, who kept its records and acted as a link with the Roman authorities.

The "thing fallen from heaven" was likely a meteorite or a stone the people believed had fallen from the sky.

The clerk's words are a good testimony to how Paul had preached. He had taught the truth about the one true God and the emptiness of idols, but he had not mocked or insulted the people's goddess. We can speak the truth plainly without attacking people.

19:38-39 *If then Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a matter against anyone, court days are held, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges against one another. But if you are seeking anything concerning other matters, it will be settled in the lawful assembly.*

"The lawful assembly" was the regular meeting of the city's citizens. A mob in the theater was not the way to do it.

19:40-41 *For indeed we are in danger of being accused of insurrection concerning today, there being no cause **for it**, concerning which we will not be able to give an account of this commotion." And having said these things, he dismissed the assembly.*

Rome did not tolerate riots, and a city that couldn't keep order could lose some of its freedoms.

God used a city official to protect His church, just as He had used Gallio in Corinth (18:14-16). The Lord does not always remove opposition, but He keeps His people and His work. As Jesus said, He will build His church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

Chapter 19 Summary

In Ephesus, Paul found about twelve disciples who knew only John's baptism. When they believed in Jesus and were baptized, the Holy Spirit came on them as Paul laid hands on them. Paul taught in the synagogue for three months and in the school of Tyrannus for two years, and all of Asia heard the word of the Lord. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, the sons of Sceva learned that the name of Jesus is not a magic formula, and many new believers burned their books of magic. When the silversmith Demetrius stirred up a riot in honor of Artemis, the town clerk calmed the crowd, and the word of the Lord kept growing and prevailing.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. Have you ever believed something sincerely, only to learn later that you were missing part of the truth? How did you respond?

2. What question did Paul ask the disciples in Ephesus, and what did their answer reveal? (19:2-3)

3. How was John's baptism different from baptism in the name of Jesus? (19:4-5)

4. Where did Paul teach after leaving the synagogue, and how far did the word of the Lord spread? (19:9-10)

5. What happened to the seven sons of Sceva, and what does it teach us about the name of Jesus? (19:13-16)

6. What did the new believers do with their books of magic, and why does that matter? (19:18-19)

7. What was Demetrius' real reason for starting the riot? (19:24-27)

8. Why did the disciples and the Asiarchs keep Paul out of the theater? (19:30-31)

9. How did the town clerk calm the crowd? (19:35-41)

10. Is there anything in your life you are holding on to that you know God wants you to get rid of? What would "burning the books" look like for you?

Chapter 20: Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

Scripture: Macedonia and Greece; Eutychus; Miletus; Paul's Farewell to the Elders

20:1-6 And after the uproar had ceased, Paul, having called the disciples to himself and having said farewell, went out to go to Macedonia. And having passed through those districts and having exhorted them with many words, he came to Greece. And having spent three months ***there***, when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, ***there*** came about a decision to return through Macedonia. And ***there*** accompanied him as far as Asia Sopater, a Berean; and of ***the*** Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe; and Timothy; and Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. These, having gone ahead, were waiting for us in Troas. But we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened ***Bread***, and came to them at Troas within five days, where we stayed seven days.

20:7-12 And on the first ***day*** of the week, the disciples having been gathered together to break bread, Paul was reasoning with them, being about to depart on the next day, and he prolonged ***his*** speech until midnight. And ***there*** were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. And a certain young man named Eutychus was sitting at the window, being overcome by deep sleep as Paul reasoned longer; having been overcome by the sleep, he fell down from the third story and was picked up dead. But Paul, having gone down, fell upon him, and having embraced ***him***, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." And having gone up and having broken bread and having eaten, and having talked a long while until daybreak, so he departed. And they brought the boy alive, and were comforted not a little.

20:13-16 But we, having gone ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul on board from there; for so he had arranged, intending himself to go on foot. And when he met us at Assos, having taken him on board, we came to Mitylene. And having sailed from there, on the following ***day*** we arrived opposite Chios; and on the next ***day*** we put in at Samos, and having stayed at Trogyllium, on the following ***day*** we came to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that it might not happen to him to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying, if it were possible for him, to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

20:17-27 And from Miletus, having sent to Ephesus, he called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You know from the first day on which I set foot in Asia how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility, and many tears, and trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I held back nothing of the things that were profitable, from declaring ***them*** to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now look, I, bound in the spirit, am going to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me in it, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But I make account of nothing, nor do I hold my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to solemnly testify ***to*** the gospel of the grace of God. And now look, I know that you all, among whom I went about proclaiming the kingdom of God, will no longer see my face. Therefore

I testify to you on this day that I ***am*** clean from the blood of all. For I did not hold back from declaring to you all the counsel of God.

20:28-38 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has placed you ***as*** overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased through His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will rise up, speaking perverted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be watchful, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears. And now, brothers, I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build ***you*** up and to give you an inheritance among all those who have been sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my needs and to those who were with me. In all things I showed you that by laboring thus it is necessary to help those who are weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And having said these things, having bowed his knees, he prayed with them all. And ***there*** came about much weeping among all, and having fallen upon the neck of Paul, they were kissing him, sorrowing most of all over the word which he had spoken, that they would no longer see his face. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

Chapter 20 Preview

After the riot in Ephesus, Paul sets out on one last trip through Macedonia and Greece before heading to Jerusalem. Along the way, a young man falls out of a window during a late-night church meeting and is raised back to life.

Then, at the seaport of Miletus, Paul calls for the elders of the church in Ephesus and gives them his farewell. It is the only speech in Acts that Paul gives to Christians, and it reads like a pastor's heart poured out. He tells them how he lived among them, warns them about wolves that will come after he leaves, and commends them to God.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1-2 *And after the uproar had ceased, Paul, having called the disciples to himself and having said farewell, went out to go to Macedonia. And having passed through those districts and having exhorted them with many words, he came to Greece.*

Macedonia was the region where Paul had planted churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (chapters 16 and 17). Luke covers this whole trip in a few words, but it probably took many months. Paul spent that time doing the same thing he did everywhere: he "exhorted them with many words." He wasn't just starting churches; he went back to strengthen them.

Most scholars believe "Greece" here means Corinth, the city where he had spent a year and a half (18:11).

20:3 *And having spent three months **there**, when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, **there** came about a decision to return through Macedonia.*

Most scholars believe Paul wrote his letter to the Romans during these three months, around A.D. 57. In that letter he tells the believers in Rome that he is about to take a gift from the churches of Macedonia and Greece to the poor believers in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-26).

A ship full of Jewish pilgrims heading to Jerusalem for the feast would have been an easy place to kill a man and throw him overboard. That is why Paul went back the long way, by land.

20:4-6 *And **there** accompanied him as far as Asia Sopater, a Berean; and of **the** Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe; and Timothy; and Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. These, having gone ahead, were waiting for us in Troas. But we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened **Bread**, and came to them at Troas within five days, where we stayed seven days.*

Many scholars believe the men traveling with Paul were representatives from the churches carrying the offering to Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:19-21). Paul was careful with money. He made sure other trusted men from the churches were with him so no one could accuse him of stealing.

Notice the word "us" in verse 5. Luke, the author of Acts, is back in the story. The last "we" passage ended in Philippi (16:16-17), and now it picks up again in Philippi. It seems Luke stayed there for several years and now rejoins Paul. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was the week right after Passover.

20:7 *And on the first **day** of the week, the disciples having been gathered together to break bread, Paul was reasoning with them, being about to depart on the next day, and he prolonged **his** speech until midnight.*

"On the first day of the week," the believers gathered "to break bread." This is one of the clearest early signs that Christians met together on Sunday, the day Jesus rose from the dead (Luke 24:1). Paul also told the Corinthians to set aside their gifts on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). Breaking bread here most likely means the Lord's Supper, shared together with a meal.

Paul had a lot to say and not much time to say it. If you have ever felt a sermon was too long, take comfort. You are in good company.

20:8-9 *And **there** were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. And a certain young man named Eutychus was sitting at the window, being overcome by deep sleep as Paul reasoned longer; having been overcome by the sleep, he fell down from the third story and was picked up dead.*

Oil lamps give off heat and smoke, and the upper room would have been warm and crowded.

Luke says Eutychus was "picked up dead." Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14), and he was there. He doesn't say Eutychus looked dead or was knocked out. He says he was dead. I take Luke at his word.

20:10-12 *But Paul, having gone down, fell upon him, and having embraced **him**, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." And having gone up and having broken bread and having eaten, and having talked a long while until daybreak, so he departed. And they brought the boy alive, and were comforted not a little.*

Paul fell on the young man and embraced him, the same thing Elijah and Elisha did when God raised a child through them (1 Kings 17:21; 2 Kings 4:34). Some read "his life is in him" to mean he was never really dead. But I believe Paul is telling them that God has just given the boy his life back.

What happened next is striking. There was no panic and no big show. God had worked, and the church went right on worshiping. God cares about one sleepy young man in a window. He cares about you too.

20:13-15 *But we, having gone ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul on board from there; for so he had arranged, intending himself to go on foot. And when he met us at Assos, having taken him on board, we came to Mitylene. And having sailed from there, on the following **day** we arrived opposite Chios; and on the next **day** we put in at Samos, and having stayed at Trogyllium, on the following **day** we came to Miletus.*

Paul chose to walk to Assos, about twenty miles. Scripture doesn't tell us why. Maybe he wanted time alone to pray before what was waiting for him in Jerusalem.

Luke gives us each day of the trip down the coast of Asia Minor like a ship's log. This is the kind of detail an eyewitness remembers, and it is one reason we can trust Acts as real history.

20:16 *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that it might not happen to him to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying, if it were possible for him, to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.*

If Paul stopped in Ephesus, he knew he would be held up for days.

Pentecost came fifty days after Passover. It was one of the feasts when Jews from all over the world filled Jerusalem. It was also the day, years before, when the Holy Spirit came on the church (2:1-4). Paul wanted to be there with the offering from the Gentile churches, a picture of Jews and Gentiles made one in Christ.

20:17-19 *And from Miletus, having sent to Ephesus, he called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You know from the first day on which I set foot in Asia how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility, and many tears, and trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews;*

Miletus was about thirty miles south of Ephesus. An elder was a mature believer chosen to lead and care for a local church (14:23).

Paul starts by reminding them how he lived. They had watched him from the first day, serving "with all humility, and many tears." Paul's ministry was not done from a stage. It was done up close, where people could see his life. That is still the best kind of ministry.

20:20-21 *how I held back nothing of the things that were profitable, from declaring **them** to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul taught "publicly and from house to house": in the synagogue and the school of Tyrannus (19:8-9), and also in people's homes.

His message was the same for everyone, Jews and Greeks: "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the Gospel in one line. Repentance means turning away from sin and toward God. Faith means trusting Jesus to save you. The two go together like two sides of one coin. You can't truly turn to Jesus without turning away from what He died to save you from.

20:22-23 *And now look, I, bound in the spirit, am going to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me in it, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.*

To be "bound in the spirit" means Paul felt a strong, inner pull from God, as if he were already tied to this journey.

Think about that. Paul knew he was walking toward suffering, and he went anyway. He wasn't careless with his life. He was obedient with it.

20:24 *But I make account of nothing, nor do I hold my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to solemnly testify **to** the gospel of the grace of God.*

Paul does not hold his life "dear" to himself. He has one goal: to "finish my course," the race and the ministry Jesus gave him, which is to testify to "the gospel of the grace of God."

Near the end of his life, Paul wrote, "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). He did exactly what he set out to do here. Ask yourself: What is the course God has given me? Am I running it?

20:25-27 *And now look, I know that you all, among whom I went about proclaiming the kingdom of God, will no longer see my face. Therefore I testify to you on this day that I **am** clean from the blood of all. For I did not hold back from declaring to you all the counsel of God.*

Paul says he is "clean from the blood of all." This goes back to Ezekiel 33:1-9, where God told the watchman that if he warned the people, he was not guilty if they ignored the warning. Paul had warned them. He did not hold back "all the counsel of God," meaning all of God's plan and truth, not just the easy parts. A good teacher doesn't pick only the verses people like to hear.

Old Testament links: Ezekiel 33:8 (alluded to)

20:28 *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has placed you **as** overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased through His own blood.*

This is the heart of the speech. Paul tells the elders to watch over themselves first, then the whole flock. A leader who doesn't guard his own walk with God can't protect anyone else.

Notice three words for the same men. They are called elders (verse 17), here they are "overseers," and their job is to "shepherd" the church. In the New Testament, these words describe one office from three angles: the elder's maturity, the overseer's responsibility, and the shepherd's care (see also 1 Peter 5:1-2 and Titus 1:5-7).

The church is God's, not theirs. He "purchased" it "through His own blood." That is a powerful statement. Paul speaks of God shedding His own blood. This is only true because Jesus is God in the flesh. Every church member, even the hard ones, was bought at that price. That is how much each person in the flock is worth.

20:29-31 *For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will rise up, speaking perverted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be watchful, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.*

False teaching comes from outside the church, the "savage wolves," and from inside it, even from among the elders themselves.

Did it happen? Yes. Paul later had to tell Timothy to stay in Ephesus to stop certain men from teaching strange doctrines (1 Timothy 1:3-7). Decades later, Jesus Himself told the church in Ephesus that they had tested false apostles and found them to be liars, but they had left their first love (Revelation 2:1-7). The Ephesian church listened to Paul's warning about doctrine. Somewhere along the way, their love grew cold.

Three years of warning them "night and day" with tears: that is a shepherd's heart.

20:32 *And now, brothers, I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build **you** up and to give you an inheritance among all those who have been sanctified.*

Paul does not leave them to their own strength. He commends them "to God and to the word of His grace." To be "sanctified" means to be set apart for God.

Paul would be gone, but God and His Word would stay. The same is true for us. Teachers and pastors come and go. God's Word remains.

20:33-35 *I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my needs and to those who were with me. In all things I showed you that by laboring thus it is necessary to help those who are weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

In Ephesus, as in Corinth, Paul likely supported himself as a tentmaker (18:3).

He did this as an example, so they would work hard to help the weak. The saying of Jesus that Paul quotes here is not found in any of the four Gospels. Paul and the apostles passed along teachings of Jesus that were remembered and treasured, and here the Holy Spirit made sure this one was written down for us (John 21:25).

20:36-38 *And having said these things, having bowed his knees, he prayed with them all. And **there** came about much weeping among all, and having fallen upon the neck of Paul, they were kissing him, sorrowing most of all over the word which he had spoken, that they would no longer see his face. And they were accompanying him to the ship.*

This is not a cold scene. These are grown men, church leaders, crying openly over a brother they love. The early church was not just an organization. It was a family. Do we love our brothers and sisters in Christ like this?

Chapter 20 Summary

Paul's third missionary journey neared its end. He strengthened the churches in Macedonia and Greece, raised Eutychus from the dead in Troas, and hurried toward Jerusalem. At Miletus, he gave the Ephesian elders his farewell: he reminded them of his example, warned them of false teachers, and commended them to God and the word of His grace.

People and Places in Chapter 20

Troas (20:5-6): A seaport on the northwest coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Paul received his vision of the man from Macedonia here (16:8-10), and here Eutychus was raised from the dead (20:7-12).

Miletus (20:15): An important port city about thirty miles south of Ephesus, where Paul met with the Ephesian elders (20:17-38).

Elders (20:17): Mature believers chosen to lead and care for a local church. In this chapter they are also called overseers and shepherds (20:17, 28).

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. Who is someone you had to say goodbye to, knowing you might not see them again?
2. What day of the week did the believers in Troas gather, and what did they do? (20:7)
3. What happened to Eutychus, and what did Paul do? (20:9-10)
4. How does Paul sum up the message he preached to Jews and Greeks? (20:21)

5. What did the Holy Spirit tell Paul was waiting for him in Jerusalem? (20:23)

6. What does Paul say about his own life in verse 24? What would it look like for you to finish your course?

7. What are the elders told to guard, and why is the church so valuable? (20:28)

8. Where did Paul say false teachers would come from, and how can we watch for them today? (20:29-30)

9. What words of Jesus does Paul quote, and how can you live them out this week? (20:35)

10. What does the elders' goodbye tell you about the love in the early church? (20:37-38)

Chapter 21: Paul Goes to Jerusalem

Scripture: Tyre and Caesarea; Agabus' Warning; Paul and James; Paul Seized in the Temple

21:1-6 And it happened, when we had set sail, having been drawn away from them, having run a straight course, we came to Cos, and on the next ***day*** to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, having gone on board, we set sail. And having sighted Cyprus and having left it on the left, we were sailing to Syria, and we landed at Tyre; for there the ship was unloading the cargo. And having found disciples, we remained there seven days; they were telling Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. And when it happened that we had completed the days, having gone out, we were journeying, all of them accompanying us with wives and children as far as outside the city; and having bowed the knees on the shore, we prayed. And having greeted one another, we went on board the ship, and they returned to their own ***homes***.

21:7-14 And we, having completed the voyage from Tyre, arrived at Ptolemais; and having greeted the brothers, we stayed one day with them. And on the next day, having gone out, we, those around Paul, came to Caesarea; and having entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was of the seven, we stayed with him. And this ***man*** had four daughters, virgins, prophesying. And as we were remaining several days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And having come to us and having taken the belt of Paul, having bound both his ***own*** hands and feet, he said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit: 'The man whose belt this is, the Jews in Jerusalem will bind in this way, and they will deliver ***him*** into ***the*** hands of Gentiles.'" And when we heard these things, both we and those of that place were begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. And Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And when he was not persuaded, we fell silent, having said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

21:15-26 And after these days, having packed up ***our baggage***, we were going up to Jerusalem. And ***some*** of the disciples from Caesarea also went with us, bringing ***us*** to a certain Mnason, a Cypriot, an early disciple, with whom we might lodge. And when we had arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. And on the following ***day*** Paul was going in with us to James, and all the elders arrived. And having greeted them, he was relating one by one each of ***the things*** which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And having heard, they were glorifying the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and all are zealous for the law. And they have been informed about you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles apostasy from Moses, telling them not to circumcise the children nor to walk in the customs. What then is it? Certainly a multitude must come together; for they will hear that you have come. Therefore do this which we tell you: There are with us four men having a vow on themselves. Having taken these, be purified with them and spend on them, so that they may shave the head; and all may know that ***the things*** of which they have been informed about you are nothing, but ***that*** you yourself also walk in line, keeping the law. And concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having judged that they should keep no

such thing, except that they keep themselves from both what ***is*** sacrificed to idols and blood and what ***is*** strangled and sexual immorality." Then Paul, having taken the men, on the following day, having been purified with them, was entering into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of the purification, until the offering was offered for each one of them.

21:27-36 And when the seven days were about to be completed, the Jews from Asia, having seen him in the temple, were stirring up all the crowd, and they laid the hands on him, crying out, "Men, Israelites, help! This is the man who is teaching all ***men*** everywhere against the people and the law and this place; and besides, he has also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, whom they were supposing that Paul had brought into the temple. And the whole city was stirred, and there was a running together of the people; and having laid hold of Paul, they were dragging him outside the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. And as they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion, who at once, having taken soldiers and centurions, ran down upon them; and they, having seen the commander and the soldiers, stopped beating Paul. Then the commander, having drawn near, laid hold of him and commanded ***him*** to be bound with two chains; and he was inquiring who he might be and what he had done. And some were shouting one thing, others another, in the crowd; and not being able to know the certainty because of the uproar, he commanded him to be brought into the barracks. And when he came onto the stairs, it happened that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd; for the multitude of the people was following, crying out, "Away with him!"

21:37-40 And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he says to the commander, "Is it permitted for me to say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? Are you not then the Egyptian who before these days stirred up a revolt and led out into the wilderness the four thousand men of the Assassins?" And Paul said, "I am indeed a man, a Jew, of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people." And when he had permitted ***him***, Paul, having stood on the stairs, motioned with the hand to the people; and when ***there*** had been a great silence, he addressed ***them*** in the Hebrew language, saying,

Chapter 21 Preview

Paul finishes his journey to Jerusalem. All along the way, believers warn him that suffering is waiting for him there. In Caesarea, the prophet Agabus acts out what will happen: Paul will be bound and handed over to the Gentiles. Paul's answer is simple. He is ready to be bound, and even to die, for the name of the Lord Jesus.

In Jerusalem, the church leaders welcome him warmly, but they are worried about rumors among Jewish believers. Paul agrees to join four men in a temple vow to show he still respects the Law of Moses. While he is in the temple, Jews from Asia stir up a mob against him. Roman soldiers rescue him just in time, and Paul asks for a chance to speak to the crowd that was trying to kill him.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1-3 *And it happened, when we had set sail, having been drawn away from them, having run a straight course, we came to Cos, and on the next **day** to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, having gone on board, we set sail. And having sighted Cyprus and having left it on the left, we were sailing to Syria, and we landed at Tyre; for there the ship was unloading the cargo.*

Patara was on the southern coast of Asia Minor. Phoenicia was the coastal region north of Israel (modern Lebanon).

Luke again writes like an eyewitness, because he was one. The "we" tells us he was on board.

21:4 *And having found disciples, we remained there seven days; they were telling Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.*

We don't know who started the church in Tyre. It may have come from the believers who scattered after Stephen was killed (11:19).

If they spoke "through the Spirit," you might ask, "Was Paul disobeying the Holy Spirit by going?" I don't believe so. The Spirit had already told Paul that chains and afflictions were waiting for him (20:23), and Paul went "bound in the spirit" (20:22). I believe the Spirit showed these believers what was coming, and out of love they concluded that he shouldn't go. The warning came from God. The advice to stay away came from people who loved him.

21:5-6 *And when it happened that we had completed the days, having gone out, we were journeying, all of them accompanying us with wives and children as far as outside the city; and having bowed the knees on the shore, we prayed. And having greeted one another, we went on board the ship, and they returned to their own **homes**.*

Picture this: whole families kneeling in the sand to pray for a man they had known for only seven days. The love of Christ makes strangers into family very quickly.

21:7-9 *And we, having completed the voyage from Tyre, arrived at Ptolemais; and having greeted the brothers, we stayed one day with them. And on the next day, having gone out, we, those around Paul, came to Caesarea; and having entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was of the seven, we stayed with him. And this **man** had four daughters, virgins, prophesying.*

Caesarea was the Roman capital of the province of Judea.

We last saw Philip in chapter 8. He was one of the seven men chosen to serve the widows (6:5). He preached in Samaria, led the Ethiopian official to Christ, and settled in Caesarea (8:40). About twenty years have passed. Philip is still faithful, still called "the evangelist," still serving.

Luke mentions Philip's daughters but doesn't record what they said. Their gift shows that women were given the gift of prophecy in the early church, just as Joel had foretold and Peter had preached at Pentecost (2:17-18).

21:10-11 *And as we were remaining several days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And having come to us and having taken the belt of Paul, having bound both his **own** hands and feet, he said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit: 'The man whose belt this is, the Jews in Jerusalem will bind in this way, and they will deliver **him** into **the** hands of Gentiles.'"*

We met Agabus in 11:28, when he correctly predicted a great famine.

Old Testament prophets sometimes acted out their messages like this (Isaiah 20:2-4; Jeremiah 13:1-11; Ezekiel 4:1-3). It's a picture no one in the room would forget.

And that is exactly what happened. Paul was seized by Jews and ended up a prisoner of the Romans for years.

21:12-13 *And when we heard these things, both we and those of that place were begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. And Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."*

Notice the "we" in verse 12. Even Luke, the writer of this book, was pleading.

Paul's reply is full of love and full of steel. Their tears were hard for him, but he was ready "not only to be bound but also to die."

Jesus did the same thing. Luke wrote in his Gospel that Jesus "set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51), knowing what was waiting for Him. Paul followed his Lord on that same road.

21:14 *And when he was not persuaded, we fell silent, having said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."*

"Let the will of the Lord be done" is the right place for any believer to land. The believers didn't stop loving Paul or stop caring. They handed it over to God. These words echo Jesus' own prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). When we can't change the situation and can't see the outcome, we can still pray this prayer.

21:15-16 *And after these days, having packed up **our baggage**, we were going up to Jerusalem. And **some** of the disciples from Caesarea also went with us, bringing **us** to a certain Mnason, a Cypriot, an early disciple, with whom we might lodge.*

Jerusalem was about sixty miles from Caesarea. Mnason, "an early disciple," may have been one of the very first believers.

Paul was traveling with several Gentile men. Not every Jewish believer in Jerusalem would have been comfortable hosting them. Mnason was. Hospitality is a simple gift, but it mattered a great deal here.

21:17-19 *And when we had arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. And on the following **day** Paul was going in with us to James, and all the elders arrived. And having greeted them, he was relating one by one each of **the things** which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.*

The James here is the brother of Jesus, the leader of the church in Jerusalem (12:17; 15:13; Galatians 1:19). Notice how Paul tells it. It was what God had done. Paul was the tool, not the hero.

It is very likely that this is when Paul handed over the offering he had collected from the Gentile churches (24:17; Romans 15:25-27).

21:20-22 *And having heard, they were glorifying the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and all are zealous for the law. And they have been informed about you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles apostasy from Moses, telling them not to circumcise the children nor to walk in the customs. What then is it? Certainly a multitude must come together; for they will hear that you have come.*

The rumor about Paul was false. Paul taught that Gentiles did not need to become Jews to be saved (15:1-11; Galatians 5:2-6). He never told Jews to stop being Jews. He even had Timothy circumcised, since Timothy's mother was Jewish (16:1-3). But rumors spread fast and hurt deeply, then and now.

21:23-24 *Therefore do this which we tell you: There are with us four men having a vow on themselves. Having taken these, be purified with them and spend on them, so that they may shave the head; and all may know that **the things** of which they have been informed about you are nothing, but **that** you yourself also walk in line, keeping the law.*

The four men's vow was most likely a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1-21). A person under this vow did not cut his hair or drink wine for a set period. At the end, he shaved his head and offered sacrifices at the temple.

Paying for their offerings was costly, and it would show everyone that Paul himself still respected the Law and was not against his own people. Paul had taken a similar vow himself earlier (18:18).

21:25 *And concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having judged that they should keep no such thing, except that they keep themselves from both what **is** sacrificed to idols and blood and what **is** strangled and sexual immorality."*

The elders make it clear that this was not about Gentile believers. The decision of the Jerusalem Council still stood (15:19-29). Gentiles didn't need to keep the Law of Moses to be saved.

21:26 *Then Paul, having taken the men, on the following day, having been purified with them, was entering into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of the purification, until the offering was offered for each one of them.*

Some people ask, "Was Paul compromising here?" I don't believe he was. Paul wrote that to the Jews he became as a Jew, so that he might win Jews (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Keeping a Jewish

custom was not wrong in itself. What would have been wrong is teaching that it was needed for salvation, and Paul never did that. He was willing to give up his own freedom to keep peace and open doors for the Gospel.

21:27-29 *And when the seven days were about to be completed, the Jews from Asia, having seen him in the temple, were stirring up all the crowd, and they laid the hands on him, crying out, "Men, Israelites, help! This is the man who is teaching all* ***men*** *everywhere against the people and the law and this place; and besides, he has also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, whom they were supposing that Paul had brought into the temple.*

The Jews from Asia were likely Jews from Ephesus, the same kind of men who had opposed Paul there (19:9; 20:19).

Trophimus was a Gentile from Ephesus (20:4). Seeing him with Paul in the city, they jumped to a conclusion, and it nearly cost Paul his life.

In the temple, a stone barrier separated the outer Court of the Gentiles from the inner courts. Gentiles who went past it could be put to death. Archaeologists have found stone signs from that temple warning Gentiles not to go any further. Paul later wrote that Christ "broke down the middle wall of the barrier" between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14). In the temple, that wall still stood. In Christ, it was gone.

21:30 *And the whole city was stirred, and there was a running together of the people; and having laid hold of Paul, they were dragging him outside the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.*

There is something sad in the phrase "the doors were shut." The doors of God's house were shut, and the man carrying the message of God's Messiah was outside them. That is a picture of what much of Israel did with the Gospel. But the story doesn't end there. Paul himself later wrote that God has not rejected His people, and that a day is coming when Israel will turn to Christ (Romans 11:1, 25-27).

21:31-32 *And as they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion, who at once, having taken soldiers and centurions, ran down upon them; and they, having seen the commander and the soldiers, stopped beating Paul.*

A Roman cohort was a unit of several hundred soldiers. They were stationed in the Fortress of Antonia, which stood at the northwest corner of the temple area and overlooked its courts. During the feasts, soldiers watched for trouble from above.

Centurions were officers each in charge of about a hundred men. God used a pagan Roman officer to save His servant's life.

21:33-34 *Then the commander, having drawn near, laid hold of him and commanded **him** to be bound with two chains; and he was inquiring who he might be and what he had done. And some were shouting one thing, others another, in the crowd; and not being able to know the certainty because of the uproar, he commanded him to be brought into the barracks.*

Being bound "with two chains" probably means Paul was chained between two soldiers. Agabus' prophecy had come true (21:11).

21:35-36 *And when he came onto the stairs, it happened that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd; for the multitude of the people was following, crying out, "Away with him!"*

The cry "Away with him!" is the same one the crowd shouted about Jesus before Pilate (Luke 23:18; John 19:15). Paul is walking in the footsteps of his Lord. Jesus said that a servant is not greater than his master, and if they persecuted Him, they would persecute His followers (John 15:20).

21:37-38 *And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he says to the commander, "Is it permitted for me to say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? Are you not then the Egyptian who before these days stirred up a revolt and led out into the wilderness the four thousand men of the Assassins?"*

Paul spoke to the commander in Greek, and the commander was surprised. He had assumed Paul was "the Egyptian."

The Assassins were Jewish rebels who carried short daggers hidden in their clothes and killed people in crowds. The Jewish historian Josephus also writes about an Egyptian false prophet who led a large following out to the Mount of Olives and was driven off by the Romans, though the Egyptian himself escaped. The commander thought he finally had him.

21:39 *And Paul said, "I am indeed a man, a Jew, of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people."*

Tarsus was a well-known center of learning in the Roman world. Paul is telling the commander he is not a desert rebel but an educated man from a respected city.

Then he makes an astonishing request: to speak to the same crowd that had just been beating him. Paul wasn't looking for escape. He was looking for an opportunity to tell them about Jesus.

21:40 *And when he had permitted **him**, Paul, having stood on the stairs, motioned with the hand to the people; and when **there** had been a great silence, he addressed **them** in the Hebrew language, saying,*

The language Luke calls "Hebrew" was most likely Aramaic, the everyday language of the Jews in that region. Speaking in their own language instead of Greek told the crowd, "I am one of you." Paul was bruised, chained, and surrounded by soldiers, and he was about to preach. Chapter 22 records what he said.

Chapter 21 Summary

Paul completed his journey to Jerusalem, warned along the way that chains awaited him. He was welcomed by James and the elders and agreed to join four men in a temple vow to quiet false rumors. Jews from Asia accused him of bringing a Gentile into the temple, and a mob tried to kill him. The Roman commander rescued and arrested him, and Paul asked for the chance to speak to the crowd.

People and Places in Chapter 21

Caesarea (21:8): A port city on the Mediterranean coast and the Roman capital of Judea. Philip the evangelist lived here (21:8), and Paul would later be held prisoner here for two years (24:27).

Agabus (21:10): A prophet from Judea who predicted a famine (11:28) and acted out Paul's arrest using Paul's own belt (21:10-11).

Nazirite vow (21:23-24): A special vow of devotion to God described in Numbers 6. The person did not cut his hair or drink wine for a set time, then shaved his head and offered sacrifices at the temple.

Fortress of Antonia (21:34): A Roman fortress at the northwest corner of the temple area where soldiers were stationed to keep order (21:34-37).

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been warned not to do something that you believed God wanted you to do? What happened?

2. What did the disciples in Tyre tell Paul, and how did they say goodbye to him? (21:4-5)

3. Who was Philip, and where have we seen him before in Acts? (21:8; 6:5; 8:5-40)

4. What did Agabus do with Paul's belt, and what did it mean? (21:11)

5. What was Paul's response to the believers who begged him not to go? (21:13)

6. What did the believers say when they could not change Paul's mind? How can you pray that same prayer in your life? (21:14)

7. What false rumor was being spread about Paul? (21:21)

8. Why did Paul agree to join the four men in their vow? (21:23-26; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

9. What did the Jews from Asia accuse Paul of doing, and why? (21:28-29)

10. What did Paul ask the commander for right after being rescued? What does that tell you about him? (21:39)

Chapter 22: Paul's Defense Before the Crowd

Scripture: Paul's Testimony to the Crowd; Paul and the Roman Commander

22:1-5 "Men, brothers and fathers, hear my defense to you now." And having heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he says, "I am indeed a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strictness of the ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as you all are today, who persecuted this Way to the point of death, binding and delivering both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest bears witness to me, and all the council of elders; from whom also, having received letters to the brothers, I was journeying to Damascus to bring also those who were there bound to Jerusalem, so that they might be punished.

22:6-11 And it happened to me, as I was journeying and drawing near to Damascus, about noon, suddenly out of heaven a great light flashed around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' And those who were with me indeed beheld the light and became terrified, but they did not hear the voice of the One speaking to me. And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Having risen up, go into Damascus, and there it will be told to you concerning all things which have been appointed for you to do.' And as I was not seeing because of the glory of that light, being led by the hand by those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

22:12-16 And a certain Ananias, a pious man according to the law, being borne witness to by all the Jews who dwelt ***there***, having come to me and having stood by ***me***, said to me, 'Saul, brother, look up.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. And he said, 'The God of our fathers has designated you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice out of His mouth; for you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you delay? Having risen up, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

22:17-21 And it happened to me, having returned to Jerusalem, and while I was praying in the temple, that I came into a trance, and saw Him saying to me, 'Hurry, and go out quickly from Jerusalem, because they will not receive your testimony about Me.' And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that I was imprisoning and beating throughout the synagogues those who believe on You. And when the blood of Stephen Your witness was being poured out, I myself also was standing by and consenting to his killing, and guarding the garments of those who were killing him.' And He said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to Gentiles.'"

22:22-30 And they were listening to him up to this word, and they lifted up their voice, saying, "Away from the earth with such a ***one***! For it is not fitting for him to live." And as they were shouting and flinging off the garments and throwing dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, having said that he should be examined with scourges, so that he might know for what cause they were crying out against him like this. And as they

stretched him out with the straps, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man ***who is*** a Roman and uncondemned?" And having heard ***this***, the centurion, having gone to the commander, reported ***it***, saying, "See what you are about to do; for this man is a Roman." And the commander, having come near, said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes." And the commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a great sum." But Paul said, "But I was even born ***so***." Therefore immediately those who were about to examine him departed from him; and the commander also was afraid, having learned that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. And on the next day, wanting to know the certainty, why he was being accused by the Jews, he released him from the chains and commanded the chief priests and all their Council to come; and having brought Paul down, he set ***him*** before them.

Chapter 22 Preview

Paul stands on the steps of the Roman fortress, in chains, and tells the angry crowd his story. He doesn't argue theology. He tells them who he used to be, what happened to him on the road to Damascus, and what Jesus told him to do.

The crowd listens quietly until Paul says one word: Gentiles. Then they explode again. The Roman commander orders Paul to be whipped to get the truth out of him, but Paul reveals that he is a Roman citizen, and everything changes.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1-2 *"Men, brothers and fathers, hear my defense to you now." And having heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he says,*

Paul begins with respect: "Brothers and fathers." These were the same words Stephen used when he stood before the Council years earlier (7:2). Paul was there that day. Now he stands where Stephen stood.

The Hebrew dialect was most likely Aramaic. Paul wasn't a foreigner speaking down to them. He was one of their own. It's a good lesson in sharing the Gospel: meet people where they are, in words they understand.

22:3 *"I am indeed a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strictness of the ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as you all are today,*

Gamaliel was one of the most respected teachers of the Law in that day (5:34).

When Paul says he was "zealous for God, just as you all are today," he isn't insulting them. He is saying, "I know exactly how you feel, because I used to feel the same way." Zeal for God is a good thing. But zeal without knowledge can lead people far from God (Romans 10:2).

22:4-5 *who persecuted this Way to the point of death, binding and delivering both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest bears witness to me, and all the council of elders; from whom also, having received letters to the brothers, I was journeying to Damascus to bring also those who were there bound to Jerusalem, so that they might be punished.*

Paul admits his past openly. "The Way" was an early name for the Christian faith (9:2; 19:9, 23), and it may echo Jesus' words, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Paul doesn't hide his sin. Our testimony is stronger when we are honest about who we were before Christ.

22:6-8 *And it happened to me, as I was journeying and drawing near to Damascus, about noon, suddenly out of heaven a great light flashed around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.'*

At noon the sun is at its brightest, and this light outshone it (26:13).

The answer to "Who are You, Lord?" changed his life. Jesus did not say "My followers." He said "Me." When someone attacks the church, they are attacking Jesus Himself. He takes it personally, because believers are His body.

22:9 *And those who were with me indeed beheld the light and became terrified, but they did not hear the voice of the One speaking to me.*

In 9:7, Luke says the men heard the voice but saw no one. Some people point to this as a contradiction. It isn't. The men heard a sound, but they didn't understand the words. The same Greek word can mean "to hear" or "to understand," much like we say "I hear you" when we mean "I understand you." They knew something was being spoken. Only Paul understood what was said. Something similar happened when the Father spoke from heaven in John 12:28-29. Some heard words, while others thought it had thundered.

22:10-11 *And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Having risen up, go into Damascus, and there it will be told to you concerning all things which have been appointed for you to do.' And as I was not seeing because of the glory of that light, being led by the hand by those who were with me, I came into Damascus.*

"What shall I do, Lord?" is the question of a man who has just surrendered. This is the second time he has called Jesus "Lord."

The proud Pharisee who rode out to arrest others now had to be led by the hand like a child. God sometimes has to bring us low before He can lift us up.

22:12-13 *And a certain Ananias, a pious man according to the law, being borne witness to by all the Jews who dwelt **there**, having come to me and having stood by **me**, said to me, 'Saul, brother, look up.' And at that same hour I looked up at him.*

Telling this story to a Jewish crowd, Paul describes Ananias as "a pious man according to the law." He wants the crowd to know that the man God sent to him was a faithful, respected Jew, not some rebel against Moses.

The first face Paul saw as a believer was the face of a man who called him "Brother."

22:14-15 *And he said, 'The God of our fathers has designated you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice out of His mouth; for you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.*

"The God of our fathers" is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the same God this crowd worshiped. Paul is showing them that following Jesus is not leaving the God of Israel. It is following Him.

Ananias calls Jesus "the Righteous One," a name for the Messiah (see 3:14 and 7:52). Every believer is a witness. We tell others what Jesus has done for us.

22:16 *And now why do you delay? Having risen up, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'*

Some read "wash away your sins" to mean baptism itself washes away sin. I believe the key words are at the end: "calling on the name of the Lord." Scripture says that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (2:21; Romans 10:13). Paul had already surrendered to Jesus on the road, calling Him Lord. Baptism was his public step of obedience, an outward picture of the inward washing that comes by faith. Peter said it plainly: through Jesus' name, everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins (10:43).

Still, notice Ananias' urgency. "And now why do you delay?" Baptism is not optional for a believer. It is the first step of obedience, and it should not be put off.

22:17-18 *And it happened to me, having returned to Jerusalem, and while I was praying in the temple, that I came into a trance, and saw Him saying to me, 'Hurry, and go out quickly from Jerusalem, because they will not receive your testimony about Me.'*

From Galatians 1:18, we know Paul's return to Jerusalem was about three years after his conversion.

Notice where Paul says this happened: in the temple. The crowd had just accused him of defiling the temple (21:28). Paul tells them he was praying there, and the Lord met him there. He loved God's house as much as they did.

22:19-20 *And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that I was imprisoning and beating throughout the synagogues those who believe on You. And when the blood of Stephen Your witness was being poured out, I myself also was standing by and consenting to his killing, and guarding the garments of those who were killing him.'*

Paul argued with the Lord. He thought the people of Jerusalem would surely listen to him, since they knew his past, even his part in Stephen's death (7:58; 8:1).

Paul thought his past would make his witness more convincing. Surely if a man like him had changed, they would want to know why. It is a natural way to think. But God knew their hearts better than Paul did.

22:21 *And He said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to Gentiles.'"*

Sending Paul to the Gentiles was God's plan from the start (9:15). It was also the word that set the crowd off. Paul had been telling his story to a Jewish crowd, and now he says the God of their fathers sent him to the nations.

22:22-23 *And they were listening to him up to this word, and they lifted up their voice, saying, "Away from the earth with such a **one**! For it is not fitting for him to live." And as they were shouting and flinging off the garments and throwing dust into the air,*

Throwing off cloaks and tossing dust into the air were signs of rage and of rejecting what they had heard.

Why that word? The idea that God would welcome Gentiles without first making them Jews was more than they could take. Yet God had promised Abraham long before that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3), and Isaiah said the Messiah would be "a light of the nations" (Isaiah 49:6). The Gentiles being brought in was never a new idea. It was God's plan all along.

22:24 *the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, having said that he should be examined with scourges, so that he might know for what cause they were crying out against him like this.*

The commander didn't understand Aramaic, so he likely had no idea what Paul had said to cause such an uproar.

Being "examined with scourges" was not the same as the beatings Paul had suffered from the Jews (39 lashes, 2 Corinthians 11:24). Roman scourging used a whip of leather straps with pieces of bone or metal tied in. It could cripple a man or kill him. This was the kind of whipping Jesus received before His crucifixion (John 19:1).

22:25 *And as they stretched him out with the straps, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man **who is** a Roman and uncondemned?"*

Under Roman law, it was illegal to scourge a Roman citizen, and even more so one who had not been tried and found guilty. Paul used his legal rights here. There is nothing wrong with a Christian using the protection of the law. Paul did it in Philippi as well (16:37). He was willing to suffer for Christ, but he didn't seek suffering when God had given him a lawful way to avoid it.

22:26-28 *And having heard **this**, the centurion, having gone to the commander, reported **it**, saying, "See what you are about to do; for this man is a Roman." And the commander, having come near, said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes." And the commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a great sum." But Paul said, "But I was even born **so**."*

Paul's father must have been a Roman citizen, though Scripture doesn't tell us how his family gained it. Paul had something the commander had to pay for. He had been born into it.

There is a picture here for us too. We can't buy our way into God's kingdom. We are "born from above" into it (John 3:3), and our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

22:29 *Therefore immediately those who were about to examine him departed from him; and the commander also was afraid, having learned that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.*

The commander had already broken the law by putting a Roman citizen in chains, and he knew it could cost him.

God was using Paul's Roman citizenship to protect him and move him toward Rome. The Lord had told Ananias that Paul would carry His name before kings (9:15). The road to those kings had just opened.

22:30 *And on the next day, wanting to know the certainty, why he was being accused by the Jews, he released him from the chains and commanded the chief priests and all their Council to come; and having brought Paul down, he set **him** before them.*

The Council, also called the Sanhedrin, was the highest Jewish ruling body. It was made up of about seventy elders, chief priests, and scribes. Paul had once worked for these men. Now he stood before them as the accused. Chapter 23 tells us what happened.

Chapter 22 Summary

Paul spoke to the crowd in their own language and told the story of his conversion: his zeal as a Pharisee, his meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Ananias' visit, and Jesus' command to go to the Gentiles. When he said the word "Gentiles," the crowd erupted. The Roman commander ordered him scourged, but Paul revealed he was a Roman citizen by birth. The commander then brought him before the Jewish Council.

People and Places in Chapter 22

Gamaliel (22:3): A highly respected Pharisee and teacher of the Law in Jerusalem. He advised the Council to leave the apostles alone (5:34-39), and Paul studied under him (22:3).

Ananias of Damascus (22:12): A devout Jewish believer whom God sent to restore Paul's sight and baptize him (9:10-19; 22:12-16). He is a different man from the Ananias of 5:1 and the high priest Ananias of 23:2.

Roman citizenship (22:25-28): A legal status that gave special rights, including protection from scourging without a trial and the right to appeal to Caesar. Paul was a citizen by birth (22:28).

Scourging (22:24): A Roman whipping with a whip of leather straps tied with bone or metal. It was used to punish or to force a confession, and it could be deadly.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. If you had two minutes to tell someone how you came to know Jesus, what would you say?

2. How did Paul show respect to the crowd at the start of his defense? (22:1-2)

3. What did Paul say about his life before he met Jesus? (22:3-5)

4. What did Jesus say to Paul on the road to Damascus, and why do you think He said "Me" instead of "My followers"? (22:7-8)

5. What question did Paul ask Jesus, and how can that question shape your own walk with God? (22:10)

6. What did Ananias tell Paul he was chosen to do? (22:14-15)

7. What does "calling on the name of the Lord" mean to you? (22:16; Romans 10:13)

8. What word made the crowd turn against Paul again, and why? (22:21-22)

9. How did Paul use his Roman citizenship, and is it right for Christians to use their legal rights? (22:25)

10. What is the difference between how the commander and Paul received their citizenship, and how does that remind you of your citizenship in heaven? (22:28; Philippians 3:20)

Chapter 23: The Plot Against Paul

Scripture: Paul Before the Council; The Plot to Kill Paul; Paul Sent to Felix

23:1-5 And Paul, having looked intently at the Council, said, "Men, brothers, I have lived as a citizen in all good conscience toward God until this day." And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing by him to strike his mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God is about to strike you, whitewashed wall! And do you sit judging me according to the law, and, acting contrary to the law, command me to be struck?" And those standing by said, "Do you revile the high priest of God?" And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he is high priest; for it has been written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

23:6-11 And Paul, having known that the one part was of Sadducees and the other of Pharisees, cried out in the Council, "Men, brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee; concerning ***the*** hope and resurrection of ***the*** dead I am being judged." And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the multitude was divided. For Sadducees indeed say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but Pharisees confess both. And a great clamor arose; and the scribes of the party of the Pharisees, having risen up, were contending, saying, "We find no evil in this man; and if a spirit has spoken to him, or an angel, let us not fight against God." And when much dissension had arisen, the commander, having feared that Paul would be torn apart by them, commanded the troop, having gone down, to take him by force out of their midst and to bring ***him*** into the barracks. And on the following night the Lord, having stood by him, said, "Take courage, Paul; for as you have solemnly testified the things about Me at Jerusalem, so you must also testify at Rome."

23:12-22 And when it had become day, certain of the Jews, having formed a conspiracy, bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. And there were more than forty who had formed this sworn plot; who, having come to the chief priests and the elders, said, "We have bound ourselves under a curse with a curse, to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. Now therefore you, with the Council, notify the commander, so that tomorrow he may bring him down to you, as ***though you were*** about to determine the things about him more accurately; and we, before he draws near, are ready to do away with him." But the son of Paul's sister, having heard of the ambush, having come and having entered into the barracks, reported ***it*** to Paul. And Paul, having called one of the centurions to ***him***, said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him." So he, having taken him, brought ***him*** to the commander and says, "The prisoner Paul, having called me to ***him***, asked ***me*** to bring this young man to you, since he has something to say to you." And the commander, having taken hold of his hand and having withdrawn in private, was inquiring, "What is it that you have to report to me?" And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you that tomorrow you bring Paul down into the Council, as ***though they were*** about to inquire something more accurately about him. Therefore do not be persuaded by them; for more than forty men of them are lying in wait for him, who have bound themselves under a curse neither to eat nor to drink until they have done away with him; and now they are ready, awaiting the promise from you." So then the commander dismissed the young man, having instructed ***him*** to tell no one "that you have reported these things to me."

23:23-35 And having called to ***him*** a certain two of the centurions, he said, "Prepare two hundred soldiers so that they may go as far as Caesarea, and seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, from ***the*** third hour of the night." And ***he said*** to provide mounts, so that, having set Paul on ***them***, they might bring ***him*** safely to Felix the governor, having written a letter containing this form: "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix: greeting. This man, having been seized by the Jews and being about to be done away with by them, having come upon ***them*** with the troop, I rescued him, having learned that he is a Roman. And wanting to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council; whom I found being accused concerning questions of their law, but having no accusation worthy of death or of chains. And when it was disclosed to me that a plot against the man was about to be ***carried out*** by the Jews, I sent ***him*** to you at once, having instructed the accusers also to say before you the things against him. Farewell." So then the soldiers, according to what had been ordered them, having taken up Paul, brought ***him*** through the night to Antipatris. And on the next day, having let the horsemen go with him, they returned to the barracks; who, having entered into Caesarea and having delivered the letter to the governor, also presented Paul to him. And the governor, having read ***it***, and having asked from what province he was, and having learned that ***he was*** from Cilicia, said, "I will hear you fully when your accusers also have arrived." And he commanded him to be kept under guard in the Praetorium of Herod.

Chapter 23 Preview

Paul stands before the Jewish Council, the same body he once served. The high priest has him struck in the mouth, and the hearing turns into an argument between Pharisees and Sadducees over the resurrection. Once again the Roman commander has to pull Paul out before he is torn apart.

That night, Jesus Himself stands beside Paul and tells him to take courage: he will testify in Rome. The next morning, more than forty men swear an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed Paul. But God uses Paul's young nephew to uncover the plot, and the commander sends Paul to the governor in Caesarea under a guard of nearly five hundred soldiers.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1 *And Paul, having looked intently at the Council, said, "Men, brothers, I have lived as a citizen in all good conscience toward God until this day."*

The Council, or Sanhedrin, was the highest Jewish court, led by the high priest. Many of these men would have known Paul from years before.

Paul calls them "Brothers," speaking as an equal, not as a prisoner begging for mercy. When he says, "I have lived as a citizen in all good conscience toward God until this day," he isn't claiming he never sinned. He called himself the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). He means that he has always acted on what he believed God wanted, both before and after he met Jesus, and now his conscience is clean because Christ has forgiven him.

23:2 *And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing by him to strike his mouth.*

In the high priest's mind, a man who followed Jesus could not possibly claim a clean conscience before God.

This Ananias was high priest for several years around A.D. 47 to 59. The Jewish historian Josephus describes him as a greedy and violent man. He is not the same Ananias who restored Paul's sight in Damascus (22:12).

Jesus was also struck in the face during His trial before the high priest (John 18:22). The same thing is now happening to His servant.

23:3 *Then Paul said to him, "God is about to strike you, whitewashed wall! And do you sit judging me according to the law, and, acting contrary to the law, command me to be struck?"*

A whitewashed wall looks clean on the outside but could be cracked and weak underneath. Ezekiel used this picture for false prophets who covered over sin (Ezekiel 13:10-15), and Jesus called the Pharisees "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27).

Paul's point was clear. Ananias was sitting there to judge by the Law, and yet he broke the Law by ordering a man to be struck before he had been found guilty (Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 25:1-2).

Did Paul's words come true? Ananias was killed by Jewish rebels at the start of the war against Rome, around A.D. 66. Whether Paul meant it as a prophecy or spoke in anger, Scripture doesn't say.

23:4-5 *And those standing by said, "Do you revile the high priest of God?" And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he is high priest; for it has been written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"*

Paul's quotation comes from Exodus 22:28.

Why didn't Paul know? Scripture doesn't tell us. Some think Paul had poor eyesight (see Galatians 4:15 and 6:11) and couldn't see who gave the order. Others point out that Paul had been away from Jerusalem for years and might not have known this man, especially if the meeting was called quickly and the high priest wasn't wearing his robes. Others believe Paul was speaking with irony, as if to say, "I didn't recognize a high priest in a man acting like that."

What matters most is Paul's response. As soon as he learned who it was, he admitted his words were out of line and submitted to God's Word. Even when we are mistreated, we are not given permission to sin in return. When we get it wrong, we should own it quickly, the way Paul did.

Old Testament links: Exodus 22:28 (quoted)

23:6 *And Paul, having known that the one part was of Sadducees and the other of Pharisees, cried out in the Council, "Men, brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee; concerning* ***the*** *hope and resurrection of* ***the*** *dead I am being judged."*

The Sadducees were the wealthy, priestly party who controlled the temple. They rejected the Pharisees' traditions, gave first place to the five books of Moses, and denied the resurrection. The Pharisees were a strict group devoted to keeping the Law and its traditions, and they believed in the resurrection of the dead.

Some say Paul was just being clever to divide the room. I believe he was telling the truth about the center of everything he preached. The whole Gospel rests on the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:14-17). If God raises the dead, then Jesus could be alive, and if Jesus is alive, He is exactly who He said He is. Paul didn't change the subject. He went straight to the heart of it.

23:7-8 *And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the multitude was divided. For Sadducees indeed say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but Pharisees confess both.*

Luke explains the split for his readers. Jesus Himself had answered the Sadducees on this very question and told them they were mistaken because they didn't understand the Scriptures or the power of God (Matthew 22:23-33).

23:9 *And a great clamor arose; and the scribes of the party of the Pharisees, having risen up, were contending, saying, "We find no evil in this man; and if a spirit has spoken to him, or an angel, let us not fight against God."*

The Pharisees who spoke up still didn't accept that Jesus was the Messiah. But they were willing to defend Paul because he agreed with them about the resurrection. God can use even the disagreements of His opponents to protect His people.

23:10 *And when much dissension had arisen, the commander, having feared that Paul would be torn apart by them, commanded the troop, having gone down, to take him by force out of their midst and to bring* ***him*** *into the barracks.*

For the second time in two days, Roman soldiers had to rescue Paul from his own people. The commander still didn't know what Paul had done wrong.

23:11 *And on the following night the Lord, having stood by him, said, "Take courage, Paul; for as you have solemnly testified the things about Me at Jerusalem, so you must also testify at Rome."*

This is one of the most tender moments in Acts. Paul was beaten, chained, alone in a Roman barracks, and probably wondering whether he had done the right thing by coming to Jerusalem. Jesus didn't send a message. He came Himself and stood by him.

Notice what Jesus said. He didn't scold Paul for coming to Jerusalem. He said Paul had witnessed faithfully there. And He gave Paul a promise: he would testify in Rome. Paul had wanted to go to Rome for years (19:21; Romans 1:10-13). Now he knew he would get there, though not in the way

he had planned. From this night on, no plot and no storm could stop him until that promise came true.

23:12-13 *And when it had become day, certain of the Jews, having formed a conspiracy, bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. And there were more than forty who had formed this sworn plot;*

The forty men "bound themselves under a curse," calling down a curse on themselves if they failed.

That is how much hatred they had for Paul and his message. It's sad to see such zeal aimed in the wrong direction. Jesus warned His disciples that a time would come when those who killed them would think they were serving God (John 16:2).

Did these forty men starve? Scripture doesn't tell us what became of them or their oath. Since the plot failed, they either broke their oath or found a way to be released from it.

23:14-15 *who, having come to the chief priests and the elders, said, "We have bound ourselves under a curse with a curse, to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. Now therefore you, with the Council, notify the commander, so that tomorrow he may bring him down to you, as **though you were** about to determine the things about him more accurately; and we, before he draws near, are ready to do away with him."*

The religious leaders went along with a plan to murder a man. These were the men who claimed to guard God's Law, and the Law clearly says, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). When people reject the truth, they often end up breaking the very rules they claim to defend.

23:16 *But the son of Paul's sister, having heard of the ambush, having come and having entered into the barracks, reported **it** to Paul.*

This is the only time Scripture mentions Paul's sister or her son. We don't know whether his family accepted Jesus, or how the young man heard about the ambush.

Here we see God's hand at work in the ordinary details. Forty men made a secret plan. God had one young man in the right place to hear it.

23:17-19 *And Paul, having called one of the centurions to **him**, said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him." So he, having taken him, brought **him** to the commander and says, "The prisoner Paul, having called me to **him**, asked **me** to bring this young man to you, since he has something to say to you." And the commander, having taken hold of his hand and having withdrawn in private, was inquiring, "What is it that you have to report to me?"*

The word used for "young man" could describe a teenager or someone in his early twenties. The commander's gentle way with him, taking "hold of his hand," suggests he may have been quite young.

23:20-21 *And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you that tomorrow you bring Paul down into the Council, as **though they were** about to inquire something more accurately about him. Therefore do not be persuaded by them; for more than forty men of them are lying in wait for him, who have bound themselves under a curse neither to eat nor to drink until they have done away with him; and now they are ready, awaiting the promise from you."*

The young man told the commander everything, down to the detail that the men were "ready, awaiting the promise from you."

23:22 *So then the commander dismissed the young man, having instructed **him** to tell no one "that you have reported these things to me."*

The commander now knew the plot. He also knew that if a Roman citizen in his custody was murdered, he would answer for it.

23:23-24 *And having called to **him** a certain two of the centurions, he said, "Prepare two hundred soldiers so that they may go as far as Caesarea, and seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, from **the** third hour of the night." And **he said** to provide mounts, so that, having set Paul on **them**, they might bring **him** safely to Felix the governor,*

The commander acted fast. Leaving at "the third hour of the night" meant about nine o'clock in the evening.

Two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen: about 470 men to protect one prisoner from more than forty men. Paul had just been promised by Jesus that he would get to Rome. Now the Roman army itself was carrying him there, one step at a time. God can use anything and anyone to keep His promises.

23:25-27 *having written a letter containing this form: "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix: greeting. This man, having been seized by the Jews and being about to be done away with by them, having come upon **them** with the troop, I rescued him, having learned that he is a Roman.*

Felix was the Roman governor of Judea, ruling from Caesarea; most scholars date his term to about A.D. 52 to 59. Luke gives us the commander's name for the first time: Claudius Lysias.

Lysias told the story his way. He claimed he rescued Paul, "having learned that he is a Roman." That isn't quite what happened. Lysias only learned Paul was a Roman after he had chained him and nearly had him scourged (22:25-29). He left that part out. People have always been good at telling stories in a way that makes themselves look best. God's Word, by contrast, tells us the whole truth, even when it doesn't flatter anyone.

23:28-30 *And wanting to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council; whom I found being accused concerning questions of their law, but having no accusation worthy of death or of chains. And when it was disclosed to me that a plot against the man was about to be* ***carried out*** *by the Jews, I sent* ***him*** *to you at once, having instructed the accusers also to say before you the things against him. Farewell."*

Lysias is the first of several Roman officials in Acts who declare Paul innocent (25:25; 26:31-32). Luke made sure we see it. The charges against Paul, like the charges against Jesus (Luke 23:4, 14-15, 22), were about religion, not crime.

23:31-32 *So then the soldiers, according to what had been ordered them, having taken up Paul, brought* ***him*** *through the night to Antipatris. And on the next day, having let the horsemen go with him, they returned to the barracks;*

Antipatris was a town roughly forty miles from Jerusalem. By then they were well away from the danger near the city.

23:33-34 *who, having entered into Caesarea and having delivered the letter to the governor, also presented Paul to him. And the governor, having read* ***it****, and having asked from what province he was, and having learned that* ***he was*** *from Cilicia,*

Felix asked about Paul's province to see whether the case was his to hear. Cilicia was under Roman rule, so the case fell within his authority.

23:35 *said, "I will hear you fully when your accusers also have arrived." And he commanded him to be kept under guard in the Praetorium of Herod.*

Herod's Praetorium was a palace built by Herod the Great that now served as the governor's headquarters.

Paul would stay in Caesarea for two years (24:27). It might seem like wasted time, but God never wastes time. During those years Paul would speak before a governor, another governor, and a king. Jesus' promise that night in the barracks was being kept, step by step.

Chapter 23 Summary

Paul defended himself before the Jewish Council, but the hearing broke down when he declared he was on trial for the hope of the resurrection. That night, Jesus stood beside Paul and promised he would testify in Rome. More than forty men vowed to kill Paul, but his nephew uncovered the plot. The commander, Claudius Lysias, sent Paul by night under heavy guard to Felix, the Roman governor in Caesarea.

People and Places in Chapter 23

Sanhedrin (23:1): The highest Jewish council and court, led by the high priest and made up of chief priests, elders, and scribes. Luke calls it "the Council."

Pharisees (23:6): A strict Jewish group devoted to the Law and its traditions. They believed in the resurrection, angels, and spirits (23:8).

Sadducees (23:6): The wealthy priestly party that controlled the temple. They denied the resurrection, angels, and spirits (23:8).

Felix (23:24): The Roman governor of Judea, ruling from Caesarea, before whom Paul was tried in chapter 24.

Herod's Praetorium (23:35): The palace built by Herod the Great in Caesarea, used as the Roman governor's headquarters. Paul was held there (23:35).

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. Have you ever had someone step in at just the right moment to help you? What happened?

2. What did Paul say about his conscience, and how can a person have a clean conscience before God? (23:1)

3. Why did Paul call the high priest a "whitewashed wall"? (23:3)

4. How did Paul respond when he learned he had spoken against the high priest? What can we learn from that? (23:5)

5. What did the Pharisees and the Sadducees disagree about? (23:8)

6. Why is the resurrection so important to the Christian faith? (23:6; 1 Corinthians 15:14-17)

7. What did Jesus say to Paul in the night, and how do you think it made him feel? (23:11)

8. What did the forty men vow to do? (23:12-13)

9. How did God use Paul's nephew to protect him? (23:16-22)

10. How do you see God working through ordinary people and events in this chapter? How might He be doing the same in your life?

Chapter 24: Paul Before Felix

Scripture: The Charges Against Paul; Paul's Defense; Felix Waits

24:1-9 And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with the elders and a certain orator, Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. And when he had been called, Tertullus began to accuse ***him***, saying, "Since we are attaining much peace through you, and excellent accomplishments are being done for this nation through your foresight, we accept ***it*** both in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. But in order that I may not hinder you any further, I beg you to hear us briefly in your kindness. For having found this man a plague and one stirring up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, who also attempted to profane the temple, whom also we seized and wanted to judge according to our own law. But Lysias the commander, having come up, took ***him*** away out of our hands with great violence, having commanded his accusers to come to you; from whom you yourself, having examined ***him***, will be able to know concerning all these things of which we accuse him." And the Jews also agreed, declaring that these things were so.

24:10-21 And Paul answered, the governor having nodded to him to speak, "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I more cheerfully make my defense ***in*** the things concerning myself, since you are able to know that it is not more than twelve days for me since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. And neither in the temple did they find me reasoning with anyone or making an uprising of a crowd, nor in the synagogues, nor throughout the city; nor are they able to prove the things of which they now accuse me. But I confess this to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I serve the God of ***my*** fathers, believing all things that are according to the law and that have been written in the Prophets, having a hope toward God, which these themselves also await, that there is about to be a resurrection of ***the*** dead, both of ***the*** righteous and of ***the*** unrighteous. And in this I myself strive always to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. And after several years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings, in which they found me purified in the temple, not with a crowd nor with tumult, ***but*** certain Jews from Asia, who ought to be present before you and to accuse, if they should have anything against me. Or let these themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me when I stood before the Council, other than concerning this one utterance which I cried out, standing among them: 'Concerning ***the*** resurrection of ***the*** dead I am being judged by you today.'"

24:22-27 And having heard these things, Felix, knowing more accurately the things concerning the Way, put them off, having said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will determine the things concerning you." And he ordered the centurion that Paul be kept, and that he have relief, and to forbid none of his own ***people*** to serve or to come to him. And after some days, Felix, having arrived with Drusilla his wife, who was a Jewish woman, sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he was reasoning about righteousness and self-control and the judgment that is about to be, Felix, having become frightened, answered, "For the present, go; and having found an opportunity, I will call for you." And at the same time he was also hoping that money would be given to him by Paul, so that he might release him; therefore also, sending for him more often, he was conversing with him. But when two years had been completed, Felix

received a successor, Porcius Festus; and wishing to lay up favors with the Jews, Felix left Paul bound.

Chapter 24 Preview

Paul is now in Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea, under the protection of the governor. His enemies don't give up. They hire a professional speaker and travel down from Jerusalem to press charges against him.

Paul answers every charge calmly and honestly. Then the governor, Felix, and his wife listen to Paul talk about faith in Christ. Felix hears the truth, becomes afraid, and puts off his decision. He leaves Paul in prison for two years. This chapter shows us what happens when a man hears the Gospel clearly and keeps saying "later."

Chapter 24 Study

24:1 *And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with the elders and a certain orator, Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.*

At the end of chapter 23, the Roman commander Claudius Lysias sent Paul by night to Caesarea to keep him from being ambushed and killed. The elders who came with Ananias were the leaders who sat on the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council in Jerusalem).

Tertullus was a trained public speaker who knew how to argue a case in a Roman court. The Jewish leaders wanted to win, and they brought a professional to do it. It tells us how badly they wanted Paul silenced.

24:2-4 *And when he had been called, Tertullus began to accuse **him**, saying, "Since we are attaining much peace through you, and excellent accomplishments are being done for this nation through your foresight, we accept **it** both in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. But in order that I may not hinder you any further, I beg you to hear us briefly in your kindness.*

Tertullus opens with flattery. Thanking a ruler like this was the normal way to begin a speech before a Roman official, but it was far from the truth.

Felix was governor of Judea from about A.D. 52 to about A.D. 59. He had been born a slave and later freed, and he rose to power through his brother's influence in the emperor's court. He was known for putting down unrest with harsh force. The Jewish historian Josephus records that his time in office was full of violence and that the people of Judea hated him. Thanking him for peace was praise he had not earned.

Flattery is a tool of people who don't have the truth on their side. Paul never flatters Felix. He is respectful, but he simply tells the truth.

24:5-6a *For having found this man a plague and one stirring up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, who also attempted to profane the temple, whom also we seized*

Tertullus makes three accusations. Calling Paul "a plague" meant a troublemaker who spreads disease wherever he goes. Stirring up dissension among the Jews all over the Roman world was a serious political charge, since Rome cared more about keeping order than anything else. A sect is a group that splits off from a larger body. The Nazarenes were the followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

To profane the temple means to treat it as common and make it unclean. The charge goes back to the false rumor in 21:28-29 that Paul had brought a Gentile into the temple courts. None of it was true. But notice how the charges are built to sound dangerous to a Roman governor.

24:6b-8a *and wanted to judge according to our own law. But Lysias the commander, having come up, took **him** away out of our hands with great violence, having commanded his accusers to come to you;*

The label 24:6b-8a means the second half of verse 6 through the first half of verse 8. The SLB includes these words, as the King James Version does. Most modern translations leave them out of the text or put them in a footnote, because the earliest manuscripts do not have them.

If they are original, this was another twist of the facts. The leaders had not been holding a fair trial. A mob had been beating Paul in the temple courts, and Lysias rescued him (21:30-32). Whether or not these words belong here, the main point does not change. Paul's accusers were bending the story to make themselves look lawful.

24:8b-9 *from whom you yourself, having examined **him**, will be able to know concerning all these things of which we accuse him." And the Jews also agreed, declaring that these things were so.*

It is easy to say "everyone knows it's true" when a group stands together. But a crowd agreeing does not make something true. Throughout Acts, the Gospel was attacked by people who repeated the same accusations again and again with no proof (17:6-7; 21:21). Christians today will face the same thing. Our job is to answer with the facts and with a clean conscience, as Paul does next.

24:10 *And Paul answered, the governor having nodded to him to speak, "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I more cheerfully make my defense **in** the things concerning myself,*

Paul begins with a respectful opening, but there is no flattery in it. Because Felix has been a judge over this nation for many years, he knows the customs and can understand the case. Paul makes his defense "cheerfully."

That word stands out. Paul is a prisoner on trial for his life, and he is cheerful. He trusts that God is in control. In 23:11 the Lord had stood beside him and told him he would testify in Rome. Paul knew this trial was not the end of the story.

24:11 *since you are able to know that it is not more than twelve days for me since I went up to worship in Jerusalem.*

Paul gives the facts. He went up "to worship," not to start a riot. Twelve days was not much time to stir up a nation, and a good part of it he spent in Roman custody. The facts were easy for Felix to check.

24:12-13 *And neither in the temple did they find me reasoning with anyone or making an uprising of a crowd, nor in the synagogues, nor throughout the city; nor are they able to prove the things of which they now accuse me.*

The key thing Paul says is that they cannot "prove" any of the charges.

In a Roman court, the accuser had to bring evidence. Tertullus had given a speech, but he had not given any proof. Paul doesn't attack his accusers. He simply points out that their case is empty. That is a good model for us. When we are falsely accused, we can stay calm and stick to what is true.

24:14 *But I confess this to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I serve the God of* ***my*** *fathers, believing all things that are according to the law and that have been written in the Prophets,*

Here Paul admits one thing. "The Way" was one of the earliest names for the Christian faith (9:2; 19:9, 23). Jesus called Himself "the way" in John 14:6.

Paul's point is that following Jesus is not a new religion that turned its back on Israel. He serves "the God of my fathers," the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He believes everything written in the Law and the Prophets. The Christian faith is the fulfillment of what God promised Israel all along. Jesus is the Messiah the Old Testament pointed to.

24:15 *having a hope toward God, which these themselves also await, that there is about to be a resurrection of* ***the*** *dead, both of* ***the*** *righteous and of* ***the*** *unrighteous.*

Paul shares the same hope that many of his accusers hold: that there will be a resurrection "of the dead, both of the righteous and of the unrighteous." Every person who has ever lived will be raised. Some will rise to life and some to judgment. Jesus taught this in John 5:28-29, and Daniel 12:2 says the same thing.

This fits the order of events I believe Scripture teaches. Believers who have died are raised when Christ comes for His church (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Those who die for their faith during the Tribulation are raised when He returns to reign (Revelation 20:4-6). The rest of the dead are raised after the thousand years to stand before God for judgment (Revelation 20:5, 11-15). Paul does not lay out the timing here, but he is clear that everyone will be raised and everyone will face God.

Old Testament links: Daniel 12:2 (alluded to)

24:16 *And in this I myself strive always to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.*

Because Paul believes he will one day stand before God, he strives always to have "a conscience without offense toward God and men." Belief in the resurrection is not just a doctrine to Paul. It shapes how he lives every day.

That should be true for us too. If we really believe we will give an account to God, it will change how we treat others, how we work, and what we say. Paul said something similar in 23:1 and in 2 Corinthians 5:10.

24:17 *And after several years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings,*

Alms are gifts to the poor. This was the collection Paul had gathered from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia for the poor believers in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9).

This is the only place in Acts where Luke mentions that gift. Paul came to Jerusalem to help people, not to hurt them. The man accused of being a plague had actually come carrying money for the poor.

24:18-19 *in which they found me purified in the temple, not with a crowd nor with tumult, **but** certain Jews from Asia, who ought to be present before you and to accuse, if they should have anything against me.*

When Paul's accusers found him in the temple, he had just completed the purification rites (21:26). The trouble started with "certain Jews from Asia," the Roman province where Ephesus was, who recognized Paul and stirred up the mob (21:27).

Paul makes a sharp legal point. Those men from Asia were the actual witnesses. Roman law took this seriously. An accuser who failed to show up was a big hole in the case. The people who started the riot had disappeared.

24:20-21 *Or let these themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me when I stood before the Council, other than concerning this one utterance which I cried out, standing among them: 'Concerning **the** resurrection of **the** dead I am being judged by you today.'"*

The only thing the Council could point to was the one sentence Paul shouted out about the resurrection of the dead (23:6).

That was the real issue all along. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection and the Sadducees did not. More than that, the whole Christian message rests on the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead. Paul keeps coming back to it, because it is the center of everything (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17).

24:22 *And having heard these things, Felix, knowing more accurately the things concerning the Way, put them off, having said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will determine the things concerning you."*

Felix knew "more accurately the things concerning the Way." He understood more about the Christians than the Jewish leaders realized. Maybe he learned it from his Jewish wife, or from years of governing a land where the church was growing.

He knew Paul had done nothing wrong. A just judge would have released him. Instead, Felix "put them off," saying he would decide the case when Lysias the commander came down. Scripture never tells us Lysias came. This was a way to avoid making a decision that would anger the Jewish leaders.

24:23 *And he ordered the centurion that Paul be kept, and that he have relief, and to forbid none of his own* ***people*** *to serve or to come to him.*

A centurion was a Roman officer in charge of about one hundred soldiers.

Paul's friends were allowed to bring him food and supplies and to visit. Luke was likely nearby during these two years, and many believe he used this time to gather the eyewitness accounts he used for his Gospel and for Acts (Luke 1:1-3). God was at work even while Paul sat in a cell.

24:24 *And after some days, Felix, having arrived with Drusilla his wife, who was a Jewish woman, sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.*

Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I, the king who killed James and imprisoned Peter, and then died after being struck by an angel (12:1-2, 20-23). She was the sister of King Agrippa II, whom we will meet in chapters 25 and 26. Josephus records that she left her first husband to marry Felix. She would have known a good deal about the Jewish faith and about Jesus.

24:25 *And as he was reasoning about righteousness and self-control and the judgment that is about to be, Felix, having become frightened, answered, "For the present, go; and having found an opportunity, I will call for you."*

Paul doesn't water down the message for the powerful couple in front of him.

Think about who was listening. Felix was a harsh ruler who had taken another man's wife. Paul spoke about living right before God, about controlling our desires, and about the day every person will answer to God. The Holy Spirit used those words. Felix, "having become frightened," told Paul, "For the present, go."

But fear is not the same as repentance. This is one of the saddest verses in Acts. Felix heard the truth and felt its weight, and he chose to wait. Scripture never tells us he ever found that time.

You might be thinking, "I'll get serious about God later." Felix thought that too. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:2 that "now is a day of salvation." If God is speaking to your heart today, don't put Him off.

24:26 *And at the same time he was also hoping that money would be given to him by Paul, so that he might release him; therefore also, sending for him more often, he was conversing with him.*

Felix had another reason for calling Paul back. Taking bribes to release prisoners was against Roman law, but it was common among corrupt officials. Felix may have heard that Paul had brought a large gift of money to Jerusalem (24:17) and thought Paul could get his hands on more.

Felix heard the Gospel many times. But he was listening for money, not for truth. It is possible to sit under the Word of God again and again and never let it change you.

24:27 *But when two years had been completed, Felix received a successor, Porcius Festus; and wishing to lay up favors with the Jews, Felix left Paul bound.*

Paul's custody in Caesarea likely ran from about A.D. 57 to 59. Josephus records that Felix was called back to Rome after trouble between the Jews and Gentiles of Caesarea.

Paul's freedom was traded for a politician's popularity. Two years can feel like a long time to wait on God. But Paul was not forgotten. The Lord had promised he would testify in Rome (23:11), and that promise still stood. God's timing is not ours, but He is never late.

Chapter 24 Summary

Five days after Paul arrived in Caesarea, the high priest Ananias and a hired speaker named Tertullus came to accuse him before Governor Felix. They called him a troublemaker, a ringleader of the Nazarenes, and a man who tried to defile the temple. Paul answered calmly. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship and to bring gifts for the poor, he had caused no riot, and no one could prove otherwise. He admitted only that he followed the Way and believed in the resurrection.

Felix knew Paul was innocent, but he put off a decision. Later he and Drusilla listened to Paul speak about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. Felix was afraid, but he sent Paul away and waited for a better time that never came. He kept Paul in custody for two years, hoping for a bribe, and left him in prison when Festus replaced him.

I have been accused of something I did not do. I got angry, and I treated the others with disrespect and no compassion. Paul answered his accusers calmly and with respect. I wish I had. That is a lesson I am still learning.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? How did you respond?
2. What three charges did Tertullus bring against Paul? (24:5-6)
3. How did Paul's opening words to Felix differ from Tertullus'? (24:2-4, 10)

4. What did Paul admit to, and what did he say it was based on? (24:14-15)

5. Why did Paul work to keep a conscience without offense? (24:15-16)

6. Why had Paul come to Jerusalem in the first place? (24:17)

7. What three subjects did Paul talk about with Felix and Drusilla, and how did Felix react? (24:25)

8. Why do you think people put off responding to God, the way Felix did?

9. How does believing in a coming judgment change the way you live day to day?

10. Paul waited two years in custody. How do you stay faithful when God's answer seems slow?

Chapter 25: Paul Before Festus

Scripture: Paul Appeals to Caesar; Festus and Agrippa

25:1-12 Festus therefore, having arrived in the province, after three days went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul, and they were begging him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem, forming an ambush to do away with him on the way. So then Festus answered that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was about to set out shortly. "Therefore," he says, "let those among you who are in authority, having gone down with ***me***, if there is anything amiss in this man, accuse him." And having spent more than ten days among them, having gone down to Caesarea, on the next day, having sat on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought. And when he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around ***him***, bringing many and weighty charges against Paul, which they were not able to prove, while he was making his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I sinned in anything." But Festus, wishing to lay up a favor with the Jews, answering Paul, said, "Are you willing, having gone up to Jerusalem, to be judged there concerning these things before me?" And Paul said, "I am standing before the judgment seat of Caesar, where I must be judged. To ***the*** Jews I have done no wrong, as you also know very well. For if indeed I am doing wrong and have done anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if there is nothing ***in the things*** of which these accuse me, no one can hand me over to them as a favor. I appeal to Caesar!" Then Festus, having conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go!"

25:13-22 And when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to greet Festus. And as they were staying there many days, Festus laid before the king the things concerning Paul, saying, "There is a certain man left by Felix a prisoner, about whom, when I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed ***me***, asking for judgment against him; to whom I answered that it is not ***the*** custom with Romans to hand over any man to destruction as a favor before the one being accused has the accusers face to face and receives an opportunity for defense concerning the charge. Therefore, when they had come together here, I, having made no delay, on the next ***day***, having sat on the judgment seat, commanded the man to be brought; concerning whom the accusers, having stood up, were bringing no charge of ***the things*** which I was suspecting, but they had certain questions against him concerning their own religion, and concerning a certain Jesus who had died, whom Paul was asserting to be alive. And being at a loss concerning the inquiry about this, I was asking whether he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and there to be judged concerning these things. But when Paul appealed to be kept for the decision of the Emperor, I commanded him to be kept until I might send him to Caesar." And Agrippa said to Festus, "I myself also was wishing to hear the man." "Tomorrow," he says, "you will hear him."

25:23-27 Therefore on the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp and had entered into the audience hall with both the commanders and the men who were of prominence in the city, and Festus had commanded, Paul was brought in. And Festus says, "King Agrippa, and all you men who are present with us, you see this one, concerning whom all the

multitude of the Jews petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, crying out that he must not live any longer. But I, having found that he had done nothing worthy of death, and since he himself also appealed to the Emperor, determined to send him; concerning whom I have nothing definite to write to ***my*** lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, the examination having taken place, I may have something to write. For it seems unreasonable to me, sending a prisoner, not also to indicate the charges against him."

Chapter 25 Preview

A new governor, Porcius Festus, takes office in Judea. Paul's enemies have not forgotten him after two years. They ask Festus to send Paul back to Jerusalem, planning to kill him on the way. When Festus asks Paul whether he will stand trial in Jerusalem, Paul uses his right as a Roman citizen and appeals to Caesar.

Then King Agrippa and his sister Bernice come to visit. Festus doesn't know what to write to the emperor about Paul, so he brings Paul before the king. This chapter sets the stage for one of Paul's greatest speeches, and it shows God using Roman law to move Paul toward Rome, just as He promised.

Chapter 25 Study

25:1 *Festus therefore, having arrived in the province, after three days went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.*

Festus' province was the Roman province of Judea. Jerusalem was the religious center of the nation, and a wise new governor would want to meet the Jewish leaders right away.

Festus ruled for only a short time, from about A.D. 59 until he died in office about two years later. History remembers him as more fair than Felix. But as we'll see, even a fair man can be tempted to please the crowd.

25:2-3 *And the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul, and they were begging him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem, forming an ambush to do away with him on the way.*

Two years have passed, and the hatred of the chief priests has not cooled at all. Luke tells us the real reason for their request. They were "forming an ambush to do away with him on the way." This is the same kind of plot the forty men swore to carry out in 23:12-15. Back then, the plotters asked the chief priests for help. Now the chief priests themselves are asking for the ambush. Sin that is not dealt with grows. Their anger had turned into a plan to murder.

25:4-5 *So then Festus answered that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was about to set out shortly. "Therefore," he says, "let those among you who are in authority, having gone down with **me**, if there is anything amiss in this man, accuse him."*

Festus probably just wanted to handle the case the proper Roman way, in his own court. He didn't know about the ambush. But God did. Once again, God used a Roman official's ordinary decision

to protect His servant. We may never know how many times God has quietly closed a door that would have led us into harm.

25:6 *And having spent more than ten days among them, having gone down to Caesarea, on the next day, having sat on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought.*

A tribunal was the judge's raised platform. When a Roman official sat there, the court was officially in session.

Festus moved quickly. Felix had let this case sit for two years. Festus deals with it the day after he gets back.

25:7 *And when he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around* ***him****, bringing many and weighty charges against Paul, which they were not able to prove,*

Luke adds that the charges were ones they "were not able to prove."

This is the same thing that happened before Felix (24:13). Two years later, the accusers still have no evidence. They have only volume. They make many charges and serious-sounding charges, but none of them stand up. A lie doesn't become true because it is repeated loudly for a long time.

25:8 *while he was making his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I sinned in anything."*

Paul's defense is short. Caesar was the title of the Roman emperor. At this time the emperor was Nero.

Paul names three things: the Law, the temple, and Caesar. These three cover every charge. The Law and the temple were the religious charges. Caesar was the political charge, and that was the one that could get Paul executed under Roman law. Paul denies all of them with a clear conscience.

25:9 *But Festus, wishing to lay up a favor with the Jews, answering Paul, said, "Are you willing, having gone up to Jerusalem, to be judged there concerning these things before me?"*

Festus was "wishing to lay up a favor with the Jews." He was new in office and needed to get along with the Jewish leaders.

Festus did not seem to understand what he was asking. In Jerusalem Paul would be surrounded by men who wanted him dead, and the ambush was already waiting. Festus offers to stay as judge, but the trial would happen on his enemies' ground. This is the same temptation that pulled at Felix (24:27) and at Pilate before him (Luke 23:23-24): treating justice as a favor to be traded for popularity.

25:10 *And Paul said, "I am standing before the judgment seat of Caesar, where I must be judged. To* ***the*** *Jews I have done no wrong, as you also know very well.*

Paul isn't being proud or stubborn. He knows his rights as a Roman citizen. A Roman court was the right place for a Roman citizen. He also knows that going back to Jerusalem means almost certain death. Paul was ready to die for Christ (21:13), but he was not going to throw his life away when God had told him he would testify in Rome.

25:11 *For if indeed I am doing wrong and have done anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if there is nothing* ***in the things*** *of which these accuse me, no one can hand me over to them as a favor. I appeal to Caesar!"*

Paul says that if he has done wrong, he is not trying to escape death. Then come the famous words: "I appeal to Caesar."

Every Roman citizen had the right to appeal his case to the emperor. Once a citizen made that appeal, the governor had to send him to Rome. Paul was not running from suffering. He was using the law God had put in place to carry him where God wanted him to go.

There is a lesson for us here. It is not unspiritual to use legal rights to protect ourselves and the work of the Gospel. Paul did it in Philippi (16:37), in Jerusalem (22:25), and here. We trust God, and we also use the means He gives us.

25:12 *Then Festus, having conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go!"*

Festus' council was made up of the advisors who helped a governor with legal questions. His answer, "To Caesar you will go!" settled the matter.

These words from a Roman governor fulfilled the promise Jesus had made in 23:11, and the words God spoke when He first called Paul: that Paul would carry His name before Gentiles and kings (9:15). Paul's enemies wanted him dead in Jerusalem. God was sending him to Rome. No plan of man can overturn a promise of God.

25:13 *And when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to greet Festus.*

King Agrippa is Herod Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I from chapter 12 and the great-grandson of Herod the Great, who tried to kill the baby Jesus (Matthew 2:16). Rome let him rule territory to the north and east of Galilee, and he had authority to appoint the high priest in Jerusalem. He knew the Jewish faith well.

Bernice was his sister and the sister of Drusilla, the wife of Felix (24:24). She lived at her brother's side at this time, and ancient writers spread rumors about the two of them. Luke doesn't say anything about that, and neither will we. What matters is that the most powerful Jewish ruler of the day is about to hear the Gospel.

25:14-16 *And as they were staying there many days, Festus laid before the king the things concerning Paul, saying, "There is a certain man left by Felix a prisoner, about whom, when I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed **me**, asking for judgment against him; to whom I answered that it is not **the** custom with Romans to hand over any man to destruction as a favor before the one being accused has the accusers face to face and receives an opportunity for defense concerning the charge.*

Festus' answer to the chief priests reflects one of the best things about Roman law: no man is handed over before he has met his accusers face to face and had a chance to defend himself. Festus is proud of it, and he should be. It is a principle Scripture affirms as well: a matter must be settled by witnesses, not rumor (Deuteronomy 19:15; John 7:51).

25:17-19 *Therefore, when they had come together here, I, having made no delay, on the next **day**, having sat on the judgment seat, commanded the man to be brought; concerning whom the accusers, having stood up, were bringing no charge of **the things** which I was suspecting, but they had certain questions against him concerning their own religion, and concerning a certain Jesus who had died, whom Paul was asserting to be alive.*

Festus had expected charges of something like robbery or rebellion. Instead they argued about "their own religion" and about "a certain Jesus who had died, whom Paul was asserting to be alive."

That phrase sums up the whole Christian faith from the outside. To Festus it was a strange argument about a dead man. To Paul it was everything. Jesus really died, and Jesus really rose from the dead. Either Paul was wrong, or Jesus is alive today and is Lord of all. There is no middle ground. Every person has to decide what they believe about "a certain Jesus who had died," whom we say is alive.

25:20-21 *And being at a loss concerning the inquiry about this, I was asking whether he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and there to be judged concerning these things. But when Paul appealed to be kept for the decision of the Emperor, I commanded him to be kept until I might send him to Caesar."*

Festus admits he was "at a loss" how to look into these questions. When he tells of asking Paul to go to Jerusalem, he leaves out his real reason, which was to do the Jews a favor (25:9).

The word translated "Emperor" here was the title Augustus, first given to Caesar Augustus and then used by each emperor after him.

25:22 *And Agrippa said to Festus, "I myself also was wishing to hear the man." "Tomorrow," he says, "you will hear him."*

Agrippa's wish to hear Paul may remind you of an earlier Herod. Herod Antipas, Agrippa's great-uncle, had wanted for a long time to see Jesus, hoping to see a miracle (Luke 23:8). Agrippa's interest may have been curiosity too. But God would use it. Jesus had told His disciples they would be brought before kings and governors for His sake, as a testimony to them (Luke 21:12-13). That was about to happen.

25:23 *Therefore on the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp and had entered into the audience hall with both the commanders and the men who were of prominence in the city, and Festus had commanded, Paul was brought in.*

Luke paints a picture of royal robes, attendants, and display. The auditorium was the hall used for public hearings. Caesarea had five cohorts of Roman soldiers, so there may have been five commanders present.

Picture the contrast. On one side, kings and officers in their finery. On the other, a prisoner in chains. Yet the man in chains is the one with the true riches. The pomp of that day is long gone, but the words Paul spoke are still changing lives.

25:24-25 *And Festus says, "King Agrippa, and all you men who are present with us, you see this one, concerning whom all the multitude of the Jews petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, crying out that he must not live any longer. But I, having found that he had done nothing worthy of death, and since he himself also appealed to the Emperor, determined to send him;*

Festus found that Paul "had done nothing worthy of death." This is now the third Roman official to say Paul is innocent. Lysias said so in 23:29. Felix knew it (24:22-23). Now Festus says it publicly. Luke records this carefully. Like Jesus before Pilate (Luke 23:4, 14, 22), Paul was declared innocent again and again and still kept in chains.

25:26-27 *concerning whom I have nothing definite to write to **my** lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, the examination having taken place, I may have something to write. For it seems unreasonable to me, sending a prisoner, not also to indicate the charges against him."*

Here is Festus' problem. He has "nothing definite" to write to "my lord," the emperor. When a governor sent a prisoner to Caesar, he had to send a letter explaining the charges. Festus had no real charges to write down.

Festus calls it "unreasonable" to send a prisoner without stating the charges. It was worse than unreasonable. It was unjust to hold an innocent man at all. But God was using even Festus' confusion to bring the Gospel before a king.

Chapter 25 Summary

Festus became the new governor of Judea. The chief priests asked him to bring Paul to Jerusalem, planning to ambush and kill him, but Festus held the trial in Caesarea. Once again the accusers could prove nothing. When Festus, wanting to please the Jewish leaders, asked Paul to go to Jerusalem, Paul appealed to Caesar, and Festus agreed to send him.

King Agrippa II and Bernice came to visit. Festus explained that the case was about Jewish religious questions and about a dead man named Jesus whom Paul said was alive. Agrippa wanted to hear Paul, so the next day Paul was brought before the king and the leaders of Caesarea. Festus admitted Paul had done nothing worthy of death, and that he had nothing to write to the emperor.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. Have you ever had to explain something important to someone who had no background to understand it?

2. What did the chief priests ask Festus to do, and what was their real plan? (25:2-3)

3. What three areas did Paul say he had not sinned against? (25:8)

4. Why did Festus ask Paul to go to Jerusalem? (25:9)

5. Why did Paul appeal to Caesar? Was he trying to avoid suffering? (25:10-11)

6. How did Festus describe the heart of the dispute to King Agrippa? (25:19)

7. Which Roman officials had now found that Paul had done nothing deserving death? (23:29; 25:25; see also 24:22-23)

8. Is it right for Christians to use their legal rights? When might it be wise, and when might it not be?

9. How does God's promise in 23:11 help you understand the events of this chapter?

10. If someone asked you whether Jesus is dead or alive, what would you say and why?

Chapter 26: Paul Before Agrippa

Scripture: Paul's Defense Before Agrippa; Almost Persuaded

26:1-11 And Agrippa said to Paul, "It is permitted for you to speak for yourself." Then Paul, having stretched out the hand, was making his defense: "Concerning all the things of which I am accused by Jews, King Agrippa, I have considered myself fortunate, being about to make my defense before you today, especially knowing you to be an expert in all the customs and also questions among ***the*** Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently. So then, my manner of life from youth, which was from the beginning among my nation in Jerusalem, all the Jews know, knowing me beforehand from the first, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived ***as*** a Pharisee. And now I stand being judged for the hope of the promise made by God to the fathers, to which our twelve tribes, serving with earnestness night and day, hope to attain; concerning which hope I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa. Why is it judged incredible with you if God raises ***the*** dead? So then I myself thought to myself that I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus the Nazarene, which I also did in Jerusalem; and I locked up many of the saints in prisons, having received the authority from the chief priests; and when they were being done away with, I cast ***my*** vote against ***them***. And punishing them often throughout all the synagogues, I was compelling ***them*** to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I was persecuting ***them*** even as far as to foreign cities.

26:12-23 In which ***pursuits*** also, journeying to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday on the road, O king, I saw a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining around me and those journeying with me. And when we had all fallen down to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? ***It is*** hard for you to kick against goads.' And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise up and stand on your feet; for to this ***end*** I have appeared to you, to designate you an attendant and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things in which I will appear to you, rescuing you from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes and to turn ***them*** from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith which ***is*** in Me.' Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but I was declaring, first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and to all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, to repent and to turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance. Because of these things the Jews, having seized me in the temple, were attempting to kill ***me***. Therefore, having obtained the help that ***is*** from God, to this day I stand, testifying both to small and to great, saying nothing besides the things which both the prophets and Moses said were about to happen: that the Christ ***is*** subject to suffering, that, first out of ***the*** resurrection of ***the*** dead, He is about to proclaim light to the people and to the Gentiles."

26:24-32 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "You are insane, Paul! Much learning is turning you to insanity." But he says, "I am not insane, most excellent Festus, but I utter declarations of truth and soberness. For the king knows about these things, to whom also I speak with boldness; for I am not persuaded that any of these things

escapes his notice, not one; for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a little you are persuading me to become a Christian." And Paul said, "I would pray to God that, both in a little and in much, not only you but also all who hear me today might become such as I also am, except for these chains." And when he had said these things, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and those sitting with them; and having withdrawn, they were speaking to one another, saying, "This man is doing nothing worthy of death or of chains." And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar."

Chapter 26 Preview

Paul stands before King Agrippa, Bernice, Governor Festus, and the leading men of Caesarea. This is not really a defense of himself. It is a testimony. Paul tells his story: his life as a strict Pharisee, his violent persecution of Christians, and the day the risen Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and sent him to the Gentiles.

Festus interrupts and says Paul has lost his mind. Paul turns to the king and presses him to believe. Agrippa does not make a decision, but he and Festus agree that Paul has done nothing to deserve death or prison. This chapter is the third account of Paul's conversion in Acts (9:1-19; 22:6-16), and it is the fullest picture we have of the commission Jesus gave him.

Chapter 26 Study

26:1 *And Agrippa said to Paul, "It is permitted for you to speak for yourself." Then Paul, having stretched out the hand, was making his defense:*

Stretching out the hand was the way a public speaker began. Even in chains, Paul speaks with confidence. He is not a beaten man pleading for mercy. He is an ambassador for Christ (Ephesians 6:20).

26:2-3 *"Concerning all the things of which I am accused by Jews, King Agrippa, I have considered myself fortunate, being about to make my defense before you today, especially knowing you to be an expert in all the customs and also questions among* ***the*** *Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.*

Paul says he considers himself "fortunate" to make his defense before Agrippa. Unlike Tertullus' words to Felix, this is not flattery. It is simply true. Agrippa was "an expert in all the customs and also questions among the Jews." Festus didn't understand the case, but Agrippa did. Paul could talk about the Law, the Prophets, and the Messiah with a man who knew what those words meant.

What follows is the longest of Paul's defense speeches, and he wants the king to hear the whole thing.

26:4-5 *So then, my manner of life from youth, which was from the beginning among my nation in Jerusalem, all the Jews know, knowing me beforehand from the first, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived* ***as*** *a Pharisee.*

The Pharisees were a group of Jews who were very careful to keep the Law of Moses in every detail, along with many traditions handed down by their teachers. They also believed in angels and in the resurrection of the dead. Paul's point is that he was no outsider or rebel. He came from the most devoted part of Judaism.

26:6-7 *And now I stand being judged for the hope of the promise made by God to the fathers, to which our twelve tribes, serving with earnestness night and day, hope to attain; concerning which hope I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa.*

Here is the real reason Paul is on trial: "the hope of the promise made by God to the fathers," the patriarchs of Israel.

What was the promise? It was the promise of the Messiah, and with Him the resurrection and the kingdom (Genesis 22:18; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Daniel 12:2). Paul's message is that the promise has come true in Jesus. The irony is painful. Israel was waiting for it, and the people who should have welcomed it were putting Paul on trial for announcing it.

Paul speaks of "our twelve tribes." He still sees Israel as God's people, with a promise that has not been canceled. Paul makes the same point in Romans 11:1-2, 29. God is not finished with Israel.

26:8 *Why is it judged incredible with you if God raises* ***the*** *dead?*

Paul's question to the whole room is a fair one. If God is God, the One who created life in the first place, why would it be hard for Him to give life back? The resurrection only seems impossible if we leave God out of the picture. Once we believe God exists and has power over His creation, the empty tomb makes perfect sense.

26:9-11 *So then I myself thought to myself that I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus the Nazarene, which I also did in Jerusalem; and I locked up many of the saints in prisons, having received the authority from the chief priests; and when they were being done away with, I cast* ***my*** *vote against* ***them****. And punishing them often throughout all the synagogues, I was compelling* ***them*** *to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I was persecuting* ***them*** *even as far as to foreign cities.*

Some teachers take "cast my vote" to mean Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. Others think it simply means he gave his full approval, as he did at Stephen's death (8:1). Scripture doesn't settle it, and it isn't the point. The point is that Paul was guilty.

To blaspheme here means to speak against Jesus. Paul does not hide what he did. Telling the truth about our past is part of a real testimony. It shows how great God's grace is (1 Timothy 1:13-16).

26:12-13 *In which **pursuits** also, journeying to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday on the road, O king, I saw a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining around me and those journeying with me.*

The light at noon, when the sun was at its strongest, still outshone the sun. This was the glory of the risen Christ. It reminds us of John's vision in Revelation 1:16, where the face of Jesus shone like the sun in its strength.

26:14 *And when we had all fallen down to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? **It is** hard for you to kick against goads.'*

Jesus also says, "It is hard for you to kick against goads." The SLB has these words at 9:5 as well, as the King James Version does; most modern translations have them only here. A goad was a long pointed stick used to drive oxen. When a stubborn ox kicked back against the goad, it only hurt itself. This was a common saying in that day.

Jesus was telling Paul that by fighting Him, he was only wounding himself. Some believe God had already been pressing on Paul's conscience, maybe through Stephen's death. Many of us know what it feels like to fight against God. It never works, and it only brings pain.

26:15 *And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.*

Notice Jesus doesn't say, "whom you are persecuting by attacking My followers." He says, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Jesus is so closely joined to His people that what is done to them is done to Him. The church is His body (1 Corinthians 12:27). That should comfort every suffering believer. And it should make us careful how we treat other Christians.

26:16 *But rise up and stand on your feet; for to this **end** I have appeared to you, to designate you an attendant and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things in which I will appear to you,*

Paul is appointed "an attendant and a witness." An attendant is a servant who works for his Master. A witness is someone who tells what he has seen.

The Lord did appear to Paul again and again (18:9; 22:17-18; 23:11; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). Every believer is a witness in a sense (1:8). We tell others what Jesus has done for us.

Old Testament links: Ezekiel 2:1 (alluded to)

26:17-18 *rescuing you from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes and to turn **them** from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith which **is** in Me.'*

Jesus promised to rescue Paul from the very groups he was being sent to.

This is one of the clearest descriptions of salvation in Acts. People without Christ are blind and in darkness, under Satan's power (2 Corinthians 4:4). The Gospel opens their eyes. They turn to God, and He forgives their sins and gives them a place in His family. All of it comes "by faith which is in Me," faith in Jesus. Not by works, not by keeping the Law, but by trusting Him (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Old Testament links: Isaiah 42:7 (alluded to)

26:19-20 *Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but I was declaring, first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and to all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, to repent and to turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance.*

Paul obeyed the heavenly vision. The order of his preaching matches the pattern Jesus gave in 1:8.

Repentance means a change of mind and heart that turns us away from sin and toward God. Good deeds don't save us, but they are the fruit that shows the change is real (Ephesians 2:10; James 2:17-18). John the Baptist preached the same thing (Luke 3:8).

26:21 *Because of these things the Jews, having seized me in the temple, were attempting to kill **me**.*

Paul was seized in the temple (21:30-31), but he was not a criminal. He was a man who obeyed a vision from heaven and preached to Gentiles as well as Jews. That was what his accusers could not stand (22:21-22).

26:22-23 *Therefore, having obtained the help that **is** from God, to this day I stand, testifying both to small and to great, saying nothing besides the things which both the prophets and Moses said were about to happen: that the Christ **is** subject to suffering, that, first out of **the** resurrection of **the** dead, He is about to proclaim light to the people and to the Gentiles."*

Paul has had "the help that is from God" to this very day. That is how he is still standing.

Paul sums it up in three points. The Christ, or Messiah, would suffer (Isaiah 53). He would be the first to rise from the dead, not just brought back to life to die again, but raised in a glorified body that will never die (1 Corinthians 15:20). And He would proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6). Jesus said the same thing to His disciples after He rose (Luke 24:44-47).

Old Testament links: Isaiah 42:6 (alluded to)

26:24 *And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "You are insane, Paul! Much learning is turning you to insanity."*

To a Roman, a man rising from the dead was nonsense. Festus could see that Paul was highly educated, but he thought all those books had gone to his head. The Gospel still sounds like foolishness to many people today (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23). That shouldn't surprise us or stop us.

26:25 *But he says, "I am not insane, most excellent Festus, but I utter declarations of truth and soberness.*

Paul answers calmly and politely. "Most excellent" was the proper title for a governor.

Paul doesn't get angry or insult Festus. He simply restates that what he's saying is true and reasonable. Our faith is not blind. It rests on real events that happened in history before many witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

26:26 *For the king knows about these things, to whom also I speak with boldness; for I am not persuaded that any of these things escapes his notice, not one; for this has not been done in a corner.*

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus didn't happen in secret. Jesus taught in public. He was crucified outside Jerusalem during a major feast. The empty tomb was talked about all over the city, and thousands came to faith in Jerusalem itself. Christianity is open to examination. It is not built on hidden visions or secret knowledge, but on public facts.

26:27 *King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe."*

This was a hard question for Agrippa. If he said no, he would lose standing with the Jewish people he ruled over, who honored the Prophets. If he said yes, then Paul would show him that the Prophets pointed to Jesus. Paul isn't giving a speech anymore. He is calling a man to make a decision.

26:28 *And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a little you are persuading me to become a Christian."*

People have read Agrippa's words in different ways. The King James Version translates it, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," as if Agrippa were close to believing. The SLB reads, "In a little you are persuading me to become a Christian." Most modern translations take this as Agrippa brushing Paul off, maybe with some sarcasm: "Do you really think you can make me a Christian so quickly?" Either way, Agrippa did not believe that day. Being close is not the same as coming to Christ.

26:29 *And Paul said, "I would pray to God that, both in a little and in much, not only you but also all who hear me today might become such as I also am, except for these chains."*

Paul is the prisoner, yet he wishes that the king, the governor, and the leading men of the city could have what he has. He doesn't want them to share his chains, but he wants them to share his Savior. That is real love for the lost. Paul cared more about their souls than about his own freedom.

26:30-31 *And when he had said these things, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and those sitting with them; and having withdrawn, they were speaking to one another, saying, "This man is doing nothing worthy of death or of chains."*

Once again, Paul is declared innocent, this time by a king and a governor together. Luke wanted his readers, including Theophilus and any Roman official who might read Acts, to know that the Christian faith was not a crime against Rome.

26:32 *And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar."*

From a human point of view, Agrippa's words make it sound like Paul made a mistake. But it was no mistake. Jesus had told Paul he would testify in Rome (23:11). The appeal was the road God used to get him there. Sometimes what looks like a wrong turn is God's way of moving us exactly where He wants us. Romans 8:28 was true for Paul, and it is true for us.

Chapter 26 Summary

Paul made his defense before King Agrippa. He described his life as a strict Pharisee and said he was on trial for the hope of the promise God made to Israel, the hope of the resurrection. He confessed how he had persecuted believers, and then told how the risen Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light on the road to Damascus and sent him to open the eyes of the Gentiles, turning them from darkness to light and from Satan to God.

Paul explained that he had only preached what Moses and the Prophets foretold: that the Messiah would suffer, rise from the dead, and bring light to Jews and Gentiles. Festus said Paul was out of his mind. Paul pressed Agrippa to believe, but the king turned him aside. Both agreed Paul had done nothing to deserve death or prison, and that he could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar.

Chapter 26 Study Questions

1. If you had a few minutes to tell your story of coming to faith, what would you include?

2. How did Paul describe his life before he met Jesus? (26:4-5, 9-11)

3. What hope did Paul say he was on trial for? (26:6-8)

4. What did Jesus mean by "kick against goads"? (26:14)

5. What mission did Jesus give Paul? (26:16-18)

6. According to 26:18, how do people receive forgiveness and a place among God's people?

7. What three things did Paul say Moses and the Prophets had foretold about the Messiah? (26:22-23)

8. How did Festus respond to Paul's message, and how did Paul answer? (26:24-25)

9. Why does it matter that the events of the Gospel had "not been done in a corner"? (26:26)

10. Is there someone in your life who is "almost persuaded"? How can you pray for them this week?

Chapter 27: Shipwreck

Scripture: Paul Sails for Rome; The Storm; The Shipwreck

27:1-8 And when it was determined that we should sail away to Italy, they were delivering both Paul and certain other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Augustan cohort. And having boarded an Adramyttian ship, being about to sail to the places along Asia, we set sail, Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And on the next ***day*** we landed at Sidon; and Julius, having treated Paul kindly, allowed ***him***, having gone to ***his*** friends, to receive care. And from there, having set sail, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And having sailed across the sea along Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came down to Myra of Lycia. And there the centurion, having found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, put us on board it. And sailing slowly for many days, and having arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us ***to go on***, we sailed under Crete off Salmone; and coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a certain place called Fair Havens, near which was a city, Lasea.

27:9-20 And when considerable time had passed, and the voyage was already dangerous because the Fast also had already gone by, Paul was admonishing ***them***, saying to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage is about to be with damage and much loss, not only of the cargo and of the ship but also of our lives." But the centurion was persuaded by the pilot and the ship owner rather than by the things spoken by Paul. And because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to set sail from there also, if somehow they might be able, having arrived at Phenice, to winter ***there***, a harbor of Crete looking toward ***the*** southwest and toward ***the*** northwest. And when a south wind blew gently, having thought that they had obtained ***their*** purpose, having weighed ***anchor***, they were coasting along Crete closer ***to shore***. But not long after, a tempestuous wind, which is called Euroclydon, rushed down from it. And when the ship was caught and was not able to face the wind, having given way ***to it***, we were being driven along. And having run under a certain small island called Clauda, we were able with difficulty to get control of the lifeboat; which having hoisted up, they were using supports, undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might fall into the Syrtis, having lowered the gear, they were driven along in this way. And as we were being violently storm-tossed, on the next ***day*** they were making a jettison; and on the third ***day*** we cast out with our own hands the tackle of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars were appearing for many days, and no small tempest was pressing on ***us***, from then on all hope that we would be saved was being taken away.

27:21-26 And when there had been long abstinence from food, then Paul, having stood up in their midst, said, "You ought indeed, O men, having obeyed me, not to have set sail from Crete, and to have avoided this damage and loss. And now I urge you to take courage; for there will be no loss of life among you, except of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and look, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' Therefore take courage, men; for I believe God that it will be so, in the way in which it has been told to me. But we must fall upon a certain island."

27:27-38 And when the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about the middle of the night the sailors were sensing that some land was drawing near to them. And having taken soundings, they found approximately 120 feet (twenty fathoms); and having gone a little farther and having taken soundings again, they found approximately 90 feet (fifteen fathoms). And fearing lest perhaps we might fall into rocky places, having cast four anchors out of the stern, they were praying for day to come. And as the sailors were seeking to flee out of the ship, and had lowered the lifeboat into the sea under pretense as though they were about to cast out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the lifeboat and let it fall away. And until day was about to come, Paul was urging all to partake of food, saying, "Today ***is the*** fourteenth day ***that***, watching, you continue without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take food; for this is for your preservation; for not a hair will fall from the head of any of you." And having said these things and having taken bread, he gave thanks to God before all, and having broken ***it***, he began to eat. And all, having become encouraged, also took food themselves. And we were, all the souls in the ship, two hundred seventy-six. And having been satisfied with food, they were lightening the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

27:39-44 And when it became day, they were not recognizing the land; but they were noticing a certain bay having a shore, onto which they determined, if they could, to drive the ship. And having cut away the anchors, they were leaving ***them*** in the sea, at the same time having loosened the ropes of the rudders; and having hoisted the foresail to the blowing ***wind***, they were making for the shore. But having fallen into a place between two seas, they ran the vessel aground; and the bow, having stuck fast, remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' plan was that they should kill the prisoners, lest anyone, having swum away, should escape. But the centurion, wishing to bring Paul safely through, kept them from ***their*** purpose, and commanded those able to swim, having thrown ***themselves overboard*** first, to go out onto the land, and the rest, some on planks and some on things from the ship. And so it happened that all were brought safely to the land.

Chapter 27 Preview

Paul finally sets sail for Rome, but not as a free man. He travels as a prisoner, guarded by a Roman centurion. The trip starts slowly and then turns into a disaster. Late in the sailing season, against Paul's warning, the ship leaves a safe harbor and is caught in a violent storm. For two weeks the crew sees neither sun nor stars, and they give up all hope.

In the middle of the storm, the prisoner becomes the leader. An angel of God tells Paul that everyone on board will live. Paul encourages them, gives thanks for bread in front of them all, and in the end every one of the 276 people on board reaches land safely. This chapter is one of the most detailed sea voyages written anywhere in the ancient world, and it shows how God keeps His promises in the middle of the storm.

Chapter 27 Study

27:1-2 *And when it was determined that we should sail away to Italy, they were delivering both Paul and certain other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Augustan cohort. And having boarded an Adramyttian ship, being about to sail to the places along Asia, we set sail, Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.*

The small word "we" tells us Luke is back with Paul. The "we" sections of Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16) are where Luke tells what he saw firsthand. A centurion commanded about one hundred soldiers, and a cohort was a unit of several hundred.

Adramyttium was a port on the northwest coast of Asia Minor. Aristarchus had traveled with Paul before and had been seized in the riot at Ephesus (19:29; 20:4). Paul later calls him "my fellow prisoner" (Colossians 4:10). Paul was not alone. God gave him faithful friends for the journey.

27:3 *And on the next **day** we landed at Sidon; and Julius, having treated Paul kindly, allowed **him**, having gone to **his** friends, to receive care.*

Sidon was a port city on the coast north of Caesarea. Julius' kindness is the first sign of something we'll see through this whole chapter. Julius respects Paul. Paul's character won him favor even with the Roman officer guarding him. When we live faithfully, God can give us favor with people we would never expect (Proverbs 16:7).

27:4-5 *And from there, having set sail, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And having sailed across the sea along Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came down to Myra of Lycia.*

Sailing "under Cyprus" meant staying on the side of the island protected from the wind. In this part of the Mediterranean, the winds during the summer and fall mostly blow from the west and northwest, which made sailing west toward Rome slow and hard.

Cilicia was Paul's home region. Myra in Lycia was on the southern coast of what is now Turkey.

27:6 *And there the centurion, having found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, put us on board it.*

Alexandria in Egypt was the main source of grain for the city of Rome. Large grain ships regularly made the run from Egypt to Italy, and Myra was a common stop for them. We learn in 27:38 that this ship was carrying wheat.

27:7-8 *And sailing slowly for many days, and having arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us **to go on**, we sailed under Crete off Salmone; and coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a certain place called Fair Havens, near which was a city, Lasea.*

Cnidus was on the southwest tip of Asia Minor. Salmone was the cape at Crete's eastern end, and Fair Havens was on Crete's southern coast. Luke gives us the names of real places, in order, with real sailing conditions. This is history written by someone who was there.

27:9-10 *And when considerable time had passed, and the voyage was already dangerous because the Fast also had already gone by, Paul was admonishing **them**, saying to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage is about to be with damage and much loss, not only of the cargo and of the ship but also of our lives."*

The fast was the Day of Atonement, the one day each year when the Law commanded Israel to fast (Leviticus 16:29-31). It came in late September or early October. In the ancient world, sailing the open Mediterranean became risky after mid-September and mostly stopped from about November until spring.

Paul's warning was not a guess. He was an experienced traveler. By this time he had already been shipwrecked three times (2 Corinthians 11:25). He knew what he was talking about.

27:11-12 *But the centurion was persuaded by the pilot and the ship owner rather than by the things spoken by Paul. And because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to set sail from there also, if somehow they might be able, having arrived at Phenice, to winter **there**, a harbor of Crete looking toward **the** southwest and toward **the** northwest.*

The centurion's choice to trust the pilot and the captain seems reasonable from a human point of view. They were the professionals. Paul was a prisoner and a preacher.

Phenice (also called Phoenix) was a better harbor farther west on Crete. The majority voted, and the majority was wrong. Popular opinion and expert advice are not always right. When God gives wisdom through one of His people, it is foolish to ignore it.

27:13 *And when a south wind blew gently, having thought that they had obtained **their** purpose, having weighed **anchor**, they were coasting along Crete closer **to shore**.*

How often does this happen to us? Things look good, so we assume we made the right choice. But a soft breeze is not the same as God's approval. Conditions can change in a moment.

27:14 *But not long after, a tempestuous wind, which is called Euroclydon, rushed down from it.*

The name "Euroclydon" combines the Greek word for the east wind with the Greek word for a wave, a wind that stirs up the sea. Many Bibles call it "Euraquilo," a northeaster. It came off the mountains of Crete and slammed into the ship. The easy sail had turned into a fight for their lives.

27:15-16 *And when the ship was caught and was not able to face the wind, having given way **to it**, we were being driven along. And having run under a certain small island called Clauda, we were able with difficulty to get control of the lifeboat;*

The ship's boat was a small lifeboat being towed behind the ship. It had probably filled with water, and they had to haul it on board before it was lost or smashed against the ship.

Notice Luke says "we" were scarcely able. Luke may have been pulling on the ropes himself.

27:17 *which having hoisted up, they were using supports, undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might fall into the Syrtis, having lowered the gear, they were driven along in this way.*

To undergird the ship, they passed ropes or cables around the hull to hold the timbers together so the ship would not break apart.

The shallows of Syrtis were the dangerous sandbanks off the coast of North Africa that sailors dreaded. The sea anchor was gear dragged behind the ship to keep it from racing.

27:18-19 *And as we were being violently storm-tossed, on the next **day** they were making a jettison; and on the third **day** we cast out with our own hands the tackle of the ship.*

The ship's tackle was the spare gear and equipment. Everyone was working, including the passengers.

Sometimes the storms of life force us to let go of things we thought were important. What looked valuable in calm weather is thrown overboard when lives are at stake.

27:20 *And when neither sun nor stars were appearing for many days, and no small tempest was pressing on **us**, from then on all hope that we would be saved was being taken away.*

Sailors in those days steered by the sun and stars. Without them, they had no idea where they were.

This may be the lowest point in the book of Acts. Even Luke, the writer, says they had given up. Maybe you've been in a place like that, where you can't see any light and you have stopped hoping. Keep reading. God is about to speak into the darkness.

27:21 *And when there had been long abstinence from food, then Paul, having stood up in their midst, said, "You ought indeed, O men, having obeyed me, not to have set sail from Crete, and to have avoided this damage and loss.*

No one had eaten in a long time, either from seasickness, from fear, or because they couldn't cook.

Paul isn't saying "I told you so" to make himself look good. He is reminding them that he spoke the truth before, so they will believe what he says next.

27:22 *And now I urge you to take courage; for there will be no loss of life among you, except of the ship.*

Paul's promise that no life will be lost is a change from his earlier warning in 27:10, where he said lives would be lost. Between then and now, God gave Paul new information. God had not changed. He had answered prayer and revealed His plan, as the next verses show.

27:23-24 *For there stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and look, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.'*

Notice how Paul describes "the God whose I am and whom I serve." He makes sure these pagan sailors know which God he means. It isn't one of their gods. It is the one true God, the God Paul belongs to.

God's earlier promise (23:11) still stood. Paul could not die in this storm, because God had more for him to do. The words "God has granted you" suggest Paul had been praying for them. Because of one faithful man, the whole ship was spared. God sometimes shows mercy to many for the sake of His people (Genesis 18:26).

27:25-26 *Therefore take courage, men; for I believe God that it will be so, in the way in which it has been told to me. But we must fall upon a certain island."*

Paul's words "I believe God" show what faith is. Paul couldn't see the shore. The storm was still raging. But he believed God would do exactly what He said.

God did not promise an easy rescue. The ship would be lost, and they would come ashore in a wreck. But they would live. God doesn't always take us around the storm. Sometimes He takes us through it, and He keeps us all the way.

27:27-29 *And when the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about the middle of the night the sailors were sensing that some land was drawing near to them. And having taken soundings, they found approximately 120 feet (twenty fathoms); and having gone a little farther and having taken soundings again, they found approximately 90 feet (fifteen fathoms). And fearing lest perhaps we might fall into rocky places, having cast four anchors out of the stern, they were praying for day to come.*

In that day the name "Adriatic" covered the open sea between Greece, Italy, and Sicily, not just the narrow gulf we call the Adriatic today. The sailors may have sensed land from the sound of waves breaking on a shore.

Taking soundings meant dropping a weighted line to measure the depth. A fathom is about six feet, so the water was getting shallower fast. Luke says "they were praying for day to come." Some translations say they wished for daybreak. Either way, they were waiting desperately for light.

27:30-32 *And as the sailors were seeking to flee out of the ship, and had lowered the lifeboat into the sea under pretense as though they were about to cast out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the lifeboat and let it fall away.*

The sailors planned to save themselves and leave everyone else to die.

Some might ask, "If God already promised everyone would live, why did it matter if the sailors left?" It's simple: God's promise did not cancel human responsibility. God had promised the

outcome, and He used the skill of the sailors to bring it about. God's sovereignty and our obedience work together, not against each other (Philippians 2:12-13).

27:33-34 *And until day was about to come, Paul was urging all to partake of food, saying, "Today **is the** fourteenth day **that**, watching, you continue without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take food; for this is for your preservation; for not a hair will fall from the head of any of you."*

Paul's promise that "not a hair will fall from the head" of anyone on board echoes Jesus, who used similar words when He promised to care for His followers (Luke 21:18).

Paul is practical. Faith in God's promise doesn't mean ignoring common sense. They needed strength to get to shore. Trusting God and taking care of our bodies go together.

27:35-36 *And having said these things and having taken bread, he gave thanks to God before all, and having broken **it**, he began to eat. And all, having become encouraged, also took food themselves.*

Picture it: a prisoner on a sinking ship, in front of soldiers, sailors, and other prisoners, bowing his head to thank God for bread. It was a simple act, but it was a powerful testimony. Paul's calm faith gave courage to everyone around him. Our quiet trust in God, in front of others, can do the same.

This was an ordinary meal, not the Lord's Supper, but the words echo how Jesus took bread and gave thanks (Luke 22:19). Paul knew who provided every meal.

27:37-38 *And we were, all the souls in the ship, two hundred seventy-six. And having been satisfied with food, they were lightening the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.*

With 276 people on board, this was a large ship. Luke gives the exact count so we'll know that every one of them survived. Some ancient manuscripts have a different number, but 276 is the reading in the SLB and most translations.

Throwing out the wheat let the ship sit as high in the water as possible, so it could ride closer to the shore before it grounded.

27:39-40 *And when it became day, they were not recognizing the land; but they were noticing a certain bay having a shore, onto which they determined, if they could, to drive the ship. And having cut away the anchors, they were leaving **them** in the sea, at the same time having loosened the ropes of the rudders; and having hoisted the foresail to the blowing **wind**, they were making for the shore.*

The rudders were large steering oars on each side of the stern. The foresail was a small sail at the front.

27:41 *But having fallen into a place between two seas, they ran the vessel aground; and the bow, having stuck fast, remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.*

The ship fell "into a place between two seas," likely a sandbar or reef where two currents met. The bow is the front of the ship, and the stern is the back.

Just as Paul said, the ship was lost (27:22). Everything God told him came true, even the part that was hard to hear.

27:42-43 *And the soldiers' plan was that they should kill the prisoners, lest anyone, having swum away, should escape. But the centurion, wishing to bring Paul safely through, kept them from* ***their*** *purpose, and commanded those able to swim, having thrown* ***themselves overboard*** *first, to go out onto the land,*

Under Roman law, a soldier who let a prisoner escape could be punished with the prisoner's own penalty (12:19; 16:27).

Paul had won the centurion's respect. For the second time in this chapter, many lives were spared because of one man.

27:44 *and the rest, some on planks and some on things from the ship. And so it happened that all were brought safely to the land.*

Every single one made it. Not one of the 276 was lost, just as God promised. The ship was gone and the cargo was gone. But the promise of God held. Whatever storm you are in today, the God who kept Paul is the same God who keeps you. He may not save the ship, but He will keep every promise He has made.

Chapter 27 Summary

Paul sailed for Rome as a prisoner, under the care of a centurion named Julius, with Luke and Aristarchus at his side. The voyage was slow from the start. At Fair Havens on Crete, Paul warned that going on would bring great loss, but the centurion listened to the pilot and captain instead. A violent northeaster caught the ship and drove it helplessly for two weeks, until all hope was gone.

An angel of God told Paul that he would stand before Caesar and that everyone on board would live. Paul encouraged them, stopped the sailors from abandoning ship, and gave thanks for bread before them all. The ship ran aground and broke apart, but all 276 people reached land safely, just as God had promised.

Chapter 27 Study Questions

1. What is the worst storm or rough trip you have ever been through?
2. How did Julius the centurion treat Paul, and why do you think he did? (27:3, 43)

3. What warning did Paul give at Fair Havens, and why did the centurion ignore it? (27:9-12)

4. What did the sailors do to try to save the ship? (27:15-19)

5. What message did the angel give Paul, and what did Paul say about his faith? (27:23-25)

6. Why did Paul insist that the sailors stay on the ship? (27:30-32)

7. What did Paul do before the people on board ate, and what effect did it have? (27:35-36)

8. How was God's promise fulfilled in the end? (27:44)

9. How can you show calm faith in God in front of others during a hard time?

10. Paul's promise from God did not mean the ship would be saved. How does that shape what you expect from God in your own storms?

Chapter 28: Rome at Last

Scripture: Malta; Arrival in Rome; Paul Preaches in Rome

28:1-10 And having been saved, then they recognized that the island is called Malta. And the natives were showing us no ordinary kindness; for having kindled a fire, they received all of us because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold. But when Paul had gathered a quantity of sticks and laid ***them*** on the fire, a viper, having come out from the heat, fastened on his hand. And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they were saying to one another, "Surely this man is a murderer, whom, though he has been saved from the sea, Justice has not permitted to live." He then, having shaken off the creature into the fire, suffered no harm. But they were expecting him to be about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had been expecting ***it*** for a long while and saw nothing amiss happening to him, changing their minds, they were saying that he was a god. Now in the ***parts*** around that place were lands belonging to the leading ***man*** of the island, named Publius, who, having received us, entertained ***us*** hospitably three days. And it came about ***that*** the father of Publius was lying down, oppressed with fevers and dysentery, to whom Paul, having gone in and having prayed, having laid his hands on him, healed him. So when this had happened, the rest also who had infirmities in the island were coming and were being healed; who also honored us with many honors, and when we were setting sail, they put on ***board*** the things for the need.

28:11-16 And after three months we set sail in an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, with a figurehead, ***the*** Dioscuri. And having put in at Syracuse, we stayed three days, from where, having gone around, we arrived at Rhegium. And after one day, when a south wind came up, on the second day we came to Puteoli, where, having found brothers, we were urged to stay with them seven days. And so we came to Rome. And from there the brothers, having heard the things concerning us, came out to meet us as far as Forum of Appius and Three Taverns; and when Paul saw them, having given thanks to God, he took courage. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the camp commander; but Paul was permitted to stay by himself with the soldier who was guarding him.

28:17-22 And it came about after three days ***that*** Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews. And when they had come together, he was saying to them, "Men, brothers, I, though I had done nothing against the people or the ancestral customs, was delivered a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, having examined me, were wanting to release ***me***, because no ground for death existed in me. But when the Jews were objecting, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not as though I had anything of which to accuse my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have called for you, to see ***you*** and to speak with ***you***; for because of the hope of Israel I have this chain around ***me***." And they said to him, "We neither received letters concerning you from Judea, nor did any of the brothers, having arrived, report or speak anything evil concerning you. But we consider it fitting to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, indeed, it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against."

28:23-31 And having appointed him a day, many more came to him at the lodging, to whom he was expounding, solemnly testifying to the kingdom of God, and persuading them ***of*** the things

concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and the prophets, from morning until evening. And some were persuaded by the things being spoken, but some were disbelieving. And being in disagreement with one another, they were departing after Paul had spoken one declaration: "Rightly the Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say, "In hearing you will hear and you will certainly not understand, and seeing you will see and you will certainly not perceive; for the heart of this people has been made dull, and with the ears they heard with difficulty, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with the eyes, and hear with the ears, and understand with the heart, and turn, and I should heal them."' Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they also will hear." And when he had said these things, the Jews went away, having much discussion among themselves. And Paul stayed two whole years in his own rented house, and was welcoming all who were coming in to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered.

Chapter 28 Preview

The shipwrecked travelers wash up on the island of Malta. The islanders welcome them, and God works through Paul there: a deadly snake can't harm him, and he heals the father of the island's leading man and many others. After three months they sail again and finally reach Rome, where believers come out to meet Paul and give him courage.

In Rome, Paul is kept under guard in a house of his own. He calls together the Jewish leaders of the city and explains the Gospel to them from the Law and the Prophets. Some believe and some don't. Paul then announces that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles. The book ends with Paul spending two years preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus "with all boldness, unhindered."

Chapter 28 Study

28:1 *And having been saved, then they recognized that the island is called Malta.*

Malta is a small island south of Sicily, about sixty miles off its coast. It sat right along the route from the eastern Mediterranean to Rome.

Most scholars accept that this was the island we call Malta today. A bay on its northeast coast, now called St. Paul's Bay, has long been pointed to as the place of the shipwreck.

28:2 *And the natives were showing us no ordinary kindness; for having kindled a fire, they received all of us because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold.*

The SLB calls the people of the island "natives." The Greek word Luke uses was used for anyone who did not speak Greek. It doesn't mean they were wild or uncivilized. In fact, Luke says they showed "no ordinary kindness" to all 276 of the shipwrecked strangers.

Kindness is not limited to believers. God has placed a sense of right and compassion in every person (Romans 2:14-15). These islanders didn't know the God of Israel yet, but they showed mercy to strangers, and God was about to show mercy to them.

28:3 *But when Paul had gathered a quantity of sticks and laid **them** on the fire, a viper, having come out from the heat, fastened on his hand.*

Paul, the man whose word had saved everyone on the ship, is out gathering firewood. He didn't stand around expecting to be served. Real leaders serve (Mark 10:43-45).

28:4 *And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they were saying to one another, "Surely this man is a murderer, whom, though he has been saved from the sea, Justice has not permitted to live."*

In the islanders' beliefs, Justice was a goddess who punished wrongdoers. They assumed that bad things happen only to bad people. Many people still think this way. Jesus corrected the same idea in John 9:1-3 and Luke 13:1-5. Suffering is not always a sign that someone has done wrong.

28:5 *He then, having shaken off the creature into the fire, suffered no harm.*

This fulfills what Jesus said His followers would be protected from as they carried the Gospel (Luke 10:19; compare Mark 16:18, in a passage the earliest manuscripts do not have). This was God's protection on His servant, not an invitation for anyone to go looking for snakes to prove their faith. Paul didn't pick the snake up on purpose. It attacked him while he was serving, and God kept him.

Some point out that Malta has no venomous snakes today. But the islanders knew the animals of their own island, and they fully expected Paul to die. Wildlife on an island can change over two thousand years. Luke tells us what happened, and the islanders' reaction tells us they knew this snake was deadly.

28:6 *But they were expecting him to be about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had been expecting **it** for a long while and saw nothing amiss happening to him, changing their minds, they were saying that he was a god.*

Back in Lystra, the crowd did the opposite. First they called Paul a god, then they stoned him (14:11-19). People's opinions swing wildly. One minute you're a murderer, the next you're a god. Paul was neither. He was a servant of the living God. We shouldn't be shaken by what people say about us, good or bad.

28:7 *Now in the **parts** around that place were lands belonging to the leading **man** of the island, named Publius, who, having received us, entertained **us** hospitably three days.*

"Leading man" was a real title used on Malta for the island's chief official under Rome. Luke uses the right local title, which is another sign of how careful a historian he was.

28:8 *And it came about **that** the father of Publius was lying down, oppressed with fevers and dysentery, to whom Paul, having gone in and having prayed, having laid his hands on him, healed him.*

Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14), and he describes the illness of Publius' father, "oppressed with fevers and dysentery," in plain detail.

Notice the order. Paul prayed first. He knew the power to heal came from God, not from himself. Then he laid his hands on the man. The kindness Publius showed was returned many times over.

28:9 *So when this had happened, the rest also who had infirmities in the island were coming and were being healed;*

The whole island hears that God's power is at work through this prisoner.

Luke doesn't tell us whether a church was started on Malta. But it's hard to imagine Paul healing people for three months without telling them about the One who healed them. Wherever Paul went, he pointed people to Jesus.

28:10 *who also honored us with many honors, and when we were setting sail, they put on **board** the things for the need.*

These people who had lost everything in the shipwreck now leave fully supplied.

God took care of Paul and everyone with him, just as He promised. Philippians 4:19, which Paul probably wrote during this same imprisonment, says God will supply all our needs. Paul had seen it happen on Malta.

28:11 *And after three months we set sail in an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, with a figurehead, **the** Dioscuri.*

Three months on Malta means they left in early spring, when the sailing season opened again.

"The Dioscuri" were the twin brothers Castor and Pollux, two gods in Greek and Roman mythology who were believed to protect sailors. Luke mentions it simply to identify the ship. Paul and his companions knew their safety did not depend on carvings on the front of a boat. It depended on the one true God, who had already brought them through the storm.

28:12-13 *And having put in at Syracuse, we stayed three days, from where, having gone around, we arrived at Rhegium. And after one day, when a south wind came up, on the second day we came to Puteoli,*

Syracuse was the chief city of Sicily, and Rhegium was on the toe of Italy.

A south wind was the right wind for going north. Puteoli was a major port on the Bay of Naples where many grain ships unloaded. From here Paul would go the rest of the way to Rome on foot, about 140 miles.

28:14 *where, having found brothers, we were urged to stay with them seven days. And so we came to Rome.*

The "brothers" they found were fellow believers. Julius the centurion allows the stay. Once again his respect for Paul shows.

After years of waiting, false charges, prison, and shipwreck, Paul's long journey is almost done. He had wanted to visit Rome for years (19:21; Romans 1:10-13). He didn't arrive the way he planned, but he arrived exactly as God promised.

28:15 *And from there the brothers, having heard the things concerning us, came out to meet us as far as Forum of Appius and Three Taverns; and when Paul saw them, having given thanks to God, he took courage.*

The Forum of Appius was about forty miles from Rome, and Three Taverns about thirty miles away.

Paul had written his letter to the Romans about three years earlier. Now these believers walk for days just to greet him and walk with him into the city.

Even Paul needed encouragement. He was a prisoner arriving in the capital of the empire to face trial before Caesar. The love of other believers lifted his heart. Never underestimate what it means to show up for a brother or sister in Christ.

28:16 *And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the camp commander; but Paul was permitted to stay by himself with the soldier who was guarding him.*

Paul was likely chained to his guard (28:20). Soldiers probably took turns guarding him, which meant a steady stream of Roman soldiers spent hours with the apostle Paul.

Paul later wrote that his imprisonment had become known throughout the whole praetorian guard, and that it had actually helped the Gospel spread (Philippians 1:12-14). God turned Paul's chains into a pulpit.

28:17 *And it came about after three days* ***that*** *Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews. And when they had come together, he was saying to them, "Men, brothers, I, though I had done nothing against the people or the ancestral customs, was delivered a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,*

Even in Rome, Paul's pattern is the same: he goes to the Jews first (13:46; Romans 1:16).

He calls them "brothers." Paul wants them to know he is not an enemy of Israel.

28:18-19 *who, having examined me, were wanting to release **me**, because no ground for death existed in me. But when the Jews were objecting, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not as though I had anything of which to accuse my nation.*

Paul adds something important: he had no accusation against his own nation. Paul wasn't in Rome to bring charges against the Jewish leaders. He had not come to get even. He still loved his people (Romans 9:1-3).

28:20 *For this reason, therefore, I have called for you, to see **you** and to speak with **you**; for because of the hope of Israel I have this chain around **me**."*

"The hope of Israel" is the same hope he spoke of before Agrippa (26:6-7): the promised Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, and the kingdom God promised to the fathers. Paul is a prisoner because he believes God kept His promise to Israel by sending Jesus.

28:21 *And they said to him, "We neither received letters concerning you from Judea, nor did any of the brothers, having arrived, report or speak anything evil concerning you.*

It may seem surprising that no word had come from Judea, but it makes sense. Paul's ship had sailed late in the season and spent the winter on Malta. Any messengers from Jerusalem would probably not have arrived before him. Or the leaders in Jerusalem may have decided their case was too weak to press in Rome.

28:22 *But we consider it fitting to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, indeed, it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against."*

Christians in Rome were already well known, and not in a good way. About ten years before this, the emperor Claudius had ordered Jews out of Rome (18:2), and the Roman historian Suetonius connects that order with disturbances over someone he called "Chrestus," which many take as a garbled reference to Christ. The Christian faith was already being talked about, and argued about, in the capital.

28:23 *And having appointed him a day, many more came to him at the lodging, to whom he was expounding, solemnly testifying to the kingdom of God, and persuading them **of** the things concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and the prophets, from morning until evening.*

This was an all-day Bible study. Paul did what Jesus did on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27), showing from the Old Testament that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The Old Testament is not a different message from the New. From Genesis on, it points to Jesus.

28:24 *And some were persuaded by the things being spoken, but some were disbelieving.*

This has been the response everywhere the Gospel has gone, from Jerusalem to Rome. The same message, the same evidence, and two very different results.

The Gospel calls every person to decide. No one can make that decision for someone else. Our job is to share the truth clearly and lovingly. The results belong to God.

28:25 *And being in disagreement with one another, they were departing after Paul had spoken one declaration: "Rightly the Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,*

Paul says the Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah. Paul believed Scripture was the very word of God, given through human writers (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

28:26-27 *saying, 'Go to this people and say, "In hearing you will hear and you will certainly not understand, and seeing you will see and you will certainly not perceive; for the heart of this people has been made dull, and with the ears they heard with difficulty, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with the eyes, and hear with the ears, and understand with the heart, and turn, and I should heal them."'*

Paul quotes Isaiah 6:9-10.

Jesus quoted the same passage to explain why many did not receive His teaching (Matthew 13:14-15; John 12:39-41). The problem was never that God's message was unclear. The problem was hearts that would not receive it. The saddest part is the last line of the quote: if they turned, God would heal them. The door was open, and they refused to walk through it.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 6:9-10 (quoted)

28:28 *Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they also will hear."*

This is the third time in Acts Paul says the Gospel is going to the Gentiles (13:46; 18:6). But it doesn't mean God has given up on Israel. In this very chapter Paul still called the Jewish leaders his brothers and wore his chain for "the hope of Israel." In Romans 11 Paul explains that Israel's hardening is partial and temporary, that it opened the door for the Gentiles, and that a day is coming when "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25-26). I believe that day is still ahead, when Christ returns.

28:29 *And when he had said these things, the Jews went away, having much discussion among themselves.*

The SLB includes this verse, as the King James Version does. Most modern translations leave it out of the text or put it in a footnote, because the earliest manuscripts do not have it. It adds nothing new. We already know from 28:25 that they disagreed and began to leave.

28:30 *And Paul stayed two whole years in his own rented house, and was welcoming all who were coming in to him,*

Paul was still a prisoner, but he had a house, and his door was open.

During these years many believe Paul wrote what we call the Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In those letters he talks about his chains and sends greetings from people who were with him, including Luke, Aristarchus, Mark, and Timothy.

28:31 *proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered.*

Notice the word "unhindered." Paul is chained, but the Word of God is not chained (2 Timothy 2:9).

And that is where Luke ends the book. He doesn't tell us how Paul's trial before Caesar turned out. Many believe Paul was released after these two years, traveled and preached again, and wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Then he was arrested a second time and wrote 2 Timothy, knowing his death was near (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Early Christian tradition says he was beheaded in Rome under Nero, sometime around A.D. 64 to 67. Scripture doesn't tell us that part of the story.

Why would Luke stop here? I believe it's because Acts was never really the story of Paul. It is the story of the risen Jesus building His church by His Spirit. That story didn't end in Rome. In 1:8 Jesus said His witnesses would go to "the uttermost part of the earth." The Gospel has now reached the capital of the world, and it is still going. The last word of the book in the original Greek means "unhindered." Nothing has stopped it since.

Chapter 28 Summary

After the shipwreck, everyone came ashore on Malta, where the islanders welcomed them with great kindness. A viper bit Paul, but he shook it into the fire and was unharmed. Paul healed the father of Publius, the island's leading man, and many other sick people came and were cured. After three months they sailed on to Italy, and believers came out from Rome to meet Paul, giving him new courage.

In Rome, Paul lived under guard in his own rented house. He met with the Jewish leaders and spent a whole day showing them from Moses and the Prophets that Jesus is the Messiah. Some believed and some did not. Paul quoted Isaiah's warning about hardened hearts and said God's salvation had been sent to the Gentiles. For two years he welcomed everyone who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ openly and unhindered.

Chapter 28 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been shown unexpected kindness by a stranger? What happened?

2. How did the people of Malta treat the shipwrecked travelers? (28:2)

3. What did the islanders think when the viper bit Paul, and how did their opinion change? (28:4-6)

4. What did Paul do before he laid his hands on Publius' father? (28:8)

5. How did the believers from Rome encourage Paul, and how did he respond? (28:15)

6. Why did Paul say he was wearing his chain? (28:20)

7. How did Paul try to persuade the Jewish leaders about Jesus, and how did they respond? (28:23-24)

8. Does Paul's statement in 28:28 mean God has given up on Israel? How does Romans 11 help answer that?

9. Paul was chained, but the Gospel was "unhindered." How has God used hard circumstances in your life to spread His message?

10. Acts doesn't really end. What part will you play in the next chapter of the story?

Conclusion

The book of Acts doesn't really end. Luke leaves Paul in a rented house in Rome, under guard, "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered" (28:31). No farewell scene. No final chapter on what happened to Paul. I believe Luke ended it that way on purpose. The story of the church is still being written, and you and I are part of it.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. When we do that with Acts, we see a church that was far from perfect. They argued, they made mistakes, and some of them lied to God. But we also see a God who kept His promise. The Holy Spirit came just as Jesus said He would, and a handful of ordinary men and women were accused of having "upset the inhabited earth" (17:6).

Acts also shows us what to follow. The first believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (2:42). They prayed for boldness and then spoke the word of God (4:31). They learned that God shows no partiality (10:34-35), and that Jew and Gentile alike are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus (15:11). That is still the pattern for the church today.

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and encourage you to be a witness for Jesus right where you are. Your Jerusalem might be your home, your job, or your neighborhood. The same Spirit who gave Peter and Paul boldness lives in every believer today.

The message Peter preached at Pentecost, and again before the Council, is the same message for us now. Jesus died for our sins, God raised Him from the dead, and "there is not salvation in any other; for neither is there another name under heaven which has been given among men by which we must be saved" (4:12). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can devote yourself to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:41-42).

Old and New Testament Links in Acts

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
1:20	Psalm 69:25	quoted
1:20	Psalm 109:8	quoted
2:16-18	Joel 2:28-29	quoted
2:19-21	Joel 2:30-32	quoted
2:25-28	Psalm 16:8-11	quoted
2:29-31	Psalm 16:10	quoted
2:29-31	Psalm 132:11	quoted
2:29-31	1 Kings 2:10	alluded to
2:29-31	2 Samuel 7:12-13	alluded to
2:32-33	Joel 2:28	alluded to
2:34-35	Psalm 110:1	quoted
2:40	Deuteronomy 32:5	alluded to
3:7-8	Isaiah 35:6	alluded to
3:13	Exodus 3:6	alluded to
3:22-23	Deuteronomy 18:15	quoted
3:22-23	Deuteronomy 18:19	quoted
3:22-23	Leviticus 23:29	alluded to
3:25	Genesis 22:18	quoted
3:25	Genesis 12:3	quoted
4:11	Psalm 118:22	quoted
4:23-24	Exodus 20:11	alluded to
4:25-26	Psalm 2:1-2	quoted
4:27-28	Psalm 2:2	fulfilled
7:2-4	Genesis 12:1	quoted
7:2-4	Genesis 11:31-32	alluded to
7:2-4	Genesis 15:7	alluded to
7:5-8	Genesis 15:13	quoted
7:5-8	Genesis 15:14	quoted
7:5-8	Genesis 17:8	alluded to
7:5-8	Genesis 12:7	alluded to
7:5-8	Genesis 21:4	alluded to
7:5-8	Genesis 17:10	alluded to
7:9-10	Genesis 39:2	alluded to
7:9-10	Genesis 37:28	alluded to
7:9-10	Genesis 45:8	alluded to
7:9-10	Genesis 41:41	alluded to
7:11-16	Joshua 24:32	alluded to
7:11-16	Genesis 33:19	alluded to
7:11-16	Genesis 50:13	alluded to
7:11-16	Genesis 42:1-2	alluded to

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
7:11-16	Genesis 46:6	alluded to
7:11-16	Genesis 46:27	alluded to
7:17-19	Exodus 1:8	quoted
7:17-19	Exodus 1:10	alluded to
7:17-19	Exodus 1:22	alluded to
7:17-19	Exodus 1:7	alluded to
7:20-22	Exodus 2:2	alluded to
7:20-22	Exodus 2:5	alluded to
7:20-22	Exodus 2:10	alluded to
7:23-25	Exodus 2:11-12	alluded to
7:26-29	Exodus 2:14	quoted
7:26-29	Exodus 2:15	alluded to
7:26-29	Exodus 18:3-4	alluded to
7:26-29	Exodus 2:13	alluded to
7:30-34	Exodus 3:2	quoted
7:30-34	Exodus 3:5	quoted
7:30-34	Exodus 3:6	quoted
7:30-34	Exodus 3:7-10	quoted
7:30-34	Exodus 3:3-4	alluded to
7:30-34	Exodus 2:24	alluded to
7:35-36	Exodus 2:14	quoted
7:35-36	Exodus 7:3	alluded to
7:35-36	Numbers 14:33	alluded to
7:37-38	Deuteronomy 18:15	quoted
7:39-41	Exodus 32:1	quoted
7:39-41	Exodus 32:23	quoted
7:39-41	Exodus 32:4	alluded to
7:39-41	Numbers 14:4	alluded to
7:39-41	Exodus 32:6	alluded to
7:39-41	Psalm 106:19	alluded to
7:42-43	Amos 5:25-27	quoted
7:44-47	Psalm 132:5	alluded to
7:44-47	Exodus 25:40	alluded to
7:44-47	Exodus 26:30	alluded to
7:44-47	2 Samuel 7:2	alluded to
7:44-47	Exodus 25:9	alluded to
7:44-47	1 Kings 6:14	alluded to
7:48-50	Isaiah 66:1-2	quoted
7:51-53	Deuteronomy 10:16	alluded to
7:51-53	Exodus 33:5	alluded to
7:54-56	Daniel 7:13	alluded to
7:54-56	Psalm 110:1	alluded to
8:32-35	Isaiah 53:7-8	quoted
10:14-16	Ezekiel 4:14	alluded to
10:36-38	Isaiah 61:1	alluded to
13:16-20	Deuteronomy 7:1	alluded to
13:16-20	Judges 2:16	alluded to
13:16-20	Joshua 14:1	alluded to

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
13:16-20	Deuteronomy 4:37	alluded to
13:16-20	Exodus 6:6	alluded to
13:21-23	1 Samuel 13:14	quoted
13:21-23	Psalm 89:20	quoted
13:21-23	1 Samuel 10:21	alluded to
13:21-23	2 Samuel 7:12	alluded to
13:21-23	1 Samuel 8:10	alluded to
13:32-33	Psalm 2:7	quoted
13:34-35	Psalm 16:10	quoted
13:34-35	Isaiah 55:3	quoted
13:36-37	1 Kings 2:10	alluded to
13:36-37	Psalm 16:10	alluded to
13:40-41	Habakkuk 1:5	quoted
13:47	Isaiah 49:6	quoted
14:14-15	Exodus 20:11	alluded to
14:14-15	Psalm 146:6	alluded to
15:15-17	Amos 9:11-12	quoted
15:15-17	Jeremiah 12:15	alluded to
17:26-27	Deuteronomy 32:8	alluded to
17:30-31	Psalm 96:13	alluded to
20:25-27	Ezekiel 33:8	alluded to
23:4-5	Exodus 22:28	quoted
24:15	Daniel 12:2	alluded to
26:16	Ezekiel 2:1	alluded to
26:17-18	Isaiah 42:7	alluded to
26:22-23	Isaiah 42:6	alluded to
28:26-27	Isaiah 6:9-10	quoted

Bibliography

The following sources were consulted for this study. Ancient historians such as Josephus and Suetonius are named in the text where their work is used. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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