

## *Acts Study Guide*

### **Lesson 1: Waiting for the Holy Spirit – Acts 1**

#### **Objectives of this study:**

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1. Understand the role of the apostles in the beginning days of the kingdom and explain the gradual broadening of the sphere of influence to others.
2. Examine and understand the role of the Holy Spirit: the baptism with the Spirit, the miracles worked through the Spirit's power and the transmission of spiritual gifts.
3. Be aware of the gradual inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom and the problems this created.
4. Appreciate the high degree of fellowship and camaraderie among early Christians.

#### **Overview of Acts 1:**

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1. Luke begins his "Volume Two" of the life and work of Christ by summarizing the period between His resurrection and ascension. Jesus displayed Himself in unmistakable form to the apostles, men who knew Him intimately and could be certain of His identity.
2. Jesus accompanies the apostles to the Mount of Olives. His comments are filled with anticipation, urging them to wait in Jerusalem for developments that were imminent. Jesus repeats His commission to send them out as witnesses, and He then ascends into heaven.
3. As the apostles continue their gaze in amazement, uncertainty and who knows what other emotions sweeping over their souls, two angels gently bring them back to reality with the promise of Jesus' eventual return. The apostles return to the other disciples and engage in prayer and reflection.
4. In the interim, Peter takes the lead in determining a replacement for Judas, who has committed suicide.

#### **1. Acts 1:1-3 – A Forty-Day Tutorial**

A. Jesus "*presented Himself alive*" (1:3) after His crucifixion, even as He promised would happen before the fact.

B. This presentation was not merely fleeting or fragmentary but varied manifestations, "*many infallible proofs,*" that were designed to instill confidence that Jesus truly had been raised.

C. Jesus did in this period what He had done previously: He taught the disciples "*things pertaining to the kingdom of God*" which was shortly to come into existence.

## 2. Acts 1:4-8 – “Not Many Days From Now”

A. Jesus says several things before His ascension that suggests something imminent is to happen. Can you list them?

1. 1:4 \_\_\_\_\_.

2. 1:4 \_\_\_\_\_.

3. 1:5 \_\_\_\_\_.

B. Jesus indicates that something superior to John’s baptism was to unfold, and crucial to these events was the Holy Spirit. How is the coming influence of the Spirit upon them described?

1. 1:5 \_\_\_\_\_.

2. 1:8 \_\_\_\_\_.

C. While the apostles had wanted power to rule with Jesus at His right hand, Jesus tells them they will be empowered for something other than warfare. They will be His *witnesses*, not His *warriors* (in a carnal sense).

## 3. Acts 1:9-14 – The “Upper Room”

A. An exclamation point is put upon the words of Jesus as He rises into the heavens in full view of His “witnesses.” Whatever the apostles were expecting Jesus to do now that He was raised, whatever misconceptions of the kingdom may have been lingering, Jesus dispels by departing the earth for heaven.

B. To further instruct and convict them, two angels appear. In gentle rebuke, they tell the apostles that it is fruitless to stare into the sky in anticipation of some grand further development. He will return in like manner as He departed – *after* going to prepare a place for them (cf. Jn 14:2-3).

C. As Jesus commanded, the apostles return to Jerusalem and to the “entourage” that had lately been with Jesus – the women, Mary and Jesus’ brothers. The events that will transpire and their relation to the “upper room” have been greatly distorted and misapplied by those who wish to expand the Holy Spirit’s influence. As we study pay close attention to what is said about the “upper room.”

## 4. Acts 1:15-26 – Judas Is Replaced

A. Peter takes the lead in initiating proceedings to replace Judas. Whether this is a result of instructions given by the Lord (cf. 1:3), or whether Peter acted by some other direction, it does appear that the selection is legitimate and endorsed by God.

B. Note that there is a definite conception of the “office” of apostleship:

1. “*He was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry*” – 1:17.
2. “*Let another take his office*” (1:20)(quoting Ps 109:8).
3. Specific criteria are proposed that certainly rule out anyone presently living as an apostle – 1:21-22. (Only two out of 120 were deemed qualified.)
4. The replacement was “*to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell*” (1:25).

C. The selection of Matthias makes ready the coming of the Holy Spirit.

**Questions:**

1. What do you make of the apostles’ question in Ac 1:6?
2. Can you tie Acts 1:8 to the format of the book of Acts?
3. What passage(s) can you cite indicating that the coming of the Holy Spirit was “*the Promise of the Father*”?
4. What instruction or command was given to the apostles that would enable them to manipulate or influence the coming of the Holy Spirit?
5. Is there any evidence that would reasonably lead one to the conclusion that the promise of the baptism with the Holy Spirit applied to anyone other than the apostles?
6. When did two angels in shining garments help other of Jesus’ disciples understand the significance of what they saw?
7. From where did Jesus ascend to heaven?
8. What did the apostles do with the others in the “upper room”? What do you think about the intensity of these activities given the events that have transpired?
9. What bearing would Acts 6:2 have on the legitimacy of Matthias’ appointment?
10. What observations can you make about inspiration of the Scriptures from Acts 1:16?

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 2: The Coming of the Holy Spirit – Acts 2**

#### **1. The Phenomenon of Baptism with the Spirit – 2:1-13**

A. Who are “they” (2:1)? Advocates of modern charismatic “tongue-speaking” (gibberish) reach all the way back to the 120 disciples in 1:15. But is this warranted?

1. Note that 1:15-26 is merely parenthetical to Luke’s main flow of thought: his emphasis is *entirely* on the apostles and the events transpiring relative to them (as they had been chosen, taught, commissioned and now promised that the coming of the Spirit is imminent).
2. Review the pronouns and references in Acts 1 which hearken back to “the apostles” in 1:2: “to whom” (1:3), “witnesses” (1:8), “men of Galilee” (1:11), “the eleven apostles” 1:26 (which is the immediate antecedent of “they” in 2:1.)
3. As we shall see, this same emphasis upon the apostles continues throughout chapter 2 and well into the earlier chapters of Acts as Luke unfolds his narrative of the fledgling kingdom.

B. Note the sensory evidence of what transpires:

1. Audible #1: There was no wind but the *sound* as of a rushing, mighty wind, a roar or a whoosh but no apparent earthly cause for it. But the noise had a location: “*it filled the whole house where they were sitting*” (2:2).
2. Visual #1: The divided tongues were “as of fire,” resembling those of flames. But this, too, was very specific in its manifestation: “*one sat upon each of them.*” Again, what is the antecedent noun of “them”?
3. Audible #2: They “*began to speak with other tongues ...*” (2:4).
4. Visual #2: The crowd that had gathered marveled: “*Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?*” (2:7). What made this event so arresting was that a group of men from a particular district who spoke with a specific dialect were now speaking a multitude of dialects from across the Empire.

C. Thus the miracle was not only the manifestation of the humanly impossible; it also signified the universal nature of what was beginning that day: a singular kingdom for all cultures and peoples for all time.

#### **2. Peter’s Explanation of the Present Events – Acts 2:14-40**

A. The prophecy of Joel fulfilled – 2:16-21. Many hundreds of years earlier Joel had

foreseen the time when God would inaugurate a final dispensation with mankind (the “*last days*” – 2:17). In this era God would distribute the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit globally (“*all flesh*” – 2:17), not merely upon the fleshly descendants of Abraham. The end result: salvation will be made available to all who seek God and desire fellowship with Him (2:21).

B. The testimony of Christ – 2:22-24. Peter now boldly gives the testimony he was so afraid to give just two months earlier. List the major points covered by Peter:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

C. Messianic prophecy fulfilled – 2:25-35. David is cited twice (Ps 16:8-11; Ps 110:1) to indicate that the Messiah would not remain dead but would be resurrected.

1. Jesus would rise to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Jesus was exalted to \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Jesus received the promise \_\_\_\_\_.
4. As a result Jesus has \_\_\_\_\_.

### 3. The Conviction of the Audience – Acts 2:36-40

A. The dynamics of this occasion are most interesting. Though Jews from all parts of the Empire are present, there is a sufficient core of scribes, Pharisees and priests (and perhaps regular inhabitants of Jerusalem who believed in Jesus but knuckled under to their leaders) for Peter to refer to Jesus as the one “*whom you crucified*” (2:36). He boldly declares Jesus to be “*both Lord and Christ.*”

B. All of the elements for true conviction are now in place. It took more than just miracle-working to bring the Jews around. This Jesus had done abundantly. It is not until the full impact of His *death* and *resurrection* dawns upon them that they are brought to ask: “*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” They now realize their guilt and condemnation and beseech the apostles for a solution, if one is available.

C. Peter is succinct and direct in reply. Yes, there *is* a solution; they are not unalterably subject to the wrath of God for this breach of His trust.

1. They must repent of their sins.
2. They must, “*every one of you,*” be baptized for the remission of those sins. (Did John not wonderfully prepare the people for Peter’s message? cf. Lk 3:3)
3. In so doing they would receive “*the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” Much debate still continues as to the meaning of this phrase. But *contextually*, what would be the sense of this phrase to these people? Previously, Peter had mentioned the salvation that would come in connection with the pouring out of the Spirit (2:21). It is this very need that the guilty audience has expressed. God has promised this forgiveness to “*whoever*” (2:21) calls on the name of the Lord, even “*to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call*” (2:39).

#### **4. The Church Takes Root – Acts 2:41-47**

- A. There is an instant bonding and camaraderie between these newly committed believers in Jesus. One can only imagine the life-change that takes place as these Jews abandon social, political, family and generational ties for an uncertain future.
- B. Note the continued focus upon *the apostles* (not the previously mentioned 120) – Ac 2:42-43.

#### **Questions:**

1. What was the general content of what was being spoken in tongues?
2. Is there anything in the text that suggests the apostles were still in the upper room?
3. What two classes of people were in the audience (cf. 2:5, 13)?
4. Who did Peter stand up with?
5. What kind of language is Acts 2:19-20? What does it generally signify?
6. What does Peter call himself and those with him (Acts 2:32)?
7. What was the nature of Peter’s further exhortations on Pentecost?
8. What relationship did these new converts to Jesus sustain to the apostles?
9. What relationship did they sustain to each other?
10. Describe the activities of their new spiritual lives. How might we fall short of this pattern in our own era?

#### 1. Healing the Lame Man – Acts 3:1-10

- A. How it must have galled the Jewish leaders that this heretical “faction” was using the temple to advance their doctrine (Ac 2:46). And Peter and John present themselves in the temple for the mid-afternoon prayers (3:1).
- B. A man well known in the area for his crippled condition and his daily appearance in the temple is healed by Peter. The effect is instantaneous, and the man is overcome with ecstasy by his new lease on life. This action adds to the excitement and buzz surrounding the fledgling movement.

#### 2. Peter's Second Sermon – Acts 3:11-26

- A. The commotion of the healing draws a crowd to Solomon's porch, a colonnaded area of the temple that provided shelter for gatherings. Note Luke's descriptive terms: wonder and amazement (3:10); amazed (3:11); marvel (3:12).

B. Peter's address can be broadly divided into three sections:

1. 3:12-16 – **Condemnation** for the rejection and death of Jesus.

- a. What does Peter immediately disavow concerning the miracle?
- b. How does Peter tie in ancient Jewish history with recent events?
- c. What makes their rejection of Jesus so heinous?
- d. What role do the apostles play in the aftermath of His death?
- e. To whom does Peter attribute the healing of the lame man?

2. 3:17-20 – **Conciliation** toward the rebellious Jews.

- a. To what does Peter attribute their rejection of Jesus?
- b. What had God “fulfilled” in the death of Jesus?

- c. What does Peter urge these people to do to repair the damage?
3. 3:21-25 – **Context** of history. Peter emphasizes that the events which have transpired are not innovative, novel or dishonoring of Judaism. As he did in his first sermon on Pentecost, Peter strongly ties the present issues to the ancient prophecies. The events fulfill longstanding declarations of what would occur.
- a. Cite the verses where Peter mentions the prophets.
  - b. When had these prophecies begun?
  - c. What is the nature of Moses’ prophecy? How long did it take for his words to come true?
  - d. What covenant does Peter mention with the Jews’ ancestry?

C. Peter’s conclusion – Acts 3:26:

1. The Jews – “*to you first*”: The privilege and reward of being God’s covenant people by virtue of connection to Abraham was that salvation is first offered to them.
2. God – The true force behind these events which the Jews had been wrestling with since the prophet John came on the scene.
3. Having raised up His Servant Jesus – The resurrection always figures prominently in the preaching of the apostles. This reference may also be designed to bring to mind the “Servant” prophecies of Isaiah.
4. Send Him to bless you – The incarnation of Jesus is the ultimate expression of God’s love and concern for mankind. God had every right to destroy man in his rebellion, but He sent His Son to *bless mankind!*
5. In turning away every one of you from your iniquities – The objective: God wished to create a spiritual family from among men who would choose Him over sin, who would repent and renounce the rule of sin in their lives and strive for purity and godliness. *Forgiveness* is the main objective in all that God has done through Christ.



## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 4: The Arrest of Peter and John – Acts 4**

#### **1. The Arrest and Inquisition – Acts 4:1-22**

##### A. The arrest – 4:1-4.

1. The temple was the domain of the priesthood; they controlled the activities that transpired and had a police force to insure compliance. How incensed they must have been to see “unauthorized” commoners preaching about resurrection – a theological concept they denied – but especially the resurrection of the one they had murdered!
2. Yet, in spite of the intimidation, the influence of the gospel continues to grow. This, also, is very troubling to the Jewish leaders.

##### B. Peter’s bold declaration – 4:5-12.

1. After a night in jail, Peter and John (and the healed man) are brought before the Sanhedrin. What an intimidating situation, especially for Peter who has so recently wilted under similar but less pressurized circumstances.
2. Peter is asked a rather open-ended question which allows him latitude to preach about Jesus (4:7).

##### 3. Peter makes several points in his short address. List the main thoughts:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_.
- f. \_\_\_\_\_.

##### C. The threat – 4:13-22.

1. The embarrassed Sanhedrin dismisses the accused so they can settle on a course of action. However, the course they choose is always ineffective, for men who act out of deep conviction cannot be effectively threatened or intimidated.

2. Peter and John stand their ground and refuse to submit to civil powers that are in rebellion to God. They are bound by their conscience to “*speak the things which we have seen and heard*” (4:20), fulfilling their very purpose as witnesses.

## **2. The “Debriefing” and Prayer for Boldness – Acts 4:23-31**

- A. In their supplication to God to assist them amid growing persecution, the apostles indicate a broader insight into the situation than they had previously shown.
  1. They acknowledge God’s creative power and recognize that the struggle is actually between the Creator and the rulers of the earth – 4:24-27.
  2. They further admit the providence of God in the unfolding affairs – 4:28.
  3. They pray for courage to “hold up their end of the bargain” – 4:29-30.
- B. God gives them miraculous confirmation of their requests – 4:31.

## **3. Unity Among the Early Disciples – Ac 4:32-37**

- A. The unique circumstances of this newly forming congregation create some logistical problems, specifically the adequate material support of all. But these are overcome by a commonness of spirit that results in the needs of life being supplied.
- B. Consistent with Luke’s literary style, he introduces a character (Barnabas) whom he will consider in more detail later. Pay special attention to this technique.
- C. Note the emphasis upon the leadership and focus of the apostles (4:33).

### **Questions:**

1. What positive result came from the preaching of Peter in chapter 3?
2. To whom had miraculous powers been previously attributed by the Jews (Lk 11:15)?
3. What was the real force behind Peter’s words (Ac 4:8)? Where was this promised?
4. Where else in the NT is Ps 118:22 cited?
5. How did the Sanhedrin view Peter and John? What did they realize about them?
6. What did Peter and John ask the Sanhedrin to judge for themselves?
7. What kept the Sanhedrin from punishing Peter and John more severely?
8. What might have made material needs among these saints so acute?

## ***Acts Study Guide***

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### **Lesson 5: Trials Within and Without – Acts 5**

#### **1. Acts 5:1-16 – An Act of Heavenly Discipline**

A. One hallmark of the divine origin of the Scriptures is the inclusion of details which are uncomplimentary. We see the warts and weaknesses of even the greatest heroes. Though there was a strong spirit of camaraderie and selflessness among the early disciples, there was also a spirit of competition.

B. Describe the actions of Ananias and Sapphira relative to:

1. Satan –

2. The Holy Spirit –

3. Barnabas –

4. Other brethren –

5. Each other –

C. People may reason that they aren't so bad because they have not robbed, raped or killed, but consider how seriously God takes hypocrisy and the attempt to deceive!

#### **2. Acts 5:17-32 – Apostles On Trial Again**

A. The Jewish leaders are growingly incensed that their orders are being defied and the new movement is gaining ground – and this right under their noses in the temple!

1. The apostles are arrested, only to be let out of jail by an angel – 5:17-21.

2. Upon receiving this shocking news, the priests have the apostles brought before them again – but very gently, fearing a backlash by the people – 5:22-26.

3. The high priest, missing the great truths staring him in the face, blusters about the apostles' defiance and their intimations of the Sanhedrin's guilt in the death of Jesus – 5:27-28.

B. Peter (again) takes the lead in responding, with the assent of all the apostles.

1. Yes, they had defied the edict of the Sanhedrin because they have a greater obligation to obey God – 5:29.
2. Yes, the blood of Jesus rightly belonged upon the hands of the Jewish leaders because: a) They murdered Jesus; b) God had raised Him up to be a Prince and Savior (and they have been unable to disprove it); c) Both the apostles and the Holy Spirit were bearing witness to these truths.
3. *The blood of Jesus belongs on the hands of the Jews*, but there is still the opportunity of forgiveness – if they will lay their envy and stubbornness aside.

### 3. Turning Up the Heat on the Apostles – 5:33-42

- A. The Sanhedrin is enraged at the *justified* defiance of the apostles. They begin to openly discuss their murderous intentions until Gamaliel intervenes.
- B. Men differ on whether Gamaliel's advice is sound (though it does work to the benefit of the apostles). Consider:
1. His recommendation ignores the facts of the case; it is totally speculative.
  2. If the facts warrant that Christianity is apostate Judaism, then the Council was *obligated* to oppose it, not leave it alone.
  3. In spite of the demise of Theudas and Judas, false notions are not immediately overthrown by God. Witness Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.
- C. Note the resolve and fortitude of the apostles after being beaten by the Council.

#### Questions:

1. What reaction did the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira have upon the church?
2. What effect did this discipline have upon outsiders becoming Christians?
3. At this early stage, who is working miracles in the church?
4. What does this passage say about the Jews' responsibility for Jesus' death?
5. How does the second charge (5:28) fulfill the instructions of Jesus to the apostles?
6. What is the implication of Peter's assertion about the Holy Spirit in Acts 5:32?
7. Which of the two episodes in Acts 5 seems to be the greater threat against the church?

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 6: The Martyrdom of Stephen – Acts 6-7**

#### **1. A Second Major Internal Threat – Acts 6:1-7**

A. *The choice:* The explosive growth of the church gives occasion for internal discord: the charge of discrimination by Hebrew (orthodox Jews) brethren against the Hellenists (Jews influenced by the Greek culture) relative to the care of their widows.

1. Though volatile and threatening, the apostles did not want the dispute to distract them from spiritual matters, so they sought for spiritual men to handle it.
2. Describe the kind of work the apostles were focused on:
3. Direction is given for the “multitude of the disciples” to choose their own leaders in dealing with this matter (6:2, 5). What kind of men were they to look for?

B. *The appointment:* The apostles are presented with the seven chosen men, and they appoint them to the task through prayer and laying on of hands.

1. What purpose would be served by such a public appointment?
2. Consistent with Luke’s literary style, he introduces a matter that will be more fully developed later. He mentions the laying on of the apostles’ hands, then with no further elucidation tells of miracles being worked by two of the objects of this blessing: first Stephen (6:8), then Philip (8:6-7). The significant connection between these two items will be explained in Acts 8.

C. Who are these seven men? They are not specifically called “deacons” (a transliteration of the Greek *diakonos*), though the verb form is found in 6:2 (“serve tables” = *diakonein trapezais*). Note that they were to be “*over this business*” (6:3); that is, the apostles delegated the responsibility of effectively handling the matter to them.

#### **2. Another Major External Threat Arises from Success – Acts 6:8-15**

A. Stephen represents the gradual broadening of the apostles’ influence to others. Until now the focus has been upon the “apostles’ doctrine,” the apostles’ teaching, the miracles worked by the apostles, the decisions of the apostles. But Stephen is not only a responsible and capable man in the matter of the widows’ distribution; he is also a man of great teaching and debating ability – 6:8-10.

B. Similar to the trial of Jesus, Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin and saddled with charges from false witnesses (6:11-15). Note, as in the case of Jesus (Mt 26:61), the Jews are sensitive to any suggestion of the temple being threatened.

### 3. Stephen's Defense and Death – Acts 7:1-60

A. It can be difficult to precisely analyze the specific purpose of Stephen's references to Old Testament history, for it appears that the situation rapidly deteriorates and results in his death before he finishes. Consider the following suggestions:

1. 7:1-8 – Stephen reminds them that Abraham received great blessings from God while yet uncircumcised and living in a far away land. The Jews had become so proud of their “property” and saw Palestine, the temple, etc. as the be-all and end-all of relationship with God. But God desired for Israel to “*serve Me in this place.*” Were they, in fact, now doing so? And what if Israel has itself become the oppressors of the people of God (7:7)? What will God do to them? Stephen also emphasizes the working of God through these early developments of the Abrahamic program. Is He now working in a way they refuse to acknowledge?
2. 7:9-16 – The OT tutorial now moves on to the period of Egyptian bondage and the blessing that came to Israel via Joseph's position. One possible parallel is that Stephen is subtly tying the jealousy and obstinacy of Joseph's brothers to the behavior of the Jewish leadership toward Jesus. In both cases, the one formerly despised and forsaken is the very one through whom deliverance comes.
3. 7:17-36 – Stephen reviews the details of Moses' rise to leadership as Israel's deliverer. He emphasizes the efforts of Moses to assert himself and secure the freedom of his people by his own initiative and efforts. But this had resulted in disaster, and Moses needed to learn the lessons of humility and submission to the will of God. He was not sufficient by his own power to accomplish the purposes of God. It seems that the theme of stubbornness and rebellion is developing in Stephen's address – and perhaps the Sanhedrin is beginning to catch on.
4. 7:37-43 – Stephen now takes a more pointed step in his presentation. He documents Israel's rebellion against Moses and God. In spite of the fact that Moses had direct interaction with the Angel of God on Mt. Sinai, that Moses had received “living oracles” from heaven, that God had appointed him His designated leader and given him unmistakable credentials, the people rejected him and appealed to the weaker Aaron to lead them back into their former state of captivity. *Incredible!*
5. 7:44-50 – Though Stephen follows the OT history of the tabernacle and temple, he is also indicating that the legitimacy of each depended upon the instructions of God. The tabernacle had no fixed location for years as Israel carried it about in the wilderness. Finally, God instructed that a permanent house be established by Solomon in Canaan. But even so, argues Stephen, one should not conclude that God is *dependent* upon such a physical structure. God has shown that His representative place of presence among men has changed from time to time, and so it has changed again. Apparently, however, Stephen does not get the chance to finish this thought.

B. For reasons not quite clear from Luke's narrative, Stephen's address takes a sharp turn toward harsh rebuke – 7:51-53.

1. What terminology does Stephen use to describe these Jewish leaders?
2. How does he describe their behavior relative to their ancestors?
3. How does he describe them relative to the Holy Spirit, Jesus and angels?

C. For the Sanhedrin, a body of men who have been boiling and seething ever since the resurrection, who are helplessly watching gradual encroachments upon their territory, who have lost many of their own priests to this new movement, who have seen commoners openly resist their authority and defy their orders, Stephen's remarks are the last straw.

1. They rush upon the accused with murderous rage, losing the control that had been maintained by fear of public opinion in the case of Jesus.
2. Stephen is given a vision of the exalted Lord, perhaps as a final testimony to these rebellious Jews before his execution, and perhaps to encourage him during the violent end of his life.
3. Again, note Luke's literary device of introducing a character who will be later developed: "*And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul*" (7:58).

### Questions:

1. What similarity is there between Acts 6:1-7 and Num 11?
2. What effects follow the wise handling of this matter (Ac 6:7)?
3. How would prophecy have been violated if the Sanhedrin had done to Jesus what they did to Stephen?
4. What connection might one make between Ac 7:48-50 and Ac 17:24? (Cf. Ac 7:58).
5. Considering the terms "filled" or "full" as found in Acts 2:2, 4; 3:10; 4:8, 31; 5:3, 17, 28; 6:3, 5, 8 and 7:55, what observations would you make concerning their use? You may also wish to check a Greek dictionary such as Vine or Thayer.

#### 1. The Gospel Spreads to Samaria – Acts 8:1-25

- A. Chapter eight represents a major turning point in the early history of the church. Not satisfied with the blood of Stephen, Saul of Tarsus, with the approval of the chief priests, begins a campaign of terror against the brethren – 8:1-3. God, however, uses the persecution to further His cause.
- B. Philip, one of the servants of high character and strong faith chosen to oversee care for the widows, becomes the focus of the early expansion as he preaches in Samaria. However, it is clear from Ac 8:1, 4 that many others did work similar to Philip.
1. Like Stephen, another of the seven chosen servants, Philip displays miracle-working ability. Luke simply acknowledges this without a detailed explanation, which he will supply shortly (8:14-19).
  2. Describe the effects of Philip's miracles:
  3. What synonymous terms describe Philip's preaching? What are the effects of this preaching?
- C. Simon's greed and the explanation of the transmission of spiritual gifts – 8:14-24.
1. Simon was duly impressed by the power of Philip to perform *legitimate* miracles, but he is overwhelmed by his past conditioning and inclinations when he understands the source of *conferring* this power upon others in Peter and John.
  2. The principle expressed here by Luke is of crucial importance in responding to those who insist that such miraculous powers are present today. Obviously, the possession of such power, if it currently exists, would be of tremendous importance and influence. *If it did exist today*, we should be the first to recognize and acknowledge it.
  3. But this is the only passage that *expressly* connects the necessity of an apostle's personal touch (in conjunction with his will) with the reception of such gifts (one might also compare 2 Tim 1:6). In the absence of other references about methods of transmission (prayer, direct endowment from heaven), we are forced by respect for the revelation of God to "remain silent where the Bible is silent."
  4. Certainly, no one doubts the *ability* of God to confer spiritual gifts in any way He so chooses, even as He has the power to forgive sins on other conditions besides



immersion in water. *But the issue lies in what is stated in the Scriptures, and consequently what is omitted by such positive precepts.* If the Scriptures indicated another viable method of transmission of these gifts that could be fulfilled in the present day, then we would conclude *from revelation*, not from the practice itself, that the power of God was operative today.

## **2. An International Seed Is Planted – Acts 8:26-40**

A. From Samaria, Philip is now directed to a Jewish proselyte, an Ethiopian man who is returning home from worshiping in Jerusalem. The spiritual interest of this man is demonstrated by his reading of the Scriptures as he bumps along in his chariot.

1. Describe the spiritual dimension of the treasurer from his interaction with Philip.

2. What miracle does Philip work to persuade the treasurer to listen?

B. The treasurer is already reading a Messianic passage, Isaiah 53. This gives Philip a starting place in presenting the concept that the Messiah has indeed come (8:35).

C. Acts 8:35-36 would seem to present a “necessary implication.” Since Philip “*preached Jesus*,” and in response the treasurer asked about the possibility of being baptized, it would follow that Philip had spoken of the necessity of immersion as a part of preaching Jesus (see the similar conclusion from Philip’s preaching in Samaria – 8:5, 12-13).

D. Thus we see by persecution and other means that Jesus is directing the growth of His kingdom. As faithful men and women respond in humble submission, even in the face of dire suffering, the Lord is able to use them to achieve His goal of offering salvation to the whole world. May we be as courageous and diligent in our day as Philip and others were in theirs.

### **Questions:**

1. Specifically, who was/was not scattered from Jerusalem by the persecution?
2. What did those who were scattered do?
3. What terminology describes the influence of the Holy Spirit coming upon Samaritans?
4. What supernatural agencies are involved in Philip’s teaching the Ethiopian treasurer?
5. How has it been demonstrated so far in Acts that men and women become Christians? What is the process? What principles are operative in this transition?

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 8: The Conversion of the Arch Enemy – Acts 9**

#### **1. The Conversion of Saul (Paul) – Acts 9:1-19**

A. In laying the groundwork for the ultimate direction of his narrative, Luke now includes his account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (“Paul” from hereon). The importance of this event is documented by the significant role Paul has in establishing churches across the Empire, writing the majority of NT epistles and even by the repeated accounts of his conversion in Acts 22:3-21 and 26:12-18.

1. Paul is still intensely zealous in persecuting Christianity and is not content with the dispersion of disciples from Jerusalem. He embarks upon a program to hunt them down wherever they may be (9:1-3).
2. Has any human undergone a greater shock to their consciousness than did Paul when Jesus identified Himself to him (9:4-9)? Paul had much to meditate upon during the three days in Damascus until Ananias came to him.

B. How much time has elapsed since the scattering is difficult to determine, but secular history places Aretas in control of Damascus not earlier than AD 37. With the three-year span mentioned in Gal 1:18, together with some other chronological information, it is likely that Saul’s conversion occurs between AD 34-36. In this relatively short time since Pentecost, note that a strong disciple such as Ananias dwells in a foreign city and exercises considerable influence (Ac 9:10-16; 22:12).

1. Though reluctant (perhaps out of fear, and perhaps somewhat in the spirit of Jonah?!), Ananias complies with the Lord’s command to locate Paul, baptize him and clarify his mission to the Gentiles (cf. Ac 22:14-16).
2. Paul’s conversion, though accompanied by certain miraculous activities, presents some interesting principles for consideration:
  - a. What evidence indicates that Paul was saved merely through excruciating guilt and unremitting prayer for three days?
  - b. To the contrary, what states that he was *not* saved until Ananias’ visit?
  - c. What is the *first* thing that Paul did once Ananias restored his sight?
3. Since Ananias was not an apostle, and therefore could not convey miraculous gifts to anyone, how would you explain the phrase “*has sent me that you may ... be filled with the Holy Spirit*” (9:17)?

## 2. Paul's Post-Conversion Activities – Acts 9:20-30

- A. This period is crucial as Paul's detractors will later accuse him of "hijacking" the apostleship from Peter. He will be portrayed as an interloper, a "Johnny-come-lately" who plagiarizes from the others and mixes in his own pro-Gentile slant.
1. But Paul "*immediately ... preached the Christ in the synagogues*" (9:20). It is not stated whether this was the result of a special endowment of the Holy Spirit or merely the fresh perspectives that had been brought to the OT prophets by the reality that Jesus was the Messiah. It is stated that "*Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews ...*" (9:22).
  2. In any case, note the effect upon the Jews in Damascus (9:21):
- B. Perhaps the phrase "*after many days were past*" (9:23) encompasses the three years Paul says he spent in Arabia *before* going to Jerusalem for the first time (cf. Gal 1:17-18). Nevertheless, the hunter becomes the hunted and the disciples he once tried to imprison help him escape from Damascus (9:24-25).
- C. What thoughts must have coursed through Paul's mind as he neared Jerusalem (9:26-30)! How he would look anew upon the hill of Calvary. How he would shudder at the memory of Stephen's murder and his role in it. And how apprehensive he must have been as he contemplated engaging his former Jewish allies in debate, knowing they would respond to him the way he himself responded to Stephen.
1. Explain how the brethren in Jerusalem reacted to Paul's desire for fellowship.
  2. Who interceded for Paul and encouraged his acceptance?
  3. How does the Jewish community react to Paul's preaching? Is fleeing always a mark of cowardice? Where does Paul go and why?

## 3. A Season of Peace and Prosperity – Acts 9:31-43

- A. Reese, in his commentary *New Testament History – Acts*, attributes this period of prosperity to the Jews' distraction with the emperor Caligula, who commanded the governor of Syria to set up a statue of himself in the temple at Jerusalem. Thus preoccupied with the threat of Roman defilement, the Jews overlooked the activities of the Christians.
- B. Luke now returns to Peter and tells of his role in the broadening of the kingdom to the Gentiles. In the meantime, Peter is fulfilling the command of Jesus to preach throughout Palestine first, and a brief account of his work in Lydda, Sharon and Joppa is given.

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 9: The First Gentile Convert – Acts 10**

**Introduction:** The groundwork for the expansion of the kingdom to the Gentiles has been laid by Paul’s conversion and commission as an apostle. Before he can commence this great undertaking, however, another piece of the puzzle must be added. Peter is again given the “keys of the kingdom” and opens the door to all Gentiles via Cornelius.

#### **1. Preparing for the Crucial Meeting – Acts 10:1-23**

A. The preparation of Cornelius – 10:1-8.

1. Describe the character and religious inclinations of Cornelius.
2. Did God “hear” Cornelius’ prayer? Explain your answer in view of Jn 9:31 and 1 Pet 3:12.
3. What did the angel tell Cornelius would be revealed to him by Simon Peter?

B. The preparation of Peter – 10:9-16.

1. Describe the contents of the sheet which Peter saw descending from heaven.
2. What command did Peter hear regarding these animals?
3. How does he respond to the command?

C. The messengers arrive in Joppa – 10:17-23.

1. Peter needs more information in order to make sense of what he saw in the trance. It is not unusual for God to disseminate truth in small doses, allowing men to ponder and gradually draw conclusions as they are able.
2. As the messengers arrive from Cornelius, Peter is given a further nudge by the direct revelation of the Holy Spirit – 10:19-20.
3. What knowledge do the messengers share with Peter that would further convince him that something significant is unfolding?

## 2. The Arrival and Address – Acts 10:24-43

- A. The meeting – 10:24-29. Cornelius, in great anticipation of his guest’s arrival, gathers his relatives and friends to hear his message.
1. So overwhelmed is he that he bows before Peter as he enters.
  2. The dawn is beginning to break upon Peter’s understanding, for he acknowledges that “*God has shown me that I should not call **any man** common or unclean.*”
- B. Peter asks for Cornelius to clarify his motive in sending for him – 10:30-33.
- C. Peter’s address to this devout, Gentile audience – 10:34-43.
1. Peter now seems to grasp the full significance of what he had said in his very first sermon on Pentecost (10:34-35; cf. Ac 2:39).
  2. He gives a very brief synopsis of Jesus’ life – 10:36-40. List the major points:
    - a.
    - b.
    - c.
    - d.
    - e.
  3. The role and message of the apostles – 10:41-43. List the major points:
    - a.
    - b.
    - c.
    - d.

## 3. The Manifestation of the Holy Spirit – Acts 10:44-48

- A. The fuller significance of this event, as Peter later explains back in Jerusalem, will be explored in the next lesson. For now, note that it is the *fourth* direct act of intervention from heaven: 1) the angel speaks to Cornelius, 2) Peter’s trance/vision, 3) the Spirit’s directive to Peter, and 4) the pouring out of the Spirit.

- B. When the Holy Spirit first was manifested in this way on the day of Pentecost, the unbelievers were amazed. Who is now “astonished” by such an event?
- C. What is Peter’s conclusion to the Spirit coming upon the Gentiles? What terminology is used relative to baptism as directed by Peter?
- D. Is there any evidence for/against the conclusion in the text that Cornelius and his household were saved *before* being baptized? Who else had experienced divine intervention before being baptized?

***Questions:***

1. By what method of reasoning does Peter arrive at the conclusion that God had shown him not to call a man common or unclean? Were there any men in the sheet?!
2. How does Peter respond to Cornelius’ bowing to him?
3. Compare/contrast Cornelius’ response to the events that transpire regarding his spiritual status and Paul’s response in Acts 9.
4. How does Peter describe an acceptable response to God in Acts 10:35?
5. To what great future event does Peter appeal in Acts 10:42? Find another place in Acts where an apostle warns Gentiles of this coming day.

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 10: Peter's Defense and the Church in Antioch – Acts 11**

**Introduction:** The reaction to Peter's trip to Caesarea by those in Jerusalem gives some perspective on the depth of prejudice between Jew and Gentile. It took divine intervention to persuade Peter to go, and it will take a clear and orderly explanation of the events to convince the other Jewish believers to accept what has occurred.

#### **1. Peter's Defense – Acts 11:1-18**

- A. News travels fast, even in the pre-satellite/cell phone days. The other apostles and brethren in Judea are alarmed at the news of Peter's actions, and they call upon him to explain himself upon his return – 11:1-3.
- B. Even as Peter had been persuaded by divine instruction in the matter, so he recounts the events in the hope that their minds, too, might be changed – 11:4-17.
  - 1. The six witnesses who accompanied Peter to Caesarea are there – 11:12.
  - 2. Peter recalls the divine intervention on both his and Cornelius' behalf – 11:5-14.
  - 3. The clincher, however, is the coming of the Holy Spirit upon uncircumcised believers – 11:15-17. Note carefully the terminology involved:
    - a. The Holy Spirit "fell upon them" – 11:15. No imposition of apostles' hands as in the case of the seven servants (ch 6) or the Samaritans (ch 8). This was a unique event.
    - b. Peter equates it with "as upon us at the beginning" – 11:15. Again, he goes all the way back to Pentecost, a number of years earlier, to find a precedent. Obviously, the action that happened at Cornelius' house was not commonplace; it did not accompany "normal" conversion.
    - c. The event causes Peter to remember the Lord's instructions about being "baptized with the Holy Spirit" – 11:16. This happened "at the beginning."
    - d. Peter styles the Spirit's influence upon Cornelius as "the same gift" that was given to the apostles by virtue of their belief in Christ.
    - e. The logical conclusion: "*Who was I that I could withstand God?*" – 11:17. Indeed, through this process God gradually revealed to Peter the truth about His acceptance of the Gentiles. Peter properly evaluated the evidence.
- C. Peter's testimony is convincing, and thus we see the convicting and educating power of truth upon good hearts – 11:18.

## 2. The Beginning of the Church in Antioch – Acts 11:19-26

**Note:** The chapter division surely would have been better placed here, for Luke now recounts a major phase of early kingdom development. As Jerusalem became the center of activity in the early stage of preaching among the Jews, so Antioch becomes a focal point of preaching among the Gentiles.

- A. The seed planted – 11:19-21. Luke returns to the story line begun in chapter 8. The scattered disciples, not merely the apostles, took the gospel with them in their flight from Judea. Initially preaching was limited to the Jews, but the conversion of Cornelius opens the door to Gentiles as well. (**Note:** In older manuscripts the term “Hellenists” (11:20) is from the Gk. *hellenas*, whereas the term “Hellenists” in 6:1 is *hellenistas*. The difference is that 6:1 refers to Greek-influenced Jews and 11:20 refers to pure Gentiles. The intervening chapters make it clear that there was no conversion of Gentiles until Cornelius.)
- B. The seed watered – 11:22-26a. Barnabas, introduced in Ac 4:36 and 9:27, now resurfaces as a major character in the expansion of the kingdom. The apostles have confidence in him to see about the events they heard are transpiring in Antioch. Paul, who has also been out of the picture since 9:30, reappears to work closely with Barnabas in teaching in this new and different kind of congregation: a mix of Jews and Gentiles.
- C. A change of designation – 11:26b. Believers, mostly referred to thus far by Luke as disciples, brethren or the church, are now styled “Christians.” The new, ethnically diverse makeup of the Antioch church calls for a new designation.

## 3. Gentile → Jew Benevolence – Acts 11:27-30

In anticipation of broader issues to come, Luke includes an episode of Gentiles sending financial assistance to Jews in Judea. A famine in the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54) creates a hardship upon the brethren, and the church at Antioch responds with sympathy and magnanimity. Note that the first elders are mentioned by Luke.

### Questions:

1. Compare Acts 11:18 and Acts 5:31. How is repentance “given” by God?
2. How did God grant repentance to the “Gentiles” when only Cornelius and his associates became Christians?
3. Describe the growth of the gospel in Antioch.
4. Put together a character sketch of Barnabas from what is said about him thus far.
5. Do you think Acts 11:29 is a “church contribution”? Explain.



## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 11: Herod's Persecution – Acts 12**

**Introduction:** Herod Agrippa 1 gradually broadened his kingdom by edicts from the Roman Emperors Caligula (AD 37-41) and Claudius (AD 41-54). In order to solidify his support from the Jews, he turns to the persecution of Christianity. Thus, difficulty comes to the brethren in Judea on two fronts: the natural catastrophe of famine and the civil persecution by Herod.

#### **1. James' Death and Peter's Arrest – Acts 12:1-4**

- A. It is interesting to note the peculiarities of inspiration. The death of Stephen is given much space while one of Jesus' closest associates and the first apostle to die, James, is given 11 words. This is not the exalted position that James once coveted.
- B. Some speculate that this renewed persecution, much to the Jews' liking, is consequent upon the inclusion of the Gentiles. This would have further enraged the Jewish leadership, especially if such Gentile believers gradually began to infiltrate Jerusalem (cf. the charge against Paul in Acts 21:28-31). If this is accurate, it is not surprising that Peter is Herod's next target.
- C. For maximum political effect, Herod engineers Peter's arrest and planned execution at Passover. This would ensure broad publicity and favor among orthodox Jews.

#### **2. Peter's Release – Acts 12:5-19**

- A. It was undoubtedly reported to Herod by the Jews that his prize prisoner had once before been imprisoned and had escaped under highly unusual circumstances. Thus Herod devotes 16 guards to guarantee Peter's incarceration.
- B. Opposite this flexing of military muscle, "*constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church*" (12:5; cf. 12:12). As a result, an angel comes to liberate Peter.
  - 1. Peter, himself, seems slow to grasp what is happening to him. At first he thinks the events are a vision (12:9). Not until he is outside the prison, "*when Peter had come to himself*" (12:11), does he understand that his freedom is real.
  - 2. Further, the disciples, who are gathered praying, are shocked by such a sudden and clear answer to their prayers (12:15-17).
- C. Peter escapes to an undisclosed location, making it impossible for Herod to find him. One would like to have witnessed the consternation, anger and frustration of this pompous, carnal man as he realized that his political insurance had inexplicably disappeared from the midst of sixteen soldiers. They are summarily executed for their "dereliction of duty."

#### **3. Herod's Demise – Acts 12:20-24**

- A. Herod's horrendous death is consistent with Old Testament accounts of God's immediate judgment against some rebellious civil rulers, false prophets and other enemies. Josephus sustains Luke's account and says that Herod was stricken even while speaking to the crowd.
- B. Note the contrasting actions of angels: toward those who are in fellowship with God they are benevolent; toward those who rebel against God they are frighteningly destructive.
- C. But in spite of such persecution and threat, "*the word of God grew and multiplied*" (12:24). Note other such assessments of the growth of the kingdom and give the context of each:
  - 1. Acts 9:31 –
  - 2. Acts 6:7 –
  - 3. Acts 5:14 –
  - 4. Acts 4:4 –

## Questions

- 1. What was Peter doing the night before his death? How might this be explained?
- 2. What lessons for us today grow out of this story?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 12: Paul's First Journey (1) – Acts 13**

**Introduction:** Some time after Paul has been converted, perhaps 10-12 years, the Holy Spirit is finally ready to send him abroad. These last two lessons in this segment of study center upon the first journey among the Gentiles.

#### **1. From Antioch to Cyprus – Acts 13:1-12**

A. The commission of Paul and Barnabas – 12:25-13:3.

1. True to Luke's writing style, he first introduces John Mark in 12:12 and now weaves him into the narrative. "Recruiting" of men to serve in the gospel alongside those of greater maturity, apprenticeship if you will, is common in Acts and the epistles. Jesus, Himself, used such "on the job training" with the apostles.
2. What a rich congregation Antioch was with teachers such as these. But the Holy Spirit assigns two of their most prominent leaders to travel abroad. This is a trip of probably three years in duration.

B. Confrontation with Elymas – 13:4-12.

1. The story of gospel preaching never changes: it is the search for opportunity amid a sea of obstacles. The opportunity: an audience with the proconsul of the island, Sergius Paulus. The obstacle: a Jewish sorcerer, Elymas.
2. Sergius Paulus wishes to hear what Paul and Barnabas have to say, but Elymas is shrewd enough to realize that if he is converted, his influence will be negated. So, "*he withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith*" (13:8).
3. With strenuous rebuke, Paul by the hand of the Lord strikes Elymas blind. Certainly Paul knows firsthand the blinding power of God, and such an act is symbolic of the moral and spiritual blindness that Elymas is choosing by opposing the truth of God.

#### **2. In the Synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia – Acts 13:13-41**

A. The defection of Mark – 13:13. Again, note Luke's literary technique. He passes by this event with no explanation, but he will later refer to its deeper implications.

B. Paul's address in the synagogue – 13:16-41. A tactical pattern emerges in Cyprus (13:5) and Antioch (13:14) that will be followed by Paul in his evangelistic endeavors. Preaching first in the synagogues of the Jews is both practical and doctrinal: these are the people God promised would hear the gospel first, and they are the ones who have the history and Scriptural foundation to appreciate the message.

1. *Historical review:* Paul begins with a review of Jewish history, establishing the point that God created a special nation for the purpose of bringing His Savior into the world (Ac 13:16-22). What span of history is covered in ...
  - a. Ac 13:17-19 –
  - b. Ac 13:20-22 –
  
2. *The Messiah has come:* Paul's main point is that all Old Testament history and prophecy has reached its fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Ac 13:23-39).
  - a. What is David's role in this saving work of God (13:23)?
  
  - b. What purpose did the prophet John serve (13:24-25)?
  
  - c. How does Paul explain the Jews' rejection and murder of their Savior (13:26-29)? Where earlier in Acts has responsibility for this been laid at their feet?
  
  - d. What is the main theme of 13:30-37?
  
  - e. What does Paul do to substantiate the resurrection of Jesus?
  
  - f. How does Paul contrast David and Jesus?
  
3. *Driving the point home:* Now that Paul has laid the historical foundation and expounded upon its fulfillment in Christ, he establishes the significance of what is being offered by God and warns his Jewish brethren of rejecting it – 13:38-41.
  - a. The inspired heart of the gospel is that the promise of God made so long ago and toward which He has been working is *forgiveness of sins* – 13:38-39 (cf. Ac 3:19, 26; 10:43). Even to Jews who are familiar with their history and the law, forgiveness is not what they have been looking for or perceived themselves to be in need of.
  
  - b. Perhaps Paul, like Stephen in Ac 7, perceived by body language and facial expression that his message was not being charitably received. Or perhaps he, as a Jew – one who himself had been resistant to the very message he was now preaching – could accurately anticipate the normal reaction of most Jews. At any rate, Paul warns them of the consequences of turning away from the truth he is proclaiming.

### 3. The Reaction to and Aftermath of the Sermon – Acts 13:42-52

A. Another pattern that begins to develop is the resistance of the Jews corporately to the gospel and the agreeableness of the Gentiles. This is reflected in Paul's comments in Rom 9-11. In Antioch, the Gentiles are thrilled by the message that they, too, are acceptable to God. The Jews, on the other hand, are envious.

1. What is the first tactic used by the Jews to oppose the gospel (Ac 13:45)?
2. What do they do after Paul withdraws from the synagogue and teaches among the Gentiles (Ac 13:50)?

B. In response to the rejection of the Jews, Paul indicates that he and Barnabas had fulfilled their obligations to them and pronounced condemnation upon them: "*you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life*" (13:46).

C. Paul and Barnabas are finally driven from the city. But persecution, as in the case in Jerusalem following the stoning of Stephen, often becomes the catalyst for the spread of the gospel.

**Special Note:** Calvinists use Acts 13:48 to substantiate the doctrine of limited atonement: that God arbitrarily elects some to be saved and other to be irrevocably lost. But the word "appointed" carries the idea of order or arrangement, not unilateral decree. Simply, the hearts of the Jews were not disposed to recognize and accept the truths of the gospel because they were motivated carnally (i.e., envy, 13:45). Thus, said Paul, you "*judge yourselves unworthy ...*" (13:46). The Gentiles, on the other hand, had their hearts so attuned to spiritual things that when they heard, they appreciated and responded to the truth. In this sense they were "appointed to eternal life."

#### Questions:

1. How does Sergius Paulus react to the blinding of Elymas and the teaching of Paul?
2. What is the primary condition of receiving forgiveness as stated in Acts 13:39? To whom does this promise apply?
3. From what parts of the Old Testament does Paul quote to substantiate his arguments?
4. What does Paul remember about this situation later in life (cf. 2 Tim 3:10-11)?
5. What reaction does the acceptance of the gospel create in saved people (Ac 13:52)?

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 13: Paul's First Journey (2) – Acts 14**

#### **1. At Iconium – Acts 14:1-6**

- A. Describe the work of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium.
  
- B. Describe the positive reaction to the gospel in Iconium.
  
- C. What negative reaction occurred? How did Paul and Barnabas handle it?

#### **2. At Lystra – Acts 14:6-20**

- A. The healing of the lame man – 14:8-13. This event was so impressive that the townsfolk believed the gods of Greek and Roman mythology had come. In their euphoria, they prepare sacrifices for Paul and Barnabas.
  
- B. The two preachers are mortified by the Lystrans' misguided zeal and only with great difficulty halt the proceedings – 14:14-18. Paul takes the opportunity to preach to them about the proper object of worship – God. Note how differently a Gentile audience with no knowledge of Scripture is appealed to than a Jewish one.
  
- C. Outline Paul's brief address to the Lystrans:

1. 14:15 (three points):

- a.
- b.
- c.

2. 14:16 (one point):

3. 14:17 (two points)

- a.
- b.

D. The Jewish persecution – 14:19-20. When the Jews of Antioch and Iconium heard of Paul and Barnabas’ success in Derbe and Lystra, they made it their aim to rid the entire region of their influence – permanently.

1. It is shocking to see how swiftly the inhabitants of Lystra turn on Paul.
2. But those whose values, worldview and deepest religious beliefs are founded upon the shifting sands of human philosophy, fiction and myth should be expected to be likewise fickle and unstable.
3. Commentators differ as to whether Paul actually died and was raised, but there appears to be no definitive language one way or the other. Nevertheless, it was an act of viciousness and brutality, though probably done with a clear conscience (as Paul later testifies of himself in his persecutions) as they fancied themselves to be defending Judaism. Paul recovers and travels with Barnabas to Derbe.

### 3. The Return Trip – Acts 14:21-28

A. Luke now returns to a subject previously mentioned in passing: the presence of elders in a local church (cf. Ac 11:30). As Paul and Barnabas begin their return trip to Syrian Antioch, they revisit the churches that have been started and appoint elders.

1. There would be great danger in leaving such new Christians in a highly volatile environment without leadership and oversight. On the other hand, one wonders how spiritually mature men could be found among such infantile churches. In the absence of a divine explanation we may only conjecture.
2. First, note that Paul and Barnabas appear to be in these cities longer than the simple narrative suggests. For example, what might be the time frame of Ac 14:21? Or 14:7? Or 14:3?
3. Secondly, while it is improbable that Gentiles steeped in fables and myths could mature spiritually in a short time, it is likely that a Jew would experience accelerated growth resulting from his knowledge of the Old Testament. There might be several other factors that would differentiate our own cultural framework – which makes it difficult to envision appointing elders so quickly – from that of the first century.

B. More preaching and teaching is done during their return travel, and having gathered the brethren in Antioch they reported on the events that have transpired – 14:27. What stories they had to tell!

**Conclusion:** We marvel in this first section of Acts of the growth of the kingdom amid such severe trials. The gospel has met with religious persecution (Jews), civil persecution (Herod Agrippa 1), defamation (Elymas), physical violence (imprisonment, beatings, murder),

abandonment (Mark), prejudice (the Jews' skepticism of Cornelius), famine, internal strife – even the punishment of God, Himself (Ananias and Sapphira). But Paul, Barnabas, Peter, Philip, Stephen and others demonstrate the resilience and strength of spiritually convicted men. The servants of God through faith, purity and love are able to withstand and overcome the carnal weapons of man. What inspiration to us all to strive more diligently, to live with more focus, to prioritize our lives according to spiritual realities as we study the history of the early church.

**Questions:**

1. How would you answer someone who said there could be apostles today because Barnabas, not one of the twelve, is called an apostle in Acts 14:4, 14?
2. What pattern do you see in the following verses: Acts 14:3; 8:5-6; 4:29-30; 2:42-43?
3. What future assistant of Paul was from the region of Derbe and Lystra?
4. Comment on the zealousness of opposition to the gospel demonstrated by the Jews of Antioch and Iconium.
5. What did Paul understand about the price to be paid in participating in the kingdom of God?
6. What event, principle or person impresses you in this first half of Acts?



## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 14: The Jerusalem Conference – Acts 15**

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#### **Objectives of this study (Acts 15-28)**

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1. Be able to state the main themes of chapters 15-28 (and thus the entire book).
2. Understand the role of Paul and why his actions eclipse those of the other apostles in the divine record.
3. Continue to examine the role of the Holy Spirit as the kingdom develops.
4. Note the relative response of Jews and Gentiles to the gospel and the potential problems that stem from the inclusion of the Gentiles.
5. Note chronological framework of Acts as it pertains to the writing of various epistles.

#### **1. Controversy in Antioch and Jerusalem – Acts 15:1-5**

- A. The tenacity and brazenness of error is demonstrated by the Pharisaic converts. They are apparently disturbed by the reports coming from Antioch of great numbers of Gentiles obeying the gospel. Apparently, this sentiment had been dormant since the vehement accusations against Peter in chapter 11.
- B. Things to note about this episode (one must also compare Paul's account in Gal 2: 1-10 for a fuller picture):
  1. The objectors were not timid; they took the fight directly to Antioch and engaged Paul and Barnabas. They asserted that Gentile converts must be circumcised and observe various Mosaic customs to be acceptable (Ac 15:1, 5).
  2. Paul said he went to Jerusalem "by revelation" (Gal 2:2). The Holy Spirit was involved in the events; it was not merely by human initiative that the meeting in Jerusalem took place (cf. Ac 15:28).
  3. Titus was taken along as a "test case" (Gal 2:1-3).
  4. Paul calls his opponents "*false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty ... that they might bring us into bondage)*" – Gal 2:4).
  5. Paul defends his preaching "*privately to those who were of reputation*" (Gal 2:2).
- C. The matter needed to be settled in Jerusalem because the impression is left that the Jerusalem church approves of this doctrine. Too, great respect for the Law and its customs is demonstrated in Jerusalem long afterward (cf. Ac 21:20-26).

## 2. The Public Forum and Letter of Clarification – Acts 15:6-35

A. It appears from Gal 2 that agreement upon the truth of the issue was established at the private meeting between Paul and Barnabas and the others. The purpose of the public forum seems to be an open ratification of what is already settled.

1. The apostles and elders gather to consider the issue, and “much dispute” transpires – 15:6-7.
2. Peter then recounts his role in first preaching to the Gentiles – 15:7-11. He states his conclusion from the events: there is “no distinction” between Jewish and Gentile believers and declares “*we shall be saved in the same manner as they.*” Peter rebukes the Judaizers for testing God.
3. Paul and Barnabas then report on the blessing of God upon their work – 15:12.

B. James (the Lord’s brother) then brings closure by equating the events to the prophecy of Amos – 15:13-21. He rightly concludes from the evidence that God’s hand is in the events and the Gentiles should not be further troubled by the imposition of Mosaic practices. James then proposes that a letter of clarification be sent to the Gentiles, specifically to the regions of Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. We shall see, however, that this Judaistic influence doesn’t stop in these places but continues to follow Paul in his work.

(**Note:** It is difficult to fully grasp the significance of the admonitions to the Gentiles. Certainly the apostles are not trying to say that these are the only requirements of the child of God. Perhaps these are mentioned because they represent historic, deep differences between Jews and Gentiles. Things that were commonplace to the Gentiles were extremely abhorrent to the Jews. For the Gentiles to respect these scruples of the Jews would not be attempting to make Jews out of them – as the Judaizers were trying to do.)

C. The letter is written and sent to the brethren in Antioch along with chosen representatives to verify its validity – 15:22-30. The matter caused great rejoicing as the Gentiles contemplated harmony with their Jewish brethren – 15:31-35.

## 3. The Division Between Paul and Barnabas – Acts 15:36-41

A. The second preaching journey begins inauspiciously as Paul and Barnabas disagree over the inclusion of John Mark. It is a matter of judgment, not doctrine, but each feels so strongly about his stance that compromise cannot be found.

1. Speculation arises over Barnabas’ insistence to take Mark, particularly that the two are related and Barnabas wishes to give him a second chance (cf. Col 4:10).
2. Paul’s position seems more clear: Mark is “*the one who departed from them ... and had not gone with them to the work*” – 15:38.

B. Silas, the prophet, joins Paul and the two head northwest, taking the land route back to the churches that had been earlier established. What a sad journey this must have been for Paul as he reflected upon his benefactor, compatriot and friend from whom he has now parted company.

**Questions:**

1. What did Paul and Barnabas do on their way to the conference in Jerusalem?
2. How are the Judaistic objectors referred to in Acts 15:5?
3. To what does Peter liken keeping the Law in Acts 15:10?
4. What did Paul and Barnabas do after delivering the Jerusalem letter to Antioch?
5. Describe Judas and Silas, the two men sent with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch.
6. What observations would you make on the difference between forgiveness and trust as it pertains to the dispute between Paul and Barnabas? Do you think one of them should have given in to the other?

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 15: The Gospel Introduced to Europe – Acts 16**

#### **1. The Addition of Timothy – Acts 16:1-5**

- A. We previously mentioned the concept of “apprenticeship” practiced by John, Jesus and Paul. One of Paul’s chief apprentices was Timothy, a devout and dedicated young evangelist who assists Paul in his labors and travels.
- B. As Paul returns on the over-land route to the cities of southern Galatia, Timothy is selected to accompany Paul and Silas. Luke notes that Timothy “*was well spoken of by the brethren ...*” (16:2), perhaps giving Paul confidence that he would fare better than John Mark did.

#### **2. The Journey Toward Philippi – Acts 16:6-10**

- A. An interesting similarity exists between the Holy Spirit’s directions to Paul and His instruction to Peter regarding Cornelius.
- B. Both conclusions are indirectly stated and require the engagement of human contemplation and reason. In this case, the Holy Spirit gives Paul two “nos” and a vision of an entreating Macedonian.

#### **3. The First Converts in Philippi – Acts 16:11-15**

- A. Note that Luke, having previously given at least partial texts of sermons to Jews, no longer in Acts includes such details. We are to apparently conclude that Paul’s “reasoning” (cf. Ac 17:2-3) follows the same general concepts as outlined earlier.
- B. Lydia hears Paul and is persuaded by his teaching. As is true in earlier cases of conversion, “*she and her household were baptized.*”
- C. Much is made over the phrase “*the Lord opened her heart*” by those of Calvinistic persuasion. Though there have been *no indicators whatsoever* in Acts that God must work upon the heart of an individual unilaterally and without cooperation or consent in order for that person to receive the truth, this phrase is seized upon to assert such a notion. Does the passage put responsibility for salvation on God’s shoulders?
  - 1. This is similar to the point made of the residents of Pisidian Antioch (Ac 13:48).
  - 2. There is no doubt that God opened Lydia’s heart; the question is *how*. The Scriptures, both Old Testament and New, reveal that God has done many things to open the hearts of men and make them softer toward their Creator. The majority resist and stiffen themselves against God’s overtures. Others, however, like Lydia, allow God’s truths and laws to unlock their heart and accept His will when-

ever and however it is manifested. Lydia *already* demonstrates a faithful disposition toward God as she a) worships though away from home, b) respects God's revelation via Mosaic Law, c) carries on as faithfully as she can in the absence of a local synagogue (Reese in *New Testament History – Acts* notes that there must be ten Jewish family heads in a community to have a synagogue, p. 575).

3. Those who denigrate the simple, pure preaching of the gospel to convert and save souls desperately search for any tidbit that puts the onus for salvation back on God. But the truth is, as evidenced by each conversion in Acts, that the gospel is preached to lost men and those who have allowed themselves to be softened by God's revelation of Himself receive it, and the rest do not (cf. similar OT references: 1 Sam 10:26-27; 2 Chr 30:12; 1 Kgs 18:37).

#### 4. The Rise of Persecution – Acts 16:16-34

- A. When Paul casts a demon out of a slave girl, persecution erupts against him primarily on economic grounds. However, it is apparent that these accusers are well acquainted with Paul's effective labors in Philippi (16:20-21). In haste, and without due process, Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned.
- B. These two servants of God set an eternal example of joy in the midst of suffering as they pass the midnight hours in song and prayer. God responds with a stunning display of power: a great earthquake shakes the foundation of the prison, but instead of killing the inmates they are set free. An unusual earthquake, indeed!
- C. The jailer, a man of honor and duty, prepares to take his own life upon seeing the prison doors open. But his near-fatal assumption is erroneous: the prisoners had not escaped though they are free from their shackles. Overwhelmed by the events and by the overtures of the one he had previously imprisoned in maximum security, the jailer asks the most crucial question of all: "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*"
  1. Again, Paul's response to the jailer in 16:31 is used by the unscrupulous in order to circumvent the plain process of conversion. The jailer is starting from scratch; he has no spiritual foundation such as Lydia for Paul to build on. Thus, he states the very essence of salvation in the form of overview: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.*"
  2. But Paul does not stop there and tell them to rejoice in their salvation: "*Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house*" (16:32). Paul answers the man's question in the most fundamental and comprehensive sense *and then* "fleshes it out" with further teaching.
  3. In response, "*immediately he and all his family were baptized*" (16:33). The jailer "*rejoiced, having believed in God ...*" (16:34). This man is able to fulfill the condition of salvation by *hearing* Paul's message about Christ and *complying* with the conditions of that message.

## 5. Paul's Departure from Philippi – Acts 16:35-40

- A. After Paul and Silas have been publicly humiliated and punished, the city magistrates now wish to quietly rid themselves of these “nuisances.” But an egregious affront to Paul’s Roman citizenship privileges has been committed, acts themselves punishable by death, and Paul insists on public exoneration (16:36-37).
- B. The officials come in person and beg for Paul to depart quietly, fearing the wrath of Rome (16:38-39).
- C. But Paul’s concern is not for himself but the fledgling church that has witnessed the dastardly work of Satan firsthand. In order to neutralize the threat to the church, Paul defies the magistrates and reenters the city. *“And when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed”* (16:40).

### Questions:

1. What act demonstrates Timothy’s sincere desire to serve God alongside of Paul?
2. What did Paul’s presence and work mean to the growth of the kingdom in this region?
3. Based on the change of pronouns in Acts 16:8, 10, what apparently happens in Troas?
4. What does Lydia do for those who have shared spiritual things with her?
5. Why do you think Paul was so irritated with the slave girl when she spoke the truth?
6. As Paul himself once asked the same question as the jailer (Acts 16:30; 9:6), do you suppose he would give a different answer to the jailer than the one given to him? Was Paul told *only* to believe in Jesus?
7. Briefly describe the relationship that eventually grows between Paul and the Philippian church. Cite a Scriptural reference to support your observation.

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 16: Thessalonica, Berea and Athens – Acts 17**

#### **1. Preaching in Thessalonica – Acts 17:1-9**

A. The establishment of a new congregation – 17:1-4.

1. Luke’s narrative is also a manual on church planting. It is significant that Paul did not first set up a secular school, begin a tent-making for the homeless outreach or engage in some other tangential “good works” program. Paul *taught*; specifically, he “*reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer ...*” (17:2-3).
2. As before, the teaching had a predictable effect: some Jews were persuaded but many more Gentiles obeyed the gospel (17:4).

B. What is also predictable is opposition from envious Jews – 17:5-9. The Jews enlist a group of idle scoundrels to help raise a rabble and prejudice the atmosphere against the apostles.

1. When Paul and his companions are not found, Jason and some other brethren are hauled before the city magistrates.
2. A charge of treason is made against Jason and the others and entered without evidence or substantiation. The situation is volatile and violence is brewing.
3. The “security,” apparently a financial bond of some sort, is taken from the brethren. Perhaps this was to ensure that no more preaching would be done by the associates of Jason; i.e., Paul.

[**Note:** The Thessalonian epistles must be read against this backdrop to fully appreciate Paul’s emotions and admonitions to these beleaguered brethren. He could leave, but they would have to remain and build their faith in the midst of a hostile environment.]

#### **2. Preaching in Berea – Acts 17:10-15**

A. The mindset of the Jews in Berea was different than in Thessalonica. They were more “fair-minded,” dispassionate, objective, analytical, desirous of truth. As Paul reasoned from the Scriptures about the coming of the Messiah in the person of Jesus, many Jews believed along with a significant number of Gentiles.

B. But as in the case of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium (Ac 14:19), the troublemakers from Thessalonica came to Berea and raised a commotion against Paul. Jesus had said they would persecute His messengers “*from city to city*” (Mt 23:34), and so it happens.

### 3. Preaching in Athens – Acts 17:16-34

A. Athens was not a political or economic leader in the Empire but it was the seat of culture, philosophy and education. Athens represented man's attempt to understand himself and his existence apart from the revelation of God. The result: a city literally overrun with statues and temples devoted to mythological gods. This ignorance, combined with his possession of the truth, provoked Paul's spirit deeply.

B. Given a chance to address this Gentile audience of philosophers and intellectuals on Mars' Hill (or the Areopagus), Paul approaches the subject from a completely different point of view than he would the Jews. He does not begin with the Law of Moses but with the nature of God relative to creation. Fill out the subpoints of Paul's address according to the outline below:

#### 1. Introduction – 17:22-23

A.

B.

#### 2. God: Lord of Heaven and Earth – 17:24-25

A.

B.

#### 3. God: The Creator of Man – 17:26-29

A.

B.

C.

D.

#### 4. The Proper Response of Man to God – 17:30-31

A.

B.

C.

C. What was the outcome of Paul's preaching on this occasion?



## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 17: In Corinth / Conclusion of the Second Tour – Acts 18**

#### **1. Paul's Long Stay in Corinth – Acts 18:1-17**

- A. 18:1-8 – Luke describes Paul's initial evangelistic efforts in Corinth. As is Luke's custom, he only gives a cursory account of what transpires. Much more about Paul's thoughts on this phase of his work can be learned in 1 & 2 Corinthians.
1. Paul first meets Priscilla and Aquila – 18:2-3. They will become very dear to Paul in their support of his work here and elsewhere. It seems likely that they are already Christians as no mention at all is made of converting them. Compare this with Paul's note in 1 Cor 1:14-16 on early converts in Corinth.
  2. Paul's preaching follows a familiar pattern: success at first followed by opposition of the Jews (18:4, 6). Paul apparently moves his base of operations to the house of Justus, right next door to the synagogue.
  3. At this time Silas and Timothy rejoin Paul from Thessalonica. Comparing Ac 17:15 and 1 Th 3:1-2, it appears that Timothy hastened to Athens at Paul's behest, but Paul was so consumed with anxiety about the welfare of the Thessalonians that he sent Timothy back almost immediately "*to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith.*" (This is the last direct mention of Silas in Acts.)
- B. 18:9-17 – Luke notes one particular anecdote of persecution against Paul. It is unusual in that the enemies of Paul receive their comeuppance almost immediately.
1. Apparently, the circumstances of trial and opposition, possibly combined with Paul's own awareness of gathering trouble, caused him to become somewhat timid. We get a little more insight into Paul's deeper emotional state by his reference in 1 Cor 2:1-3. Jesus encourages him with a vision: he is to keep teaching under the assurance that he will not be harmed. Jesus also acknowledges that there are many potential converts in Corinth, a city famous for gross immorality.
  2. Gallio served as proconsul of Achaia around AD 52. Reese in his commentary *New Testament History – Acts* notes that securing a judgment against Paul by a Roman proconsul could have had dire effects upon preaching the gospel across an entire region.
  3. But the tables swiftly turn against Paul's Jewish antagonists as Gallio dismisses their charges without a full hearing – 18:14-16. For unstated reasons, the present ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes, is publicly beaten – perhaps by the Roman guards (lictors) or by his own Jewish brethren ("*all the Greeks*" in the NKJ is not the best attested reading). It is uncertain whether this is the same Sosthenes included in the salutation of 1 Corinthians 1:1.

## 2. Paul's Short Stay in Ephesus – Acts 18:18-22

- A. Paul, Priscilla and Aquila travel together to Ephesus as Paul returns to Antioch.
- B. Paul preaches in the synagogue, but this time he receives a warm welcome. Paul, however, is intent upon reporting back to Antioch and declines the offer to stay longer. One cannot always take advantage of every open door immediately because of conflicting priorities. Paul hopes that the will of God will provide a future opportunity to take advantage of this interest – and He does.
- C. Thus the second journey ends in Antioch, some three years after it had commenced.

## 3. The Conversion of Apollos – Acts 18:23-28

- A. After an indeterminate amount of time in Antioch, Paul commences his third preaching tour – 18:23. He returns first to the churches of Galatia and Phrygia, established on the first tour with Barnabas, before moving further westward.
- B. Paul had not left the Jews in Ephesus without any guidance, for Priscilla and Aquila remained there while Paul traveled onward. Luke tells one anecdote from this interim which gives us insight into this godly couple and introduces Apollos.
  - 1. Apollos came to Ephesus and began to teach in the synagogue about John the prophet. Describe Apollos:
  - 2. Priscilla and Aquila, who had spent two years learning from Paul himself, were well equipped with knowledge and demeanor to take Apollos further in his knowledge. This speaks well of Apollos' lack of ego and willingness to learn.
- C. Apollos then travels to Corinth and “*greatly helped those who had believed through grace*” (18:27). Thus we see the importance of influence from Paul → Priscilla and Aquila → Apollos → Corinth.

### Questions:

- 1. How does Paul support himself early on in Corinth? What does Paul say about this in 1 Cor 9:15-18?
- 2. What does Paul's statement “I am clean” mean?
- 3. How does the coming of Timothy and Titus to Corinth affect Paul?
- 4. Who is Jesus describing when He says, “I have many people in this city?”
- 5. What is the basis of Apollos' persuasion about Jesus as the Messiah?

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 18: Paul's Three Year Stay in Ephesus – Acts 19**

#### **1. The Disciples of John Converted – Acts 19:1-10**

- A. Upon Paul's return to Ephesus he encounters several disciples who, like Apollos, had incomplete knowledge of the new covenant.
1. Paul's question, "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*" (19:2) has given rise to much dispute. The term "receive" has been used of the baptism of the Spirit relative to the apostles (Ac 1:8), the gift of the Spirit upon all who obey the gospel (2:38), the miraculous gifts as imparted by apostles (8:15) and that which occurred at Cornelius' house (10:47).
  2. I would suggest that, contextually, Paul is inquiring about their having received miraculous gifts. This question may simply be exploratory; Paul is wanting to know how far their knowledge goes, for if they received miraculous gifts at their conversion, an apostle must have been the instrument. Paul thus elicits the information he is looking for: their knowledge is woefully inadequate.
  3. When Paul clarifies the fullness of the gospel, these disciples become true believers in submitting to baptism in the Lord's name (19:5). He then imparts spiritual gifts to them, even as he had inquired in 19:2.
- B. Whether the initial interest shown in 18:20 wanes, or whether things have changed in the meantime, or whether this is a different synagogue in Ephesus is unclear. At any rate, Paul does not get the kind of favorable response he may have expected and he shifts his teaching activities to the school of Tyrannus (19:8-9).
- C. Luke notes the fruitfulness across the entire province of Asia – 19:10.

#### **2. Three Anecdotes of Success – Acts 19:11-20**

- A. Great miracles of healing – 19:11-12. The working of miracles was not uniform as Luke notes that "*God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul.*" See the similarity between this and the power of Peter in Ac 5:15.
- B. Counterfeit miracle-workers – 19:13-17. Where there is something genuine, there is also someone looking to make a profit by cheap imitation. Jesus had acknowledged the presence of Jewish exorcists (cf. Lk 11:19), but surely they knew within themselves their own impotence. So these in Ephesus took to calling upon "*the Jesus whom Paul preaches*" to cast out demons – even while rejecting true faith and obedient submission to that Jesus. Such does not work, and the demons put them to flight.

C. The burning of books – 19:18-20. So sweeping and powerful was the gospel and its miraculous affirmation that multitudes came confessing their sin and, in genuine penitence, burning their books of magic. The true heart can distinguish between what is legitimate and what is false, but the unstable is subject to deception.

### 3. The Riot – Acts 19:21-41

A. As the gospel began to seep into the consciousness of Ephesian society, the economic effect was felt among the metalworkers who fashioned idolatrous images – 19:23-27.

1. Ephesus housed a grand, ornate temple dedicated to Diana, the goddess of fertility. Ephesus was also a great city of the Empire through which much trade and tourism passed. The silversmiths made much profit through the people's affinity for Diana.

2. The men acknowledge the significant influence of the gospel: *“not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people ...”* (19:26). Though the work of teaching was done by others in addition to Paul, it is his name that has become prominent as the main proponent of Christianity in the province of Asia.

B. The city in an uproar – 19:28-34. Demetrius succeeds in provoking the citizenry into pandemonium. Such occasions are extremely dangerous as the lack of restraint unleashes evil desires that are normally suppressed. Some of Paul's associates are seized, and when Paul wishes to come to their defense the disciples and even some provincial officials prevent him from entering the theater.

C. Finally, order is restored without violence by the city clerk, a man of great wisdom and rationality – 19:35-41. As is often the case, Paul leaves when his presence becomes counterproductive and dangerous to the brethren (20:1).

**Note:** First Corinthians was written during Paul's stay in Ephesus and possibly Galatians (another possibility for Galatians would be from Corinth on Paul's second tour).

#### Questions:

1. Who has been mentioned as traveling companions of Paul in this chapter?
2. Would you characterize the Ephesian church as predominantly Jewish or Gentile?
3. How do the demons respond to the Jewish exorcists? Who did they know?
4. With what reasoning did the clerk quiet the riotous crowd?
5. As his work in Ephesus drew to a conclusion, what are Paul's future plans?

### **Lesson 19: Paul Heads for Jerusalem – Acts 20**

#### **1. From Ephesus to Macedonia to Troas – Acts 20:1-6**

- A. Some of what Luke passes over in brevity is supplied in the epistles. Second Corinthians makes it clear that Paul was greatly concerned about how his first epistle would be received by the Corinthians.
1. Paul's original intent was to go directly to Corinth, travel north into Macedonia, and return to Corinth en route to Jerusalem (cf. 2 Cor 1:15-16). However, because of Titus' remedial work in Corinth, Paul delays so that they may have time to correct themselves (cf. 2 Cor 1:23-2:2; 12:20-21; 13:1-3, 10). This change of plans leads Paul's enemies to accuse him of cowardice or vacillation (2 Cor 1:17ff).
  2. He left Ephesus and went to Troas, hoping that he would meet up with Titus and receive good news from Corinth (2 Cor 2:12-13). He speaks of preaching in Troas and a door of opportunity being opened to him. However, he is so troubled by what is transpiring in Corinth that he leaves for Macedonia in search of Titus.
  3. Paul speaks of extreme distress when he came into Macedonia (2 Cor 7:5), but this is allayed when he finally meets up with Titus and hears that the majority of the Corinthian congregation has repented and affirmed their love and respect for Paul (2 Cor 7:6, 13-16).
  4. From Macedonia, a short time before he goes to Corinth, Paul writes 2 Corinthians. It is also during this period that Paul is making plans to travel to Jerusalem with the offerings from various churches. Thus we see quite a collection of traveling companions who serve as messengers and witnesses to the integrity of Paul (2 Cor 8:18-24; 1 Cor 16:3-4).
- B. Paul stays in the environs of Corinth for three months, during which time he writes Romans.
- C. Paul learns of a plot against his life and changes his plans yet again. He sends several of his associates on to Troas by ship while he and Luke ("us" – 20:5) and possibly others take the land route to Philippi and then a ship to Troas.

#### **2. Worship at Troas – Acts 20:7-12**

- A. Luke includes an anecdote which occurs on the last day of the week spent in Troas. Almost incidentally, he includes valuable information regarding the worship of the early brethren.

B. Brethren have been worshipping together for over 25 years, yet nothing specific has been mentioned about the structure of that worship. But Luke notes that “*on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread,*” Paul spoke to them throughout the night until his departure the next day.

1. Though this instruction is not in “command” form, it certainly presents a practice in which an inspired apostle is engaged. Paul mentions consistency in teaching from one church/city to the next (1 Cor 4:17), and he has previously written that churches in Galatia and Achaia should take up their collections “on the first day of the week” (1 Cor 16:2).
2. For those who respect the authority of the Scriptures, and who have regard for the actions of an apostle, and who seek to recreate the practices of Christians who were under the direction of apostles and prophets as inspired of the Holy Spirit, this reference is conclusive. If someone wishes to engage in the Lord’s supper on another day, he is bound to produce some sort of Scriptural warrant for that day.
3. Note also the reference to sailing from Philippi after Passover (Ac 20:6). The reference in the next verse to the observance of the Lord’s supper makes it evident that the memorial meal was not *annual* as in the pattern of Passover, the Jewish feast day upon which the Lord died. Rather, it was *weekly*, and that on the *first* day of the week, the day of resurrection.

C. Luke includes the story of Paul raising Eutychus from the dead after the young man had fallen asleep during Paul’s discourse and crashed to the ground from the third floor.

### **3. The Emotional Visit with the Ephesian Elders – Acts 20:13-38**

A. Paul, in his haste to return to Jerusalem by Pentecost (now less than six weeks away), sends for the elders of Ephesus during a stop-over in Miletus. Paul has now been gone from Ephesus for about a year (1 Cor 16:8; Ac 20:6). Consult the following verses and note what is said about each topic in Paul’s address:

1. Paul’s past labors in Ephesus: Ac 20:18-21, 26-27, 33-34 –
2. Paul’s expectations for the future: Ac 20:22-25, 29-30, 38 –
3. Paul’s exhortations to the elders: Ac 20:28, 31-32, 35 –

B. Paul is apparently speaking out of his own anticipations of the future, for as emotional and final as this parting seems at the time, it does appear that he is in Ephesus again (cf. 1 Tim 1:3).

C. Paul's comments reveal the depth of his commitment to the work of the Lord, his carefulness not to compromise his influence, his determination to teach by example and action as well as by word, his genuine love for his brethren.

**Questions:**

1. What did Paul do while in Macedonia before going to Corinth (Acts 20:2)?
2. Did Paul endure persecution stoically? What suggests otherwise?
3. What consistent message does the Holy Spirit indicate about Paul's trip to Jerusalem?
4. How does Paul describe his preaching in his address to the Ephesian elders?
5. What is the entity which gives us our heavenly inheritance?

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 20: Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem – Acts 21**

#### **1. Paul's Arrival in Jerusalem – Acts 21:1-17**

- A. After visiting ports-of-call such as Cos, Rhodes and Patara, Paul and company arrive at Tyre. From there they work their way down the coast to Caesarea where they stay in the home of Philip, who was last seen at the end of Acts 8.
- B. An element of this trip that is difficult to reconcile is the consistent message given to Paul that he will be treated harshly at Jerusalem: 20:23; 21:4, 11.
1. Brethren are pressuring him not to venture into Jerusalem (21:12). But further, Ac 21:4 seems to indicate that the Holy Spirit is telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem. An added difficulty is Ac 19:21 which is translated in the NKJ: "*Paul purposed in the Spirit ... to go to Jerusalem*" (cf. Ac 20:22). Is this a contradiction?
  2. Note that it would be wholly out of character for Paul to flagrantly disobey the direct command of God. After his arrest he will affirm that he has acted in purity of conscience (if also in ignorance upon occasion) – 23:1; 24:16.
  3. It also appears to be wholly in harmony with the will of God that Paul undertake both the contribution of the Gentile brethren and the personal delivery of it to Jerusalem. Perhaps the exhortation of the brethren contains consistent warnings of the Holy Spirit coupled with their own urging of Paul not to go. In other words, the prohibition is of the brethren rather than God.
- C. When Paul firmly and resolutely states his resolve to go to Jerusalem regardless of the consequences, the brethren desist from their persuasion and commit the future proceedings to the will of God (21:13-14). Acts 21:17 signifies the official end of Paul's third major evangelistic trip.

#### **2. The Recommendation of James – Acts 21:18-26**

- A. Another difficulty presented in this chapter is reconciling the teaching of Paul concerning the end of the Law of Moses with his participation in Jewish purification rites. Is this contradictory?
1. James states his concern that rumor and false reports have maligned Paul's reputation among Jewish believers – 21:20-22. It appears that those of Jewish ancestry continued to engage in Mosaic customs and practices so long as they didn't interfere or conflict with new covenant directives.
  2. As long as one observed these customs within the realm of liberty and not of necessity to be pleasing to God, this was deemed acceptable. Paul himself had ear-



lier written: “to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews” (1 Cor 9:20). Or, as he might say on this occasion: “with Jewish brethren I voluntarily observed Mosaic customs to answer the charge that I prohibited Jews outside of Palestine from doing so.”

B. James and the elders suggest that Paul participate in the purification rites of four men who had taken a vow and had apparently become defiled. Paul would go through ritual cleansing and pay their expenses so that they could renew their vow.

C. James refers to the letter to the Gentiles again as if to say that such is a matter of liberty for Jewish converts and not a requirement for Gentiles, which would have been a reversal of the declaration in Ac 15 (21:25).

### **3. The Warnings of the Spirit Realized – Acts 21:27-40**

A. When Paul entered the temple, he was recognized by “the Jews from Asia,” presumably the same group that Paul mentions in Ac 20:19. These “*spoke evil of the Way before the multitude*” (19:9), causing Paul to withdraw from the synagogue.

1. The Jews were volatile people, and the great crowds assembled for Pentecost would be swelling with ancestral pride. All it would take to ignite the masses into a frenzy would be a cry that the sanctity of the temple was threatened.

2. The mob grabs Paul and immediately commences vigilante justice: they “*dragged him out of the temple*” and began viciously beating him.

B. Paul is “rescued,” albeit in chains and with the assumption of guilt, by the Roman commander of the garrison, Claudius Lysias.

C. While being led away to formally investigate the nature of the tumult, Paul asks for an opportunity to address the very men who had tried to kill him and even now were calling for his murder.

#### **Questions:**

1. Compare these events with Romans 15:30-32 and describe how Paul’s requests were fulfilled.

2. Compare/contrast Paul’s approach to Jerusalem and the threat of danger with that of Jesus’ last journey to that city before His crucifixion.

3. What observations might you make concerning the effects of rumor, innuendo or false charges from this chapter?

## *Acts Study Guide*

### **Lesson 21: Paul Preaches to the Mob – Acts 22**

#### **1. Paul's Address – Acts 22:1-21**

A. Paul is granted permission by Lysias to speak to the crowd. From the stairs leading up from the temple courtyard to the Fortress of Antonia, Paul begins to speak in Hebrew, further arresting the attention of the mob. Paul's address can be divided into four sections. Write the main points of each section:

1. Paul's partisan Jewish background – Ac 22:1-5:

a.

b.

c.

2. The vision of Jesus near Damascus – Ac 22:6-10:

a.

b.

c.

3. Paul's conversion to the Lord – Ac 22:11-16:

a.

b.

c.

4. Paul's departure from Jerusalem – Ac 22:17-21:

a.

b.

c.

B. Paul hoped his past connection with the Jews would give him some credence (22:19-20), but Jesus knows this will not dampen the furor of the Jews who would see Paul as a traitor. Even now, Paul's Jewish background is of no consequence.

## 2. Paul's Invocation of Roman Citizenship – Acts 22:22-29

- A. The Jews listened to Paul perhaps longer than might be expected, especially since the name “Jesus of Nazareth” (22:8) would by this time have a negative connotation. But when he mentioned the Gentiles, the spell was broken and the crowd resumed shouting its murderous desires.
- B. Lysias, having no time or inclination to commence a formal trial, makes preparations to scourge the truth out of Paul. Consider the following description of this horrible torture:

The Roman scourge (Latin, *flagellum*) was a fearful instrument of torture, consisting of three to nine strands of leather thongs, weighted with rough pieces of metal and attached to a stout wooden handle. The person to be scourged was stripped to the waist, and then tied with leather thongs, either in a stooping position over a short post or suspended by the hands above the ground. Men were known to have had their eyeballs gouged out by the metal ends of the thongs, or to have their abdomens torn open, during the brutal lashing. Tacitus tells us that in such beatings seven out of ten men died, literally beaten to death; the other three were carried out in a stretcher, and most remained cripples for life. (Reese, *New Testament History – Acts*, p. 810)

- C. To inflict this kind of punishment on a Roman citizen was punishable by death, and to make a false claim of citizenship was also a capital offense. It would have been easy to verify this claim by citizenship lists maintained in each city. Lysias is truly fearful to learn that the man he has bound against the law, and was preparing to beat against the law, was a Roman citizen. This secures Paul's freedom, and no doubt his life.

### Questions:

1. What connection with Jerusalem did Paul mention when he first started speaking?
2. Who could corroborate Paul's former persecution of Christians?
3. What was Paul's own conception about when his sins were washed away? How did he learn about this?
4. Can you list the times after his conversion that Paul has been back in Jerusalem?
5. How did Paul's assessment differ from the Lord's relative to his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion?

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 22: Paul's Escape from Jerusalem – Acts 23**

#### **1. Paul Before the Sanhedrin – Acts 22:30-23:10**

A. The exchange between Paul and the high priest – 23:1-5. A hearing for Paul before the Jewish Sanhedrin is arranged by Lysias on the following day in order to establish the facts of the case.

1. Paul's opening statement, wherein he affirms a good conscience in all that he has done, is highly offensive to the high priest. Perhaps he thought Paul was insulting them for trying to kill him without cause.
2. Paul responds to the command to strike him with a stern rebuke. This has led to much speculation as to nature of Paul's actions which follow.
3. First, Paul seems to offer a humble apology for not recognizing the high priest. While some find this unlikely due to Paul's close association with the Sanhedrin in the past, he has been gone for a long time and there were approximately 28 different high priests between AD 37-70 (Reese, p. 817). Too, it is possible that the Sanhedrin is not assembled in its usual chambers; perhaps Lysias hastily called the meeting and there was not the usual protocol (dress, seating arrangements, etc.) that would readily identify the high priest.

B. Secondly, Paul deliberately throws the assembly into chaos by mentioning a "hot button" issue: the resurrection – 23:6-10.

1. Luke notes that Paul "perceived" the divided make-up of the gathering. That is, it dawned on him that his detractors were themselves divided by deep rifts and were only united in their opposition to him.
2. Rather than charge Paul with unscrupulous behavior, however, it is likely that Paul wanted to demonstrate to Lysias (and perhaps to the Sanhedrin itself) that they were not an objective, unbiased body. They had their own agendas, and the immediate degeneration of the meeting into a free-for-all made it clear that they were not capable of dispassionate justice.
3. When the gathering turns violent, Lysias again rescues Paul from danger.

#### **2. Another Plot Against Paul's Life – Acts 23:11-22**

A. Note the clear picture of the battle that ensues: a band of 40 Jews vow to kill Paul before their next meal versus the Lord who promises that Paul will be spared to preach in Rome – 23:11-13.

B. News of the plot reaches Paul via his nephew – 23:16. Note the providence of God in foiling the rebellious plans of men. The fact that God *can* prevent our demise is of great comfort in times when we are doubtful of what God *will* do in a given situation. Paul sends his nephew to Lysias with the information.

### 3. Paul Is Sent to Felix in Caesarea – Acts 23:23-35

A. The seat of Roman government in Palestine is Caesarea, and the governor at the time was Felix. Felix was extremely unscrupulous and felt that he could rule over this territory with impunity, for his brother Pallas was a close associate of the emperor, Claudius. Lysias decides to spirit Paul from Jerusalem at night under heavy guard to Caesarea and let Felix sort the situation out.

B. Note the letter of explanation composed by Lysias.

1. What falsehood does Lysias write? Why do you think he did so?

2. How does he exonerate Paul? What should Lysias have done if Paul was innocent?

C. The brethren in Caesarea would now commence a lengthy period of care for Paul as the Lord's prisoner ground along through the slow-turning wheels of Roman justice. Paul knows he is going to Rome, but he doesn't yet know how excruciating will be the wait and how rigorous the travel.

#### Questions:

1. Would you judge Paul's statement to the high priest out of line?

2. What did the Pharisees' think about Paul's claims? Who had said something similar to the Sanhedrin several years earlier?

3. What other plots against Paul does Luke record?

4. What exhortation does Jesus give to Paul? What could possibly be cheerful about the coming years in chains and incarceration?

5. What charade is proposed to create an opportunity to kill Paul?

6. What observations concerning the Jewish leadership would you make as you review the events of this chapter?

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 23: Paul's Two Years Under Felix's Rule – Acts 24**

#### **1. The Charges Against Paul – Acts 24:1-9**

- A. The Jewish leaders are in a bind because they now have to formally substantiate their case against Paul. The truth is that Paul has done nothing to violate either Mosaic or Roman law. To help them out of their predicament, they enlist the aid of Tertullus, a lawyer and undoubtedly an expert in sophistry.
- B. Three basic charges:
1. 24:5a – “*A plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world.*” Tertullus is attempting to portray Paul as a troublemaker, one who incites civil unrest not only in Palestine but across the Empire. Threats to the general peace and well-being that has come under Roman rule is a serious charge, indeed. But no evidence is offered, merely an impugning of Paul's reputation.
  2. 24:5b – “*A ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.*” This charge suggests that Paul is championing a new, illegal religion. Tertullus says it is a religious movement that is foreign to Judaism, a mere sect which has sprung up in loyalty to one (Jesus is not named by Tertullus) who has been rejected by mainstream Judaism.
  3. 24:6 – “*He even tried to profane the temple.*” This charge has been altered from the original situation in 21:28: “*has also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.*” What was previously asserted as a fact is now weakly offered to Felix as a mere attempt.
- C. Further, Tertullus accuses Lysias of that which the Jews are guilty: acting with violence. He lies in stating that the Jews wanted to “*judge him according to our law.*” They wanted no such thing! They tried to kill him in a senseless frenzy. The Jews thus try to sway the mind of Felix with flattery, false charges and total fabrication.

#### **2. Answering the Charges – Acts 24:10-21**

- A. On short notice, and without the benefit of legal counsel or witnesses on his behalf, Paul is asked to rebut the charges. The year is about AD 57, for Felix was the procurator from AD 52-59 and Paul was under his charge for two years (24:27). Felix was married to a Jewess, Drusilla, and having lived and governed in Palestine for about six years he would have a good working knowledge of what has transpired.
- B. Paul's defense against the charges as listed above:
1. 24:12 – Paul says there is no evidence that he was engaged in disputes or had tried to stir controversy or unrest. Paul notes that the events have taken place

within the last two weeks and can be easily investigated by Felix. Furthermore, no solid evidence has been presented because none exists.

2. 24:14-16 – Paul affirms that he worships “*the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.*” That is, he is more of a “true Jew” than his accusers are. He denies introducing a new, unlicensed religion under the Roman domain.
3. 24:17-18 – Rather than profaning the temple, Paul was found *purified* in the temple, going even the extra mile in participating in Jewish rites that had been nullified of any true spiritual substance by the new covenant of Jesus. Paul had gone to great lengths to prevent such charges of defilement from being made, but they are made anyway and without evidence.

C. Paul even indicates that he has already been before the Jewish tribunal, the Sanhedrin Council, and the only indictment against him from that appearance is that he introduced the resurrection which caused the assembly to be divided. But the issue was merely a matter of religious difference, not riotous antagonism or rebellion against Rome.

### **3. Felix’s Injustice to Paul and His Downfall – Acts 24:22-27**

- A. Felix postpones the immediate disposition of the case and the postponement continues indefinitely throughout the rest of his tenure. Paul has been denied justice both by Lysius and Felix.
- B. Paul is undoubtedly aware of Felix’s desire for a bribe and knows his freedom is dependent upon Felix’s goodwill. Nonetheless, when Paul has opportunity to stand before his captor, he preaches to him about the spiritual condition of his life. Not only does Paul thus risk his freedom, Felix had already had one Jewish high priest assassinated for upbraiding him about his administration (see Reese, p. 837).
- C. Paul is left incarcerated as Felix is called to trial in Rome and Festus takes over.

#### **Questions:**

1. How does Tertullus first try to gain the favor of Felix?
2. Before this Gentile ruler, what does Paul emphasize about his service to God in Acts 24:15-16? Contrast this outlook with its opposite in 1 Corinthians 15:32.
3. How does Felix respond to hearing the preaching of Paul?
4. Research: What can you find out about the marriage of Drusilla and Felix?

#### 1. Biographical Profiles

A. Felix – The governor of Judea when Paul is first arrested. Tenure: ca. AD 52-59.

1. Felix was an emancipated slave whose brother, Pallas, also a freedman, was a close associate of Emperor Claudius.
2. Felix was married to Drusilla, a beautiful Jewess who was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Felix persuaded Drusilla, still in her late teens, to abandon her first husband and marry him.
3. Felix was a vile and wicked man who ruled over Judea for his personal gain. The Roman historian Tacitus is very disparaging of Felix. The *ISBE* says of him: “Trading upon the influence of his brother at court, his cruelty and rapacity knew no bounds; during his rule revolts became continuous, marking a distinct stage in that seditious movement which culminated in the outbreak of AD 66-70. His leaving Paul in bonds was but a final instance of one who sacrificed duty and justice for the sake of his own unscrupulous selfishness” (Vol. 2, p. 298).

B. Festus – The successor of Felix. Tenure: ca. AD 60-62. The assessment of the *ISBE*: “Felix’s maladministration bequeathed to Festus the impossible task of restoring order to a province embroiled in political strife and overrun by robbers ... But his procuratorship was too short to undo the legacy of his predecessor, and under his successor, Albinus, the situation rapidly deteriorated once again” (ibid, p. 299).

C. Herod Agrippa II and Bernice – Herod Agrippa II was the brother of Drusilla and his royal consort, Bernice. The emperors Claudius and Nero gradually added to his territory, which encompassed areas around the Sea of Galilee. His capital city was Caesarea Philippi.

1. Agrippa II was looked upon by the Romans as an expert in Jewish affairs (cf. Ac 26:3). He also retained the power to appoint high priests.
2. The *ISBE* notes: “Agrippa II’s private life was not exemplary. His sister Bernice came to live with him after their uncle, who was also her second husband, Herod king of Chalcis, died in AD 48. Because of the rumors of incest, she resolved to marry Polemo of Cilicia, but shortly after this she returned to her relationship with her brother. This incestuous relationship became the common chatter in Rome” (ibid, p. 697).



## 2. Paul's Appeal to Caesar – Acts 25:1-12

A. The vehemence of the Jews against Paul is seen by the fact that, two years after his imprisonment and upon their first meeting with the new governor, they appeal to Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem – not for trial but to assassinate him along the way.

1. The Jews wish to take advantage of Festus' "greenness," his ignorance of Jewish affairs and their past efforts to kill Paul. They hope he will grant their appeal as a way to get his governorship started on a conciliatory note.
2. Festus, on the other hand, knows full well how difficult and intractable the Jews are, and he wishes not to antagonize or alienate them in any way. While he initially refuses to summon Paul to Jerusalem, he later makes this very proposal in order to placate the Jewish leadership (cf. Ac 25:9).
3. Thus we see Paul repeatedly victimized by political expediency which is necessitated by Jewish implacableness. As strong as Rome was, they did not wish to invest the resources needed to keep Palestine firmly under control. Quality governors wished for easier appointments; other areas were more financially and militarily strategic. The result was poor management of a volatile province which not only led to the death of Jesus and the long imprisonment of Paul but of the eventual annihilation of Jerusalem itself a decade later.

B. When Paul sees that he will not get justice from Festus either, he finally exercises his right of Roman citizenship in a capital case – direct appeal to Caesar.

## 3. Festus' Appeal to Herod Agrippa II – Acts 25:13-27

Festus' weakness and vacillation has created a big problem for him in his first days of office. He admits to Agrippa that "*I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death*" and thus "*I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him*" (25:25-26). In other words, he is sending a Roman citizen under a death penalty from his jurisdiction to the Emperor without any substantive capital charges. This at the very least would be embarrassing to Festus, and at the most evidence of malfeasance.

### Questions:

1. What was once again evident in the charges against Paul in Acts 25:7-8?
2. How does Paul stress his innocence in Acts 25:11?
3. How does Festus characterize the accusations against Paul in Acts 25:18-20?
4. What prophecy of Jesus do these proceedings fulfill?

## *Acts Study Guide*

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### **Lesson 25: Paul's Defense Before Agrippa – Acts 26**

#### **1. Paul's Early Opposition to Christianity – Acts 26:1-11**

A. Judging by sheer repetition, the conversion of Paul is an event of vital importance, for while Luke skips many interesting details in Acts he recounts Paul's conversion three times (chs 9, 22, 26). His address to Agrippa is very similar in structure to his speech before the murderous mob in ch 22.

1. Paul first establishes his orthodox background – 26:4-7.
2. He then injects the spiritual ground upon which his gospel rests: the resurrection – 26:8. It is significant how often in Acts this concept is stressed, especially when speaking to men with no Jewish background or, as in the case of Agrippa, marginal belief. Belief in the resurrection is pivotal in understanding oneself, one's eternal destiny and the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus (cf. 26:23).
3. Paul returns to his fanatical defense of Judaism against Christianity – 26:9-11.

B. Thus Paul wishes to stress that he is not a blind or naïve believer; he was converted from deep skepticism, yea, even dogged opposition. There is something of substance that he wishes Agrippa to carefully consider. Paul is turning this from a legal defense to an evangelistic appeal.

#### **2. Paul's Conversion and Apostolic Work – Acts 26:12-23**

A. Paul recounts his conversion for Agrippa (26:12-18), but when he mentions the Gentiles the King does not interject as did the Jewish mob in Ac 22:21-22.

B. Paul affirms that he has subsequently lived his life in an attempt to obey the heavenly vision that he has seen – 26:19-23. Paul flatly says that the Jews are trying to kill him precisely for obeying this vision – 26:21.

#### **3. Paul's Appeal to Agrippa – Acts 26:24-32**

A. Finally, Festus cannot contain his incredulity any longer and bursts forth with the accusation that Paul is demented – 26:24. Such is the conclusion of the unspiritual toward the principles of God.

1. Paul responds in calm and lucid tones: *"I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason"* (26:25).
2. Paul then looks to Agrippa for confirmation and tries to reach into his heart and touch him personally with the gospel (26:26-27).

- B. In his famous reply, Agrippa offers: “*You almost persuade me to become a Christian*” (26:28). It is impossible to determine the underlying tone of this response. Is Agrippa being sarcastic? Is he praising Paul for his persuasiveness? Has his heart been genuinely, though perhaps fleetingly, touched by these truths? Whatever the case, it is sad indeed when any man under the bondage of sin – and most assuredly Herod Agrippa II was such a man – hears the truth and turns away.
- C. Paul responds to Agrippa with sincerity and concern for his soul – and the souls of the others present: “*I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains*” (26:29).
1. Paul retains his optimism and faith; his two years of imprisonment and unjust treatment have not dulled his spiritual sensitivities.
  2. By this time Paul has already witnessed some amazing and unlikely changes that have come upon men in response to the gospel. He is not willing to write Agrippa off in the assumption that he would never be interested in the truth.
  3. Whether king (Agrippa), governor (Felix, Sergius Paulus), Jewish synagogue leader (Crispus), jailer (in Philippi), leading philosophers (in Athens) or any other human in any station of life, all were deserving of hearing the gospel and being given the opportunity to accept or reject it. May God give us the same spirit.

### **Questions:**

1. How does Paul affirm that Christianity is not a “new religion” (and thus outlawed by Roman authority)?
2. How does Jesus describe Paul’s apostolic objective in Acts 26:18?
3. How does Paul describe a faithful response to God in Acts 26:20?
4. To what does Paul attribute his present opportunity to preach (Acts 26:22)?
5. What other unkind assessments have been made of Paul in Acts?
6. What was the conclusion of Agrippa regarding Paul after hearing his defense?

### Lesson 13: Paul's Voyage to Rome – Acts 27-28

#### 1. The Ill-Fated Voyage to Rome and Shipwreck – Acts 27

- A. “The account of Paul’s voyage to Rome is like no other story in all the Bible. In it the reader’s attention is directed, not to spiritual truths and acts of devotion, but rather to such mundane things as ships and seas, winds and waves, islands, towns, and harbors. Altogether Luke has given a description of first century ships and seamanship surpassing anything else in extant Greek and Roman literature. A fascinating story of adventure, it stands also as a descriptive masterpiece. Its nautical descriptions are authentic to the last detail” (Reese, p. 890).
- B. The voyage begins at a time of year when shipping on the Mediterranean is beginning to wane. In fact, no sensible trip is made upon the sea from mid-November through mid-March. Note the various ways in which Paul tries to use his influence to the best outcome for himself and the 275 other passengers onboard:
1. Paul tries to save the ship from disaster by *counsel* – 27:9-11. Unfortunately, the centurion rejects his judgment and follows the advice of the helmsman and owner. Later, Paul upbraids them for not listening to him (27:21).
  2. Paul effectively saves all through *prayer* – 27:23-25. Luke notes that “*all hope that we would be saved was finally given up*” (27:20), all natural and human hope that is. Paul has apparently interceded for the safety of all through prayer (“*God has granted you all those who sail with you ...*” – 27:24).
  3. Paul saves through his *insight* – 27:31. When the sailors tried to abandon ship under false pretences, Paul alerted the centurion. Without the experience of these men to guide the vessel to a “crash landing,” the others would be helpless.
  4. Paul inspires through *encouragement* – 27:33-34. The passengers and crew had been so consumed with fighting the storm and likely with anxiety at the prospect of being lost that they had not eaten for two weeks. He encourages them to eat and thus prepare themselves for the rigors to come. Note the leadership ability of one who trusts in God and who has solid judgment that comes from godly principles. Though a prisoner, Paul is the leader and sustainer of these men.
  5. Paul leads by *example* – 27:35-36. Taking one’s own advice offered to others is often hard to do. But Paul gives thanks and eats himself, thus encouraging the rest to do likewise.
  6. Finally, Paul saves all the prisoners by his *character* – 27:42-43. Rather than endanger their own lives by allowing prisoners to escape, the soldiers planned to kill Paul and the others. Julius intercedes because he has regard for Paul.

## 2. Shipwreck on Malta – Acts 28:1-10

- A. What is the likelihood that 276 people could suffer shipwreck on a reef and all make it to land safely? But the One who gave the prophecy is Himself the One who has the power to direct all things. Jesus has already demonstrated power over storms and other physical laws that govern this world.
- B. Two particular anecdotes from the winter spent on Malta are related by Luke:
1. Paul is bitten by a viper but does not die – 28:3-6. Again, the fickleness of the superstitious is seen, though this time, unlike at Lystra, the end result is favorable to Paul. When he is first bitten, the people assume Paul is a murderer because he survived the shipwreck only to be poisoned by a serpent. When Paul does not even swell from the bite, however, they change their minds and consider him to be a god.
  2. Paul heals the father of their host, Publius – 28:7-9. This news spreads among the Maltese and soon others were coming to Paul for healing.
  3. Once again, Paul's influence is a blessing to his companions, for the islanders, who were grateful for all Paul had done for them, showered them with gifts at their departure – 28:10.

## 3. Paul's Imprisonment at Rome – 28:11-31

- A. Paul's preliminary address to Jewish leaders in Rome – 28:17-22. Paul seems to have expected the Jews in Palestine to have informed the Jews in Rome of Paul's impending arrival. However, as Paul reviews the events, the Jews say they have no knowledge of him – though “*concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere*” (28:22). Having someone of Paul's Jewish stature who has converted to Christianity piques their interest and they wish to hear more.
- B. The day-long debate – 28:23-29. As he had done so many times before in other places, Paul appealed to the Scriptures to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. And as before, true to form, some are persuaded and some disbelieve. Paul dismisses the Jews with the warning of Isaiah concerning those who will not see or hear.
- C. During Paul's two years of imprisonment in Rome, he writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Though his physical freedom has been taken away, he remains hopeful that the Lord will use his life and influence to further the kingdom – by imprisonment, life or even death. This is not the trip to Rome envisioned by Paul, but God's ways do not always coincide with man's ways. During his incarceration, kings, governors, centurions, and even the Emperor (we presume) hear the gospel. Lives are saved from shipwreck; the gospel comes to Malta; epistles are written which still benefit God's people today. God's power combined with our submission can make great things happen out of the worst of situations.