

Lamp in the Valley Ministries

Robert Church, Senior Pastor

Meeting address: 167 South Country Rd, Remsenburg

Bible study Wednesdays 7 - 8 PM

Acts 1 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

1 The first account I composed, Theophilus,

- Who is "Theophilus"?
 - The name means "one who loves God" - so this may be addressed to all such people

about all that Jesus began to do and teach,

- Why "began"?
 - He came to announce the kingdom of Heaven and tell us to pray to Him and spread the Gospel. The work continues until Judgment Day.
 - HIS work is finished. Ours is continual but He supports us.
 - John 4:35-38

2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven,

- We remember His ministry on earth but He lives on in Heaven
 - Romans 8:33-39
 - What does verse 2 here and verse 33/39 in Romans 8 tell us?
 - The love of God is in Him and He is in Heaven and interceding for us
 - So as long as we obey and love Him we have the love of God through Him!

after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

- What do you notice about how He gave the orders?
- The Holy Spirit was necessary even for Christ to help us while He was on earth

3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

- What does this tell us about faith?
 - John 14:11
 - 1 Corinthians 15:6
 - Jesus Himself made an effort to give proof, so that we don't just have to take His word - He knows we are weak
 - But - John 20:29

4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me;

- What seems odd here?
- Jesus says we HEARD OF the Holy Spirit from Him
- But not that He sent him
- John 14:17

5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

- Guzik - i. It may be more useful to describe the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a condition than as an experience. We should perhaps ask, “Are you baptized in the Holy Spirit?” instead of asking, “Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit?”
- Acts 4:5-12
 - What do you notice about the description of Peter?
 - If the Holy Spirit had descended on him permanently, why was it necessary to include “filled with the Holy Spirit”? Does the Bible give dramatic effect?
 - In light of Acts 2-5, perhaps the Holy Spirit is a bit more complicated than we make Him out to be. We shall study much more of this in the book of Acts.

6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”

- Why did they expect this?
 - Ezekiel 37:21-25
 - And many other passages
- What was different about their view of the Messiah?
 - They were not just interested in forgiveness; they longed for the kingdom
 - So should we - Romans 11:13-18
 - Hebrews 13:11-14

7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;

- Matthew 24:15-34
- But Matthew 24:36-39
- Why can’t they know the times or seasons if so much other detail is given?
 - Matthew 6:25-34
 - Luke 12:35-38
 - We are soldiers clad in God’s armor fighting for His kingdom. We should concern ourselves with the battle, not with the logistics of supplying all the armies or the overall strategy of the war.

8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

- What is the nature of this power?
 - Same Greek word used to describe God’s power
 - Mark 5:30 - same word
- What should this tell us about witnessing and evangelizing?
 - It is the power of God in us that evangelizes, nothing that we do

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

- Why would Jesus leave in so dramatic a fashion?
 - To make it clear that He did not just die again or disappear - He ascended bodily into Heaven

10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

11 They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?”

- Guzik - The two men (apparently angels) told the disciples to put their attention in the right place (obedience to Jesus' command to return to Jerusalem), not in wondering where and how Jesus went. Jesus told them to go to the ends of the earth, and they stood gazing up into heaven.
- John 20:11-18
- Beautiful symmetry - first, look into tomb, news is resurrection, next look to Heaven, news is Gospel and second coming

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

Will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven: Jesus will return just as He left.

Guzik -

- He left physically and will so come in like manner.
- He left visibly and will so come in like manner.
- He left from the Mount of Olives and will so come in like manner.
- He left in the presence of His disciples and will so come in like manner.
- He left blessing His church and will so come in like manner.

The Upper Room

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

13 When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.

14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

- What do you notice about what was literally the first post-ascension church service?
- All together
 - All one mind
 - What's this mean?
 - Ever been in a crisis situation with other people?
 - All completely together concentrating on a problem
 - Apollo 13
 - This does not necessarily mean they all agreed on doctrine
 - Devoted to prayer

15 At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said,

16 “Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

17 For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry.”

18 (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out.

19 And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

20 “For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his homestead be made desolate,

And let no one dwell in it’;

and,

‘Let another man take his office.’

21 Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—

22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

- Acts 5:1-5
- So Peter had authority
- But what do you notice about his statement here?
- Entirely defended with and argued from scripture

23 So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias.

24 And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen

25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”

26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

- How are church officers chosen today?
 - Degrees, boards
 - Perhaps we should take a page from the apostles
 - Proverbs 3:5-6

Chapter 2

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

- Do you notice a theme here?
 - Every word is important
 - They were ALL TOGETHER
 - Do you think this means physically?

2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

- John 3:8

3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

- Where else did God appear as fire?
- Why do you think He hasn’t appeared this way now?

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

- What was the purpose of this?
 - Matthew 28:19-20
 - Matthew 12:28
- Why did He have them wait?
 - Acts 1:14
 - Ecclesiastes 3:1
 - Isaiah 46:10

5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.

6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together,

- The crowd did what now?
- Again, coming together, they were living together, they came together at the sound of God

and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.

- Luke 21:15
- Philippians 2:13

7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?

8 And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?

9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”

- Does this baptism have to be only foreign languages?
 - David Wilkerson - spoke and the gangs listened. But it was all english.
- What is the source of the tongues?
 - The Holy Spirit
- So what is important here?
 - That the Spirit speak through you in a way that will get to people and get their attention personally

12 And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

- Joel 2

13 But others were mocking and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.”

- What’s bizarre about this?
 - How would being drunk have allowed them to speak other languages
- Then why would people think this?
 - Same as today, they look for any explanation, no matter how implausible, to avoid facing a holy God

Peter’s Sermon

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.

- Once again - addressed to the entire city!!

15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day;

16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

- Who knew Peter at this point?
 - Probably not many
- What was unusual about this statement
 - This is a pretty bold claim coming from what would have been to most people a random fisherman
 - A little bit of a change from the night of the Passion!

17 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says,
'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
And your young men shall see visions,
And your old men shall dream dreams;

- Did this stop with the apostles?
 - 2 Timothy 3:1-5
 - 2 Peter 3:3-4
 - The last days continue until Christ comes, otherwise Paul and Peter would not have spoken of them after Pentacost

18 Even on My bondslaves, both men and women,
I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit
And they shall prophesy.

- What is the "even on" about?
 - In the Old Testament, His Spirit was poured out mostly on prophets and kings
- Is there still prophecy left to give?
 - Matthew 7:22
 - 1 Corinthians 13:9
 - It seems that this gift is ongoing. But not many speak of it, while tongues is mentioned constantly.
 - Yet 1 Corinthians 14

19 'And I will grant wonders in the sky above
And signs on the earth below, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.

20 'The sun will be turned into darkness
And the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.

- What can we learn from this?
 - I would say it's obvious not all of this has yet come to pass

21 'And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

- Does this mean if they just acknowledge Jesus they will be saved?
 - Matthew 24:9-13, 27
 - Many people use this or John 3:16 or Romans 10:9 to prove the easiness of salvation. But the question is not once you come to the Lord will you be eternally saved, but rather what does it mean to "call on the name of the Lord"? Many of the examples we have in the Gospels and Acts portray it as a complete change of lifestyle and occupation, resulting in complete self denial and ending in martyrdom. We assume we surrender to Jesus instantly, then spend the rest of the time wondering what to do.

22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—

- What is important about the wording here?
 - "Just as you yourselves know"
 - Remember, this crowd would not have easily accepted the idea that this poor fisherman and his friends were the fulfillment of prophecy - they actually believed they were drunk

- So if there were many in the crowd who disagreed that Jesus performed miracles or signs, you would think this would have ended like the stoning of Stephen.

23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

- This sentence gives us a lot of concrete information - such as?
 - Predetermined plan and foreknowledge
 - Luke 9:22
 - Matthew 26:47-56
 - By the hands of godless men
 - Puts the blame squarely on the Jews
 - Matthew 23:37
- What would have been the response of those who agreed with Herod and Pilate?
 - If they saw the apostles speaking in tongues and did not object to Peter's claim of prophetic fulfillment then this sentence should have terrified them

24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death,

- An end to who's agony of death?
 - "The" - end of death for all who call on Christ
 - The word "agony" can refer to pain of childbirth, harkening back to Genesis 3:16-19
- since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.
 - Why would it be impossible for Him to be held in the power of death?
 - Seems simple but this is profound - God did not create us to die, death came in through sin (disobedience) and is a creation of the devil, of his evil, and therefore subservient to God (see Job 1:6-12)

25 For David says of Him, 'I saw the Lord always in my presence; For He is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken.

- Psalm 16
- This is a prophetic speech of Christ through David
- What does He mean "I saw the Lord always in my presence"?
 - He is aware of His Father's presence 24 x 7 no matter the circumstance
 - Perhaps this is what allowed Him the faith to do miracles in the flesh?
- What is
- in this for us?
 - If we always acknowledge the Lord's presence and seek His face continually (1 Chronicles 16:11-12) we would never be shaken either

26 'Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted;

- We are supposed to praise God continually (Hebrews 13:15)
- It's hard to do this (therefore it says "sacrifice of praise"
- But Christ does it by seeing the Lord always with Him
- We can too

Moreover my flesh also will live in hope;

- Does your flesh live in hope? Why not?
- Hebrews 11:1

27 Because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

- What is Hades?
- It's pretty clear it is not Heaven, if Christ would not be abandoned there
- It is equivalent to Sheol, the place of the dead to the Jews, not Heaven but not Hell
- How does this relate to "today you will be with me in paradise"?
- 1 Peter 3:18-19, 4:6
- It appears that Christ did not just go to one place and come back
- Outside of this it's a bit confusing but the main point here is Christ would not stay dead as a human nor would His soul be relegated to stay anywhere but Heaven

28 'You have made known to me the ways of life;

- What does this refer to?
 - The Gospel
 - John 17:1-8
 - So God made the Gospel known to Christ who preached it to the world

You will make me full of gladness with Your presence.'

- Even Christ is gladdened by God, even though He is God

29 "[Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

- Remember this is Peter speaking
- What is he saying?
 - David spoke about not being left in Hades or decaying but he is dead and buried

30 And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne,

31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay.

- Here we are explicitly told David rightly prophesied of Christ
- How do you give the Gospel?
 - We should, as Peter does here, boldly declare not only the Gospel but the background to it, the reasons why we know it to be true
 - Christ is not convincing unless one accepts creation and original sin

32 This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

- Is it hard to declare the Gospel to people unfamiliar with God and the Bible?
- Think how much more difficult it would be for Peter - he was claiming to have physically seen, touched and spoken to the physically resurrected Christ, whom all saw scourged and hung on the cross
- But again he refers to all witnessing Christ's resurrection
- Remember Acts is in the form of a letter - to people who were alive at this time and could verify whether anyone witnessed these things

33 Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

- What is this explaining?
- John 14:16-28

- What does Peter's speech here tell us about the knowledge of the crowd?
- They must have had some foreknowledge of Christ's promise already, for Peter to be able to explain it this briefly

34 For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:

'The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit at My right hand,

35 Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

- Matthew 22:41-45
- Psalm 110
- cf "gotquestions.org"
- Jesus' reasoning is this: "Son of David" is your title for the Messiah, yet David himself calls Him "Lord." The Messiah, then, must be much more than just a son—a physical descendant—of David. According to Psalm 110:1, this "Son of David" was alive during David's time and was greater than David. All of this information is contained in the statement that "the LORD says to my Lord." Jesus is David's Lord; He is the Christ, the Jewish Messiah, and Psalm 110 is a promise of Jesus' victory at His second coming.
- So the point here is to drive home to the people to whom Peter is speaking that Christ is indeed the one they killed and whom was resurrected

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

- What does he mean, "both Lord and Christ"
 - Matthew 28:18
 - John 11:27
- "This Jesus whom you crucified"
 - Was there risk associated with this at this point?
 - You better believe it!
 - We all must declare to people who it is that they are denying, just as Peter did
 - This entire speech is really a guide on how to give the Gospel

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

- Do you think Peter was expecting this reaction?
 - It's tempting to say that after the sign of speaking in tongues they would have to agree, but they had seen wonders and miracles performed by Jesus
 - Matthew 27:45-54
- So what made the difference here?
 - We have to assume it was the Holy Spirit speaking through Peter directly to each one of those there
 - Ever feel a sermon was aimed directly at you?

38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- What do you notice about Peter's assessment of these men versus his answer of what they should do?
 - They stand accused of killing God's Messiah
 - They are to repent so that they can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and eternal life
 - Makes it kind of obvious how insane and beautiful the Gospel really is

39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

- Who is excluded?
 - No one who calls upon the name of Jesus Christ!

40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”

- What is the lesson here?
 - We must freely, adamantly and confidently preach to the unsaved, even when it seems repetitive or unfruitful. We must be bold like Peter and not give up.

41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

- Was this a one time church growth?
 - Since the Holy Spirit is calling them, He is always able
- How does this compare to our techniques and goals today in the church?
 - We do outreaches and flyers and FB posts and hope to reach a few
 - They came together, prayed the Holy Spirit in and Jesus called unto himself 3000 in one day!
 - If we want the “numbers” the way to do that is to go all in calling upon the Lord!
 - CF Guzik: God continues to do such great things. After the 1990 Summer Harvest Crusade, there was a mass baptism at Corona del Mar. They couldn’t count how many were baptized, but more than 5,000 people attended the event. It was reported as the largest baptism service in American history.

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- What is the significance of this verse
 - This is the blueprint for the church from the earliest possible example
 - Unity
 - Psalm 133:1-3
 - Colossians 3:14
 - John 13:35
 - Prayer
 - James 5:13-18
 - Bold preaching
 - Acts 4:13
 - Acts 18:5-11
 - Do you think he needed that long to make sure everyone heard?
 - Also to continually boldly preach to those to whom he had started witnessing to
 - The apostles’ teaching - how do we do this today?
 - The gospels
 - Fellowship
 - Why is this mentioned?

- Fellowship is foundational - they could just as well have all gone off and studied alone
- It is a reflection of Christ's love and the unity of the trinity
- James 5:19-20
- Why breaking of bread?
 - Luke 22:19
 - What is the symbolism here?
 - John 6:35
 - Matthew 11:29
 - Bread is no good unless it is torn apart and eaten
 - The Word is no good unless it is treated the same

43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

- This seems like it would be a good test of whether a church is healthy
- How is this instructive to us?
 - The first part of this sounds like the description of a really good prayer meeting
 - This tells us that feeling we get is not just a bunch of us getting excited
 - It's what the first believers felt as well and it was important enough to record in scripture
- What was the purpose of the signs and wonders?
 - The messiah had already come and been resurrected
 - This is what the prophet Joel spoke of that Peter quoted in 17-20 above
 - God will make it unquestionably clear that He is there if you seek communion with Him in Word, prayer and obedience
 - He wants communion with us

44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;

- Had this been instructed?
- Luke 3:10-17
- John 17:20-21 - this is literally what Jesus prayed for. Do we expect Him to answer our prayers? How about answering His?

45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

- 1 John 3:16-18

46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple,

- Again, ONE MIND, UNITY
- Does this mean we always have to agree about everything?
 - Just means we are all seeking God and believing Christ
 - If we seek God and to please Him then He will do His will through us. If we all do this, there can be no disagreement - God will not disagree with God.

and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,

- Is this what we do now?
 - House to house does not mean one house in the same arrangement. These people were a large family of believers, all going to see one another

- We still consider it a healthy thing for families to share meals together
- Our faith is represented through activities we do in our lives. Their faith was wound up in their lives and dictating its activities.

47 praising God and having favor with all the people.

- Note how these two are put together here. Again if we are praising, worshipping and OBEYING God and seeking His wisdom, we will all be in rough agreement

And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- How was He adding?
 - Just by people preaching the Gospel
 - No postcards, gimmicks, tv spots, just the truth that draws all men - John 12:32

Chapter 3

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.

- Why go up at the hour of temple prayer?
 - Some say to evangelize
 - Some say they were still following old habits
 - I think it's related to Luke 19:47-48 - they were following what their teacher did. The temple was a place to open up God's word and teach, and despite the fact so much bad teaching was going on there, they were going to teach the truth.
 - This seems plausible given what happens next

2 And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple.

- Who do you think "they" is?
 - Most likely this man's "friends"
- And what did they do for him?
 - Carry him to the temple so others could help him
 - Just like the man who was 38 years on the mat that Jesus healed
 - 1 John 3:17
- In much of the Old Testament, how would people seek healing?
 - By talking to Prophets 2 Kings 5 (initially talked to King)
 - By praying 1 Samuel 1:1-20
- But this man instead seeks just to survive by seeking sustenance *outside* the temple
 - This is what happens when we don't invite people into God's presence to seek healing from HIM
 - His friends could have carried him inside to pray. The lack of faith is astounding
 - Hebrews 11:6

3 When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms.

4 But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!"

- What do you think the normal reaction of most people was?
 - Most of them probably looked away or hurried along
- Why did Peter ask him to look at them?

- I have often felt called to do this myself so that people will focus on what God is telling them through His word that I am giving - the man was probably looking around still to see where else he could get money, maybe averting his eyes in shame
- Peter wanted him to focus on them, having been sent by God, to call his attention to what was about to unfold into his life via the Holy Spirit through Peter
- It's like saying "wake up man, the kingdom of God is upon you!"
- Matthew 13:15-16
- Matthew 6:22-24
- This man got this lesson *literally* that day!

5 And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

- He thought they would give him money or maybe something to eat

6 But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!"

- So what did Peter possess?
 - The Holy Spirit and the power of healing through it
 - Matthew 10:5-8

7 And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.

- This has to be the ultimate expression of faith - in the midst of the temple crowd

8 With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God;

- What miracles we could call down, what faith could be inspired through them, if we only had the faith of a mustard seed
- Does this relate to us today?
 - I would say this is a good description of how we act when we first receive Christ
- Where does that faith come from?
 - Reading the Word and the Holy Spirit

10 and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

- Do you have anything in common with this man?
 - Mark 5:1-16
- Weren't we all blind, crippled, out of our minds before we came to God? What a witness we can be to those who knew our state before!
- But this is also a reason to be diligent and dedicated to obeying the Lord
 - Matthew 5:13-14
 - 1 Peter 4:1-5
 - 1 Peter 3:15

11 While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.

12 But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, “Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?”

- What is Peter’s first action after this miracle?
 - Point out that it was not them that caused it
- Why are you amazed?
 - If you believe the Bible why would you be amazed - God has done many miracles and created the man, the apostles and the temple.

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

- What does he mean by “has glorified His servant Jesus”?
 - John 14:12-14
 - This man’s healing is a perfect example of why God allows miracles through us all - to glorify Him and to spread belief

14 But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.

- Is this a shy gospel? Does he soften it or gently ease people in?
- Straightforward, biting, honest, truth

16 And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

- Boldly he heals in the name of Christ and boldly he declares it so!
- What is required as the basis?
 - “Simply” faith in His name
 - It’s actually stated that the *name* of Jesus has this strength
 - How does that work?
 - Philippians 2:10-11
 - This has to do with the power and sovereignty of God
 - Exodus 20:7
 - We think this has to do with cursing. It does not. It is stating that the sovereignty, kingship, holiness and power of God is such that even His name carries power and glory and should only be used in appropriate places.
 - Does this mean we can’t write it?
 - I would say this refers to when we are using it to call on the Lord, not just in documents such as this one

17 “And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.

- John 9:39-41
- Does sin increase or decrease as our knowledge increases?
 - Increases
 - Proverbs 3:5-6
 - We must let the Spirit live in us and through us and refuse to move until He speaks
 - The more “we know” the harder that gets

18 But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.

19 Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;

20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you,

- What can we learn from this about preaching the Gospel?
 - Peter's idea of an easy, light Gospel was not to weaken our responsibility or the punishment for not believing it, but instead to emphasize the great reward of peace and filling by the Holy Spirit
 - When we encourage people in other areas of their lives, we don't minimize what's necessary to accomplish their goals but rather just encourage them to think about the final outcome
 - Same here

21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

- What does this answer
 - "Where is this Jesus now?"
 - Especially for the Jews who believed He would reign on earth

22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you.

23 And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'

- This was to convince the Jews that Moses, whom they respected, spoke of Christ
- This is also a good verse for us to go to now

24 And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days.

25 It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

26 For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

- What does he mean "for you first"?
 - Salvation was first offered to the Jews before the gentiles
 - But how did Peter know to speak of this?
 - The Holy Spirit
- What do you notice about the content of Peter's gospel?
 - It relies heavily on the Old Testament
 - As does Paul's - Acts 17:24-31

Chapter 4

1 As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them,

2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

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

- Matthew 10:16-18

4 But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

- So what does all of this say about our Christian walk?
 - This is our job and function, just as it was Jesus' job and function - to preach boldly so that some may be saved
 - But along the way to be questioned, scourged and persecuted at every turn
- So how is this an encouragement?
 - Luke 6:22-23, 26
 - When we are called before church boards, criticized, thrown out, it is then we know we are speaking the truth

5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem;

6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.

- Why is this list important?
 - These are all learned, well respected religious leaders

7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"

- Luke 21:13
 - Was this easy testimony?
 - Remember they are prisoners right now

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people,

9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well,

- Does this remind you of anything Jesus said?
 - John 10:31-32
 - A servant is not above his Master

10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health.

- What does this part of the statement mean for our walk?
 - We not only need to do good acts but when the Lord moves we need to declare His glory, even when it puts us in peril to do so

11 He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone.

- Why do you think "the builders" is in there?
 - These men were supposed to be building a kingdom for God, praising His name, carrying out His will
 - Instead they were building the temple as they saw fit
 - We still do this today
 - Christ must be the corner stone - what does this mean?
 - Any teaching, any act, any sermon, any ministry, must be within that which He taught us and asked of us
 - This does not mean just His resurrection as the cornerstone, but the entirety of His teaching

- how can you separate the teacher from the teaching, and why would you want to when God Himself in the flesh is speaking?

12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

- Anyone who claims to believe in God but believes He is in everything or all religions lead to Him, this is a great verse to share with them. Ask them how they believe in God if not from the Bible, and if they believe the Bible then what about this statement?

13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

- This is actually a huge statement that has a huge bearing on our modern church
- What made their testimony so effective?
 - They had no way to know it or give it and still gave it, under duress
- Would this have been as effective had they gone to seminary and been able to argue theology with the Pharisees?
 - 1 Corinthians 1:17
 - Isaiah 42:8
- Why are we studying so hard when our job is to testify and we are told that is done through us by the Holy Spirit?

14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

15 But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another,

16 saying, “What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.

- What does this tell us about miracles?
 - John 14:13
 - John 10:38
- So God not allowing us to perform the things the apostles did would mean God is not interesting in being glorified any more??

17 But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name.”

18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;

20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

- Would you be this bold? Suppose this was the secret service, threatening you with lifelong prison?
- Matthew 10:32-33

21 When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened;

22 for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

- John 8:32

23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

- Why is this significant?
 - Luke 12:1-6
 - Ephesians 5:11-12
 - It is important to expose evil. Doing this is not gossiping if those in charge are truly rebelling against the Lord. You have a responsibility to not allow your brothers and sisters to be misled.

24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them,

25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, And the peoples devise futile things?’

26 ‘The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord and against His Christ.’

- Psalm 2
- Was the Old Testament important to the early church?
 - They quote it extensively!

27 For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,

28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

- What underscores that it was predestined?
 - Psalm 2
- What does this tell us?
 - It’s important to God that we *know* He is predermining everything
 - Why?
 - Perhaps so we can relinquish control to Him easier

29 And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,

- What do you notice about this prayer vs typical prayers?
 - They prayed for continued boldness to defy those who were threatening them!
 - Sometimes the path out of trouble is to continue following God even if it is counter intuitive within your physical world

30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

- We often struggle to know what to pray. I think this is an excellent place to start.
- Let us speak Your Word boldly and heal and show wonders through us!

31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

- Ever have a prayer answered almost before you finished speaking?
- When does this happen?
 - When we pray in God’s will

32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.

- Is this essential for us to know?
 - Deuteronomy 15:7
 - Proverbs 14:31

- Proverbs 21:16
- Matthew 5:42
- Matthew 25:35-36
- Mark 10:21
- Luke 14:33
- 1 John 3:17
- James 2:16

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

- What caused the Holy Spirit to pour forth this great power on them?
 - Obedience
 - Living as one body
 - Boldly preaching
 - Obeying God not men
 - No fear
 - Providing for one another
 - Studying and praying continuously
 - Giving glory to God

34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales

35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

- Is this anything like what anyone does today?
 - No, it sounds more like communism
 - But it isn't. Because this can only happen successfully when all are surrendered to and obeying the Lord

36 Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement),

37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 5

1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,

2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.

- Why are these two stories one after another, what is the contrast here?
 - Pride
 - Deception
 - Those who lust after power will always try to use God to obtain fame
 - But if their hearts are not pure it will be obvious to the Spirit and will always be revealed

3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?"

4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?

Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

- How did Peter know this?
 - The Holy Spirit
- What does he mean you have not lied to men but to God
 - Even though he laid the money at the feet of the apostles it was really laid as an offering to God
- Is this simply a warning to tithe properly?
 - Is your offering to God only money?
 - We are not to hold back a portion of ANYTHING we offer to God.
 - Safety
 - Health
 - Time
 - Love

5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

- What explains this harsh punishment
 - Matthew 12:31-32
 - 1 John 5:16-17
 - They were invited to give up all of their earthly cares; they gave up some and kept some

7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

- Why are these two facts important
 - She had time to think
 - She could respond genuinely - had she heard about her husband she might have responded out of pure fear
 - 2 Corinthians 5:10

8 And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price."

- Why did he ask her?
 - She got her own chance before the judgment seat
- Jeremiah 23:34

9 Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well."

- Is this typical Peter speak?
 - Nahum 3:13-15
 - Anyone who has read the Old Testament should be familiar with the voice of this scripture

10 And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

- There is a subtlety here having to do with the culture at the time - what is it?
 - At this time, men were the ones who owned property, were responsible for transactions and business
 - But here the man's wife is punished just as severely because under the New Covenant we are each responsible for our own iniquity - we shall all appear before the judgment seat
 - Galatians 3:28

12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

- Why are they always in Solomon's portico?
 - When Herod rebuilt the temple there was no proper leadership and there was no ark in the Holy of Holies - it was a temple without the presence of God, being used by those who were not following His law but their own, worshipping Him in vain with false hearts
 - Solomon was a true king, chosen and anointed by God, and he built a temple that housed the ark of the covenant
 - I believe this is why they are always said to be in this last vestige of Solomon's temple - the last vestige of true belief and worship

13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.

- Who are "the rest"
 - It can't be just the rest of the Christians venerating the apostles- that would run contrary to everything about them
 - Instead this must mean those who had not converted
 - So Ananias and Sapphira's deaths were a warning to those who would approach and pretend to be disciples but have deception in their hearts
 - Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,

- Why do you think this is mentioned a third time?
 - If we truly have a ministry dedicated to the Lord, there should be fruit, we should have people joining us.

15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.

- Is this good?
 - It seems they had hope, but in what? Prayer might have been a better alternative.
 - Matthew 8:5-13

16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.

17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.

18 They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.

- They were not the first
 - Matthew 27:17-18
- What does the Lord say about this?
 - Exodus 20:17
 - James 3:16

19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 20 “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.”

- So God saved them because He wanted good for them?
 - He saved them so that they could preach!

21 Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach.

- After being freed from a prison they were put in for preaching!

Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought.

22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back,

23 saying, “We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside.”

24 Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this.

25 But someone came and reported to them, “The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!”

- Isaiah 46:9-11
- How does this relate to fear of God?
 - If we are not about His purpose and His purpose shall be accomplished, the resolution will be chastisement and correction for *us*

26 Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned).

- What do you notice about this?
 - They are in constant fear of the people, from the time they are condemning Jesus until now
 - They arrested Jesus in the middle of the night for this very reason

27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

- Why the last phrase?
 - *FEAR*
 - Proverbs 28:1-2

29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

- Same usage as Matthew 23:23
- What is the significance of this verse?
- This is one of the most important words in the post-Gospel New Testament - central to a believer's life

30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.

31 He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

32 And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

- Was the part about *them* putting Him to death necessary to the Gospel?
 - To preach it to the leaders it was; they had to face their guilt

33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them.

- Do you think they thought they were doing God's work at this point?
 - It doesn't seem so
- Does this still apply today?
 - This kind of thing happens in churches every day, just not with actual death

34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time.

35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.

- What do you think of Gamaliel's advice?
 - 2 Chronicles 16:9
 - Matthew 5:21-26

36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.

37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.

38 So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown;

39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

- How does Gamaliel's wisdom guide us today?

- If God is sovereign and we are to leave vengeance to Him and not worry about tomorrow, then all we need do unless He prompts us otherwise is to wait and see what His will brings
- If God ordains something, it cannot be stopped. If it is not His will, it WILL be stopped.
- Psalm 91:7-8
- Psalm 37:12-17

40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.

41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

- Luke 6:22-23
- Why?
 - Because the world is only going to resist and fight against truth
 - John 8:31-32

42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

- Boy they were brave right?
 - See verse 29

Acts 6

1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

- What should have been their attitudes?
 - Deuteronomy 8:3
 - Philippians 2:3

2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

- This is a very very important statement - why? Why is it included here?
- Luke 11:42
- Genesis 25:27-34
- Luke 10:38-42
- Luke 12:13-15
- Ministry of the word and prayer should ALWAYS be more important than anything else that goes on in a church

3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

- What was the task?
 - Serving tables
- Why did they need to make sure they had men of good reputation full of the Spirit and wisdom?
 - Jude 1:3-4, 12-13
 - Luke 21:8
 - James 2:1-7

- It is in the poor that Jesus' heart lies, and it is in the everyday ministry to them that there is hope, there is opportunity to exhort, to encourage, and there is danger that we will speak a misword to them and cause them to stray. It is critically important that those whom you trust to serve the most common and vulnerable in your church are able to do so with love, integrity and the Spirit.

4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

- What was first?
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- And the ministry of the Word...
 - What word would this have been?
 - Remember, Acts, Revelation, probably Timothy, Romans, etc were not yet written at this time.
 - Consider that when Peter preached in the preceding chapters, he spoke of Joel, David, Moses, Abraham
 - Consider that each time Peter preached he reminded the people to whom he was preaching of the full story of Jesus Christ and the Gospel
 - It seems logical that the ministry of the Word would have been very similar to these sermons

5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation;

- Again togetherness and one mind

and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

- What is the significance of laying on of hands?
 - 1 Timothy 4:14
 - Numbers 27:15-22
 - So often today people think of laying on of hands as healing... but that is done via simple anointing and prayer as per James 5:14-15
 - Laying on of hands is actually giving of commission, authority
 - This is the true way that a pastor or deacon is appointed biblically; it has nothing to do anywhere in scripture with a test or degree, other than the list of qualifications for deacons and elders
 - 1 Timothy 3:8-13
 - Titus 1:5-9
- There is a deeper point to all of this, what is it?
 - The apostles, hand chosen by Jesus and leading the earliest church, responded to quarrels and division not by dragging people before a council as the Pharisees did but instead solving the issue in a practical way agreed upon by the whole congregation, and then getting back immediately to concentrating on prayer and God's Word

7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

- Why are the priests mentioned separately and prominently here?
 - Because it was a testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit that men who had been steeped in the Pharasaical traditions and rituals were able to be converted to believers
 - This would be like a devout atheist becoming an evangelist
 - Which happens all the time

8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

- How do you think he felt?
 - We desire these things greatly, tongues, prophesy, signs and wonders
 - But.....

9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.

10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

- Literally a fulfillment of Luke 21:12-15
- We have no righteousness and cannot “win” anybody over to belief - we must allow the Spirit instead to speak through us, which is only possible through prayer and surrender in true repentance and realization of our absolute inability to be holy

11 Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”

12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council.

13 They put forward false witnesses who said, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law;

14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.”

- Does this sound familiar?
- Mark 14:55-64

15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

- Exodus 34:29-30
- What an extraordinary sign of divine presence!

Chapter 7

1 The high priest said, “Are these things so?”

- At least this one asked...

2 And he said, “Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,

3 and said to him, ‘Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.’

4 Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living.

- Were the Jews unaware of this full story that Stephen is telling?
 - They had the original Old Testament; we know that from the Dead Sea scrolls
 - But there are two testimonies here to its importance even post-resurrection - what are they?
 - Stephen who was so full of and led by the Holy Spirit that his face glowed and he performed signs and wonders, felt it necessary to speak the whole story of the plan of salvation
 - Luke, the orderly physician who wrote Acts, felt it necessary to put the whole summary down here, well past the resurrection
 - This is the ministry of the Word - ALL of it!
 - What do you notice about Stephen’s story telling in verse 4?
 - He relates the story of Abraham, from over a thousand years earlier, directly to those to whom he is speaking - “in which YOU are now living”

5 But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him.

6 But God spoke to this effect, that his descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years.

7 'And whatever nation to which they will be in bondage I Myself will judge,' said God, 'and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place.'

- Why emphasize this? It sounds almost discouraging
 - Genesis 15:6
 - All of Romans 4
 - Galatians 3:6
 - James 2:23
 - It's like Stephen is describing how amazing the faith of Abraham was, to point out the lack of faith of the ones he was speaking to

8 And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

- As Paul says, the covenant was given *after* Abraham believed

9 "The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt."

- Who else was jealous?
 - The Pharisees, of Jesus
 - The Pharisees, of Stephen

Yet God was with him,

10 and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.

- What does this verse powerfully prove?
 - The sovereignty and omnipotence of God
 - 2 Chronicles 16:8-9

11 "Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could find no food."

12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time.

- Do you notice anything about how his telling is phrased?
 - *Our fathers*
 - He is stressing to these people their history, the reasons why their forefathers failed, trying to get them to see the light through this history that God allowed to progress
- So what does this say about God and history?
 - Everything he has allowed to happen is to maximize the chance of humankind to realize their errors and repent

13 On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh.

14 Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all.

15 And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died.

16 From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

17 “But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt,

18 until there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph.

19 It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive.

- What does this emphasize?
 - The persecution they have faced via man, not God

20 It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father’s home.

21 And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son.

22 Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.

23 But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel.

24 And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian.

25 And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand.

26 On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?’

27 But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and judge over us?’

28 You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?

- Obviously Stephen is picking which parts of the story to tell - why choose this?
 - This part about Moses shows how their greatest leader’s impatience cost years and time
 - Should be obvious that this also was the case with the leadership of Joseph and his brothers’ rejection of him

29 At this remark, Moses fled and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

30 “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush.

31 When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord:

32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look.

33 But the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

- Obviously the people to whom Stephen was talking did not agree with his current viewpoint
- Yet they all held this common history and they could not deny what he was saying
- This is the beauty of the history that God planned all along for the Israelites

34 I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt and have heard their groans, and I have come down to rescue them; come now, and I will send you to Egypt.’

35 “This Moses whom they disowned, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.

36 This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.

- Again he is stressing their disobedience of a leader whom God sent

37 This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.'

38 This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you.

39 Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt,

40 saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt—we do not know what happened to him.'

41 At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

42 But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'It was not to Me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel?'

43 You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.

- Do you see what Stephen's sermon is about?
 - It is a legal argument about the common history of their fathers and the proof of their repeated disobedience to the Lord and lack of respect for the leaders and prophets sent by Him
 - Luke 20:9-19 refers to this same subject

44 "Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen.

- Why mention this?
 - To show that their fathers had all the evidence they needed to know God was among them and speaking to them

45 And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David.

46 David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

47 But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.

48 However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:

49 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is the footstool of My feet; What kind of house will you build for Me?' says the Lord, 'Or what place is there for My repose?'

50 'Was it not My hand which made all these things?'

- Matthew 23:16-22

51 "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.

52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;

53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

- Is this Stephen speaking in his own strength?

- Matthew 23:27-39
 - This is the Holy Spirit rebuking them again, giving them another chance now that they have witnessed the Resurrection

54 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.

- John 15:18-25
 - This is why Jesus spoke in parables

55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;

56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

- Why standing at the right hand of God?
 - This was the final time he would stand and wait to welcome them into Heaven. Of course He knew they would not accept but He still was genuine with the warning and the offer. What just judge would not allow another chance to make a plea after such evidence?

57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse.

58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

- Even after all that...
- Is there a warning for us?
 - When we concentrate on statements of faith, on denominations, on memberships, on commitments to a building and a leader, we put ourselves right in the footsteps of these men and the danger of the judgment they faced.
- Why make sure Paul (Saul) was there?
 - So he could be a first hand witness to their rejection of the Gospel, even though at the time he agreed with them
 - God always plans ahead

59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

- Do these statements remind you of anything?
 - Luke 23:34
 - Luke 23:46
 -

Chapter 8

1 Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

- 1) to be pleased together with, to approve together (with others)
- What can we take from this for our ministry?
 - We know now, in hindsight what a mistake this was. In fact I think this may be what Paul's thorn in his flesh was - the memory of the death of Stephen. Just imagine knowing you did this..
 - We should never, ever, under any circumstance, be gleeful about harm coming to another, even when we are sure they are wrong
 - Proverbs 3:5-6
 - Matthew 5

- There is a reason we are given Matthew 18. And it isn't to do an inquisition when there is disagreement with the pastor on some management issue where the division is not over scripture
- Matthew 18:15
 - Goal is to "win your brother" not to be right or in charge

And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem,

- Which Jesus speaks of over and over again
- Luke 21:5-19
- Has this persecution ended?
 - Look around.

and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,

- What a blow to the church right?
 - Romans 8:28
 - This was a vehicle to allow the church to expand like a fire spreading seeds of a tree
 - Pinecones, at least some types, cannot open and give their seed without being burned

except the apostles.

- Why this interesting exception?
 - 1 Corinthians 14:33
 - Isaiah 46:9-10
 - He sent out the apostles in a very targeted means as time went on - we will see this later
 - God had a plan to spread His Gospel.

2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.

- What is the reason to include this fact?
 - Normally people killed for blasphemy by the Sanhedrin were not mourned or buried in any special place- they were buried in a place of criminals with little fanfare.
 - This is an analog of Joseph of Arimathea burying Jesus in his tomb even though he was a part of the Pharisees.

3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

- Ravaging = to defile, treat shamefully
- If they were blasphemers, was this what he should have done?
 - This is not God's law, it is vengeance
- Why would Saul, a religious man and a God believer, be so mean?
 - He felt he was executing God's justice
 - James 1:19-20
- What can we take away from this?
 - Romans 12:18-20
 - Written by the very man described here!
 - Evidence of how God can change a heart

4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

- You see the futility of fighting against God
 - Those banning the ten commandments in schools today would do well to read this

5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

- Do you think he started a church? Bought a building? Wrote a charter?
 - We're told what we need to know - he proclaimed Christ
 - 1 Corinthians 1:12-13, 17

6 The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

7 For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

- What do you notice about Philip's actions?
 - Evangelism was so much different..
 - I believe we could still do this if we had the faith. Miracles happen every day - "Breakthrough"
 - Mark 9:25-29
 - We want to speak in tongues and call on the Spirit but remember the apostles joined together the whole church and prayed for days ahead of that

8 So there was much rejoicing in that city.

- What is the biggest problem we run into with evangelism
 - Getting people to listen'
 - They were rejoicing because Philip in his zealousness and faith was healing them and showing them wonders
 - Even if we don't believe we can do the same signs and wonders, we can certainly change their lives by helping them in Christian ways - doing good works in the Lord's name

9 Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great;

10 and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God."

11 And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.

- Matthew 24:4-5
 - There is a lesson here
 - Matthew 7:15-23
 - Jonathan Cahn and the like
 - Just because they give testimonies and signs and prophecies that sound good does not mean they are from the Lord
- How do we know?
 - 1 John 2:15-17
 - 1 John 3:17
 - 1 John 4:1-6
 - Matthew 7:15-20
 - Do they live by Matthew 5-6?

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

- Why mention "men and women alike"?
- Galatians 3:28
- 2 Corinthians 5:10-11
- Just like Sephira had her own chance to be honest about the money from the land she and her husband sold - normally she would have had no part or voice or even ownership of the money once he died.

13 Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

- But wait for more notes on this

14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,

15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

- When was the last time our churches heard of the Word being believed somewhere and sent out people to pray? Not missionaries, just in other cities.
- This should be our task, not to fill our own churches but to be the members of one body and fill the Lord's wedding supper
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
- Luke 14:15-24 (23!!)
- Matthew 28:18-20 - important enough to be the last thing Jesus said!
- When did He preach about filling a church?!
- 1 Kings 8:27 and Acts 7:48
- They knew this in the early church and spent their time concentrating on new cities, new converts
- In unity - the apostles didn't each have their own church

16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

- Three distinct things here - why do we make it one?

18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!

21 You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

- Do you offer yourself to the Lord or only tithes and offerings?
- Luke 11:42
- Matthew 9:10-13
- This is all so instructive! And we are given all this to see how a church should operate, but instead we just cherry pick things that Paul said that we like

22 Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.

23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

- Matthew 18:12-15

24 But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

- James 5:16
- 1 Peter 4:8
- Love cannot brook division

25 So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

- Again - traveling village to village, as Jesus sent them out twice to do

26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)

- Do you think angels still give us direction?
- Isaiah 30:21
- Acts 2:17-21
- In these current times we should all be listening for this voice

- I have never *heard* or *seen* an angel but for both of our prayer rallies we seemed to get confirmation that I got the locations right

27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship,

28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."

30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

- Remember the queen of Sheba came and saw Solomon's wealth and glory - maybe that's why this man came to see the holy city himself
- Why would God have singled out this man?
 - Matthew 7:6-11
 - There is a cool double point here - don't actively try to give the Gospel to those who are mocking it and God, but the one who seeks will be rewarded with someone sent to give the Word to them
 - We saw this with someone we met at a random outreach in a parking lot who previously was witnessed to by one of our brothers in Christ. She is not a believer yet but must be seeking.

32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He does not open His mouth.

33 "In humiliation His judgment was taken away; Who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth."

34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"

- Imagine reading this scripture without your knowledge of the kingdom of God and of scripture
- But obviously this word spoke to him - Isaiah 55:11 in action!
- Hebrews 4:12

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

- Why do you think it's stated this way (he opened his mouth and preached)
 - We must be bold and overcome the discomfort of giving the Gospel to those who are not in love with God
- Note that Philip does not just go straight to Christ - he begins at the start, with Isaiah
 - Luke 16:31
 - John 5:46-47
 - It is important when we witness to someone that we give them as much about God and the history and plan of salvation as we can. People will briefly entertain facts about Jesus when they are under duress, but in general people want to understand, and knowing at least some of the prophecies and at least what sin is and where it comes from (Genesis 3) will make for a much more stable and thorough foundation to their faith.

36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

- What an amazing question
- What would prevent him?
- Not sin - Romans 3:23
- Matthew 4:17

- They must repent. And in this if they have active sin you see, you must tell them of it so that they may repent and not just surrender. Repentance is key, we must understand we are evil to understand why and how we need Jesus Christ

37 [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]

38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing

- He didn't give him a membership agreement, didn't give him a brochure on the apostolic church or start him on a devotional reading plan. The man now had repentance and belief in his heart and Christ within him, and the Holy Spirit was satisfied at that. The rest is up to the Lord - 1 Timothy 2:5

40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

- Philip accepts this miracle of the Lord and merely goes on his way
- Acts 3:1-13
- Why are you amazed if you believe?

Chapter 9

1 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

- What do you notice here?
 - Breathing threats and murder
 - Threats - what man of God would be justified in giving threats? Even under the Mosaic law people are convicted and stoned or released
 - And on the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses - Deuteronomy 19:15
 - He asks for papers that say if *he* finds any he can detain them
 - Murder - there are separate words for kill and murder. This one is murder, which is in violation of the sixth commandment
 - Again, this is what zealotry and reliance on human understanding rather than reliance on scripture and prayer and the Holy Spirit does
 - Remember Saul thought he was doing right
 - What does that tell us?
 - Obviously there was a problem with the teaching authorities, because he was taught by Gamaliel, a great pharisee and teacher

3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;

- Damascus - one translation of this name is "a well watered land"
 - Probably not an accident
- Does this remind you of anything else in the Bible?
 - Matthew 24:27
 - Isaiah 6:1-4
 - Exodus 19:18-19
 - So we will know if the Lord ever truly appears to us

- Matthew 24:23-27
- Don't be fooled!

4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

- Isaiah 43:1
- Romans 8:30
- Isaiah 46:10
- Proverbs 19:21

5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,

- What do you think of Paul's reaction?
 - This is beautiful. Remember, Saul was a man of God. He believed in miracles, demons, etc.
 - So it wasn't a foregone conclusion that he would respond this way
 - Matthew 16:13-17
 - "Lord" is kirios - master - same word used in Romans 10:9 and also used for "master and slave" in Ephesians 6
 - So Paul both believed in his heart Jesus was raised from the dead at this moment and also confessed with his mouth that Jesus is Lord
 - Galatians 1:11-24
 - Conversions must happen in the heart. You can go to years of school, read the Bible cover to cover, sit in sermon after sermon, but until and unless the Holy Spirit gives you the revelation in your heart that God exists, that Jesus died for your sins, that the resurrection occurred, it is of no use.
 - And once you have that revelation nothing more is necessary for faith.
 - BUT you will have an intense desire as evidence of that conversion to study God's Word, to know all about Him, His desires for you, His law, His nature, His will
 - Paul's letters and their detail and arguments are evidence of that desire
 - Psalm 119:97-104
 - People ask do we have to obey God's law since we're saved
 - But it should be a question of how do we work toward fully obeying it because we love God and we love His law
 - John 14:15

6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."

- This is an important statement why?
 - James 4:13-16
 - This is the whole Christian walk. First surrender then wait for the Lord's direction
 - So often we are in planning mode instead.

7 The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

- There have been many conjectures by those outside the faith that perhaps Paul had a stroke. If this was the case one would think that this verse would have easily been shown false by the Jewish leaders by simply questioning these men who were with Paul.

8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.

- Why would the Lord take his sight?

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

- This appears to be why. It is conjectured that the revelation Paul speaks of receiving in Galatians 1 happened during this time
 - Galatians 1:11-12

10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

- This is almost always the answer given by disciples when called on by the Lord
- Matthew 24:45-46
- James 5:9
- Many times I have felt promptings to do awkward things at inconvenient times and doubted whether I was hearing the Lord correctly. In every case where I didn't listen I found out later that there was a very good reason for the prompting.

11 And the Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying,

12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight."

- Why would it be noted that he is praying?
 - The Lord delights in us reaching out to Him, especially in moments of rebuke
 - Psalm 139:23-24
- Note how the Lord gives Paul the vision and then confirms it through Ananias
- Most often the Lord will confirm what He tells you either through another believer or through signs or even dreams

13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;

14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

- Is this how we speak to the Lord now?
 - We do in our actions but not in words
 - James 2:15-17
 - Perhaps it would be better if we voiced our objections to God instead of assuming He is cool with them
 - Lord I don't want to give to this man, because I think he's cheating. Lord this woman might use this money for drugs.
 - Lord, I don't really want to go to church. I'm going because I have to.
 - The Lord already knows, tell Him. He wants you to bring it to Him.

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

- How does this instruct us in ministry?
 - Paul is literally a chosen vessel, container, tool
 - He acknowledges this in 1 Timothy 1:12-16
 - We must always remember it is Him at work not us
 - Daniel 4:28-37
 - James 4:4-10

16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

- How does Paul react to this?
 - 2 Corinthians 11:16-31
 - He gladly suffers knowing that Christ is using him, supporting him and showing the world the Gospel through him
 - How much would you be willing to get beat up in order to save a sinner from hell?
 - Matthew 16:22-26
 - You can almost hear the frustration in Jesus' voice in that last verse

17 So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

- Do you notice how Ananias addresses this man?
 - *Brother* Saul
 - Look back at verses 13-14
 - But Ananias is faithful. The Lord said not to reject Saul
 - Acts 10:15

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

- Was baptized - why?
- Paul was given the Gospel straight from Christ
- Consider this man being transformed in 3 days by the Gospel and Christ!
- There is hope for anyone!

19 and he took food and was strengthened.

- God always provides nourishment after someone is touched by Him
 - Mark 5:35-43
 - 1 Kings 19:1-8
 - Why is there many times food involved?
 - Matthew 6:25-33
 - God is not unaware of our material needs

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,

20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

21 All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"

- How is this possible? How could he have known what to preach not having been with Jesus and having the Pharasaical view of the Messiah?
- Galatians 1:11-17
- This is what modern religion doesn't get. The truth comes from only one place, and only via a divine revelation. If you have it, you have the truth and will eagerly seek the rest of the understanding. If you don't seek it and it is not provided to you, all the schooling in the world won't help.

22 But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

- Proving?
 - 1) to cause to coalesce, to join together, put together
 - 1a) to unite or knit together: in affection
 - 2) to put together in one's mind
 - 2a) to compare
 - 2b) to gather, conclude, consider
 - 3) to cause a person to unite with one in a conclusion or come to the same opinion, to prove, demonstrate
 - What is truly amazing is that he proved it even though not only was he not schooled about Christ's ways and the revelations about the Messiah but the schooling he had actually would have been opposed to what he now taught
 - Again, REVELATION. Not study.

23 When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,

- Of course. As soon as they knew that he had hold of something that would be more powerful than them they wanted to eliminate him
- Jude 1:14-16
- This shows who they were allied with
- Hosea 2:1-13

24 but their plot became known to Saul.

- Psalm 55:22

They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;

25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

- This seems an odd detail but what else does it remind you of?
 - Exodus 2:1-4

26 When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

- Isn't it funny how the disciples were all afraid of a man that Jesus Himself had anointed but Barnabas was OK with him

28 And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

29 And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death.

- Notice how plainly it is mentioned here that they were trying to kill him
 - We should all consider ourselves lucky that our faith has not yet been tested to that level
 - Hebrews 12:4
 - Luke 21:16-18
 - John 3:19-20

30 But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

- Who would have thought that the movement that started out with its leader being horribly beaten and crucified would grow into a built up church that spread throughout the whole region
 - God moved aside Pharisees and Sadducees, chief priests, Romans all to grow His kingdom
 - Think about this next time you are afraid to step out in some ministry
- Churches today are fascinated with growth
 - Notice the two factors mentioned here for growth
 - Fear of the Lord
 - Matthew 10:28
 - How does this relate to modern church security?
 - Comfort of the Holy Spirit
 - "Comfort" is really "help"
 - It does not mention
 - Money
 - Membership
 - Outreach
 - Meetings
 - The Holy Spirit is what originally drew thousands to the fledgling church
 - He is all that is needed and He will respond if we are in a good fear of the Lord

- Not emotional fear but a good grounding in the knowledge of who and what God is and isn't

32 Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed.

34 Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed." Immediately he got up.

35 And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

- John 14:12-14
- Notice that Jesus did not need to stay on earth and personally heal people
- As long as God got the glory through Jesus all was good

36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.

37 And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room.

38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, "Do not delay in coming to us."

39 So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.

40 But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise."

And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

- This woman was allowed to die for the glory of God
- Again Peter is allowed to be the one to resurrect her
- Prayer and the faith to call her by name is all that was required

41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

42 It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

- There are not many reports of saints today performing resurrections, even though I believe it is possible
- However we can take someone who is dead, guide them to be healed and present them alive
- We can do this through evangelism and the healing power of salvation

43 And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.

Chapter 10

1 Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,

- This was an important man - a cohort was a unit of about 600 men, and a centurion (century) would have been in charge of 100 of them

2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

- This would have been very strange for a number of reasons
- First and foremost, this man's allegiance should have been only to his Roman leaders, who would have expected him to worship the Roman gods and serve only them, under pain of death
- He was devout and feared God
 - What does this tell us of this man?
 - First, he was obviously called by God
 - John 6:44
 - Second, he understood that God's sovereignty and power is to be feared
 - Proverbs 9:10
 - With all his household

- This man fits several of the characteristics for being an elder!
 - Devout
 - Family in good standing
 - Obviously austere and serious
 - Gave to the poor
 - Prayed continually

3 About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!"

- "Clearly saw in a vision"
 - Why include this?
 - 2) a sight divinely granted in an ecstasy or in a sleep, a vision
 - Clearly
 - To instruct us
 - Joel 2:28-32
 - I have had dreams I would call visions
 - So have many, many others
 - This is how God spoke to Cornelius, it is also how He can speak to us
- John 10:1-5; 16

4 And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?"

- Why was he alarmed?
 - I remember our old pastor once saying he hoped to never hear physically from God, because it usually signalled something pretty intense
 - Samuel's call to prophet
 - Noah's call to build the ark
 - Mary's immaculate conception
 - Just think how a man who had grown up as a Roman and probably wasn't completely familiar with the God to whom he was praying would have felt

And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

- This is a confirmation of something we get told in a later book - what is it?
 - Revelation 5:8
- Also an older passage
 - Psalm 141:2

5 Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;

6 he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea."

- We see how the Holy Spirit works differently in different situations - with the eunuch of an earlier chapter He prompted the apostle to go, here He prompts Cornelius to send men to get the apostle
- Why the difference?
 - Perhaps this was a test of faith for Cornelius - remember he was part of a larger Roman force. He had to know the men whom he sent would surely be asked by their comrades what they had been sent to do

7 When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants,

8 and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

- Were these men also believers?
 - If Cornelius was a devout man who feared God, perhaps these men were too - he would not have wanted to have God's messenger hurt.

9 On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

- Notice the way this is told - as they were approaching the city, Peter was going on the roof to pray
 - This has the ring of personal testimony to it - "and you wouldn't believe it, while I was praying the very men Cornelius sent were already on their way!"

10 But he became hungry and was desiring to eat;

- I'm glad I'm not the only one who gets distracted when I should be praying!
- With all seriousness, look at the human frailties of him who God hand picked to lead His first church!

but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;

11 and he *saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,

12 and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.

13 A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!"

- Leviticus 11 - ex. 1-8

14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean."

- Peter had received a direct command from the Lord but could not obey it because he was worried about double checking what the Lord commanded
- Peter always has a hard time with this. Notice:
 - Matthew 9:9 vs
 - Luke 5:1-11

15 Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy."

- One of the most important sentences in the Bible!
- Why?
 - The biggest difficulty of the early church according to Paul's letters was people preaching false gospels by trying to convince converts that they must do other things to get saved than just repent of their sin and believe Jesus Christ
 - The entire mechanics behind the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that if we repent which means we realize what we have been doing and continue to do is wrong and evil, and believe that Jesus Christ died for payment of our sins, then when we confess sin He is faithful to forgive us and clean us of all unrighteousness
 - But many times we cannot believe He will forgive us, or others try to convince us we must jump through some other hoop.
 - This verse taken with 1 John 1:9 prove this not to be the case
 - We should absolutely follow God's law after we are truly born again
 - But this is evidence of salvation and the Holy Spirit living within us, it is not the means of salvation

This also speaks to spiritual abuse and church hurt - there is no other name by which we must be saved, no condemnation in Christ Jesus for those who repent and confess Christ, and anyone who tries to force us to bend to their will is only concerned about their earthly pride, not the things of God

16 This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

- One wonders if Peter objected the same way all 3 times!

17 Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate;

18 and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there.

19 While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you.

20 But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself."

- God, as usual, prepares both parties and confirms His plan
- This is important - why?
 - 1 Kings 13:11-26
- It is CRITICAL that whenever you are told the Lord commanded someone to talk to you, to do something with you, etc., that you carefully investigate, pray, seek confirmation from the Lord through some other avenue, for most often in the Bible He confirms what He commands to both parties.
- Think of Joseph and Mary
- Notice the “without misgivings” clause - the Lord knows Peter!

21 Peter went down to the men and said, “Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?”

- Peter already knew why they came - but he still confirmed. Good guy Peter.

22 They said, “Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you.”

- What a mixed up description
- They lead off by calling him a centurion - obviously they still felt this was the most important title. I doubt Cornelius would have agreed
- And yet they feel compelled to tell him that Cornelius is righteous (!) God fearing and liked by the Jews. Did they fear Peter wouldn’t go with them?
- And they place the divine directions from a holy angel dead last!
- So they and Peter both kind of miss the boat - God is sovereign and we must obey Him!
- Peter KNOWS this too - Acts 5:29

23 So he invited them in and gave them lodging. And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

- Hebrews 13:2
- Now these men were not literally angels but they *were* messengers of God
- I wonder how many of us would give up space in our homes for a brother or sister this easily

24 On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

- This man was evangelizing before even he was converted
- He didn’t even know under exactly what purpose this man was coming to him, but he knew it was from God and obviously wanted to bring as many of his fellow human beings to God as possible
- I remember inviting our neighbors and friends to our baptisms - only a few came. We should be inviting all the time and praying for the Holy Spirit to show up

25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him.

- This is always a danger with a new believer
- We crave someone to judge us - 2 Samuel 14:32
- And we crave in person contact with that being - Exodus 32:1

26 But Peter raised him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am just a man.”

- Peter could have said you *may* stand. He was the hand picked head of Christ’s church. But he humbled himself
- Matthew 23:1-11
- It is important to remember that although we have elders and deacons in order to ensure that we stick to the pure faith, none of us is above another in any real sense
 - We are all sinners
 - We will all go before the judgment seat
 - We must all bow to Christ

- If those who lead us teach well and stick to scripture and watch over us well, we are to respect them and try to live in a way that will make their responsibility for our discipleship easier
- But there is no power structure other than us as brothers and Christ as teacher and rabbi

27 As he talked with him, he entered and *found many people assembled.

28 And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

29 That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for.

- Peter obviously felt the need to explain himself here even though no one here would have judged him, none of them being Jews
- Galatians 2:11-14

So I ask for what reason you have sent for me.”

- Jesus often asks this kind of question
 - John 18:33-34
 - John 6:66-67
 - Mark 10:50-52
- In this case He is asking it through Peter
- You can hear His voice often in Acts through the words of Stephen, Peter and Paul via the Holy Spirit

30 Cornelius said, “Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments,

31 and he *said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.

32 Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.’

- Note that Cornelius has no doubt; he doesn’t consider that he might have had too much sun or too much to drink; nor do we have any report those around him said anything to this effect
- This illustrates his faith, especially as a gentile raised in Roman customs and gods

33 So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come.

- Cornelius acknowledges Peter in a most humble way - this man is extraordinary
- Could he have been this way on his own?
 - John 18:35
- Does not seem likely
 - This man may have been the centurion mentioned in Matthew 8 who had great faith
 - That might explain the Lord’s desire to use him as the first gentile convert

Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

- He eagerly awaits whatever it is God has for him without knowing anything about what it is

34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,

35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

- Understand, this is a radical departure from the Jewish culture and Peter obviously was still having a hard time with it
- That is why he had to be prepared by the vision God gave him
- Which by the way came just in time for the task at hand, not through intense schooling and preparation
- Yet this was the first gentile convert - one of the most important moments in Christianity
- 1 Corinthians 1:17
- You have one teacher, the Messiah, and you are all brothers
- God works through us, He does not train us
- We are transformed by our crucifixion and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are not altered in the flesh

36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)—

- Which in this moment goes to the gentiles too

37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed.

- How often do we start the Gospel with John the Baptist? But he is the beginning of the coming (not of the Gospel, that starts in Genesis 3)

38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

- Peter's Gospel
 - Introduce John the baptist
 - Which is repentance
 - Acknowledge the origin of the Savior - God
 - He healed those oppressed by the devil - acknowledge the source of evil in this world

39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.

- The passion

40 God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible,

- The resurrection

41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

- Bodily resurrection - important!
- It took me a long time to realize Jesus wasn't a ghost or a spirit, even after being saved - He was in His human body, still is!

42 And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

- Acknowledge Jesus as Judge and Savior - no one comes to the Father but through Him

43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

- Notice Peter ties the point of the Gospel firmly to the Old Testament
- Without the prophecy of Jesus Christ and the explanation of why He had to come, His coming loses the very basis and body of its purpose
 - Luke 16:31
 - John 5:46
- God did not wait all this time and send all those prophets for no reason
- Peter acknowledges this - he is used to speaking to Jews who would definitely not accept a Savior that was not prophesied of
- Neither would most Gentiles - if they do they may profess Him falsely because they are responding in emotion rather than full acknowledgment of the truth and full belief

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.

45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.

- Again this would have been a totally new thing for the Jews
 - As far as they knew they were God's chosen people and were to keep separate from the rest of the world

- But Jesus makes clear in the parable of the wedding supper and other places as well that since the Jews as a people rejected salvation through Christ, it could therefore be offered to all
- Luke 14:16-24

Then Peter answered,

47 “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?”

48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

- Peter is still wondering here - this is the very moment the revelation comes that they may have the baptism of Christ, for God has already spoken by bringing the Holy Spirit upon them

Acts 11

1 Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

- This is no small matter
 - Matthew 15:21-28
 - This may seem harsh
 - But God always intended the Gentiles to be included, the Jews just had the right of first refusal
 - John 10:14-16
 - Isaiah 49:6
 - So why does He say her faith is great?
 - She is asking for the “crumbs” rejected by the Jewish leaders

2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him,

3 saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

- They still didn’t get it - what about Christ talking to a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well?

4 But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying,

5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me,

6 and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air.

7 I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.

8 But I said, ‘By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

- Mark 7:1-23
 - This was a major rebuke of the entire Pharaical system
 - Yet these men still don’t get it
- Luke 14:33
- Luke 9:61-62
- Life with Christ must be a radical departure from all things not scriptural
- Life must be devoted to being a servant to Christ, and Christ was about spreading the Gospel

9 But a voice from heaven answered a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.’

10 This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.

11 And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea.

12 The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man’s house.

13 And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here;

14 and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.'

15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.

16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

17 Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

- Notice that as with Stephen and Saul / Paul, not only do we have Peter's original experience recorded here but his retelling also
- Why?
 - Because it was this important of a point that God offered salvation to the Gentiles
 - Those reading this would have been incredulous and so this section is meant to clearly lay out the reason why Jewish men would be eating with gentiles and giving them the Gospel of Jesus Christ

18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

- These men gratefully accepted the Lord's decision
- Whereas the leaders, the scholars, those put in charge of all and supposing to be holy, could not accept
- Luke 6:20-26
- Luke 2:8-17
- Jesus' disciples were fishermen and tax collectors
- His biggest encounters a Samaritan woman, a chief tax collector and an adultress
- So why do we still look to scholars, papers, schools, priests, boards?
- There are two leaders besides Christ in the Bible - elders and deacons. And deacons are really just intended to serve the flock.

19 So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.

20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

- Here we have God's plan in beautiful and perfect action
 - Genesis 22:15-18
 - John 16
 - Acts 10:44-45
 - You and I

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

- Note that there is no emphasis here on what their technique was, their mission statement, their organization
- Only that the hand of the Lord was with them
- Remember we are only laborers in the vineyard - we can only reap that which we did not sow
- John 4:36-38

22 The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.

- What do you find unusual about this?
 - We sometimes send missionaries to give the Gospel. And we will go to a new location and plant a church. But how often do we, when we hear of converts in some distant land, send a disciple to minister to and encourage those who have newly believed?
 - Yet this is the second time we see it here, and this is mentioned many times in Paul's letters
 - 1 Corinthians 4:16-17
 - 1 Timothy 3:14-16

23 Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord;

24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.

- How often do we rejoice when witnessing the grace of God?
- What does he mean by this?
 - Seeing first hand the epiphany given in each new believer of the gentiles, this represented to him the overwhelming grace of God to give forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and eternal life to the gentiles
- Considerable numbers - Holy Spirit - hand of the Lord

25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul;

26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

- There's another important thing here - what is it
 - Look at the phrasing - "for an entire year"
 - Luke, the writer, is obviously thinking it is exceptional for Saul and Barnabus to stay for a whole year teaching the disciples
 - Because their entire mission was to go from place to place, spreading the Gospel and discipling the believers
 - Not to stay in one place
 - Somehow we have to resolve this in the modern church

27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.

- This prophecy was obviously a valuable tool to the modern church - through the Holy Spirit they would be warned of what was to come
- This still happens - look up David Wilkerson's prophecy about famines and everything shutting down

29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.

30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

- 1 John 3:17

Chapter 12

1 Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.

2 And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

- Note that, disturbingly, there is no higher purpose stated here.
- John 3:19-20
- This is another large moment - why?
 - This is the first apostle to be martyred
 - Matthew 20:20-23
 - Drinking of His cup is what we are all called to
 - Luke 21:12-19
 - Hebrews 11:36-38

- I wonder, do we know what we ask when we ask Christ to accept our repentance and come into our hearts?
- Matthew 16:21-27

3 When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

- What sort of act is this that is described?
 - A political one
 - When he saw how it pleased *the Jews*
 - He *should* have been trying to please God

Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

- Why is this important?
 - This was a very holy and religious time - Herod was obviously trying to appear pious by executing those who the Jews considered to be blasphemers during this time
 - Again - political..

4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.

- Sixteen men - why?
 - Acts 4:17-26
 - Their reputation preceded them
 - But, like his namesake, his grandfather, Herod still thought he could defeat the will of God by simply throwing more humanity and human will at it (his father ordered all male children killed in order to eliminate the messiah)
 - Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it..

5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

- What do you notice about this story?
 - The prelude to the climax gives the most important element of the story - prayer from the church to God
 - Not from John, not from Barnabus, from *the church*
 - 1 Corinthians 12:12-16
 - They were as one. They were of one accord, They were gathered together.
 - The three biggest strengths of the early church were
 - The Holy Spirit
 - Prayer
 - Unity

6 On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.

- Bound with two chains, between two soldiers with two more waiting at the door, and what is Peter doing?
- Sleeping.
- Mark 4:35-40 - echoes of Christ through the Holy Spirit in Peter

7 And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.

8 And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he *said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."

- Note the reality of this situation. The angel releases his chains, tells him to get dressed, tells him to hurry
- There is no hocus pocus, no quick blink
- God leads us through humanity, not around it

9 And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

- Sometimes the Lord acts so quickly we don't even know what happened

10 When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

- Matthew 17:20
- God made man. Nothing is impossible with God.
- We so often pray God, this is hopeless, i don't know what to do
- God is Lord of all. He can simply do it.
- He led Peter out from between the guards inside of a locked Roman prison!
- In the same way when we give Him our hearts He will lead us out of the worst circumstances
- Psalm 23

11 When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

- What does he mean "now I know for sure"?
 - He realizes it wasn't a dream or a vision
- The second part of this is very very powerful
 - Why?
 - He was directly delivered by God from a fate sealed by a human king and expected and desired by the vast majority of those around him
 - What expectations does the world have today - God can and will deliver His church from them all
 - Psalm 91:7-10

12 And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

13 When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.

14 When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.

- This is like something out of a Marx brothers movie - poor Peter is left standing at the gate

15 They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel."

- Two curious things here

- First, still they have no faith, even though they have seen the apostles freed before, and even though they have been engrossed in prayer for Peter
- Second - "is it his angel?" - this apparently would have referred to Peter's "guardian angel", not Peter's detached spirit.
- Also - very much parallels another time
 - Luke 24:1-12
 - This should give us some comfort - even those who were with Jesus and those who were around shortly after His resurrection had trouble repeatedly believing God could do things

16 But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.

17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.

- Obviously Peter felt it was not safe to be with the rest of the crew
- So why did he come to them?
- To report and bear witness to his miraculous escape
- Miracles are not our own - when they happen to us we must testify to them - they are God's!
- Mark 5:1-20
- Perhaps if we are unwilling to accept that responsibility, this is why we are not receiving
- James 4:1-3
- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- Luke 12:47-48

18 Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter.

- Evidence of God's movement - no one had any idea!

19 When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution.

- These would have been Jewish soldiers and mercenaries - and they were executed for allowing Peter to escape
- This tells us without a doubt the fate that would have fallen on the soldiers guarding Christ's tomb had they allowed the body to be stolen

Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

20 Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country.

- They wanted peace with an evil king to secure food
- Matthew 4:3-4
- When we are willing to compromise our faith for security that is when the danger comes

21 On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them.

22 The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"

- Herod finally got the glory he was looking for - those looking to gain something pronounced him a god

23 And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

- This death is also described by the historian Josephus, although he only mentions belly pain and not the worms, but it is just as dramatically described
- Isaiah 42:8
- There is no “you and me, God”, there is only glory to God
- Mark 10:17-18

24 But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

- Over and over we find phrases like this in acts - the Lord’s plan rolls on. Those who doubt it today would do well to take notice of these events and the men who doubted them and tried to stop them.
- If the Lord prophesied the things that would happen through men, and the people were awaiting the fulfillment of those prophecies, they had acknowledged God’s sovereignty
- Yet they still put their own envy and ambition above God’s plan

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

Acts 13

1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

- 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, 13:1-13
- We know pastors, elders and deacons. We seem to have forgotten the rest of these gifts.

2 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

- John 16:13
- Romans 8:26
- So much time is spent in planning at church meetings, developing and revising rules, frameworks, programs. The early church just prayed, fasted and listened to the Spirit.

3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

- Barnabus and Saul already had places in the church
- Still the church fasted, prayed *and* laid hands on them (to confer authority)
- When we do send folks out, for visitation or to speak on the church’s behalf to some authority or for any purpose, do we pray, fast and lay hands?
- All of this is very instructional, this whole book.
- Remember, Luke wrote all of these things down for a reason. Obviously he could have filled several volumes with every detail of these early years of the church and missionaries. So whatever he did choose to write we should pay close attention.

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

- Again, they were sent by the Holy Spirit. The men of the church just acknowledged that and acted upon it.

- What was the purpose of the prayer and fasting *after* the Spirit had spoken? Probably to verify that not only did they hear correctly but what should they do specifically, and to pray for success and protection.

5 When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.

6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus,

- Ironically or perhaps importantly, this name translates to “son of Joshua” or “son of the Savior” according to “Got Questions”

7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

- This was a Roman man. Who knows how he heard of God but this shows that the Holy Spirit does work on anyone, any time
- John 15:16
- John 6:44

8 But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

- Ephesians 6:12
- The devil does not like to lose ground.
- Mark 4:1-15

9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him,

10 and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?”

11 Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.” And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.

- Luke 10:17-20
- There is an important warning here - it is the Spirit fighting, not *you*.
- Jude 1:9

12 Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

- John 14:13
- God is certainly glorified when a pagan man of authority believes in Him
- This is a perfect example of the types of requests and prayers God will answer and why

13 Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.”

- Which of us would have the nerve to evangelize in a synagogue
- Luke 4:14-20

- Of course they being Jews were welcomed to the synagogue, many of us would go in as never having been a Jew.

16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:

- It has been said that Paul relied solely on Jesus when teaching and evangelizing. What follows here is a tour de force of the Old Testament. Of course Paul was speaking to Jews rather than gentiles but still.

17 The God of this people Israel chose our fathers

- Genesis - call of Abraham

and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it.

- Exodus

18 For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness.

- Numbers, Deuteronomy

19 When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about four hundred and fifty years.

- Joshua

20 After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.

- Judges, 1 Samuel

21 Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.

22 After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.’

- 1 Samuel - 2 Samuel

23 From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,

- Beginning of the Gospels

24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

25 And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’

- More of the early Gospel chapters

26 “Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent.

- Middle of the Gospels - Luke 4:18 from above - I have come to proclaim deliverance to the captives

27 For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him.

- Jesus’s conversations with the Pharisees in the Gospels, the passion

28 And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed.

29 When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.

30 But God raised Him from the dead;

- The passion

31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.

- Beginning of Acts

32 And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers,

33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children

- Genesis 12:3
- 2 Samuel 7:12-13
- Isaiah 9:2-7
- Micah 7:18-9
- This is the Gospel that makes sense - defined by the history of Israel and the promises made to the fathers that are fulfilled in Christ Jesus

in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.'

- Begotten is important - John 3:16 - only *begotten* Son

34 As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'

35 Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.'

36 For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay;

37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

- This is the same defense of the Gospel that Peter used in Acts 2:23-29
- These men did not shrink from the Old Testament and declare a weak Gospel that states that all that is required is belief in Christ
- Their Gospel was firmly rooted and based in the Old Testament and its facts, history and promises

38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,

39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

- The Point of the Gospel

40 Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you:

41 'Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; For I am accomplishing a work in your days, A work which you will never believe, though someone should describe it to you.'"

- Habakkuk 1:5
- Paul makes the Gospel real by outlining the alternative
- John 3:16-18

42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.

44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord.

- John 12:31-33

45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.

- So many times the Gospel was and is stymied by jealousy
- Matthew 27:17-18
- Acts 5:17-18
- But the Lord is always victorious
- This though is why James 4:6 and passages like it are written
- We must lift up Christ, not ourselves
- So many people have been turned away from the church when men of God give in to jealousy and pride and cause division and rifts

46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

- This is a very key moment
- Matthew 10:5-6
- John 4:22
- Matthew 15:22-28
- If God's chosen people will not believe and repent, He will choose men and women from all nations, which was His intended plan all along

47 For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'"

- Matthew 5:14-16
- Matthew 28:19-20

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

- The Lord calls those who will believe - this should not affect our evangelism but it is the truth that He calls those who He considers faithful
- If this doesn't seem fair consider Jeremiah 17:9-10
- We may not believe but God knows our hearts and whether they are worthy of belief
- Saul / Paul
- It's the desire to love the Lord that counts

49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

- Again this emphasis on God's plan and Gospel rolling along!
- This is obviously an important point - God's will WILL be done

50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

- We will be persecuted - this is nothing to lose heart at, just a reality
- John 3:19-20

51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.

- Matthew 10:7-15
- Spurgeon - One more reason, and I know it will be a good one for you. Try and sing in the night, Christian, for that is one of the best arguments in all the world in favour of your religion. Our divines nowadays spend a great deal of time in trying to prove the truth of Christianity to those who disbelieve it; I should like to have seen Paul trying that plan. Elymas the sorcerer withstood him; how did Paul treat him? He said, "O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" That is about all the politeness such men ought to have when they deny God's truth; we start with this assumption, that the Bible is God's Word, but we are not going to prove God's Word. If you do not believe it, we will bid you a Good-bye;" we will not argue with you. Religion is not a thing merely for your intellect to prove the greatness of your own talent; it is a thing that demands your faith. As a messenger of heaven, I demand that faith; if you do not choose to give it, on your own head be your doom. O Christian, instead of disputing, let me tell you how to prove your religion! Live it out! Live it out! Give the external as well as the internal evidence; give the external evidence of your own life. You are sick; there is your neighbour, who laughs at religion, let him come into your house. When he was sick, he said, "Oh! send for the doctor;" and there he was fretting, and fuming, and making all manner of noises. When you are sick, send for him; tell him that you are resigned to the Lord's will, that you will kiss the chastening rod, that you will take the cup, and drink it, because your Father gives it. You need not make a boast of this, or it will lose all its power: but do it because you cannot help doing it. Your neighbour will say, "There is something in such a religion as that." And when you come to the borders of the grave (he was there once, and you heard how he shrieked, and how frightened he was), give him your hand, and say to him, "All! I have a Christ who is with me now, I have a religion that will make me sing in the night." Let him hear how you can sing, "Victory, victory, victory," through him that loved you. I tell you, we may preach fifty thousand sermons to prove the gospel, but we shall not prove it half so well as you will through singing in the night

52 And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Acts 14

1 In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.

- Again, we many times feel almost apologetic for the Gospel, feel we have to defend it, explain it, soften it. But here they just spoke boldly in the Spirit and spoke in such a manner as to lead people to believe the full, whole Gospel.
- Isaiah 55:11 - speak the Word and believe its power!

2 But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.

- This is an evil evil thing - if they disbelieved and they looked down upon the Gentiles why did they need to get in their way
- Matthew 23:13

3 Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.

- This explains HOW they were able to speak boldly and convert so many
- The Lord will speak through us so that He will be glorified and His grace will find its mark
- His goal is for all to be saved - 2 Peter 3:9 - and He will accomplish His purpose!

4 But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.

- Luke 12:49
- Matthew 10:34-39
- Hebrews 4:12
- He wants us to stick with the Word!

5 And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them,

6 they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region;

7 and there they continued to preach the gospel.

- Matthew 10:14-15
- Matthew 7:6

8 At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

- John 9:1-3
- This may seem cruel - but consider this - this man, having been part of God's plan to reveal His grace, was not only lame from birth but also guaranteed from birth a place in Heaven since he was preordained to believe and be healed! Not only that but he was preordained to be part of leading a group of people to believe in Christ for eternity!

9 This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well,

- How did Paul see this?
- John 16:13

10 said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk.

- Praise God!

11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us."

- Always this is our reaction - looking toward men as the cause of the miracles.
- THIS is the reason why Christ warned us again and again to be humble and point to God. This is why He came to serve and not be served
- John 3:29-30

12 And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

- Do we do this today?
- Occasionally, when we start to heap the praise due of God on other Christians, hopefully inadvertently

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out

15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

16 In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;

17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

- We also should cry out whenever men want to give glory or attention to anyone or anything but God
- And we had better do it quickly. Praise is intoxicating.

18 Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.

- People want something in front of them, we prefer the physical to the spiritual
- Exodus 32:1

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

- 1 Peter 5:8-9
- Hebrews 12:3-4
- Note that these were not men from the city in which they were preaching but pursued them all the way from these other places - this was not an easy journey, they didn't hop on a subway
- Note that Paul was so badly injured by the stoning they had assumed him to be dead
- We can assume this crowd had stoned many others and knew better
- Therefore, the Lord allowed Paul to endure this stoning but it was only by the grace of God that he survived
- Why?
 - To prove that they could struggle all they wanted against the Gospel and the truth, but they shall endure
 - The truth shall set you free!
 - Luke 21:12-19 - clearest example yet
 - He was buried and resurrected!
 - John 11:7-10

20 But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

- Not only does he get up and walk back to the city that just stoned him and left him for dead, he goes back there again
- Just as Peter and the other apostles were threatened and imprisoned for preaching about Jesus but they went ahead and kept preaching Jesus anyway
- Proverbs 18:10

22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

- Again they returned to disciple those who they had converted
- They
 - Strengthened their souls by that discipleship - not their belief, their faith or their bodies, their souls!
 - Encouraged them to continue in the faith - I wonder how many would not fall away once they come to Christ if we continually did this
 - They did NOT preach a prosperity Gospel but instead prepared these new believers for inevitable hardship!
 - John 16:33
 - John 15:18-25

23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

- Appointed elders after praying and fasting - this is the biblical appointing of pastors
- They commended them finally to the care of those elders

- Although we know from Paul's many letters and the descriptions of his prayers and the messengers he sent that they never truly left his mind

24 They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia.

25 When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

26 From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.

- Acts 13:1-4

27 When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

- Note that it is always mentioned when they return and report these things
- This is an incredibly important purpose of Christian gatherings and services - testimony, news, needs of other congregations, etc

28 And they spent a long time with the disciples.

Acts 15

1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

- Isaiah 43:18-19
- John 3:16-18
- Matthew 15:11-20
- Jeremiah 31:31-34
- BUT
- Matthew 5:17-20
 - The new covenant does not REVOKE the law
 - It simply removes the death penalty IF the person fully repents and surrenders
 - Circumcision was the signature between the believer and God of the old covenant - the old covenant of sacrifice and ritual is done away and those temple sacrifices replaced with the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus Christ.
 - So the law didn't change, the system for forgiveness changed

2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

- Praise God!
- Proverbs 15:22
- Note that they did not simply make a membership agreement stating their point of view and make everyone sign it

3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.

- 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18
- For a true Christian there is always joy. The victory is ours, given to us individually by Jesus Christ in return for our surrender - no amount of the gnashing of teeth can take it away.

4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

- First is glory to God - reports of His great mercy!
- Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be HIS name
- BEFORE the business of man

5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

- Mark 2:21-22
- Notice His plain language - no one does that.

6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

- Not to demand compliance or rely on titles - to look into it
- As always the heart is what is most important. They truly all wanted in their hearts to discern the will of God, not of man, not of their own thoughts

7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

8 And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

11 But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

- I LOVE Peter's argument - following God does not mean abandoning logic and reason - they are indispensable along with the scripture and prayer in uncovering the correct course in a believer's life

12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

- Instead of concentrating on their own arguments they listened to what God's actions had been
- When God speaks it is often through what He allows to happen and not happen - and we must listen. He is not unaware of the issues.

13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me.

14 Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.

15 With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

16 'After these things I will return, And I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, And I will rebuild its ruins, And I will restore it,

17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,'

18 Says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago.

- After listening to God's actions, signs and wonders - the next step is the Holy Scripture - the Old Testament prophets
- Amos 9:11-12
- We cannot be guided the God without considering all the scripture He has given us

- The whole reason He spoke through the prophets was to make His plan known, to confirm His will, His desire, the things which He would bring to pass

19 Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

- Another good principle for our modern churches - do not get in the way of those who are actively seeking the Lord, but instead encourage and pray with them, speaking only when necessary to correct ongoing sin or serious misconceptions.

20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

21 For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

- The idea seems to be here mainly not to cause strife with the existing Jewish population who have come to recognize Christ.
- Romans 14:1-4, 19-23
- Philippians 2:3
- Again, do we follow this today? I have seen people have to leave a church over the most minor of disagreements - many times not even about anything having to do with scripture but rather the man made rules and traditions of the particular church.

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

23 and they sent this letter by them,

“The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

24 “Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,

25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

- Isn't it amazing that we have the actual text of the letter preserved here!
- Note the phrasing - 'unsettling your souls'
- This was probably one of the earliest cases of “church hurt” stemming from men not yielding to God in their direction, and the early church considered it important enough to right the wrong that they held a council and not only wrote a letter but preserved it here in scripture through the writings of Luke.
- Romans 16:17-18
- Almost every Christian is familiar with the so called “church discipline” process of Matthew 18 but here those who cause division are singled out because they can not only cause division but can actually prevent people from finding the truth and communing with God

26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- What a credential.

27 “Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth.

28 “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:

29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”

- One wonders why it was necessary to give the actual text of the letter here when we know what was going to be in it. It seems logical it is for the purpose of showing us how to deal with matters within the church with humility and meekness.

30 So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.

31 When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

- What was so encouraging about it?
 - Ephesians 2:8-9
 - Imagine being told that rather than go through some lengthy list of procedures and purification, you are allowed out of jail immediately

32 Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.

- This should apparently be read as “teachers”.
- Note how there was concern here to not only take special care not to allow stumbling blocks to take hold in these new believers but also to encourage, strengthen, disciple
- Note how many of the original apostle and disciple’s activities were dedicated to discipling
- Hebrews 10:24-25
- As the day draws near!

33 After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out.

34 [But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.]

35 But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.

- Again so much emphasis in this early church on teaching and discipling - appropriate considering the great commission says “making disciples” not “believers”.

36 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.”

37 Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.

38 But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

39 And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

40 But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

- Romans 8:28
- So many times I have heard that the Lord won’t tell two different people two different things, won’t do 150 different things at once, won’t cause division
- Christ dispels this - Matthew 10:34
- Paul takes the time to write of rebuking Peter, calling attention to it - Galatians 2:11-14
- Jacob the father of the 12 tribes of Israel, sharply fought with his wife - Genesis 30:1-2
- This is not to say we should be argumentative - Matthew 5:23-26
- But there are two possibilities here

- God was unaware that these two would fight and it was not part of His plan
- Or even this fight served a purpose for Him - to take the apostles in the directions He wanted them to go
- Of course only one of these is really a possibility
- What causes the strife and division is the thinking that each of us is so important to God that He will not tell us one thing and someone else something different, could not have two different purposes for us
- Which is totally contrary to Paul's entire theses on how we all have different gifts and roles and are all different parts of the same body, working together to fill in each part of God's plan

41 And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

- Not getting his attendance up, strengthening his own church or building a new building.
- God's purpose is to have the Gospel spread and disciple the world, not to make uber-disciples of 200 people.

Acts 16

1 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra.

- Remember, Lystra was where Paul was stoned and left for dead
 - We will be called, as warriors of the Light, to where it is darkest
 - Paul was fearless- IN GOD.

And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek,

- Greek is shorthand for gentile, or non Jewish, or pagan, in other words not a believer in God

2 and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.

- Proverbs 22:1
- This good name of Paul's came through sweat and blood, literally, for the Lord
- Think about how many loud voices had come against him in these towns

3 Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

- An odd choice maybe, considering that Paul chastises Peter for refusing to eat with the gentiles when fellow Jews are around
- Perhaps this shows, then, the fierceness of the opposition in these towns, that Paul was willing to go to such a measure
- 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

4 Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.

- Matthew 18:18
 - It is critical to realize this does NOT say whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven
 - As the NASB says, what they bind shall HAVE BEEN BOUND in heaven
 - This is in agreement with the rest of the scripture - it is God that determines what is bound and loosed, not men

- In other words, we have already seen that men like Paul Peter and Barnabas had the Holy Spirit speaking through them - the Holy Spirit likewise will speak through them what is and is not allowable to God
- These things will always be in alignment with scripture
 - Numbers 23:19
 - Hebrews 13:8
 - If we could change what God allows then there would be no sin and God would be wrong and Christ would have died in vain

5 So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

- “So” = “Therefore”
- What is this saying?
 - Because the apostles and disciples were following Christ’s example and not leaving the churches and new believers as orphans, but were instead continuing to disciple and lead them all, THEREFORE the churches were being strengthened in faith and increasing their numbers
 - Leading someone to Christ is not like roping a cow. You don’t put them in the corral, close the gate and walk away
 - It is instead like shepherding a sheep - they wander away, put themselves in danger, need correction, need to be led to safe places, need care and attention
 - That is why we are called shepherds and not livestock delaers

6 They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;

- Note how plainly this fact about Asia is stated - it was a given that the Spirit clearly instructs us
- Asia was witnessed to later - they were not yet ready to receive the Word

7 and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; 8 and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

9 A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

10 When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- Isaiah 30:21
- If God left it to us to preach the Gospel, or to allow it to be preached through us, it makes sense that He would lead us to the when’s and where’s.

11 So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis;

12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

- Obviously waiting on the Spirit just as they had done originally in Jerusalem

13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

- There is very important wording here

- Spoke to the women - Jews did not usually speak to their own wives in public, let alone women they didn't know
- This also shows that Paul's later statements about women being silent in the churches has a narrow scope - neither he nor Christ viewed women as less, but rather to have different roles in the church.

14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

- John 6:41-45
- More evidence that the Old Testament leads people to Christ by design, being the entire story behind why He came

15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

- A counterpart to Matthew 8:8
- Also: Matthew 12:43-45
 - She immediately and wisely seeks to FILL her house with the Lord's presence
 - Not that she needs these men there to do that, but it still shows her faith and desire

16 It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling.

- Matthew 24:24
- 1 John 1:4-6
- 1 Timothy 6:9-11
- Just because something shines does not mean it's light, and just because something is amazing it doesn't mean it's from God

17 Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation."

- This does not seem to be an evil thing to say, but nevertheless we know from the apostles' reaction that this spirit is not of God

18 She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.

- John 16:13
- Luke 10:18-20
- Power can be great temptation. We must always ensure our hearts are with the Lord, not some temptation of having power ourselves

19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities,

20 and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews,

21 and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."

- Whenever we threaten existing powers, especially their profit, they will attack
- This does not mean we shrink back, rather this is what Christ experienced and warned us about

22 The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.

23 When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely;

24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

- This is by no means the first beating nor the last that Paul received - maybe this is why Christ said in Luke 14:33 that we must hate even our own lives if we are to be His apostles, and in Matthew 16:22-24 that we must utterly destroy our lives for His sake to be given permission to take them up again
- Paul was like a soldier, wounded in battle, continuing to fight for the cause
- So may we be. Look around.

25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;

- Philippians 4:4-13
- 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

- The Lion of Judah!
- Did there need to be an earthquake? Did all the prisoners need to be released? Could not God have just sent an angel to quietly unlock their chains as He did with Peter previously?
- Deuteronomy 32:35
- Romans 12:19
- Exodus 14:14

27 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!"

- Luke 6:27-36
- BE MERCIFUL.
- Go and learn what this means - I desire mercy, not sacrifice
- If you were beaten and chained and then suddenly freed, would you stop the jailor? Remember this was a trained Roman soldier.
- Be careful of your answer...

29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas,

30 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

- Mercy leads to grace.
- Every man deserves mercy, because every man is the same under sin.

31 They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.

33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.

- Matthew 20:16

- Acts 17:30

34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

- Matthew 25:35-40
- 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
- Praise the Lord!

35 Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men."

36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace."

37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out."

- Matthew 10:26-28
- We can only assume here that Paul wished to make clear to those in the city that it was not acceptable to treat Christians this way - otherwise the principle of Romans 12:18 would have come out, not to mention most of Matthew 5

38 The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans,

39 and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.

- This reminds me of Luke 8:26-37
- People don't want their lives disturbed.
- Matthew 19:16-22
- Luke 14:33

40 They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

- Again in boldness they do not rush out of town but go about God's business as they normally would
- Proverbs 28:1

Chapter 17

1 Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

- Every word here is important - he reasoned with them *from the scriptures*
 - Ecclesiastes 12:11-14

3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

- Explaining and giving evidence. This evidence had to come strictly from the Old Testament - the new was not written and disseminated yet.
- So often Christians are criticized, somewhat rightly, for asking people to believe a story with no evidence to back it up. The great shame is, there is tons and tons of evidence, but when people challenge us we give in and abandon it instead of embracing it as firm truth and defending it

4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.

- Praise God, Paul's faithfulness to the scripture rather than reliance on his own wit pays off big
- John 12:32

5 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

- Note that in almost every case, the rejection of Christ by the Jews is not based in doubt of the scripture, in doubt of the events of Christ's life, but in jealousy
- Is this not what kept us and keeps others from Christ? Jealousy of His supreme will and sovereignty over us?
- Yet when we accept Him and acknowledge Him as our Lord, we obtain peace, glory and access to power far beyond what we could accomplish as unsaved but "free" men and women

6 When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also;

7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

- So the Jews are acknowledging Caesar as their king then?
- 1 Samuel 8:7-9
- And eventually they wound up under a king who had no allegiance at all to God

8 They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.

9 And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.

- This apparently had to do, from the Greek word used, with Jason giving some sort of pledge or bail for Paul and Silas

10 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea,

- Hebrews 6:4-8
- Matthew 10:33
- When this moment comes for you, and it is more likely than ever it will come for every modern believer, what will be your response? Will you make a pledge to the earthly emperor?

and when they arrived [in Berea], they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

- Note it does not say they just believed Paul and Silas outright
- Nor did they rise up against them
- But instead fairly examined the *TRUTH* to see whether these things were true

12 Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

- Praise God!

13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

- This is not the first time this has happened to Paul

- Things only come from two places, God or Satan. Guess where this one came from?
- Matthew 13:24-30;36-43
- These men were blocking the giving of the Gospel
- Guess which side they were on

14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there.

- They seem to have done this for his safety - the anger seems directed at him
- Acts 9:10-16

15 Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

- Paul is getting sort of forcefully led along the same mission that the apostles were given
- Matthew 10:5-15

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

- The Christian life is not a selfish one. Any Christian who sees people worshipping idols should be so moved
- Matthew 9:35-38
- We should be so moved each time we see people worshipping false idols; wealth, celebrities, causes, governments, anything people rely on in substitute for God

17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

- Look at how this is phrased - "those who happened to be present"
- Proverbs 16:33
- We do this sort of thing as a special event, a mission- we should pray each morning for the Lord to put people in front of us to witness to

18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

- This may seem like not a great response, but the Lord was putting curiosity in their hearts, which is a good thing.

19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?"

20 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean."

21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

- What a perfect opportunity - I wish the modern atheists and others would be so open
- What follows is a masterful introduction to the Gospel

22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.

23 For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

- Obviously God was telling these folks they were missing something, and Paul masterfully uses it to weave the Gospel into their own culture
- We must be shrewd - Jesus tells us this in the parable of the shrewd manager
- Luke 16:1-9

24 The God who made the world and all things in it,

- It has been accused by modern preachers with reference to this passage and Gospel that Paul avoids the Old Testament and just appeals to Christ. This is obviously false. Here he starts with Genesis.
- Genesis 1:1

since He is Lord of heaven and earth,

- Exodus 19:5

does not dwell in temples made with hands;

- 1 Kings 8:27

25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything,

- Job 22:1-4

since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

- Isaiah 42:5

26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth,

- Genesis 1:28
- Genesis 9:7
- Genesis 11:5-9

having determined their appointed times

- Genesis 6:3
- Jeremiah 10:23
- Psalm 139:16

and the boundaries of their habitation,

- Deuteronomy 1:8

27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him,

- Deuteronomy 4:29
- Jeremiah 29:13

though He is not far from each one of us;

- Isaiah 55:6
- Joshua 1:9

28 for in Him we live and move and exist,

- Exodus 4:11
- Isaiah 30:21

as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'

- It is tempting here to start mentioning New Testament verses like John 1:12
- However these men were not yet believers
- So this is in the sense then of Genesis 2:7;21-22;3:20 and Psalm 139:13-16

29 Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

- Daniel 5:23
- Ezekiel 20:32

30 Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance,

- Jeremiah 31:31-34

God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,

- Ezekiel 18:21-23
- Luke 24:47

31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed,

- Exodus 32:34
- Matthew 13:47-50

having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

- Isaiah 53:10-11
- Daniel 12:2-3
- Hosea 13:14
- Matthew 28:1-6
- How anyone could say of this beautifully crafted synopsis of the Old Testament and the teachings of Christ and His Gospel that Paul was not referring to the Old Testament is beyond the pale - The entire first $\frac{3}{4}$ of it is restatement of Old Testament scripture and Christ Himself says twice that those who believe Him must believe Moses and the prophets (John 5:45-47 and Luke 16:27-31)

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."

33 So Paul went out of their midst.

- Sneered - out of their midst - Matthew 7:6
- As for the ones who said we will hear you again - I'm sure he witnessed more to them - see verse 17:17

34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

- Praise God!

Chapter 18

1After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth.

- Where obviously a church was founded

2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them,

- Note that this man along with many others was forced to leave his home because of his beliefs
- He was one of the fortunate ones - those in the 1940's were not so lucky.

3 and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers

- I tend to think it's not an accident that the man who started so many church worked as a "tent maker"

4 And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

5 But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

- Other translations say that he was "pressed in the Spirit", so Paul was here following the urging of the Holy Spirit

6 But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

- Maybe this was God's way of showing him that the very people he came from were so greatly resistant to the Gospel
- I have personally experienced that at times God will do this - devote you to a cause in order to see the futility in it

7 Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue.

- John 3:8-9
- It's not so much that we must move on from unproductive circumstances or those who are profaning God, that's certainly true, but also we must keep following the Spirit when He leads us away

8 Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

- Praise God! Probably Crispus might be the one who founded the Corinthian church

9 And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;

10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."

- 2 Corinthians 3:17
- This also speaks to our Christian duty to have unity and to protect one another - obviously God's plan is for us to stick together
- We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately - Benjamin Franklin

11 And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

- He settled in for the long haul, devoting himself not just to the Gospel but to discipling
- Matthew 28:20
- 2 Timothy 2:2
- We're not supposed to just stop at the resurrection

12 But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,

13 saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

- Last time the Jews were using the Roman emperor as an excuse (Acts 17:7)
- This time at least they appear to be appealing on the basis of God's law, although they are wrong about Paul's teachings

14 But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you;

15 but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters."

16 And he drove them away from the judgment seat.

- But they are appealing to the wrong authority
- Leviticus 24:10-16
- For all their puffing and posturing about the law and improper worship they show their true colors in that they don't actually follow the law
- This still goes on today - leaders question someone's actions based upon some perceived violation of scripture and then proceed to all sorts of attacks and procedures that are not prescribed in scripture in return

17 And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat.

- Note that some translations have the Greeks beating Sosthenes but this is not supported by the oldest manuscripts which is why it is not listed in the NASB
- More likely it is the Jews who had risen up who assaulted their leader, probably because he had been in favor of Paul or at least not strongly against him
- There is some supposition that this is the same Sosthenes that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 1:1 as supporting him in his apostleship. But this is not definite.

But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

- Because he is not a Jew and cares not for God, the Jews or their laws. What does he care if a Jewish leader is beaten?
- 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

18 Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila.

- Again Paul is unconcerned by the controversy - he had a promise from God
- Note that this promise did not mean there would not be violence, just that he himself would not be hurt

In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.

- This is likely the vow of a Nazirite - see Numbers 6
- It's not clear from the Greek whether this was Paul or Aquila
- My own personal opinion - it makes more sense that it's Aquila because Paul is dedicated to the New Testament ways, the Gospel, etc, and makes no mention anywhere of this type of vow
- Whereas Aquila would have, until Paul spoke to him, been an "Old Testament" Jew, under the old covenant.

19 They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

- Apparently Paul had a change of heart since verse 6. Or perhaps he had just meant he was done preaching to the Jews in Corinth
- Either way it showed he was willing to keep at it preaching to his own people in the hope he would cause more of them to be saved

20 When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent,

21 but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus.

- Some say he would not stay because he needed to get to the temple and fulfill his Nazirite vow
- I do not agree. I think the Holy Spirit simply did not direct him to stay
- See Acts 16:6-10
- And Acts 13:2
- This entire set of journeys was directed by the Holy Spirit and I think we can assume this decision was as well

22 When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch.

23 And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

- The word translated strengthening is only used in 4 places in the New Testament - all referring to the discipling of believers
- Notice how Paul balances his time between preaching to those stuck in old teachings, preaching to those who didn't know God, and always discipling and reconfirming the faith of those who have confessed Christ

24 Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures.

- Here we find an encouragement to be well versed in scripture - this man is being described as being *mighty* in scripture
- 1 Timothy 4:8
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- If one truly embraces God's Word, praying in the Spirit for Him to speak to us through it, studying it all and how one book relates to another, one can become truly mighty in it, by being in tune with the character of God and giving Him the full vocabulary of all the Bible's history, laws and instruction to use in apologetics, preaching and teaching

25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John;

- So he knew nothing of the resurrection or probably many other things of Jesus' ministry
- Yet with only what John the Baptist spoke, based in Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah, he was able to accurately preach about Jesus
- This once again underscores the importance of the prophetic books that point to Christ and the work of John the Baptist

26 and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

- Meaning, we can assume, they filled him in on the entire Gospel, resurrection, etc

27 And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace

28 for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

- This passage gives us some insight into what Paul was doing when it says he was strengthening the churches and the disciples as he journeyed
- We can assume since Paul was attacked in all the places he preached, that after he left, the Jews who had come after him for preaching the Gospel would go after those in their cities who had believed the Gospel, and try to convince them to recant their belief in Christ
- Someone like this man Apollos, who is described in 1 Corinthians 3 as having watered the seed Paul planted, did so by taking the Christ they had believed for eternal life and showing how the entire Old Testament had pointed to Him, how He fulfilled all the scripture
- This watering is critical - a planted seed quickly dies if we don't water it

Acts 19

1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples.

2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism."

- This must be disciples who were baptized by Apollos

4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

- So these people repented and believed without even knowing the Messiah had yet come
- How joyful they must have been to find out Jesus had come and died for them

6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.

7 There were in all about twelve men.

- Again here we see the transferring of authority and the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands
- This was the normal way to anoint, transfer authority, pray the Holy Spirit into someone

8 And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

- Although we need to consider each time we meet a new person that we may never have the opportunity to tell them about Jesus again, at the same time for those we do get to spend time around, apologetics is an endurance sport
- It is important to remember when witnessing to someone to allow them to think things over, work things out
- They must convince themselves to listen enough to reach out to God
- Galatians 6:9
- 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

9 But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

- Matthew 7:6
- Matthew 10:14-15
- John 15:22
- Unfortunately some will resist.
- Matthew 7:13-14

10 This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

- Consider this started out as a few meek fishermen praying together and Paul persecuting the church
- This verse should encourage us about modern day revival

11 God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul

12 so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.

- Reminiscent of what happened with Peter in Acts 5:14-16
- Those who request a sign in order to believe do not receive it Matthew 12:38-39
- But those who have faith and want to be healed are
- Mark 10:46-52
- We must believe that Christ can forgive our sin and restore our bodies to health by restoring them to a state of peace with God
- Colossians 2:13
- 1 Corinthians 11:27-31
- What is required for healing is true surrender - we cannot hang on to any idea of our own righteousness or harbor doubt about Christ - we must believe He is good and just and we are dead in our sin
- Then we can truly ask for healing and forgiveness

13 But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches."

14 Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.

15 And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"

16 And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

- We cannot hang on to others' faith. Christian pastors and congregations can and should pray over one another but it is ultimately our faith that determines our fate
- Romans 10:17
- Philippians 2:12
- Luke 11:24-26
- So much emphasis is put these days on programs, groups, challenges
- The real challenge is to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling
- Get on your knees before your Lord and let go of the sin you have been carrying, give it to Him to wash clean, forsaking any notion you can be justified on your own
- Trying to fight in the name of Jesus when you don't believe or know Him is dangerous - these men found that out

17 This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.

- Note the two thoughts connected here - fear of the Lord and magnification of His name
- Matthew 10:28
- Philippians 2:9-11
- John 18:3-6
- True conversion involves the recognition of God's sovereignty and Lordship - Jesus is Lord
- Romans 10:9 - Confess that Jesus is Lord / Master (kirios)

18 Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.

- Revelation 3:19
- Usually also at some point after conversion, the Lord will show you sins you have either suppressed in your mind, or forgotten about
- This is not to condemn but so that you may fully repent and release all your sin for forgiveness
- Luke 7:36-50
- There is great freedom in confession to the Lord - it is almost true that more sin means more joy, as you are able to release and be cleansed of each one

19 And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

- When you find something that opposes the Word of God, either by teaching things contrary to it or by teaching falsehoods about God and scripture, if it belongs to you or you have the ability it is best to destroy it, that no others are led astray by it

20 So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

- Once again we find this reminder that the Lord's Word and Gospel were prospering throughout all of these missionary journeys and miracles and revelations. This is the central theme of this book - that God's Word and Gospel went forth, despite all odds and opposing forces
- Isaiah 55:11 in action!

21 Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

- Purposed in the Spirit - in other words he didn't just think about it and decide, he agreed with the Holy Spirit living within him that he must go to these places
- Note that the goal of his life at this point is solely dedicated to going to those places dictated by the Holy Spirit to spread the Gospel
- His life has been hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:2-3)

22 And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

23 About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way.

24 For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen;

25 these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business.

26 You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.

27 Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence.”

- Notice the order of concern here
- Foremost is not this goddess which Demetrius claims to worship, but rather money
- 1 Timothy 6:10
- Matthew 5:29
- If this is true of a body part according to Jesus then how much more is it true of a source of income
- Luke 14:33
- This does not necessarily mean that Christ wants you to put everything out on the lawn, but rather that no one, nothing, no relationship, no possession, no job, no position nothing should be above Christ in your priorities
- Matthew 10:37
- We must surrender all to the Lord, trusting Him completely to take care of it and us
- 2 Chronicles 14:8-15
- Asa put his trust and all he had into the hands of the Lord
- This trust is what is required - trust that comes from fear of the Lord, which is recognition of His sovereignty, His power, His glory

28 When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

- This was obviously not any righteous anger or anything coming from God since it was in defense of a false goddess
- This rage is what satan drives into those who go after false gods
- Mark 5:1-5
- Mark 9:14-18
- Deuteronomy 4:25-28
- Exodus 7:19
- The vessels who worship wood and stone (and metal) will always be turned to violence because they become worshippers of the earth and the prince of the earth is satan, who is the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44)
- We can do this today when we worship things related to God rather than God - buildings, men, systems, schools, things that may seem to us related but ultimately lead us away from the Lord and toward destruction

29 The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia.

- Contrast with what God brings - 1 Corinthians 14:30-33

30 And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him.

31 Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater.

- Apparently for all of the things that Paul was brought through, all of the times that God snatched him out of the jaws of shipwrecks and deadly snakes and stonings, this was a place where he was not given authority or protection

- The Holy Spirit will warn us, through thoughts, dreams, and even other people, when God is not sending us somewhere we may think we should go, and these are the times when we must listen to the danger that the Holy Spirit is warning us about
- This is MUCH MORE CRITICAL AND RELIABLE for a believer than systems which emphasize lockdowns and evacuation procedures and all manner of things which attempt to prepare for circumstances we know are solely controlled by the Lord
- 2 Chronicles 18 illustrates this perfectly
- Also ties in to Matthew 5:11-12
- If you are not met with insults and violence by at least some, then there is a danger you are not preaching the true Gospel

32 So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together.

- This could describe scenes happening today all over the country
- Matthew 12:30
- John 11:25-26
- Mark 10:17-18
- Romans 14:11
- If we do not realize only God is good, we are all evil and sinful and undeserving of any mercy, and surrender to the Lord in repentance to have our sins forgiven, then we become slaves to sin and serve the master of confusion, satan.
- Ephesians 6:12
- Matthew 9:36

33 Some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly.

- A crowd whipped into confusion by satan and filled with rage in the flesh at the idea of losing the sinful things of the world will almost always turn and attack a person, a group
- See Germany, 1939

34 But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

- Again, this could be taken from modern headlines - they were shouting over Alexander so he could not speak, simply because they hated him for being a Jew

35 After quieting the crowd, the town clerk *said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven?"

36 So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash.

37 For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.

- Finally a voice of reason, if not godliness
- It often happens that people who denigrate, mock and belittle the Lord and the Bible are the ones who are most desperate to silence any talk about them and anyone who makes a defense of Christ
- James 2:19
- Why protest so violently if their own god was real and residing in a temple in their home town?
- Violent silencing protests are a sign of fear. They were in Ephesus and they are now

- Men fear God. This does not require that they believe in Him in the flesh. Their own flesh recognizes its creator and the devil whips them into a rage at the sting of the recognition of sin

38 So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another.

39 But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly.

- Einstein was once accused in a pamphlet by the Germans of being a false scientist - it was called 100 scientists against Einstein. His reaction? "If I were wrong, one scientist would be enough"
- If someone's cause is just, right and obvious, it should not require violence or suppression but simply open debate
- If it cannot prevail in this situation, then it is obviously not self evident or having any power
- This was recognized by the men who wrote the declaration of independence - "We hold these truths to be self evident"
- Romans 1:18-22
- And unfortunately men's denial of these things does not negate their guilt and sentence to hell for all eternity

40 For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering."

- satan goads men to violence and then leaves them bewildered, unable to explain their behavior since he was the cause of it, or rather their surrender to him through their denial of God

41 After saying this he dismissed the assembly.

Chapter 20

1 After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia.

- Note that Paul always takes the time to strengthen those disciples where he is before he moves on
- Hebrews 3:13
- Ephesians 5:18

2 When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece.

3 And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

- Business as usual now for Paul!
- A servant is not above his Master
- Luke 4:16-30
- Jesus showed us from the start - give love through TRUTH, and expect to meet a violent response from those who are following the prince of the earth

4 And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.

5 But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas.

6 We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days.

- There is a subtle detail here - someone like Sopater is mentioned here, once. So why?

- These are historical notes and details of actual events. There would be no reason for these things to be written were this made up.

7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

- 2 Peter 1:21
- Would you have been excited to listen to Paul? Or does it sound burdensome?
- Psalm 1

8 There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.

- One of them, Paul, was even teaching
- Matthew 5:14-16

9 And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead.

- Where is Eutychus?
- Between the upper room and the world, sitting on the ledge
- Falling asleep
- Matthew 26:40-41
- John 16:13
- James 1:5-8
- The detail of this man might seem unimportant - it is not. He was in the presence of a man hand chosen by God to speak into his life, and he was falling asleep leaning out the window.

10 But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him."

- Mark 9:20-27
- Luke 15:23-24
- The Lord desires us to live. Otherwise why would He have resurrected so many?
- Praise God that He chases after us and speaks life over us when we echo the one deceiving us and speak death over ourselves

11 When he had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left.

- John 4:31-34
- Again, not an unimportant detail. Paul ate of the Spirit, took in the body of Christ, that he might give it to his fellow disciples

12 They took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted.

- John 5:25

13 But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for so he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land.

14 And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene.

15 Sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus.

- More historical details here - not much for ministry but still contributes to the veracity of this account

16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

- There may have been many reasons for this, but certainly Pentecost was and is a very important day for the Christian church
- Yet it is hardly celebrated

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

- Remember he bypassed Ephesus
- He had been with these people for, as he states below, three years - obviously he was close to them
- But he could not afford to tarry in order to refresh himself with their company
- Luke 10:1-4
- Luke 14:25-26
- A true disciple's life is one of utmost dedication to Christ - military like focus
- Why?
 - Matthew 13:44
- Our joy should depend solely upon our salvation
- If we are holding onto things here we will fail to serve Christ as we should

18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,

- This begins a section of scripture and admonition and instruction that is so wonderfully consistent with and declarative of all of the teachings of Christ!
- With no breaks - notice that a big part of Paul's witness to these folks is just the time and dedication he put in, attending to them constantly
- Nowadays we talk about boundaries and office hours
- Hebrews 10:25
- Colossians 3:16-17
- Ephesians 5:19
- We are designed to be together in Christ
- John 17:22-23

19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears

- Tears to me are the mark of the Holy Spirit - the human mind and body are moved to awe by His presence, resulting in tears of pure intenseness

and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;

- James 1:2-4
- Trials are the vehicles for our witness. The most powerful witness comes from going through trials in the sight of others and not being stopped by them

20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable,

- Things no doubt like Galatians 5:12 or 1 Timothy 5:19-21
- Do we judge what we speak to brothers and sisters on whether it is profitable to them, if difficult?
- Luke 14:25-26
- Matthew 23:27-28
- We are always to speak in love, that is with a heart of desire for repentance in those we speak to, but to speak boldly enough of those things which are profitable that proper attention is paid

- If someone is comfortable on their bed but you know the first floor of their house is on fire, is it rude or uncaring to loudly tell them they are in danger?

and teaching you publicly and from house to house,

- Here is the whole duty of the teacher
- Not just Sunday sermons but *house to house*, believer to believer
- Notice how many encounters with Jesus are with one or a few
- John 4:5-26
- Luke 10:38-42
- Luke 19:1-10
- Notice with each one He is sincere, serious and focused
- If we witness to one person alone it is often far more impactful than preaching to 10,000
- What would you give to know that one person turned to the Lord through testimony and actions that came through you? (not from you, through you)

21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

- To believers and unbelievers alike
- The heart of the Gospel - repent and believe He is Lord

22 And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there,

23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

- Again notice how the Holy Spirit's instruction in his life is spoken of matter of factly, with full confidence that it is real, critical and central
- John 14:25-26
- If you believe the Bible is true, then you believe the Holy Spirit knows all and will warn you and inform you of all you need to know
- Therefore do not worry Matthew 10:24-42
 - All the hairs on your head are numbered
 - Not even a sparrow falls without the Lord knowing of it
 - Leviticus 1:14-17
 - This is us - an offering poured out in the Lord's service

24 But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

- Matthew 6:25-34
- Matthew 20:28
- Matthew 16:21-25
- We should be joyful to be poured out before the Lord

25 "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face.

- How could he know this unless the Holy Spirit told him
- James 4:13
- We only speak about and pay attention to what the Holy Spirit tells us
- For the Holy Spirit IS God and if we are not listening to God, then who? The devil will only speak evil of our futures

26 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

- Ezekiel 33:1-9
- If this did not apply to us, why would Paul repeat it here in the New Testament?
- 1 Peter 2:9
- If God purposed us for this purpose then
- James 4:17

28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

- If God purchased something for you with money how much would you treasure it? How much more then with His blood?
- The church is His, purchased by Him, and you are made an overseer of His possession. I think it is very easy to forget this fact and many do forget.
- Proverbs 16:18

29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

- Jude 1:3-4,12-13
- 2 Peter 2:1-3
- 1 Timothy 4:1
- John 10:11-18

31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

- Matthew 26:40-41
- 1 Peter 5:8

32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

- John 16:33
- James 1:21

33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.

- Matthew 6:19-21
- Exodus 20:17
- James 5:1-6

34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.

- Luke 6:41-42 - this is a sacred duty especially to teachers and elders
- Philippians 2:3
- You are working for Christ to bring about the salvation of those around you and encourage them to walk with the Lord - never just for yourself.

35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

- Last thing he says - ever - to these people: Remember **THE WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS**

36 When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

- Just as Jesus prayed in John 17 before He went to the cross

37 And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him,

38 grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

- John 13:35
- Our love for one another is our testimony to the world that we are not of the world but instead are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Chapter 21

1 When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara;

2 and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.

3 When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo.

- Can you imagine ministering like this, just sailing on random ships in a dedicated effort to simply follow the Holy Spirit in the spreading of the Gospel
- Paul is anxious to get to Jerusalem and then Rome, I am convinced, for one reason. To spread the good news of the Gospel.

4 After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.

- It's hard to understand this verse because it's clear that the Holy Spirit is meant by "through the spirit", but Paul continues to Jerusalem
- Acts 13:1-3, 16:6, etc show that Paul would have obeyed had the Spirit forbidden him to go to Jerusalem
- But verses like verse 11 below and Acts 20:22-24 show that the Holy Spirit was warning him that persecution awaited him there
- So we can conclude that the disciples were also hearing from the Holy Spirit about what was to become of Paul in Jerusalem, and in their flesh were warning him not to go there
- But Paul clearly states that his own life is of no value to him and he is willing and ready to die for Christ
- I believe this to be the true meaning of passages like Luke 14:25-33

5 When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another.

- It does not appear that Paul necessarily had spent much time in Tyre before
- Nevertheless all of the disciples, who they had looked up when they got to the city, accepted them to the point of going with their families to "pray Paul off"
- This is brotherhood; this is unity

- A Christian should never be a stranger in any place that has other Christians
- Matthew 12:46-50
- Acts 2:43-47

6 Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

7 When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day.

- Same deal here - they had not necessarily been there before but joined with them in fellowship
- When you travel, do you look up other Christians and fellowship with them?
- Perhaps we should always make this a goal when we travel

8 On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him.

- Acts 6:1-5
- Also the man who was sent by the Holy Spirit to evangelize to the eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)

9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.

- Acts 2:17 - sons *and daughters*
- Note that this is well after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and clearly Paul has no problem accepting that there is still a gift of prophecy
- Paul greatly encourages prophesy in 1 Corinthians 14, seemingly preferring it to speaking in tongues, especially for its evangelical value

10 As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

- Imagine being given a divine mission from the Lord and then being confronted with this
- THIS is why Christ says we must be willing to give up all we have
- 2 Corinthians 1:8-10
- Acts 20:24
- Romans 8:36

12 When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.

13 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

- Here we see echoes of Saul of Acts 8:1-3
- THIS is why God knew He could use Saul/Paul - He knew Paul was zealous for Him, just misguided
- So when we see those who zealously persecute us or attempt to spoil our evangelism, we should also see the potential they have if God turns their hearts
- Therefore perhaps we should be MORE enthusiastic to preach to the ones who are in greater opposition to us!

14 And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

15 After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem.

- That falling silent is sweet evidence of the apostle Paul's influence over them in accepting the will of God

- Matthew 26:39

16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.

- You notice that some disciples were drawn to accompany their brother in Christ
- Galatians 6:2
- 1 Corinthians 12:25-26
- We should *feel* the pain of our brethren, if we are truly one as Jesus prayed we would be

17 After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

- As well we should always gladly receive brethren in Christ

18 And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

19 After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

- Note that each time someone returns from a missionary journey or a good work of the Lord is witnessed, it is carefully reported back to the brethren
- Not only to encourage but also to give God the glory He deserves for saving so many souls from their just and deserved hell!
- Philippians 4:8
- Hebrews 10:24-25
- 1 Chronicles 16:23-25

20 And when they heard it they began glorifying God;

- Praise the Lord! But wait...

and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law;

- It is obvious from what follows that what is meant here is not that these men had a heart to obey God's law by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as it should be, but rather that they claimed to believe but refused to let go of their past lives
- If they had listened to their own prophets
 - Isaiah 1:10-17 - I reject your practice of the sacrifices and ceremony I have given you because you have not believed My law in your heart. Forget the sacrifices and do good as My Law was intended to teach you!
 - Isaiah 43:19-25 - I am doing something new; you have not kept the Law; I will forgive you
 - Jeremiah 31:31-34 - I will make a new covenant and put the Law within you so that you have no need to learn it
- These things should have taught them that when the new covenant comes, they will not need to do these sacrifices but instead God will *give* them the heart and ability to follow His law
- So if they believe Christ, why would they be worried about expending their own effort to follow the Law

21 and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

22 What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

- 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

- Granted this letter was likely not yet written when Paul came to these men, however since it is described by the Greek in verse 19 that Paul would have told them every detail of his travels, they would have heard stories from Paul about all of the trouble he had with the Jewish leaders in every city, how he and his ministry were viciously attacked but God sustained them and their ministry bore fruit
- So if these apostles were truly following the Spirit, they should have had faith that God's word would go forth, just as they did in Acts 4:5-22
- But they instead advised Paul to placate the Jews who were refusing to believe the WHOLE gospel

23 Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow;

24 take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.

25 But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."

26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.

- Here is a great failure of these men and a huge lesson for us as Christians.
- There is a lot of controversy over these verses, because they seem to fly in the face of everything that Paul has done
- He is obviously a believer in the true Gospel, that there is no works that need be done to gain Heaven, but that it is purely through God's grace and our faith in Him that we are saved (Romans 9:10-16)
- He expresses great frustration later in his epistles at those who place conditions upon salvation other than grace and faith in that grace - Galatians 1:6-9
- And yet here he agrees to ritually purify himself and go participate in religious ceremony for the sake of convincing others of his credentials
- Some say this is what Paul referred to when he said "to the Jews I was a Jew" - 1 Corinthians 9:19-23
- But I think that this probably refers more to his brilliant defenses of the Gospel using the Old Testament law.

27 When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him,

28 crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

- Predictably, this does not work
- We will often be called upon, under the guise of being shrewd servants or Romans 12:18, to give in to things and practices we know are not scriptural
- But if God commands us not to do it, if He calls us to a different way and tells us ahead of time usually too what that new way will be like, then we are to follow Him unflinchingly
- Luke 14:26-27
- Christ and God must be FIRST. No matter what. The Holy Spirit, the Word and what we know of God through the Word must always guide us
- If we are just trying to placate and our hearts are not in what we are doing, and we know it's not God's will, we will never please either our enemies or our Lord
- Revelation 3:15-16

29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

- So they did not proceed by the law of Moses
 - Deuteronomy 19:15
 - Exodus 23:1

30 Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.

- Unfortunately today people are often dragged out of our churches and the door shut behind them - maybe not physically dragged out but “excommunicated”
- I don’t know how these men are expected to recover from their sin
- Jesus says to treat them as sinners and tax collectors
- In other words, love them and evangelize to them

31 While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

32 At once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

- I can’t help but think of verses here like
 - 1 Corinthians 1:27 - the Romans may not have considered themselves foolish but to the Jews they would have been considered at least base and despised
 - Romans 8:28 - Paul saved from the crowd by what should have been his enemy

33 Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains

- Remember this had been prophesied in verse 11 above

; and he began asking who he was and what he had done.

- John 18:28-35
- Matthew 10:16-18; 24-25

34 But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

- Luke 23:20-21

35 When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob;

36 for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, “Away with him!”

- Luke 23:18
- We should take all of this quite seriously. While reading from Luke 14 about stark obedience to Christ I had someone ask me “who does this” and I immediately thought of John 6:53-60
- We *will* be persecuted. We *will* have trouble in this world. And although Christ will receive us, we may in fact die in His service. We must get used to the fact we will be treated as He was treated.

37 As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I say something to you?” And he said, “Do you know Greek?”

38 Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?”

- This event is referred to by the historian Josephus in two places in his writing - thereby verifying the events described here in a non biblical historical document

39 But Paul said, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people."

40 When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,

- It is ironic that the Romans rather than the Jews are the ones that allow Paul to speak

Acts 22

1 "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you."

- Note how Paul addresses these Jewish men who were just about to beat him to death
- Paul, despite being almost constantly threatened, stoned, beaten and jailed by his own people, has deep love for them and apparently understands their hesitation enough to want to defend himself to them
- Romans 9:1-3
- Romans 12:14

2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet;

- They knew he was a man who was brought up in their tradition and knew their language
- 1 Corinthians 9:20-22

and he said,

3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

- It is worth noting that this man, among all those alive at the time, was very well qualified to judge the question of whether Christ is the Messiah
- We know that this knowledge only comes from divine revelation
 - Matthew 16:13-17
 - Galatians 1:11-12
- Still, he would know whether that revelation made sense in reference to all the scriptures and prophecies
- We can see why God chose Paul. Not only was he zealous but he also was a person who knew God's Word very well

4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons,

5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

- Who better to testify of Christ than one who was actively persecuting His church
- God uses precisely those who are the most unlikely, so that He gets the glory and His hand in events is clear
- 1 Corinthians 1:27
- Now Paul certainly wasn't foolish as we would think of foolish but certainly in a sense he was a foolish choice - the chief persecutor of the church

6 “But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me,

7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’

- Haven’t we all heard this question in one form or another, those of us who have answered God’s call

8 And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’

- Notice that Jesus tells Saul he is persecuting HIM
- Matthew 24:45-51
- We don’t need to be opposing Christ outright to persecute a church or fellow Christians - this should be a warning to us as well
- We are to ensure we are always lifting up and loving our brethren

9 And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me.

- We get a few more details here - in Acts 9 we find out that the ones with Saul could hear the voice but didn’t see anything, here we find out they could not understand the voice
- 1 Samuel 3:2-10
- It is a beautiful thing that God reaches out to each of us individually
- John 10:27-28
- It is important to realize that, Saul being a Jewish zealot, those with him would have been carefully chosen to be zealous as well
- And yet there is no record of a single one of them coming back and disputing Saul’s story

10 And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’

- What a beautiful question!
- This should ALWAYS be our response when meeting rebuke and hardship - what do YOU want me to do, Lord?

And the Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.’

11 But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.

- Obviously Paul could see now (as of Acts 22) and yet obviously those who had been with him would have seen that he had been blind
- And remember this is occurring somewhere around 33-34 AD so there was only the most primitive care available, as evidenced by the many people we meet in the gospel accounts and Acts who are helpless and begging due to blindness and other physical ailments

12 “A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,

13 came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him.

- Ananias is a bit of an unsung hero - Acts 9:10-15
- In his eyes he would have been risking his life to follow God’s instructions, and by helping Saul also risking the lives of all those of the faith
- 1 Samuel 15:22

14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth.

- What a joyous thing to hear, especially after sitting alone and blind for 3 days
- There is significance to that - three days
 - Christ was in the grave 3 days
 - God must have been dealing with Saul in those three days - Saul was a man of God, he would have been praying

15 For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.

- This is our job when God interrupts our lives - to witness
- Think of what Saul must have thought when he was blinded
- He believed in the righteousness and wrath of God
- And yet the Lord was simply preparing him for a beautiful, if trouble filled, life of ministry
- John 16:33

16 Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

- Just think how joyful it must have felt to hear this, being so zealous for the Lord and finding out that you have been persecuting His church
- He says this same thing to all who will call on Him today
- John 3:16-18

17 "It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, 18 and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.'

- This should be instructive to us that at times the Holy Spirit will overshadow you as He did to Saul this particular day in the temple
- You would think at this point, seeing this fellow Jew and Pharisee telling his harrowing story of how he was persecuting the church and encountered Christ, and then telling them that Christ warned they would not believe him, that at least their hearts would be softened toward him

19 And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You.

20 And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.'

- This all must have felt awful after knowing the truth
- But 1 John 1:9

21 And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

22 They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!"

- Despite all the prophecy backing this up that they had studied
- Deuteronomy 32:21
- Isaiah 65:1

23 And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air,

- It always seems the crowd is in a frenzy against Paul, never with orderly arguments and scripture

- This is how satan works - he has not the truth on his side (John 8:44) and so he can only silence the truth, by violence and chaos
- If you follow the Lord, whenever there is chaos go back to scripture and prayer to find the truth
- If the truth is being given, you should find it in scripture

24 the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.

- “Examined by scourging” = he would be severely lashed until he answered their questions

25 But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?”

26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.”

27 The commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” And he said, “Yes.”

- Isaiah 40:3-5
- If it is the Lord’s purpose a way will be made

28 The commander answered, “I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.” And Paul said, “But I was actually born a citizen.”

- Even though this is an actual exchange that happened, I have to think it is also meant as a sign
- Paul was born a Jew
- But he was preaching to those who would be “grafted in” to Israel from among the gentiles
- Romans 11:17

29 Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.

- Funny how they feared because he was a Roman but didn’t fear God
- Still happens today

30 But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

- We see here a commander that had in mind true justice - he wanted to know exactly what was going on even though from his standpoint there really was no difference since he would not care about matters important to Jews.

Chapter 23

1 Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.”

- This is important - Paul was being persecuted by the Jews for blasphemy against the Lord and for sedition against the Jewish ways.
- But Paul, being a former Pharisee, was not abandoning the Old Testament or going against God, but rather had received the revelation that Christ is the Son of God and therefore belief in the Gospel is not against God or scripture
- He understood Christ through the revelation given him by Christ and also through the prophetic writings of Isaiah, Joel, etc
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

- Romans 9:1-16

2 The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.

- Obviously the high priest did not agree
- Romans 11:7-10
- The high priest and the Pharisees and Sadducees were spiritually blinded by God, because they had hardened their hearts against His will by puffing themselves up using their own traditions
- We can see similarities in some churches today

3 Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?”

- No guilt had yet been established. The Jews were not following their own law
- As they had failed to do many other times when confronting Paul
- Acts 18:14-16
- Acts 21:29
- etc

4 But the bystanders said, “Do you revile God’s high priest?”

5 And Paul said, “I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

- Paul on the other hand demonstrates that he above all is following scripture, and has great respect for the Word of God
- Exodus 22:28
- It is very clear that one side here, the one accusing that the law is not being followed, does not know the law nor follow it themselves
- They are only using it to preserve their own power
- Mark 7:5-9
- When someone is accused in a Christian or Jewish setting of blasphemy, the first thing should be a reading of the law and the second should be to establish guilt through two or three witnesses
- And punishment is not to come until if and when guilt is established

6 But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”

- Paul cleverly sets up a conflict here
- Perhaps not the most Christian technique but
- Matthew 7:6
- Paul knew this bunch was beyond reason, filled with pride and vengeance
- He knew because he had been exactly where they were
- Acts 9:1-2

7 As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

9 And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, “We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”

- Paul's technique worked brilliantly, dividing those against him and pitting them one against the other
- Matthew 12:22-28
- Amazing how well this fits the situation

10 And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.

- This was the end result Paul wanted, to be removed from these people judging him and ultimately finding him guilty in a kangaroo court and killing him
- Just as they had done to Jesus

11 But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

- Luke 21:12-15
- 1 Corinthians 10:11-13
- Some say this does not mean God will tempt you beyond your ability to handle it, and give 2 Corinthians 1:8 as a refutation
- This is utter gibberish - they did not kill themselves or die from these trials and hence were able to write about them and glorify God

12 When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.

13 There were more than forty who formed this plot.

- Where in the law they are defending does it tell them to do this?
- Acts 5:34-39
- Proverbs 11:14
- But all their counsel was blind
- Luke 6:39

14 They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.

15 Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place."

- What is this, like the 20th plot against Paul?
- But the Lord's will stands
- Isaiah 43:13

16 But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul.

- Once again God is in charge and intervenes for Paul
- Psalm 37:12-15

17 Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him."

18 So he took him and led him to the commander and *said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you."

19 The commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately, "What is it that you have to report to me?"

- A centurion was in charge of a hundred Roman soldiers. And this one stops and listens to a young boy. Had to be divinely appointed.

20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him.

21 So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you."

22 So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, "Tell no one that you have notified me of these things."

- Remember Paul has birthright Roman citizenship so this man is duty bound to protect him
- Again, divine.

23 And he called to him two of the centurions and said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen."

24 They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor.

- Once again Paul is rejected by the Jews and saved by the Gentiles

25 And he wrote a letter having this form:

26 "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.

27 "When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

28 "And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council;

29 and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment.

- It is of note that the Romans, who were used to crucifying Jews and persecuting them and fighting bloody battle, found no reason to imprison or kill Paul, while the Jews, his brethren, did
- Matthew 12:41-45
- Matthew 23:29-31
 - Lies! They are about to kill another prophet!

30 "When I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you."

- Acts 19:38-40
- Deuteronomy 17:6
- Isaiah 29:13
- If God had given them the laws by which they were to accuse others and try them and punish them, then why are they constantly rushing forth in angry judgment and trying to kill in the name of God?
- Ezekiel 18:32
- This is what happens when men try to judge rather than leave it to God
- James 4:12

31 So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.

32 But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks.

33 When these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

34 When he had read it, he asked from what province he was, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, "I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also," giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

- Note that this authority is very orderly, reading the letter and discussing with Paul and guarding him until the truth can be made plain
- God IS justice and justice requires one to have witnesses and an orderly judgment
- Look how many chances God gave Israel - He wants us to do the same

Chapter 24

1 After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.

- What was in their hearts?
- Isaiah 1:18
- Matthew 9:36

2 After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor, "Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, 3 we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.

- Psalm 106:34-36
- It is a difficult thing to read "destroy nations"
- However these Jews were explicitly told not to be tempted by the pagan nations, and yet here they are heaping praise upon a pagan governor, all in the interest of preserving their own power

4 But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.

- A brief hearing - this shows their hearts toward Paul - praise to the governor and the hearing a mere formality

5 For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

- Throughout the world! Wow how many witnesses they must have had
- It is important to note here the many places in which Paul quotes from the law, the prophets and the Old Testament, as does Jesus
 - Romans 3:3-4
 - Romans 9:6-9
 - John 10:31-34
 - John 5:46
- The whole point of the Gospel is the fulfillment of the Law of Moses
 - Matthew 5:17
- Dissension would be what they did all the years in Canaan when they went after false gods and idols
 - Judges 17:1-6
 - Isaiah 10:11

6 And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law.

- Matthew 21:12-13

7 But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands,

- Chapter 23:1-2;10

8 ordering his accusers to come before you.] By examining him yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him.”

9 The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.

- Exodus 23:1
- Matthew 12:36

10 When the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense,

- Romans 13:1-5
- One wonders if Paul was inspired to this text by this very situation

11 since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

12 Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.

13 Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me.

- The Jews had a high priest, a lawyer and a Roman judge involved. But what they did not have is the testimony of two or three witnesses
- Such as God requires

14 But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets;

- Again, Paul was not an ignorant man, he was well studied in the Mosaic law and the prophets and he was absolutely convinced that Jesus Christ had fulfilled all the scriptural requirements of the Messiah
- But the Pharisees were so consumed in their jealousy that they didn't seem to stop and think about what the prophecies actually said
- John 10:22-39
- Mark 15:9-10

15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

- It is interesting to note that it is hard to find distinct and clear resurrection doctrine in the Old Testament
- There is enough clear evidence as far as the Messiah being resurrected
- But it is hard to find on what they Pharisees based their doctrine of universal resurrection
- Nevertheless Paul and the Pharisees agreed on the idea of a resurrection

16 In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.

- Matthew 7:21-23

17 Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;

18 in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were some Jews from Asia—

19 who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me.

- Even today we are allowed to face our accusers
- One of the foundations of our society is the right to a speedy trial of our peers where our accusers must allow us to question them
- Yet these people who were supposed to be the representatives of God on earth, the God of love, the God of peace, would not give Paul even this basic right
- Ezekiel 20:27, 36:20

20 Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council,

- Remember Paul was pretty much on trial for his life here
- And in front of a pagan Roman judge
- And yet he is confident enough to make this statement - because he is innocent

21 other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.'

- He was again reminding the Pharisees that they had agreement with him in principle about the resurrection

22 But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case."

- We see below that Felix's wife is a Jewess, and she is in fact the daughter of Herod Agrippa
- This is probably how Felix gained knowledge of the Way

23 Then he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.

- Between this and the delay in judging the case it seems that the governor Felix may have had some sort of a soft spot for the Way
- The same sort of characteristic that Pilate initially showed
- Mark 15:3-5

24 But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

25 But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you."

- Felix apparently got to the point of hearing the Gospel and accepting it enough to react to it
- Unfortunately for him that reaction was negative

26 At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him.

- Isn't it ironic that the Roman governor was seeking the same thing that the Pharisees sought
- Mark 7:10-12
- Mark 12:38-40

27 But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

- Much like Herod

- Acts 12:1-3
- Ego can lead to death
- James 4:6

Chapter 25

1 Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea.

2 And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him,

3 requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way).

- They have had several days to think about the matter and reconsider, and they are still looking to kill him
- Matthew 5:21-26
- Not only are they hating Paul they are plotting to murder him without cause
- One wonders what their end game is. If their God forbids murder and they clearly are not able to defeat Paul any other way what is their goal?
- Defending the law of Moses? By breaking it?

4 Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly.

5 "Therefore," he *said, "let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him."

- They are being invited to prosecute Paul by this prominent Roman
- God is making sure they have every opportunity to do what is right
- They have been blinded totally at this point by religious fervor

6 After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea, and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought.

7 After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove,

- Luke 6:22-26
- We are fighting satan - the gates of hell will come against us. But we will stand because of Christ.
- Matthew 16:15-19

8 while Paul said in his own defense, "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

9 But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?"

- Festus did not have in mind justice but rather political clout with the Jews
- What an abomination before God, to bypass His law and justice and to appeal to a pagan governor, and with murder in mind
- Proverbs 20:23
- Matthew 23:23

10 But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know.

11 If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.”

12 Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, “You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.”

- Again Paul’s Roman citizenship saves him
- Psalm 55:22

13 Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus.

- Luke 23:3-12
- Deuteronomy 7:1-6

14 While they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying, “There is a man who was left as a prisoner by Felix;

15 and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him.

16 I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges.

- Not as the Jews had done with Jesus or many times with Paul previously
- What a horrible witness of God

17 So after they had assembled here, I did not delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought before me.

- Notice again the striking difference in the tone of this pagan governor versus the Jewish authorities - he is concerned to give Paul a speedy trial and hear the charges against him laid out in an orderly way

18 When the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting,

19 but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.

- Notice again how lost this pagan is trying to make sense of charges that the Jews have brought against Paul concerning the law of Moses
- He is not supposed to be the one judging matters of God’s law
- Deuteronomy 1:16-17

20 Being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters.

21 But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor’s decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar.”

- Thereby fulfilling God’s destiny for Paul
- James 4:13
- Paul was made aware he would go to Rome, but he didn’t know how or when
- Acts 23:11

22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” he *said, “you shall hear him.”

23 So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.

24 Festus *said, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you see this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer.

25 But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him.

26 Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write.

27 For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

- Seems absurd. Because it was.
- Mark 14:53-59
- Matthew 27:11-14
- Isaiah 54:17

Chapter 26

1 Now Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul extended his hand and proceeded to make his defense:

2 "Regarding all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate that I am about to make my defense before you today,

3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

- Here God brought a judge who knew something about Jewish law
- To allow Paul to bear proper witness

4 "So then, all Jews know my way of life since my youth, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and in Jerusalem,

5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

- Think about how this must have felt - to have people who had known you for years, known how devout you were and how you were zealous for God and an expert in the law and their traditions
- And they can't wait to string you up
- Not to inquire if you have had some mental break or perhaps have been led astray by demonic influence but rather just to off you
- Micah 7:5-8
- Isaiah 2:22

6 And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;

- Genesis 26:3-4
- Luke 4:16-19
- But Judges 2:6-10
- 2 Kings 22:8-13

7 the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. For this hope, O king, I am being accused by Jews.

- Luke 2:5-14
- Jeremiah 22:3
- Deuteronomy 15:10-11
- John 1:45-46
- Matthew 13:54-56
- If they would have all followed God's law and cared for the poor and not looked down on fellow men, they would have maybe recognized the Messiah
- Their own pride closed their eyes

8 Why is it considered incredible among you people if God raises the dead?

- Isn't it ironic that this man who was originally a Pharisee prosecuting the church should ask this question
- We can ask this same question today
- Genesis 1:1
- Jeremiah 33:3
- Joshua 10:12-14
- And yet do we really believe? Do we believe the dead can be resurrected?

9 "So I thought to myself that I had to act in strong opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

- Notice how this sentence starts - I thought to MYSELF
- Judges 17:6
- Proverbs 3:5-6
- Proverbs 14:12

10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, after receiving authority from the chief priests, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being put to death.

- Paul is the ultimate turnaround story, the ultimate example of God's sovereignty

11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was extremely enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

- James 1:20
- Isn't it incredible that this man who admits to trying to force others to blaspheme so he could put them to death also wrote Romans 14:19-21
- Makes you wonder when you look at some of those today blaspheming the Lord, if they were turned what would they write

12 "While so engaged, as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who were journeying with me.

- This is now the third telling of Paul's conversion, his witness
- This time it is in the midst of a trial in front of a governor and a king - it would have been relatively easy one would think for them to find witnesses to deny his story among those who were with him that day or their families or commanders. But none were produced.
- This would seem to argue against the ridiculous assertions that have been made that perhaps Paul had a stroke

14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

- This version is just slightly different - something that actually *lends* credence to the story. Detectives look for well rehearsed stories that never change just as much as they look for totally inconsistent stories. Small differences are what you naturally expect if the story is true but being retold or told by a different witness.
- Goads were pointed sticks used to spur on livestock that didn't want to plow. Kicking at them was a natural reaction from the animal but would result in painful wounds
- Paul must have been in some spiritual and emotional pain as he was persecuting
- This tells us something about those who persecute us today

15 And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'

- This is probably the biggest necessary piece for a true conversion - we ask the Lord if He really is there, is He really Lord, and He answers us in our heart if we ask sincerely, that we may truly know He is God

16 But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you as a servant and a witness not only to the things in which you have seen Me, but also to the things in which I will appear to you,

- Note He does not say as a leader, as a Pharisee, as a priest
- SERVANT. And WITNESS.
- Luke 12:42-44
- Luke 21:12-13
- Romans 10:9 - confess with your mouth that He is Lord - really master, as in master and slave
- Confessing with your mouth in that age was to agree, to affirm
- We are to long to be servant and witnesses, not kings, leaders with titles, or great men
- And we are to understand we are sparrows on God's altar - sacrifices to bear witness to Him for which He will reward us with eternal life if we are faithful servants

17 rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,

- This must have enraged a lot of his listeners; yet they could not deny it.
- By their own witness he had "caused unrest" all over their world (Acts 24:5)
- So why had they not been able to stop him? They could not deny this statement much as it enraged them
- Plus Paul suggesting the gentiles would be preached to must have also enraged them
- They considered themselves saved through Abraham
- This is why in Matthew 3:9 John the Baptist rebukes them

18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light,

- John 3:19-21

and from the power of Satan to God,

- This is profound (and remember this is not Paul speaking but he is reporting Jesus's words) - we often smirk at the notion that people's sin is of the devil not their own initiative - "oh sure the devil made them do it"
- Yet Ephesians 6:12
- And Jude 1:23

- And Revelation 12:9
- And John 8:44-45
- And Luke 4:33-36
- We must always remember - our adversary is satan, the devil. he may have many disguises but it is him we fight. To think otherwise is dangerous - according to Jude even Michael the archangel needed to call on God to rebuke the devil (Jude 1:9). We cannot win without having God on our side and knowing whom we really fight.

that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

- Just as He had told them He would do in scripture in Jeremiah 31:31-34

19 "For that reason, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,
20 but continually proclaimed to those in Damascus first, and in Jerusalem, and then all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they are to repent and turn to God, performing deeds consistent with repentance.

- Matthew 3:1-3
- Matthew 4:12-17
- Acts 17:30-31
- Continually proclaimed For THIS REASON I give my life
- We must never forget the repentance. It is not enough to believe that Jesus died to pay for our sins. In order for that payment to be made, true repentance must draw up the bill
- Luke 14:16-23
- This is the story of the Gentiles being offered repentance and salvation since the Jews refused it
- Romans 11:25-32 - This is God's full plan for salvation

21 For these reasons some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to murder me.

- Notice the progression of events
 - Paul/Saul is a well respected Pharisee, happily persecuting Christians
 - Jesus completely rearranges Paul's world, commanding him to go and preach the gospel
 - Paul dutifully obeys the Lord
 - He, who before was well respected, ends up as the target of a murder plot
- We MUST understand, the devil is in charge of this world currently and does not want us preaching the Gospel
- So when we do this in the name of the Lord, the NATURAL consequence is extreme persecution

22 So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day

- This kind of passage always reminds me of King Asa
- 2 Chronicles 14:1-12
- Notice it says the LORD ROUTED the enemy

testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place,

- It is stunning the number of people who claim to believe the Bible but deny the spiritual gifts, deny that all the stories are literal history, deny the spiritual battles going on around them
- John 14:12-13

- You can say this is just for the apostles. Then you must accept that the passage afterward, which describes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, must just be for the apostles too
- Obviously that makes no sense
- If you “believe the Bible is true” then you believe it is HISTORY. You believe what Jesus said will occur WILL OCCUR. You believe we fight evil powers in heavenly places. ALL of it.

23 as to whether the Christ was to suffer, and whether, as first from the resurrection of the dead, He would proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”

24 While Paul was stating these things in his defense, Festus *said in a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you insane.”

- Today people prefer to say we are believing fairy tales
- What about dark matter? What about the double slit experiment?
- We simply believe what we have evidence and history to prove to us

25 But Paul *said, “I am not insane, most excellent Festus; on the contrary, I am speaking out with truthful and rational words.

26 For the king knows about these matters, and I also speak to him with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.

- This is powerful - Agrippa believes the scriptures, he has certainly heard of all that has happened, so he MUST see that these events fulfill the scriptural description of the coming of the Messiah

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you believe.”

- I would like to ask this of myself and my fellow Christians
 - Do we truly believe that
 - Christ bodily rose from the dead
 - Afterwards there were seen 500 other people rising from the dead and walking into the city (Matthew 27:50-53)
 - An angel released Peter and guided him out of the prison (note the description that even Peter himself didn’t believe at first nor did his fellow apostles) Acts 12:6-17
 - Matthew 17:19-20
 - NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE
 - If we just had the smallest amount of real FAITH. If we really BELIEVED the Bible is true

28 Agrippa replied to Paul, “In a short time you are going to persuade me to make a Christian of myself.”

- The Gospel is logical and for all those who believe in God and believe the Bible is undeniable. We have only to lay it out - God will put the knowledge in the hearts of the people we are speaking to that it is the truth
- Matthew 16:13-17
- Galatians 1:11-12

29 And Paul said, “I would wish to God that even in a short or long time not only you, but also all who hear me this day would become such as I myself am, except for these chains.”

- What a beautiful statement - bound in chains, with men after him bent on murdering him, forced to defend himself again for unproven charges, Paul in his heart only wishes all those who hear the gospel to believe, and even clarifies that he doesn’t want them in the spot he finds himself in but free

30 The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,

31 and when they had gone out, they began talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything deserving death or imprisonment."

32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

- John 8:31-32
- But it was not yet to be for Paul

Chapter 27

1 Now when it was decided that we would sail for Italy, they proceeded to turn Paul and some other prisoners over to a centurion of the Augustan cohort, named Julius.

2 And we boarded an Adramyttian ship that was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, and put out to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica.

3 The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care.

- God always finds a way to provide, even when we are under persecution
- My mom had to go to court for a rather unpleasant circumstance and accidentally dropped her keys into a storm drain
- Along comes of all people a court officer who proceeds to take off his belt and fish her keys out of the drain using the buckle
- We need not fear - Romans 4:17

4 From there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

- Note that Paul was heading to Rome to do as Jesus said (Acts 23:11)
- Still the winds were contrary
- God will get us through whatever comes up if we are doing His will. But this does not mean we will not have difficulty - without it we would not have testimony
- 2 Corinthians 11:25
- Acts 9:15-16

5 When we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.

6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it.

7 When we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us to go farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone;

8 and with difficulty sailing past it, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

- Fair havens sounds like a good place to be
- Especially after so much difficult sailing

9 When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul started admonishing them,

10 saying to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."

- It is rather incredible that Paul, being a prisoner, would admonish those taking him to his trial in Rome
- Paul must have had good reason to admonish them - he was not someone who was easily frightened Acts 20:22-24
- But we know he also had great concern for the lives of others, even those who were persecuting him (Acts 16:25-28)
- Luke 6:27

- 1 Peter 3:9

11 But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul.

- All of this was the will of God
- Romans 13:1-2
- Proverbs 16:33

12 The harbor was not suitable for wintering, so the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

- They had the guidance of God through Paul but chose instead to go with their own understanding
- Proverbs 14:12

13 When a moderate south wind came up, thinking that they had attained their purpose, they weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete, closer to shore.

14 But before very long a violent wind, called Euraquilo, rushed down from the land;

- Proverbs 16:18
- Proverbs 26:12
- Proverbs 11:14
- God's wisdom and guidance is precious and infallible - in this case it would have saved seasoned sailors and trained soldiers from disaster
- Safety is in the counsel of the Lord and the warnings from His Holy Spirit
- John 14:25-26
- Matthew 2:13

15 and when the ship was caught in it and could not head up into the wind, we gave up and let ourselves be driven by the wind.

- When we don't listen to God we are at the mercy of the world and whatever forces are in it
- Mark 4:39-41 vs Jonah 1:1-4

16 Running under the shelter of a small island called Cauda, we were able to get the ship's boat under control only with difficulty.

17 After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and let themselves be driven along in this way.

- The "ship's boat" was the life boat, or skiff, which must have been blowing around and threatening to break the ship apart
- So they did everything they could in their own strength to manually hold the ship together
- And still got drug along

18 The next day as we were being violently tossed by the storm, they began to jettison the cargo;

- They now must abandon the thing that was the main purpose behind their journey to begin with - their cargo
- The situation was bad enough now that, after trying to do everything in their own strength to hold the ship together physically they now abandon their mission and concentrate on saving their lives

19 and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.

- The final act of desperation - they abandon the equipment they used to handle any cargo, in a final desperate bid to preserve at least the ship carrying them

20 Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was slowly abandoned.

- Finally, after the storm won't relent, there is nothing to navigate by and they have done everything that was in human power, they slowly give up and face the reality that their human efforts have not been enough to save them
- This entire progression is a study in how we react to our lives without God
 - We are warned against a journey or path or task
 - We believe we know better and all is well, and we ignore counsel and set off, leaving the safety God has provided Proverbs 26:12
 - We think we are clever, stayin "safe" close to shore Proverbs 14:12
 - We are quickly overpowered in our arrogance by a violent wind, a circumstance we were blinded from by our pride Proverbs 29:1
 - We quickly become caught up in that wind, that attack, that out of control debt, that addiction, whatever it is and we lose control Matthew 7:26-27
 - We try to hold the boat together in our own strength - working insane hours, selling drugs, taking every vitamin supplement we can find, trying every drugstore self help book, anything to hold it together ourselves in our pride 1 Corinthians 1:24-25
 - When we can no longer pretend, we abandon all of the things we care about, our precious cargo, and start to focus on our own survival Revelations 6:15-17
 - Eventually getting so desperate we sell our possessions, cut off relationships, do whatever is necessary to survive in the storm we willfully sailed into Galatians 6:7
 - And wind up helplessly lost, adrift, no cargo, no skiff, no tackle, nothing
 - Then God raises up a sentinel, a savior, a dream, a prayer out of our bruised lips...

21 When many had lost their appetites, Paul then stood among them and said, "Men, you should have followed my advice and not have set sail from Crete, and thereby spared yourselves this damage and loss.

22 And yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

23 For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong, whom I also serve, came to me,

24 saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has graciously granted you all those who are sailing with you.'

- The sailors had to get to the point where all was lost including even their appetites
- Paul, even though they had dragged him into danger after he warned them, prays for them Matthew 5:43-45
- He knows if they perish the ship perishes and he perishes too
- He also loves them - he is not out to just preach to those he was headed to but takes every opportunity along the way to pray for everyone, including his enemies 2 Peter 3:9, Ezekiel 18:32
- And he boldly tells them why God has saved them and what his journey is about
 - Acts 4:29
 - 2 Timothy 4:2
 - Ephesians 6:19-20
- Imagine how bizarre this short, funny looking Paul must have seemed telling these experienced sailors of his vision and destiny

- And yet I don't think he hesitated at all
- Have you prayed for those who drag you into a shipwreck?

25 Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.

- Despite all that he saw - lean not on your own understanding
- Romans 4:16-24
- This is the central thing to the Christian walk - we must not only listen but trust that we hear and then believe

26 But we must run aground on a certain island."

- Many times the Lord will give specific instructions such as these - not only in the Bible but in our own lives. Many is the time I have been asked by God to do something that seems so arbitrary or strange only to find a confirmation waiting for me when I am faithful in doing it

27 But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to suspect that they were approaching some land.

28 And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms.

29 Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and prayed for daybreak.

- Despite Paul's assurance of God's will they began to fear
- Their human instinct told them something was not right
- So they decided to stop where they were and pray that they could see with their own eyes to get themselves out
- Genesis 19:15-26
- Fear does this - makes us root where we are instead of going forward
- It is rooted in pride
- James 4:13-16

30 But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense that they were going to lay out anchors from the bow,

31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men remain on the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved."

32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it fall away.

- At this point effectively Paul is the captain
- Hosea 8:4
- Psalms 75:6-8

33 Until the day was about to dawn, Paul kept encouraging them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken in nothing.

- Another thing that happens when we let ourselves be paralyzed by fear - we stop eating
- John 4:31-34
- John 6:53-56
- John 6:32-35
- John 1:1
- To survive, eternally, spiritually, to thrive, we must take in Jesus constantly
- His Word - He is the Word - it feeds us

- His flesh and blood - we must surrender to Him, allow Him to examine and dwell in every part of us, our lives, our thoughts
- He IS life. To eat of Him we must worship Him, read His word, confess to Him, seek His face

34 Therefore, I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your survival, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish.”

- Basically the Gospel right here, in a way

35 Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all, and he broke it and began to eat.

36 All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food.

- Paul physically displays his faith; praising the Lord in the midst of all for this provision in the midst of what must have seemed like doom and chaos to them all
- Hebrews 10:23-25
- Ephesians 4:29
- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

37 We were 276 people on the ship in all.

- We make goals of bringing 50 or 100 people to church, praying for maybe 20
- Here through faith in the midst of certain disaster Paul saves the lives of 276, and likely many were stirred to faith in God through this

38 When they had eaten enough, they began lightening the ship by throwing the wheat out into the sea.

- Once they have had food from and blessed by the Lord, they can begin jettisoning the things they had been holding onto, letting go of the earthly things that were dooming them to keep
- I've often thought what would happen if Jesus showed up at my door and told me that there was one certain thing among my prized possessions that I must give up in order to survive - what would I feel in that moment?

39 Now when day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did notice a bay with a beach, and they resolved to run the ship onto it if they could.

40 And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and they hoisted the foresail to the wind and were heading for the beach.

- At this point they have let go of all their folly, pride, arrogance and their own goals and plans, and instead are just determined to surrender and dash their only transportation upon the rocks, in order to save their lives
- Again all of this follows the surrender we give to Christ when we become saved - we realize the folly of everything we've been doing, see clearly the things we held dear that are weighing us down, keeping us from God, and in faith, strengthened by God we jettison them into the sea and throw ourselves upon the Rock
- Luke 20:17-18

41 But they struck a reef where two seas met and ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck firmly and remained immovable, while the stern started to break up due to the force of the waves.

- And as often happens in that surrender, God takes over and gives us His rock and His plan
- Revelation 3:20-21

42 The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape;

- The things of the world will try to hold us back from the Lord

43 but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from accomplishing their intention, and commanded that those who could swim were to jump overboard first and get to land,

44 and the rest were to follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

- But if we hold fast and have faith, God will bring us through one way or another
- Psalm 23:4 - we may have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death but He will be with us so we need not fear

Acts 28

1 When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta.

2 The natives showed us extraordinary kindness, for they kindled a fire and took us all in because of the rain that had started and because of the cold.

- Isaiah 4:6
- 1 Timothy 6:8
- Psalm 9:9
- Psalm 91:4
- 2 Samuel 22:3
- IF we have faith in the storm, if we do not forsake the Lord but seek His face in all situations, He will strengthen us and shelter us no matter what the situation

3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand.

- No doubt satan still trying to stop Paul
- Psalm 91:5
- But note that they WILL fly

4 When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live."

- This seems such a common thing, unfortunately even among Christians
- Job 1:1, 4:7-9 - He was an upright man but his friends assumed he had sinned badly and thus was punished - we know this is not the case from the conversations between God and satan - God allowed satan to tempt Job to use him as a witness of faith, knowing he would never curse God nor turn away from Him
- God *will* cut the evil off and they will see destruction (Psalm 37:28)
- But that is up to GOD
- Matthew 7:1-5
- We are to only
 - Forgive - Mark 11:26
 - Gently correct - Galatians 6:1
 - Correct to what? The only standard we have to correct to, the only truth, is God's Word
 - Not *our* interpretation of it, but His straight Word

5 However, Paul shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.

- Luke 10:19-20

6 Now they were expecting that he was going to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

- They go from judging to worshipping a man
- This is another mistake we can make
- Even John the Baptist
 - Who was Elijah - Matthew 11:14
 - But refused to have anyone consider him anything - John 1:19-27
- Even the angel who speaks to John the apostle in his vision warns him not to worship him - this angel in Heaven calls himself a fellow servant of the human apostle Revelation 19:9-10
- There is no created being worthy of being worshipped, held up or relied upon. Only the Lord.

7 Now in the neighboring parts of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us warmly for three days.

8 And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with a recurring fever and dysentery.

- It just happened to be the case
- Ephesians 2:10
- John 11:1-4
- We wonder why bad things happen. Sometimes it is for the sake of a witness to God's glory and mercy, so that others may be saved

Paul went in to see him, and after he prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.

- Mark 11:23

9 After this happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and being cured.

- Think about the current pandemic. If we had the faith to truly believe God and heal the sick, how many would be turned to the Lord in this moment
- There are some who believe that the spiritual gifts ceased with the apostles. This makes no sense to me - all of these healing were to glorify God and allow the people to believe and be saved - why would God hobble us by stopping that?
- John 14:11

10 They also showed us many honors, and when we were about to set sail, they supplied us with everything we needed.

- Philippians 4:19
- 1 Peter 5:6-10
- After this hellacious boat trip and near drowning amid a shipwreck, God thrust these men into the hands of those He had put there to care for them, and supplied them completely

11 After three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead.

- I believe every word of scripture is important. The mention of Castor and Pollux here, the twin Gemini brothers, apparently the patron gods of mariners at the time, I think is a result of Paul and Luke's taking notice of the gods of wood and stone these men relied on, with the impact of seeing these carvings

much more meaningful after having been saved out of the midst of a horrendous shipwreck by the One True God.

12 After we put in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days.

13 From there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium, and a day later a south wind came up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli.

- Again, these details would not be necessary was this not a historical document describing an actual journey

14 There we found some brothers and sisters, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and that is how we came to Rome.

- Note how Paul and Luke are supplied with food, rest, a place to sleep, etc all along the way by either believers who welcome them as family or others who they are there to preach to and convert
- Luke 10:1-12
- We all worry about how to pay the bills, how to get food, how to get a place to stay yet the example we have of the apostles and these men from the early church shows us that they merely went forward in full faith that God would supply their needs
- Luke 9:57-62
- Matthew 6:24-34
- Think about it - the great explorers, they might have taken some supplies with them but in order to really go into new lands they had to hunt the land and survive off of what was provided
- In this case they reach their destination by following the things and people God has put in their path
- Compare to Romans 15:22-29
- Proverbs 16:9
- The course we plan in our hearts must always be overarchingly to follow God
- Matthew 6:10, 6:33

15 And from there the brothers and sisters, when they heard about us, came as far as the Market of Appius and the Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

- These are some towns about 30-50 miles outside of Rome, where apparently these brothers and sisters traveled to meet the saints they had heard about
- If only we had this much drive to go out and greet our fellow believers
- Paul thanked God for these believers and actually had his faith buoyed by them - he considered them a gift from God to show him he was in the right place and to strengthen him
- Galatians 6:2

16 When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

- Paul was met with resistance in every city he visited on his missionary journeys, yet these pagan foreigners who were ruling this city, the center of the Roman empire, allowed Paul much more respect and freedom than did his own people

17 After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he began saying to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was handed over to the Romans as a prisoner from Jerusalem.

18 And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there were no grounds for putting me to death.

19 But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any accusation against my nation.

20 For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, since I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.”

- Paul did not necessarily need to do this - he was in Rome to go on trial before Caesar
- But he loved these brethren and wanted to share the Gospel with them
- Romans 9:1-5

21 They said to him, “We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor has any of the brothers come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you.

- Meanwhile these Jews were so concerned about Paul’s corrupting influence - see Acts 24:2-9
- But obviously they were only concerned about their influence in their own little sphere of existence

22 But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for regarding this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere.”

- The first part of this statement is full of hope - even though they have heard bad things spoken about the Christians, they still desire to fairly inquire into the matter rather than come out with torches and pitchforks
- Proverbs 17:4
- Proverbs 14:15-19
- Matthew 7:7-8

23 When they had set a day for Paul, people came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

- As it should be - an orderly appointment devoted to opening the Scripture and seeking truth
- God placed all these prophets and prophetic words that we might know what is truth - He told us what to expect the same way a spy expects a code word
- John 14:29

24 Some were being persuaded by the things said by Paul, but others would not believe.

- Romans 10:12-17
- The ones who are humble hear the truth

25 And when they disagreed with one another, they began leaving after Paul said one parting statement: “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

26 saying, ‘Go to this people and say, “You will keep on hearing, and will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, and will not perceive;

- People turn to all sorts of beliefs, devotionals, saints, creeds, boards, statements of belief
- But it seems sometimes the hardest thing in the world is to get believers to simply look into the Word they profess to believe, take it at face value and have complete faith that even though its teachings can be difficult yet it is true
- John 6:48-67
- And so it has gone throughout the years of the church

27 For the hearts of this people have become insensitive, And with their ears they hardly hear, And they have closed their eyes; Otherwise they might see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.”

- If the heart has made up its mind there is no true hearing or seeing

28 Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen.”

- This is the fulfillment of what was spoken by Hosea 2:21-23
- This shows how God foretells what will be and also that He always planned for the Gentiles
- Genesis 22:18

30 Now Paul stayed two full years in his own rented lodging and welcomed all who came to him,
31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching things about the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

- Acts 23:11
- Paul was brought there by way of prison, a shipwreck and other hardships but these God used for His glory, never wasting a single step of the apostle Paul's feet nor one morsel of his energy
- So let us be thankful when we are faced with all sorts of trials, blockages and paths that we never planned for - God will use them all for His glory
- Romans 8:28