

# **THY KINGDOM COME**

## **7. Acts – Part 2 The Biography of Paul**

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**A Teaching Commentary  
of the New Testament**

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# 1. The Ministry of Paul

Paul played two crucial roles in the life of the young church:

- Although he never quit caring about and reaching out to his own people, the Jews, he was the apostle to the Gentiles.
- Through his writings, he gave form and shape to the doctrines that uphold the church even today.

Through his extensive traveling he planted churches all over the Roman world. His churches and the followers of Jesus in those churches were Paul's children. He nurtured them and cared for them as a mother nurses her young. He visited them as often as he could. He wrote them letters to encourage or correct them. He praised them when they were good and disciplined them when they were bad.

The remainder of the book of Acts (Chapters 13-28) looks at the ministry of Paul from a biographical standpoint. It chronicles the events of his ministry. It serves as a backdrop for the letters he wrote. The letters that we have recorded in the Bible are surely only a subset of those that he actually wrote to his young churches. These were the ones, however, that the church at the time felt were key. They were circulated among the churches as important documents. They, along with a few other writings (Hebrews, the epistles of John, Peter, James, and Jude) were the only theology books that the church had. Eventually when the important documents of the church were canonized into the New Testament, these letters of Paul were included:

- Romans
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians
- 1 Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon

(Note that the authorship of Hebrews is sometimes attributed to Paul, but in fact we do not know who wrote that letter.)

In the New Testament, the letters of Paul are roughly arranged by length, from Romans (the longest) to Philemon (the shortest). This is by no means a chronological order. Comparing the letters to the biographical information found in Acts and sometimes in the letters themselves suggests that they were written approximately in the following order:

Written from Corinth, During the Second Missionary Journey

- 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians

An Early Letter, Following 1 & 2 Thessalonians

- Galatians

Unknown Date

- Romans
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians

Written from Prison in Rome

- Philemon
- Colossians
- Ephesians
- Philippians

Unknown Date, Probably Written After Roman Imprisonment As Recorded In Acts

- 1 Timothy
- Titus
- 2 Timothy

## 2. Biography of Paul

### 2.1 *The First Missionary Journey (AD 46 – 48)*

Acts 13:1-14:20

Paul (still called Saul at this point) received his call to missionary activity in Antioch of Syria. The Holy Spirit impressed the church there to set aside Saul and Barnabus “for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). After fasting and praying, the people in Antioch laid hands on these two men and sent them off on their first missionary journey.

#### 2.1.1 Cyprus

Acts 13:4-13:12

Saul and Barnabus first sailed for the island of Cyprus. They took John Mark (the author of the Gospel of Mark) with them. They began teaching in the Jewish synagogues there.

In the city of Paphos, there was a proconsul (a Roman official) named Sergius Paulus. He had an attendant named Elymas (also named Bar-Jesus) who was a Jewish sorcerer and a false prophet. Sergius Paulus wanted an audience with Barnabus and Saul because he wanted to hear what they had to say. Elymas spoke against them, trying to confuse their message and turn Sergius Paulus from believing.

Acts 13:9-11 says:

Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.”

Immediately blindness came upon Elymas. Sergius Paulus was impressed and became a believer.

The text does not say whether or not Elymas was left in that state permanently. It is quite possible that the blindness was a temporary condition, given to make a point (similar to what happened to Paul himself). We do not know.

Note that Acts 13:9 is the point where Saul becomes Paul. No longer is he referred to as “Saul” in Scripture. Why did he change his name and why did he do it now? We are not sure.

Some have suggested that he changed his name to signify that God had changed his nature. Perhaps. If that is the case, it is curious why he does it now – years after his conversion. He may have changed to Paul from the very Jewish “Saul” to better identify with the Gentiles that he was trying to reach. The fact is that we do not know why he changed his name and we do not know why he changed it now. We just know that he did.

## **2.1.2 Perga in Pamphylia**

Acts 13:13

The next leg of this missionary journey took them to Perga in Pamphylia. While they were there, John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. There is little commentary given about his leaving at this point. We are not sure why he went home. It is generally assumed that John Mark was a young man, probably away from home for the first time. He may have been homesick. He may not have been up to the rigors and demands of the work that was being done. We know from Acts 15:37-40 that Paul was upset at him for leaving, feeling that John Mark had abandoned the cause. Barnabus was more understanding and willing to give him a second chance.

## **2.1.3 Pisidian Antioch**

Acts 13:14-52

Paul and Barnabus left Perga and went to Pisidian Antioch, which is a different city than Antioch in Syria. On the Sabbath they went to the synagogue. They were invited to speak.

Paul seized the opportunity. He gave them a message that traced the history of the Jews, from the time in Egypt, through the Exodus, the taking of the land, the rise of the monarchy, and the call of David. He told them about Jesus, the son of David who fulfilled their Messianic expectations. He told them about the ministry of John the Baptist and of Jesus. He told them about the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Acts 13:38-39 he told them:

Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses.

Many were receptive to their message. They were invited to speak again the following week.

The following Sabbath a very large crowd gathered to hear their message. The size of the crowd made the Jewish leaders in the town jealous. They began to denounce Paul’s message. Paul replied to them in Acts 13:46-47:

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

“I have made you a light for the Gentiles,  
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

The Gentiles gladly received Paul and Barnabus and many became believers. The Jews stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabus and they left the area. The new disciples that they left behind had changed lives and were filled with the Holy Spirit.

### **2.1.4 Iconium**

Acts 14:1-7

From Pisidian Antioch they traveled to Iconium. As they customarily did, they went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Again they were given the opportunity to speak. A great number of people, both Jews and Gentiles, believed their message. Some of the Jews, however, resisted their message and tried to convince others to oppose the Gospel.

Paul and Barnabus remained there for considerable time. They continued to proclaim the Gospel, but they also gave a demonstration of its power. The Holy Spirit enabled them to have a "signs and wonders" ministry there. People were divided. They were either strongly confirmed followers of the Gospel or strongly confirmed opponents of the message.

Paul and Barnabus learned that their opponents in Iconium were plotting to have them stoned. They left there and went to Lystra and Derbe.

### **2.1.5 Lystra and Derbe**

Acts 14:8-20

In Lystra, Paul encountered a man who had been lame since birth. Paul spoke healing to him and the man was able to walk for the first time. Many people witnessed this miracle and they concluded that Paul and Barnabus were gods. They called Barnabus Zeus and Paul Hermes. The priest of Zeus in the city prepared to make sacrifices to them.

This was not the reaction that Paul and Barnabus wanted. They began to shout to the people to stop. In Acts 14:15-17 they said:

Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.

Still the crowds wanted to make sacrifice to them.

Unfortunately among the crowds were a number of anti-Paul Jews from Pisidian Antioch and from Iconium. They began shouting to the already-confused crowd, convincing them that Paul and Barnabus were subversives who deserved death. They managed to convince the people to stone Paul.

The people took Paul outside the city and stoned him. They left him there, thinking he was dead. Once the crowd had dispersed, the believers gathered around Paul to take care of him. He was still alive. He arose and went back into the town for the night. The next day he left and went to Derbe.

Their time in Derbe was peaceful and they won a great number of disciples there.

## **2.1.6 Return to Antioch in Syria**

Acts 14:21-28

When they left Derbe, they decided to return to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch to visit the disciples that they had made in those cities. Each of these cities had been in turmoil at the time they left because of the Gospel. They wanted to go back and encourage the believers in those places.

In each of the cities, they appointed elders and set up some structure for the church.

They then traveled through Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga, Attalia, and eventually back to Antioch in Syria. Once there, they reported back to the church about their journey and the way that God had brought the Gentiles into the faith. They remained in Antioch for a long time. They surely needed the rest.

## **2.2 In Antioch, The Jerusalem Council**

Acts 15:1-35

While Paul and Barnabus were back in Antioch a controversy arose in the church. There was a group of people in the church known as Judaizers. They firmly insisted that a Christian must be a Jew. Any follower of Jesus must live a Jewish life. He must follow the dietary laws, the Sabbath observance, the Pharisaical traditions, etc. The men must be circumcised. All of this may have seemed natural at first, when the church had a completely Jewish membership. In spite of the fact that Jesus had dealt with the sin problem and that much of the law no longer was necessary, the people were accustomed to living under these laws and they continued to do so. It was as much a cultural thing as a religious thing. It was a different matter altogether for the Gentile converts. Was it really necessary for them to adopt the Jewish dietary laws? Did the men have to undergo circumcision?

The requirements of the Judaizers were an unnecessary hardship for the Gentile converts. Paul and Barnabus cared deeply about their "children" in the faith and they would not tolerate this treatment of the Gentiles. They traveled to Jerusalem to speak to the apostles and elders about the problem.

Once there, they told the leaders in Jerusalem about the Gentile converts and it brought joy to them to find out how the Gospel was spreading. Then they engaged in a debate with the Judaizers. Peter gave his judgment on the matter in Acts 15:7-11:

Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.

Paul and Barnabus then told of their travels among the Gentiles and the signs and wonders that God worked in their midst. James, the half-brother of Jesus, arose and addressed the church in Acts 15:13-20:

Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

“After this I will return  
and rebuild David’s fallen tent.  
Its ruins I will rebuild,  
and I will restore it,

that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,  
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,  
says the Lord, who does these things”

that have been known for ages.

It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

The apostles and elders in Jerusalem decided to write a letter to the Gentiles, telling them that the only requirements on them are to avoid sexual immorality, to avoid food that had been offered to idols, and to avoid eating blood or the meat of strangled animals. To confirm the validity and authority of the message, they sent two men back with Paul and Barnabus – Judas and Silas. Judas and Silas spent time among the believers in Antioch, speaking to them and encouraging them. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

### **2.3 The Second Missionary Journey (AD 50 – 52)**

Acts 15:36-18:22

After spending an undetermined amount of time in Antioch, Paul and Barnabus decided that it would be a good idea to go back and visit the churches that they started on their first missionary journey. They wanted to check on the health of these young congregations and to strengthen them in any way possible. Paul considered these churches to be his children and he cared about them deeply.

A disagreement arose between Paul and Barnabus, however. Barnabus wanted to take John Mark on the trip. Paul refused to let him go. Paul still harbored ill feelings towards John Mark for abandoning them on the first trip. Barnabus wanted to give him a second chance. It is ironic. If anyone should have understood the concept of a second chance, it would be Paul. Still, the Bible presents its characters with all of their flaws. Abraham lied about Sarah being his wife. Jacob manipulated Esau out of his birthright. Moses disobeyed God at the Waters of Meribah. David sinned with Bathsheba. Paul was intolerant towards John Mark. God still loved each of them dearly and was able to do mighty work through these imperfect vessels. It is his power and not our purity that is the key.

Acts 15:39 says that the disagreement between Paul and Barnabus was so sharp that they parted company. Barnabus took John Mark and headed to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas as his new traveling partner. This is presumably the same Silas introduced in the first part of Chapter 15. They passed through Syria and Cilicia.

### 2.3.1 Derbe and Lystra

Acts 16:1-5

Paul and Silas went through Derbe and to Lystra. These are cities that Paul and Barnabus had visited on their first missionary journey. Recall that in Lystra Paul had healed a man and the crowd had declared Paul and Barnabus to be gods. Before it was all over Paul was stoned and left for dead. They caused great controversy in that city, but they also won some disciples to Christ.

On the second journey, Paul encountered one of those people that had been won to Christ on the first journey. His name was Timothy. He lived in Lystra and had a good reputation there and among the believers in Iconium. His mother was a Jewess who was a follower of Jesus. His father was a Greek, but there is no indication that he was a believer. Paul wanted to take Timothy along on the journey.

Because Timothy's father was Greek, Timothy had not been circumcised. Paul was concerned about what controversy it might cause to have this uncircumcised son of a Jewish mother along on his trip. The Judaizers abounded and Paul did not want unnecessary opposition to his work. Thus he had Timothy circumcised before proceeding.

Paul, Timothy and Silas continued on the journey, visiting the churches and strengthening them. As part of their work, they disseminated information about the decision of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

### 2.3.2 Phrygia, Galatia, Troas

Acts 16:6-10

Acts 16:6-10 says:

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

This is a very interesting passage from several standpoints.

Paul wanted to head into Asia. The Holy Spirit would not let him. More than one time the Spirit prevented him from entering an area where he intended to go. We have no indication of how the Holy Spirit prevented him from entering these places. More than likely it was an inner conviction – a dread – that he had no business going there.

Paul had no magic crystal ball. He got his directions from God just like the rest of us have to do. Sometimes we try things in good faith until the Holy Spirit tells us not to do it. There was nothing inherently wrong with Paul going to preach in Asia. God's call on his life was to go and preach, and he was not handed a lifetime itinerary the day of his conversion. The only thing that was wrong was that God did not want him to go there at this time.

Finally God gave Paul a vision with clearer information. He was not supposed to go to Asia because God wanted him to head to Europe – specifically to Macedonia (a section of Greece). It

is interesting that the focus of church history shifts from Israel to Europe during the first few hundred years of the church. In not too many years, the seat of the church will be in Rome rather than in Jerusalem. For the vast majority of the next two thousand years, the major church leadership, the major church movements, the reformations and the need for reformation will all come out of Europe. The church will spread out over the globe, but will look to Europe as the center. Indeed, a not-so-coincidental byproduct of this is that civilization itself will look to Europe for leadership. Europe will give birth to the world's thinking, culture, art, music, governmental concepts, economics. All of this I believe to be a byproduct of Acts 16:9 – that God sent Paul to Macedonia rather than to Asia.

There is also a subtle but important word shift in Acts 16:10:

After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Prior to this verse, the narrative of Acts is in the third person – he did so and so or they went such-and-such a place. In Acts 16:10 it shifts to “we” and “us.” Acts 16:6 refers to “Paul and his companions.” It is apparent that one of those companions is Luke, the author of Acts. Somewhere between Acts 16:5 and Acts 16:6, Luke seems to have joined Paul's traveling band.

### **2.3.3 Philippi**

Acts 16:11-40

After traveling through Troas, Samothrace and Neapolis, they came to the city of Philippi. Acts 16:12 describes Philippi as “a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia.”

In Philippi they met a woman named Lydia. Acts 16:14 describes her as “a dealer in purple cloth.” Purple was the color of royalty. Lydia was a woman who traded with the upper crust of society. She was probably a woman of means. She became a believer and was baptized. She convinced Paul and his companions to stay in her home.

While they were in Philippi, Paul also encountered “a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future.” (Acts 16:16) This girl began following Paul and shouting “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” (Acts 16:17) She did this long enough that it got to be a point of real irritation with Paul. He rebuked the spirit in her and cast it out.

This woman was telling the truth, right? She was pointing people to Paul, and thus to Jesus, right? Why would that be irritating? Why would Paul want to put an end to that? This may all seem a bit confusing. That should be a clue as to its source, because God is not the author of confusion.

Satan can twist the truth into a distraction. Paul did not need the witness of an unclean spirit to point to the truth of the cross. In fact, this woman was making such a ruckus that Paul's truth could not be heard. Even though the spirit was saying words that were true, it was doing so in such a way as to distract from the truth that Paul was trying to preach. So Paul got rid of the distraction.

The owner of the slave girl was not pleased at what happened. Paul did not simply silence the girl from talking about him; he cast out the spirit. No longer could this girl predict the future. Her ability to predict the future had been a source of revenue for her owner. In freeing the girl, Paul disrupted her owner's enterprise. The man was mad at Paul.

The man had Paul and Silas arrested on some trumped-up charges about trying to overthrow Roman culture with new and unlawful religions and customs. He roused up a crowd against them. There was such an uproar that the authorities had Paul and Silas beaten and thrown into jail.

Paul had two options. He could:

- Get depressed. Blame the owner of the slave girl for all his problems. Eat a pound of Oreos. Get drunk. Cry. Wonder why he ever made that silly trip to Damascus, anyway. Think about what a crummy childhood he had. Read a book on Inner Healing. Organize a 12 Step Program for the Religion Addiction. Protest. Threaten the jailers with a wrongful arrest lawsuit. Get really mad. Sulk. Tell Silas to “shut up” because he really did not feel like talking.

or

- Trust God and make the best of it.

Paul chose the second option. There in jail, he and Silas decided to hold a little revival service. About midnight they were praying and singing to God. The other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly the prison shook. The doors flew open. Everyone’s chains fell loose. The commotion caused the jailer to wake up. He looked around and saw what had happened and thought his life was over. The penalty for allowing a prisoner to escape was death. The jailer drew his sword and began to take his own life. Paul called out to him not to do so. He showed him that all of the prisoners were still in place. Nobody was escaping. Acts 16:29-30 says:

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

It is hard to know exactly what the jailer was asking. More than likely, his question was not on a spiritual level. He probably wanted to know what he needed to do to save his physical life. He looked around at a situation that could at any moment erupt into a massive jailbreak. If that happened it would cost him his life. He wanted to know how to keep the situation under control so that he would be saved.

Whether or not his question was on a spiritual level, Paul gave him a spiritual answer. In Acts 16:31 Paul replied to him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.” Paul and Silas used the opportunity to preach to all who were within earshot. The jailer was moved. He took Paul and Silas home. He treated their wounds and fed them. Paul baptized him and all of the members of his household.

The next day the authorities sent word to the jail to have Paul and Silas released. This is probably an indication that they never had any real reason to arrest them in the first place. When they told Paul and Silas that they could go, Paul gave them a glimpse of his tenacious character. Acts 16:37 says:

But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”

You can just hear Silas mumbling “Paul, just shut up and let’s get out of here!”

In fact, the authorities were alarmed to realize that they had beaten and imprisoned Roman citizens without due process. They did come and escort the men out of prison. Paul and Silas spent a bit more time with Lydia and then went on their way.

### **2.3.4 Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica**

Acts 17:1-9

Next on their journey, Paul and Silas passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia and landed in Thessalonica. As usual, they went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. For three weeks they spoke at the synagogue, explaining how the Scriptures pointed to Jesus and how Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Acts 17:4 says:

Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

We learn from passages such as this that there were a number of non-Jewish people who attended the synagogue and worshipped God. We are also reminded that society at that time regarded women as a separate class from men, e.g. there were Jews, Greeks, and women.

Paul and Silas were able to win converts in Thessalonica. As was true other places, they also made enemies. There were a number of Jews there who rejected their message and tried to stir up trouble for them. They gathered a mob and searched for Paul and Silas, but were unable to find them. A man by the name of Jason was arrested for simply having them into his home.

Paul and Silas quietly slipped out of town.

### **2.3.5 Berea**

Acts 17:10-15

From Thessalonica they went to the city of Berea. Again they went to the synagogue. Acts 17:11-12 says:

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

When I was growing up, there was an Adult Sunday School class at my church which called themselves "The Bereans." The Bereans have an honored place in Acts because they "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." They were open-minded to the message of the Gospel, placing it on the foundation of Scripture to see if it would stand. Many of them concluded that it did.

Unfortunately for Paul and Silas, the Jews in Thessalonica learned that they had gone to Berea. They sent people to Berea to stir up opposition against these two men. The believers there sent Paul to Athens. Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea, but would join him soon.

### 2.3.6 Athens

Acts 17:16-33

Athens was a center of Greek life and Greek culture. It was also a center of Greek religion. When Paul arrived in Athens, his spirit was troubled at all of the idols in the city. He was impassioned to tell people there about the one true God.

As normal, Paul spoke in the synagogues, trying to convert those who already believed in God to become followers of Christ. He also spoke in the marketplace, trying to convince polytheists to become monotheistic disciples of Jesus.

Some of the Greek philosophers entered into debate with Paul. There was nothing unusual about this. Philosophy and debate were national pastimes of the Greeks. For that matter, advocating a new god was also a national pastime, and for that reason Paul was not threatening to the Greeks as he was to the Jews.

Paul was brought before the Areopagus, which was a civil legislative body in Athens. The members of the Areopagus wanted to hear Paul's message. They were accustomed to hearing just about everything under the sun, but Paul had an interesting new twist to what he said – this idea about resurrection from the dead. He was given a forum by the leaders of Athenian society. He made the best use of it that he could.

Now Paul could have started his speech with a real attention-grabbing introduction such as:

Hey, you ignorant pagan idol-worshipping Greeks for whom is reserved fire and brimstone and a cheap motel room in hell with cockroaches on the walls.

After all, this is basically true. No need to beat around the bush. This would have really grabbed their attention. So much so, in fact, that they would not have heard anything else that he said.

Paul chose a different approach. Acts 17:22-23 says:

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you."

Paul had compassion on these people. The very fact that the city was full of idols indicated that they were searching. He was not there to condemn them; he was there to inform them. Thus he began very tactfully and tied his message to something that they already knew. In Athens there was some sort of memorial to every god they could imagine. Just to cover their bases, they also set up an altar "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" on the chance that they missed one. Paul told them that he was going to teach them about this unknown god and then proceeded to tell them about God.

In the course of his sermon, Paul:

- established God as creator of the entire universe. The Greek religion had many gods and a given god had dominion over something specific (the god of fire, the god of wind, etc.). Paul demonstrated God, the God of everything, the giver of life.
- quoted Greek poets and philosophers. He attempted to align himself with the Greeks, showing that it is not foreign to believe in God. 1 Corinthians 9:22 says "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." This is an example of that.

- told them that God disapproves of gods made by the hand of man. The day is coming when he will bring judgment against men who worship such gods.
- told them that God demonstrated his authority by raising Jesus from the dead.

When Paul began to speak about the resurrection of the dead, many in the Areopagus laughed at him and would hear no more. Others, however, wanted to speak to him further. Some became disciples. Specifically named are Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus and a woman named Damaris.

Did Paul see a mass of converts in Athens? No. Was Athens a major success for Paul? Yes. Why? Because he was faithful to do what he was called to do and left the results to the Holy Spirit. That is the only measure of success in the Kingdom of God.

### **2.3.7 Corinth**

Acts 18:1-17

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. As Athens was a center of Greek culture and religion, Corinth was a center of Greek vice. Greece is a country surrounded by water on three sides. The Aegean Sea is to the east. The Ionian Sea is to the west. The Mediterranean Sea is to the South. The country itself consists of two pieces – the mainland and a disjoint piece to the south known as the Peloponnesus. The two are connected by a narrow strip of land known as the Isthmus of Corinth.

Ships that needed to pass from the Ionian Sea to the Aegean Sea had two options. One is to sail completely around the Peloponnesus. This was a rather treacherous journey. The coast was very jagged. The waters were rocky. Furthermore it was a very indirect route. What ships would normally do is to sail up the Gulf of Corinth to the Isthmus, unload the ships, carry the ships and the cargo over the short stretch of land to the other side of the Isthmus, reload, and continue on their merry way. (In the 1880s and 1890s they finally built a canal across the land.) Because of its strategic location, Corinth was not only a harbor town, it was a two-harbor town. Sailors from the world over hung out in Corinth. They brought with them a hodgepodge of cultural and religious ideas. They left their morals at home. They were looking for a night of debauchery while they were ashore. Thus there was somewhat of an “anything goes” atmosphere in Corinth. It was a major center for prostitution and other vices. It was not what most people would consider to be fertile ground for planting a church. It is no surprise that Paul told them in 1 Corinthians 2:3, “I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.”

Shortly after arriving in Corinth, Paul became a friend with a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They had previously lived in Rome. Acts 18:2 says that the emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome. Extrabiblical literature leads us to believe that there was major infighting among the Jews in Rome over the issue of Jesus. Claudius got tired of the fighting and made them all leave.

Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers, which was Paul’s profession as well. He joined them in this trade so that he could support himself during his early days in Corinth. On the Sabbaths he would go to the synagogue and preach about Jesus. Eventually Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth (they did not accompany Paul on his trip). When they arrived they were able to help support Paul and he could devote himself full-time to teaching.

It did not take long for the Jews in Corinth to mount opposition to Paul’s message. Acts 18:6 says:

But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

He left the synagogue and began teaching in the home of one of the believers – who happened to live next door to the synagogue. Some of the prominent Jews in Corinth became believers and were baptized.

It is apparent from the text that opposition to Paul continued. In Acts 18:9-11 we read:

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

The Lord ministered to him in a vision, giving him comfort and assurance and fortifying him for what was ahead. He would face opposition but he would not be stopped. He had a long and fruitful ministry in Corinth.

Acts 18:12-17 does tell of a specific time when Paul was publicly opposed. Some of the Jews brought Paul into court before the Roman proconsul, Gallio. They charged him with encouraging people to worship God in a way contrary to Jewish law. Gallio told them that he had no interest whatsoever in Jewish law and that they could settle this matter among themselves. He threw them all out of the court. A physical fight erupted, but Gallio turned his back on it and ignored the whole thing.

### **2.3.8 Ephesus, Caesarea, and Antioch**

Acts 18:18-22

After leaving Corinth, Paul sailed to Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla accompanied him. Acts 18:18 says “Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchræa because of a vow he had taken.” Although we are not sure exactly what this means, the best guess is that it indicates Paul was terminating a Nazirite vow, as prescribed in Numbers 6.

Paul remained and preached in Ephesus a short time. He left Aquila and Priscilla behind to strengthen the church there. He then departed, passed through Caesarea and returned to Antioch.

## **2.4 The Third Missionary Journey (AD 53 – 57)**

Acts 18:23-21:16

### **2.4.1 Galatia and Phrygia**

Acts 18:23

After spending an unspecified amount of time in Antioch, Paul decided that it was time to head out on his third missionary journey. He began by traveling through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia. As was his custom, he visited and strengthened the disciples in these places.

## 2.4.2 Ephesus

Acts 18:24-19:41

Recall that Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus. In Acts 18:24, the attention shifts back to Ephesus and we discover that they are still there. Aquila and Priscilla make an acquaintance of a man named Apollos. He was an educated man with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, and he was a believer. Acts 18:25 has a curious statement:

He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

(A more literal translation of this passage is: “He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and boiling in the Spirit he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John.”) We shall discuss the implications of this passage in a moment. Priscilla and Aquila spent time with Apollos instructing him more thoroughly in the Gospel. He then departed and went on a missionary journey to Achaia. Scripture says that Apollos was a powerful witness for Jesus. (Some speculate that he was the author of the book of Hebrews, but there is really no evidence that this is true.)

Meanwhile Paul arrived at Ephesus. Acts 19:1-6 says:

... There he found some disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?”

“John’s baptism,” they replied.

Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

This, plus the passage quoted above raises two interesting questions:

- What is the baptism of John vs. the baptism of Jesus?
- What role does baptism play in receiving the Holy Spirit?

The first question is addressed directly by the text itself. The second is a bit more obscure.

The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance. It was a symbolic cleansing, signifying an intention to turn from sin. The baptism of Jesus is an act symbolizing submission to him as Lord. The baptism of John is symbolic of repentance. The baptism of Jesus is symbolic of repentance and atonement.

What about the second question? Why did the men not receive the Holy Spirit until after they were baptized? Does this passage support the idea that baptism is a prerequisite to salvation?

Realize that questions about baptism have divided the church for centuries. Major denominations have been formed around baptismal beliefs – who should be baptized when, what words are to be spoken during the baptism ordinance, exactly what baptism symbolizes, etc.

Verses like these cause much of that confusion. How can we harmonize this with other Scripture?

Acts 16:30-33 shows that belief, not baptism, leads to salvation. Baptism is an act of obedience that follows the salvation transaction.

The passage quoted above (Acts 18:25) shows that Apollos was operating in the Spirit (“boiling in the Spirit”) without having received Christian baptism. Baptism is not a prerequisite for salvation. It is a public celebration and declaration that salvation has already taken place.

The reason that the Ephesian men had not yet received the Holy Spirit seems to be that they were not yet true believers. When Paul first encountered these men, they believed about Jesus. They had never been introduced to Jesus. Paul led them from knowledge to relationship. Once they were in relationship, the natural next step was baptism. An infilling of the Holy Spirit accompanied that.

Paul spent three months in Ephesus teaching in the synagogue. Opposition to his message mounted steadily among some of the Jews. Finally he left the synagogue, took the disciples that he had gathered, and began meeting daily in a lecture hall in Ephesus. He remained there for around three years, teaching Jews and Gentiles about the Lord.

The ministry of Paul during this time was marked by great signs and wonders. As he proclaimed the kingdom, he demonstrated its power. Many sick were healed. Pieces of material that had touched him were taken and laid on the sick so that their illnesses would be cured. Many evil spirits were cast out.

Acts 19:13-16 says:

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

So what happened here? Didn't Jesus tell us that we would do greater things than he did? Didn't he give us the Holy Spirit so that we could work miracles in his name?

Yes he did. He also told us in Matthew 7:22-23:

Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

Jesus warned that there would be people who were not believers who would try (and perhaps succeed upon occasion) to minister in his name. The Acts 19 passage describes these men as Jews, but it does not say they were believers. They had seen Paul minister in power by saying the magic words “in the name of Jesus.” They tried to do the same thing. The evil spirits jumped all over them when they did.

The point of all of this is simple. Do not pretend to belong to Jesus. You will not fool anyone who matters. Satan does not like rebellion in his own army and he will deal with you sternly if you are his but you attempt to unleash the power of heaven against his forces.

The miracles that God performed in Ephesus caused fear and reverence for the name of Jesus. Many people turned from sorcery or other evil lifestyles and became disciples. The church there grew strong.

Eventually Paul decided it was time to leave Ephesus. He intended to travel through Macedonia and Achaia, spend some time in Jerusalem, and then go to Rome. He sent Timothy and another of his helpers named Erastus on ahead of him while he prepared for the journey.

While he was still in Ephesus, a problem developed. Ephesus was the center for the worship of the goddess Artemis. There were a number of silversmiths in Ephesus who made a living building statues of Artemis. Paul's preaching was having enough of an effect that it was negatively impacting their business. They did not like it. A particular silversmith named Demetrius organized opposition against Paul. He gathered a number of Artemis-worshippers together and they staged a protest against Paul. They seized a few of Paul's companions. Paul wanted to address the crowd but the disciples in Ephesus would not let him, fearing for his well being.

Eventually a city official quieted the crowd. He pointed out that Paul's companions had done nothing to Artemis or her temple. He advised them that if they felt they had charges against the men, the court system was the place to deal with them. He reminded them that they did not want the wrath of Rome to come down on them for rioting. Then he dismissed the crowd.

Paul and his companions came out of this without harm. The pattern is consistent, however. When the Kingdom of God advances, it advances violently. It will always meet opposition, because Satan does not like to lose ground. Anyone who steps up to serving in the front lines can expect opposition of some sort. Sometimes we come out safely, as happened in Ephesus. Sometimes it can be violent unto death, as happened to Stephen. Either way, we need to trust our eternal well being to God and do his will. To quote from [Getting Into The Promised Land Without Falling Asleep In Leviticus](#), the section on Daniel where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are thrown into the furnace:

Trust God. He may choose to protect you through the fiery furnace but he may not. He may allow your flesh to be completely destroyed. That is not the issue. Do not be flesh-minded. Be spirit-minded. Trust him, obey him, and love him even in the face of death. It is the only way that you will ever have life.

### **2.4.3 Macedonia, Philippi, Troas**

Acts 20:1-12

Paul left Ephesus and traveled through Macedonia. His journey took several months and included a detour to avoid a plot on his life by the Jews. As usual, he traveled, preached, and encouraged the believers along the way. He passed through Philippi and went to Troas.

In Troas he was speaking to a group of people late into the night. They were meeting in a third-story room. There was a young man named Eutychus sitting in a window, listening to Paul. Because of the lateness of the evening, he fell asleep and fell out the window. The fall killed him. Acts 20:10 says:

Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!"

Then Paul went back upstairs and spoke until daylight. The next day he left from Troas to continue on his journey.

#### **2.4.4 Assos, Mitylene, Kios, Samos, Miletus**

Acts 20:13-38

Paul set his face towards Jerusalem. He traveled through Assos, Mitylene, Kios, Samos, and came to Miletus. While there he summoned the elders from the church at Ephesus to come see him. When they arrived, he gave them a very poignant message. Acts 20:18-35 says:

You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Paul had faced his share of hardship. He expected to face more. He believed that the pain that he was to endure was an insignificant price to pay for the spreading of the Gospel.

He also believed that he would never see these men from Ephesus again. He wanted one last chance to charge them and instruct them. He reminded them that the Kingdom is for Jews and Gentiles alike. He admonished them that as elders of the church they were to build up and nurture the church, keeping themselves pure and never taking advantage of the flock. He warned them about those who would try to distort and corrupt the message.

For Paul, this experience was like saying good-bye to a son or daughter for the last time. His heart must have ached because he loved these people so much. He poured out his life for his children in the faith. Seeing them for the last time must have been a very difficult thing for him.

## **2.4.5 Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre**

Acts 21:1-6

They continued their journey through Cos, Rhodes, Patara, and Tyre. They spent a week with the believers in Tyre. The people there warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem but he was steadfast to go there. They left Tyre and continued on their way.

## **2.4.6 Ptolemais and Caesarea**

Acts 21:7-16

Continuing, they went through Ptolemais and landed at Caesarea. Acts 21:8 says that they stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist. We have seen Philip the apostle. In Acts 6:5 we saw Philip the deacon. Is Philip the evangelist a third Philip or is it one of these other two? Who knows. It is not a significant question because he does not play a significant role in the story. The text does say that he had four daughters who prophesied.

When they had been in Caesarea for a time, a prophet named Agabus came from Judea. This is probably the same Agabus mentioned in Acts 11:28 (he prophesied about a famine all over the Roman world). Acts 21:11 says:

Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

Paul already knew this. The Holy Spirit had already told him what would happen to him in Jerusalem. Still he was steadfastly determined to go there. You might ask yourself, "What's going on here?"

Suppose that I was planning a trip to Washington D.C. next week. Furthermore suppose that a person with a prophetic gift whom I knew and respected came in my office and said "I believe that the Lord has instructed me to tell you that if you go to Washington next week you will be robbed and beaten and perhaps killed." Would I run home and pack a suitcase or would I rethink the trip? Paul seems to have chosen the option of packing a suitcase.

The key to this is the private revelation that God had given Paul. Paul would be arrested in Jerusalem, but God had a purpose in it. Paul would submit to that purpose. The message of Agabus was not really for Paul's benefit. It was for his companions and those who loved him. When Paul was arrested, it would be very traumatic for them. They, too, needed to understand that it served God's purpose and that God would be with Paul even in prison. God did not want them to be surprised or dismayed by the events. He wanted them to submit to it, just as Paul would.

The message was painful for the believers. They urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul explained to them that he was ready to spent by the Lord however the Lord saw fit. The arrest was God's will and Paul's only desire was that the Lord's will be done.

Thus Paul left Caesarea and headed to Jerusalem.

## **2.5 At Jerusalem**

Acts 21:17-23:30

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he went to see James, the half-brother of Jesus, and the other elders of the church. He reported to them what God had been doing among the Gentiles. They were joyful to hear it.

They informed Paul that a number of stories were being circulated about his work. By this time, there was a large group of Jewish believers in Jerusalem. They followed Jesus, but they were also zealous in following Mosaic Law. Stories had circulated among them that Paul was going around encouraging Jew and Gentile alike to turn away from the Mosaic teachings. They were incensed at Paul for this. The elders decided that Paul should very publicly participate in the temple activities so that people could see that he lived in obedience to the law. Then, they thought, the people would dismiss the things that they had heard as untrue.

### **2.5.1 Arrest at the Temple**

Acts 21:26-22:29

About a week later Paul was at the temple and the trouble started. Acts 21:27-29 says:

When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.)

Gentiles were allowed into the temple complex, but only as far as the Court of the Gentiles. These men assumed that Paul had brought a Gentile into the inner courts, which was strictly forbidden.

The men whipped the crowd into a frenzy. Paul was seized and beaten. There was enough of an uproar to attract the attention of the Roman troops. They came to the temple complex. When the soldiers arrived, the crowd stopped beating Paul.

The Romans bound and arrested Paul. They asked what he had done and could not get an answer from the crowd. As Paul was being led away he asked if he could speak. The Romans allowed him to address the crowd. When he began speaking to them in Aramaic, they became quiet and listened.

Paul reminded the crowd that he was a Jew, born in Tarsus but raised in Jerusalem. He studied under Gamaliel (we saw him in Acts 5). He was a zealous Jew who persecuted the church. He told them about his conversion experience on the road to Damascus. In Acts 22:17-21 he said:

When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. "Quick!" he said to me. "Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me."

"Lord," I replied, "these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him."

Then the Lord said to me, "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles."

The crowd listened to this point. When he said the word "Gentiles" they began to shout again, calling for Paul's death.

The soldiers led Paul out of the area. The commander ordered that Paul be flogged and interrogated to find out why the crowds were so upset about him. In Acts 22:25 Paul said:

Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?

At this point the commander became alarmed because he was treating a Roman citizen in an unlawful manner.

## **2.5.2 In Prison in Jerusalem**

Acts 22:30-23:11

The Romans still had no idea why the Jews were so upset with Paul. The next day they assembled the Sanhedrin and brought Paul before him. Acts 23:1-5 says:

Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?"

Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

Paul cited Exodus 22:28 and submitted to the high priest's authority – even through the man's behavior deserved no respect.

Paul was intimately familiar with the belief systems of the members of the Sanhedrin. The members of the Sanhedrin fell into two parties, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. One of the primary doctrinal differences between Pharisees and Sadducees was that concerning the resurrection of the dead. Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead and Sadducees did not. Paul decided to use this situation to his favor.

In Acts 23:6 he said:

Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead."

When he said this, the Pharisees and Sadducees began arguing among themselves. A sharp division turned into an uproar. Some of the Pharisees began siding with Paul and saying that he was innocent. The dispute became so inflamed that the soldiers removed Paul, for fear that he would be hurt.

At this point, the Romans had Paul in custody but did not really know what to do with him. They had no real charges against him and could not even figure out why the Jews were so upset with

him. They simply knew that trouble erupted wherever Paul went. The Lord had Paul positioned where he was for a reason. Acts 23:11 says:

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

### **2.5.3 The Plot to Kill Paul**

Acts 23:12-30

Some of the Jews took an oath not to eat or drink until Paul was dead. Paul's nephew found out about it. He was brought to the Roman commander to tell him. Acts 23:20-21 says:

He said: "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request."

They arranged to escort Paul out of town that night in the company of several hundred soldiers. He would be sent to Caesarea and handed over to Governor Felix there. They wrote a letter, recorded in Acts 23:26-30:

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings.

This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

## **2.6 In Caesarea**

Acts 23:31-26:32

Paul was delivered to Felix, along with the letter of introduction. Felix held him in custody, giving his accusers time to come and present a case against him.

### **2.6.1 The Trial Before Felix**

Acts 24:1-27

Five days later, Ananias, the high priest, and a squadron of his supporters went to Caesarea to present a case against Paul. They charged him with:

- being a troublemaker, causing riots among Jews all over the world.
- being a "ringleader of the Nazarene sect" (Acts 24:5)
- desecrating the temple

(In reality, the first two accusations were true.)

Felix allowed Paul to speak. Paul indicated that his accusers could prove none of their charges. He did admit that he was a follower of “The Way,” which was a name for Christianity at the time. Thus he confirmed that he was an adherent of the “Nazarene sect.” He said that in the temple at the time of his arrest, he was ceremonially clean, minding his own business, and doing nothing to cause a riot.

Felix could find no fault in Paul, but he decided to defer a decision on his case until “Lysias the commander comes.” (Acts 24:22) Lysias was the man mentioned in Acts 23:26 who sent Paul to Felix in the first place. In the mean time, Paul was kept in low-security confinement in Caesarea, being given a certain amount of freedom to interact with his friends and supporters.

Acts 24:24-26 says that Paul discussed his faith in Jesus with Drusilla, the wife of Felix (and great-granddaughter of Herod the Great). She was a Jewess. Felix became concerned that she was responding to his message and stopped their interaction. Felix left Paul in confinement, hoping that someone would give him a bribe to let Paul go.

After Paul had been confined for two years, Felix was removed from office and Porcius Festus took his place. Hoping to placate the Jews on his way out, Felix left Paul in prison.

In spite of the fact that Paul had now served time in a Roman prison in both Jerusalem and Caesarea, the Romans still could not figure out anything wrong that he had done.

## **2.6.2 Trial Before Porcius Festus**

Acts 25:1-12

Three days after arriving in Palestine, Festus traveled from Caesarea (the Roman capital of the area) to Jerusalem (the Jewish capital). When he was there, the Jewish leadership appeared before him and renewed their charges against Paul. They asked Festus to transfer Paul to Jerusalem so that he could be tried there. In reality, they were plotting to ambush and kill him along the way.

Festus responded that they could come to Caesarea and charge Paul if they wanted. He would not transfer Paul to Jerusalem without first being convinced that Paul had done something wrong.

When Festus was back in Caesarea, Jews from Jerusalem did come to make charges against Paul. Paul denied the charges. Acts 25:9-12 describes what happened next:

Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?”

Paul answered: “I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!”

After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”

Paul remembered the plot on his life two years ago in Jerusalem. He knew that he would not be safe there. He also knew that God had destined him to testify in Rome. Thus he invoked his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar. Caesar was the Supreme Court. Any Roman citizen could appeal any legal issue to Caesar for final decision. By appealing to Caesar, Paul's fate was set. He was now on his way to Rome.

### **2.6.3 Testimony Before Agrippa and Bernice**

Acts 25:13-26:32

Several days later, while Paul was still in Caesarea, King Agrippa and Bernice came to visit Festus. This is Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I (who executed James and imprisoned Peter) and great-grandson of Herod the Great. Bernice was his sister.

The Herods had Jewish blood and certainly understood the religion better than Festus. Thus Festus asked them for assistance. He told them that he had a man named Paul in custody. The Jews had accused Paul of many things, and rather than be tried by the Jews Paul had appealed to Caesar. Festus was now obliged to send him to Caesar, but had no idea what he should tell Caesar – why Paul had been arrested and what the charges were. When Paul was sent, a letter had to go along with him explaining the charges. Festus wanted to write something more substantial than “People just do not like him.” Festus asked Agrippa and Bernice to talk to Paul and help figure out what to write to Caesar.

Thus Paul was summoned to appear before Agrippa and Bernice. In true Paul fashion, he launched into his personal testimony, telling how he has been a persecutor of the church, of his Damascus road experience, of his activity for Jesus since then. Acts 26:28-32 says:

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

Paul replied, “Short time or long – I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”

The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.”

Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

Agrippa was quick to pick up on the fact that Paul was not simply trying to defend himself; he was evangelizing. Paul would use any opportunity to win people to Jesus, even if it meant sacrificing an opportunity to win his own freedom. His focus was not on self, but on Jesus.

Thus Paul was still in a Roman prison. The Romans still had no substantive charges against Paul. God put him in a place where he testified before kings and queens (just as Jesus prophesied in Luke 21:12-13). Now he is going to the city that is the capital of the world – Rome.

## **2.7 Journey to Rome**

Acts 27:1-28:31

A group of prisoners which included Paul was put on a ship headed for Rome. Paul immediately won the favor of the centurion in charge of the prisoners. He was granted a certain amount of freedom along the way and was even allowed to visit friends at some of the ports along the journey.

Along the way they met headwinds and rough waters. The journey became slow and difficult. It was impossible to stay on course. Eventually they docked at a place called Fair Havens.

### **2.7.1 Shipwrecked**

Acts 27:9-44

Winter was approaching, along with characteristically treacherous weather for sailing. Against Paul's advice, the centurion in charge decided that they should sail ahead for Rome. They did, and as Paul had warned, they ran into terrible weather. Hurricane force winds arose and the ship was in great distress.

Paul was (literally) the calm amidst the storm. He knew that God intended for him to go to Rome. No storm would stop that. In Acts 27:21-26 we read:

After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

Things happened just as Paul said. The ship ran aground and broke into pieces. Normally the soldiers on board would kill all of the prisoners to prevent escape, but the centurion in charge did not allow them to do this because he wanted to spare Paul's life. They all worked together to see that all on board safely made it to dry ground.

### **2.7.2 On Malta**

Acts 28:1-15

They landed on the island of Malta. The people who lived there showed great kindness to them and tried to make them comfortable. Acts 28:3-6 says:

Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

Paul ministered to those who lived on the island. Many sick were healed. The people there showed great honor and care for Paul and his companions and took good care of them.

After three months on Malta, they boarded another ship and continued on their way to Rome. When they landed, Paul found that many believers had gathered there to greet him, some having traveled from far places. Paul was very encouraged to be greeted in this way.

### 2.7.3 In Rome

Acts 28:16-31

For a prisoner, Paul was treated very well in Rome. Although he lived in a state of arrest and was kept under guard, he was allowed to live in a house by himself rather than in the prisons.

Oddly enough, Acts never shows that Paul was actually brought to trial. In Rome, he did what he always did. He called Jew and Gentile to himself and told them about Jesus. The Jewish leadership there had not received communication from the Jews in Jerusalem concerning Paul and thus they were open-minded to hear what he had to say. Some of them believed. Many rejected his message. In Acts 28:26-28, Paul reminded them what Isaiah had said (Isaiah 6:9-10):

“Go to this people and say,  
“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”

For this people’s heart has become calloused;  
they hardly hear with their ears,  
and they have closed their eyes.  
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts  
and turn, and I would heal them.’

“Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”

The book of Acts closes with Acts 28:30-31:

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The story seems incomplete. Paul was brought to Rome because he appealed to Caesar. Why was he not brought to trial? Why was he kept under guard if there were no charges against him? What happened when the two years were up?

All three questions have the same answer: “Who knows?”

When Paul was sent to Rome, a letter would have been sent along explaining the charges against him. It is hard to imagine that the letter survived the shipwreck. More than likely he was held under guard without being brought to trial because they were trying to ascertain why he had been sent in the first place. Rome was probably trying to correspond with Caesarea to figure out why this prisoner had been sent their way.

Why does the book close where it does? More than likely, Luke wrote Acts while Paul was still in prison. There is various speculation about what happened to Paul at the end of this period. Some believe that he was executed at the end of this imprisonment. Others believe that he was released and then later arrested and executed. Tradition supports the view that he was ultimately beheaded in Rome.

Paul was a fascinating individual. He ultimately shaped the major doctrines of the church that he once intended to destroy. His writings encouraged and instructed and continue to do so until today. He considered himself to be a coin in God's pocket, to be spent at the Father's will. He was a model of submission for us all.

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