

# Acts of the Apostles: A Chapter by Chapter Study

## Introduction

The Book of Acts is attributed to Luke with very little dispute. Most historians date this book at 63 A.D. although there are some alternate theories that put it at 70 A.D. or later. This book is often referred to as Luke Volume 2, the first volume being the Gospel of Luke.

## Chapter 1

### Jesus' Ascension

Read vv1-11

These verses describe the last days of Jesus' time on earth. It briefly describes how Jesus left no doubt that He was risen from the dead. It also describes the method of Jesus' return. Just as He went into Heaven visibly leaving the earth, so shall He return.

### Judas' Replacement

Read vv12-26

The believers still remained together as a family, held firmly in place by the resurrection of Jesus and witnessing Him perform miracles both before and after the cross. Peter appears to oversee the gathering and is becoming 'the rock' on which the Christian church will be built.

Peter quotes from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 as a precedence to replace the position Judas Iscariot held as one of the twelve. They nominated two men who had been with them since before the death of Jesus, then prayed and cast lots to see who would be chosen. Matthias replaces Judas as one of the twelve.

## Chapter 2

### The Holy Spirit Comes

Read vv1-13

Verse 1 says the faithful were gathered on the day of Pentecost. This is no small significance. Pentecost, also known as Shavout, is a Jewish festival celebrating the wheat harvest and is also recognized as the day that the Torah was given to the Jews on Mount Sinai. Pentecost is Greek for 'fiftieth' being celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover.

When the Holy Spirit fell on them, they immediately began speaking in different languages which were not known to them. The wind, fire and talking all drew a significant crowd, though, and those who were present from different countries heard their own language being communicated to them. Those who heard their own language were amazed, but some of the local crowd scoffed at the site, supposing them to be speaking drunken gibberish.

### Peter Reacts to the Crowd

Read vv14-41

Peter quotes scripture to the Jews to try and convince them of their sincerity and authenticity. Verses 17-21 quote Joel 2:28-32, verses 25-28 quote David from Psalm 16:8-11 and verses 34 and 35 quote David again from Psalm 110:1. Peter attempts to convince the Jews that God is still here (the Holy Spirit) and that the miracles that Jesus performed and His resurrection should be enough for them to wake up and pay attention. Mentioning the tomb of David which is still occupied and comparing that to the empty tomb of Jesus would be of even further significance on the day of Pentecost. Peters speech worked and three thousand people became Christians that day.

### **The Growing Believers**

Read vv41-46

The church continues to grow at a rapid pace, the apostles are performing miracles with the Holy Spirit and a truly Christ-like form of living is taking place.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Peter Heals a Beggar**

Read vv1-11

This particular beggar was known to the regular temple visitors since he had been at the same spot everyday for most of his life. The time of day would be important since the temple would be heavily populated. This was not a small crowd, probably containing a few thousand people, maybe more than ten thousand. This beggar would be a familiar sight to those coming to the temple. To those that saw the beggar, this was either one of the biggest cons of their lifetime or Peter had actually performed a miracle in Jesus' name.

In verse 7, it says the beggars' feet and ankles had become strong. This is important to note since the beggar had been lame since birth. His muscles would have atrophied. God does not perform a miracle halfway. He provides fully.

### **Peter Preaches**

Read vv12-26

Peter takes the opportunity of the healing of the beggar to witness to those around that saw the healing. Peter gives full credit for the miracle to Jesus. He again links Jesus to God the Father so the Jews can feel a sense of connection. Peter recites the circumstances surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and invites those gathered to join them. Peter also uses more Old Testament prophesies to relate to the Jews gathered around.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Peter and John Taken Captive**

Read vv1-22

Sanhedrin: essentially the 'Supreme Court' of the Jews.

The authority figures of the temple are having none of this. They arrest Peter and John, but verse 4 says the damage is already done. "The number of men who believed grew to about five thousand." That's an

additional two thousand from the previous chapters. And that's just men, not including women and children. Peter and John are kept in prison overnight and are brought before the Sanhedrin the next day.

In verses 5-12, Peter responds to the Sanhedrin with the name of Jesus. These authority figures that make up the Sanhedrin are the same that crucified Jesus. With the beggar standing in the temple court, the Sanhedrin cannot deny what Peter and John have said and cannot punish them for their actions. The Sanhedrin call a recess to discuss what to do.

In verse 18, the Sanhedrin reconvenes and tell Peter and John to stop preaching about Jesus. Peter rebukes them, but there is nothing the Sanhedrin can do so they release Peter and John.

### **Prayer and the Holy Spirit**

Read vv23-31

Peter and John return to their Christian Camp and there is a celebration in prayer. The Holy Spirit falls over all of them and the ground itself shakes. Verse 31 says they speak the word of God boldly. How often do we speak boldly about our beliefs?

### **The Christian Community**

Read vv32-37

This is a great example of a variety of people coming together with a common cause. Rich and poor, young and old, men, women and children all lived together and celebrated Christ. Peter and the apostles were humble. Everything they did was for Jesus, not for self-gain, and the fellow Christians around them saw this, desired this and emulated this. Nothing else mattered but Jesus.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Ananias and Sapphira**

Read vv1-11

What was the sin that these two did? The issue was not that they sold their property and gave some of it to God and the Christian community. What they did was sold their property and then said they donated the entire sum to the apostles to make themselves look good to the rest of the community. Also, they didn't fully trust in God or the Christian movement. If they did, they wouldn't have had a problem giving away their entire profit. Had they simply donated the money without saying that they had given all of it, there would have been no problem. The apostles weren't asking for money. They were asking for honesty. God knew their hearts and they paid the price.

It does not say how Peter knew of their deceit, but Peter was certain of it. Certain enough to know that God was going to punish them.

In verse 11 it says, "Great fear seized the church..." This is a stark contrast to the celebration that took place at the end of chapter 4.

### **Healings**

Read vv12-16

The apostles continue to meet outside the temple gates. They are now in celebrity status. They have continued to perform miracles. So much so that the road the apostles walk on is now lined with people

in need of a miracle. But the people are still scared of the Jewish leadership and few will join them at the temple gate.

### **Persecution**

Read vv17-32

The apostles are arrested again, apparently without a specific charge other than maybe 'disturbing the peace'. They are placed in jail overnight again, but this time they are miraculously set free. Instead of fleeing, they stand in the temple courts and preach the name of Jesus.

The Sanhedrin convenes the next morning and instead of finding the apostles in jail, they find them in the temple. They carefully escort the apostles to the court. The apostles had so much favor with the people that the temple authorities were now afraid of what the people would do to them if the apostles were harmed.

The Sanhedrin accuses the apostles of continuing to preach the name of Jesus even when instructed not to. In verse 28, one of the Sadducees says, "You...are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." Well, duh.

### **Gamaliel**

Read vv33-42

One Pharisee calls a recess and applies some logic to this case. If these apostles are for earthly gain, this will fail in time. If it is of Heaven and of God, then the Jews will be at odds with God. He suggests letting the apostles go and see what happens.

The Sanhedrin are still upset, but instead of killing the apostles, they simply flog them. The apostles are again instructed to not preach the name of Jesus.

Not only did this not work, it *encouraged* the apostles to keep doing what they are doing. How often are we encouraged by persecution?

## **Chapter 6**

### **Delegation**

Read vv1-7

This is a good example of a church with priorities and how to deal with them. Also, simply a good management technique. If there's a problem, delegate someone to take care of it. This is also quite possibly the first example of bickering among churchgoers.

### **Stephen**

Read vv8-15

This chapter introduces Stephen who is an exemplary Christian. He follows Christ first and his faith is strong. The Holy Spirit works many miracles through him. He becomes so well known that a sect of Jews seek to have him killed on false accusations.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Stephen's Speech**

Read vv1-53

Stephen gives a recount of Jewish history in order to make a point that Jesus has been persecuted since before His arrival. Even their ancestors persecuted those who spoke of the coming of Christ.

### **Stephens' Death**

Read vv54-60 and 8:1

This marks the first time someone has been killed for believing in Christ and preaching in His name. Notice his last words. They mimic that of Christ on the cross.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Persecution Begins**

Read vv1-3

On the same day Stephen is killed, the Sanhedrin and Jewish officials start a heavy persecution of Christians. A door to door search is conducted looking for known Christians and the imprisonment of Christians begins. For their safety, the church scatters including some of the apostles.

### **Samaria**

Read vv4-25

Philip begins a ministry in Samaria and it is well received. Peter and John go to Samaria to help Philip. A sorcerer named Simon is one of the converts, but he still craves power and the awe of the crowd. He sees the Holy Spirit coming over many of the people and asks the apostles to let him buy his way into this power.

What kind of power does the Holy Spirit have that would make a sorcerer want to be a part of this?

### **The Ethiopian**

Read vv26-40

Philip is compelled to take a desert road south of Jerusalem. While traveling, he meets an Ethiopian official who is reading Isaiah 53:7, 8. Philip takes this opportunity to introduce the official to Jesus. The Ethiopian believes and asks to be baptized. Once the baptism is complete, Philip is miraculously transported away.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Saul**

Read vv1-9

Saul was going all out to persecute Christians, seeking out the ones that had scattered from Jerusalem and looking to go to other cities to weed them out. While he is on the road with his companions, he sees a light and hears a voice. His companions only hear a voice. Jesus announces Himself to Saul and blinds him, telling him where to go and what to do next. Saul, being blind, has no choice but to go.

## **Ananias**

Read vv10-19

Ananias, who is in Damascus, has a vision where the Lord tells him to go and heal a man named Saul. Ananias has heard of Saul and is hesitant to go, but he obeys. Have you ever been called to help or even witness to someone you don't like?

## **Saul's Conversion**

Read vv20-31

Once Saul is healed, he spends time with the disciples that are in Damascus. He listens and learns. And once he has an understanding of who Jesus is, he is on fire. He goes into the synagogues and does what Peter and Stephen have done before him. He is effective and powerful. So much so, that the Jews in Damascus plot against him.

Saul leaves Damascus by basket and arrives at Jerusalem to very skeptical apostles. Saul, now named Paul, eventually proves himself with the help of Barnabas and he seeks out the very Jews that gave him their approval to persecute Christians. Another Jewish plot against Paul arises and the apostles send him to Tarsus for awhile.

In verse 31, it says the church had peace for a time. Paul was the primary reason the church was afraid and now that threat was gone.

Do you know anyone who has had this drastic of a conversion, becoming a completely different person after coming to Christ?

## **Peter's Travels**

Read vv32-43

Peter is visiting other cities and other believers. In Lydda, Peter heals the paralytic Aeneas and in Joppa, he raises Tabitha from the dead.

Tabitha is a highly regarded servant. The people are in mourning. Peter is called for and he performs another miracle.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Cornelius**

Read vv1-8

Cornelius, a Roman officer in charge of 100 men, was a devout follower of God. So much so, that he is given a vision of an angel who tells him to find Peter.

### **Peter's Vision**

Read vv9-23

There are many significant things about this vision. One, the sheet being held by four corners is a representation of the four corners of the earth, a message from God to everyone. Second, this is singling out the dietary restrictions which God gave the Jews in Leviticus to keep them separated from the rest of the people groups of the earth. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, there is no reason to adhere

to a separating law since now everyone is included in this salvation. Another thing to note is that this was said three times. Three is an authoritative number and is demonstrated as such throughout the bible.

Do you ever wonder why the tradition to pray before a meal exists? Read 1 Timothy 4:4-5. There are no longer clean and unclean animals. All food is consecrated through prayer to God.

As Peter is finishing with his vision and pondering its meaning, the servants of Cornelius turn up. Peter is about to have dinner with a gentile, a strict Jewish no-no.

### **Peter and Cornelius**

Read vv24-48

Peter is not just teaching, he is learning from God and being shown a new way to act and behave, a love that does not know racial or traditional boundaries.

This is a turning point not just for Peter, but his entourage that came with him and for the centurion, as well. He would become a Christian in the Roman army. His life may face many difficulties ahead.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Peter's Recount**

Read vv1-18

Peter explains to his fellow believers what happened with Cornelius, a recap of chapter 10.

### **Antioch**

Read vv19-20

The persecuted church may have scattered, but this only helped to spread the word, not squelch it. Some of those that left went to Antioch and began to preach to the Greeks. Those that went to Antioch found hearts opened to Jesus there and the news of the growth of believers reached Jerusalem. The apostles sent Barnabas to help. He was glad for them and encouraged them in their faith. Barnabas later seeks out Saul to help with the new Greek believers. They spent a year in Antioch nurturing and growing the church. It was at this place where the believers were first called 'Christians'. This church was so faithful that as they learned of a prediction of famine, they gathered what they could and offered it to the Christians of Judea.

## **Chapter 12**

### **Peter in Prison**

Read vv1-19

King Herod Agrippa was king of Judea from 41-44 AD. He is the grandson of Herod, the same king who ordered the slaughter of baby boys during the birth of Jesus and the nephew of Herod Antipas who put John the Baptist to death. He is trying to make a name for himself and decides to persecute this new and upstart Christian religion. The Jews are pleased with this, so he intensifies his persecution and captures Peter with the intent to execute him. An angel of the Lord gets Peter out of prison without incident. Peter turns up at John-Mark's house and finds fellow believers praying for his safety, but even they

don't believe it when he arrives at their door. This is the Mark that would write the Gospel of Mark and, later, he will travel with Paul and then leave Paul in the middle of a journey. Herod, disposes of the guards in charge of Peter.

### **Herod's Death**

Read vv20-23

Herod goes to Caesarea for a conference and a public address. His speech goes so well that the people praise him and he let's them without acknowledging God. God has none of this and Herod dies.

Verse 23 says that worms ate him. One theory is that Herod had a form of Phthiriasis, an infestation of lice that eat away at you, usually beginning with the eyes. This is traditionally a death attributed to 'divine chastisement'.

### **Christianity Continues**

Read vv24-25

Barnabas and Saul return to Antioch with John-Mark once the gifts from Antioch are received in Judea.

## **Chapter 13**

### **Mission Trip**

Read vv1-3

Saul and Barnabas are singled out by God for more work and another journey.

Verse 1 mentions 'Simeon called Niger': this is most likely an African, probably a black man and is presumed to be the same man that helped Jesus carry the cross when He fell.

Verse 2 (NIV) 'Set apart for me...': the implication is that they would sever ties with jobs, position, family and friends to become missionaries.

### **Cyprus**

Read vv4-12

Paul, Barnabas and John-Mark travel to the Jewish synagogues on Cyprus and preach. Side note: Barnabas supposedly grew up in Cyprus so he would know the territory and possibly even the people. In Paphos, they encounter Sergius Paulus and his attendant Bar-Jesus Elymas. Paulus is intrigued by the teachings, but Elymas tries to counter Paul and Barnabas only to be blinded. Paulus becomes a believer seeing the power of God.

*Is the blinding of Elymas a harsh punishment? Why or why not?*

Elymas was trying to come between Paulus and eternal salvation, so whatever needs to be done to save a willing soul, do it. Elymas had already made his choice and that is his prerogative. But Elymas was trying to bring Paulus down with him and that's why he was blinded.

*Do you believe in the power of prayer? The power of God? If not, what do you believe and why?*

The wording in verse 12 is such that Paulus was amazed at the words Paul spoke. The blinding of Elymas was just a convincing factor, not the reason for believing.

## **Pisidian Antioch**

Read 13-43

The company sails to Perga where John-Mark leaves them. From Perga, they go to Pisidian Antioch. Paul speaks at the synagogue service.

*Why was Paul and his company asked to speak?*

A typical service involved the reading of the first five books of the OT (the Law), then a reading from the prophets. Then, if there was an educated speaker present, they were invited to speak. Paul might have been known to this Synagogue or he may have made his presence and credentials known before the service so that he would have been asked to speak. There would be both Jews and 'wanna-be' Gentiles at this service.

*What does it mean to loosen one's sandals?*

Verse 13:25 says, "...the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose." In those days it was common for teachers to have disciples who would do menial tasks for them. This system started becoming abused, so the leading rabbis established rules for the teachers and disciples so that the disciples wouldn't be demeaned. Loosening of sandals was considered a demeaning task and so teachers were not permitted to ask disciples to perform this duty.

In verse 39, Paul says that forgiveness through Christ is greater than the adherence to the old law of Moses, the Jewish laws and customs. Another pivotal verse separating the New Testament from the Old.

This sermon that Paul gives is very similar and often compared to the sermon that Stephen gave before Paul led his execution.

Read 44-52

The Jews are stirred against Christianity, but the Gentiles welcome it with open arms and become believers. The term 'shook off the dust from their feet' is a Jewish tradition of not taking anything with them when leaving a Gentile city, a form of rejection, even an insult.

## **Chapter 14**

### **Iconium**

Read 1-7

Paul and Barnabas leave Pisidian Antioch and head to Iconium and begin preaching in that synagogue. There, they find that their words leave the people divided and those that oppose them wish to do them harm, a theme that they find to be recurring.

In verse 1, it says, "...they spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed..." (NASB). Their words were encouraging, refreshing and inviting.

*Why do they keep going to synagogues?*

Verse 3 says they spent a long time there. They stayed as long as they could even with the opposition and fled only when their lives were at stake. They knew that with such opposition that the new believers would need as much help building a firm foundation of belief as they could.

A historical side-note, in verse 6 there is mention of “Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia...” The cities of Lystra and Derbe were in the Roman province of Lycaonia only for a brief time, between 37 and 72 AD. The mention of these cities in this context has been a historical confirmation of accuracy for the Bible and the New Testament.

### **Lystra**

Read 8-18

While preaching in Lystra, a man who could not walk becomes a believer. A miracle of healing is provided but attracts unwanted attention. So much so that the preaching is now overshadowed by it and Paul and Barnabas must fight to deny their own deification.

The fact that Barnabas is identified as Zeus speaks much about him. Paul is the primary speaker, but he is not the only speaker. Barnabas has an air of authority about him and commands respect. The people react to both Paul and Barnabas, but Paul is the talkative one and attracts the most attention in scripture and typically from those with opposing viewpoints.

Read 19-28

The opposition to Christianity was strong. People were not content to simply have Paul and Barnabas removed. They followed them in some cases over 100 miles to persecute them. Paul was now on the other side from where he first started and went from being the stoner to the ‘stoney’.

These Jews convinced all that they could to stone Paul. Lystra was the place to do it since these people already believed Paul and Barnabas to be gods. When the Jews showed them otherwise, something which Paul and Barnabas had difficulty doing, the people easily turned on them and sought to kill them for the deception.

After having been stoned and left for dead, Paul gets up and returns to duty *the following day*. He still would have been injured, bruised and battered and visibly so. All the more reason to return and show the believers that persecution was real and that they must remain strong through it. His appearance would speak as loud as his words.

They continue on to the places they had previously visited to strengthen them in the same manner. They then return to Antioch, which would be considered their home church and spent time there.

## **Chapter 15**

### **Circumcision Council**

Read 1-12

Paul and Barnabas are becoming so successful at converting Gentiles that some of the Jewish Christians are becoming unsettled at their growing number. They insist that the Gentiles become Jews first and then Christians. It becomes so much a source of contention that it is decided that Paul and Barnabas must return to the apostles and discuss the matter ‘at the top level’. Peter gets involved and reminds them all of his vision of the clean and unclean animals and that everyone should be treated equally.

Read 13-35

James, the half-brother of Jesus and the author of the book of James agrees with Peter, Paul and Barnabas and decides to present a formal ruling on the subject and a letter is issued to the church. It is decided that circumcision and conversion to Judaism is not a requirement to become a Christian.

In verse 14, it says, "...God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name." The Greek word 'ethne' is translated as both Gentiles and nations. The Greek word 'laos' is the word for people. This is a reinforcement of the Christian belief that we are in the world but not of the world.

Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas go to Antioch with the good news.

### **Second Missionary Journey**

Read 36-41

Barnabas, being John-Mark's cousin and typically considered being the more accepting of the two between he and Paul (maybe to a fault) wanted to take John-Mark with them again, but Paul staunchly refused. This caused a strain in the relationship and caused a split. Barnabas and John-Mark go to Cyprus and Paul and Silas go to strengthen the new churches that had been planted.

## **Chapter 16**

### **Beginning of the Second Missionary Journey**

Read 1-5

Paul and Silas set out to strengthen the previous church plants and head back to Derbe and Lystra. In Lystra, where Paul and Barnabas were worshipped as Greek gods, they meet young Timothy. He is a believer in Christ and is highly thought of among his peers. In verse 3, it says Paul had Timothy circumcised.

*With the new covenant being revealed and the council of the apostles recently reaching a decision on Jewish law, why would Paul have Timothy circumcised?*

Because Paul intended to continue preaching in synagogues and to Jews as well as Gentiles, it would be less of a hindrance for them to communicate with the Jews if they were all circumcised. The circumcision of Timothy wasn't a religious cause, it was a relational cause.

Read 6-15

Verse 6 says they were actually forbidden to speak the Word of God. *Why?* There is no specific explanation given, but God did not want Paul and his company to preach yet. The NASB says the location is Asia. This is a reference to Asia Minor, modern day Turkey which was a Roman province at the time. Missionary journeys to there would come later, though.

Phrygia, Galatia and Bithynia seemed to be closed off to them for whatever reason. They went to Troas where God made it clear that Macedonia was the next stop. In Philippi, a colony of Macedonia, the company settled in to do some preaching.

There was no synagogue in Philippi, so the few Jews that were there met by the river for the Sabbath. 10 men in a location would be enough to constitute the necessity of a synagogue. Women, however, did not constitute a need for a synagogue no matter the number there.

Lydia would most likely be a fairly well-off, if not outright wealthy women since dealing in purple dyes and fabrics was very expensive. In verse 14 it mentions Lydia was from Thyatira. Thyatira is one of the seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation.

It is important to note that this group is now referred to as 'we' instead of 'they' (See verses 8 and 11). At some point, probably in Troas, Luke joined this band and was witness to most of these events.

### **Imprisonment**

Read 16-24

A demon possessed slave girl with the spirit of divination followed Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy.

*Why would Paul be annoyed with this 'free advertising'?*

Paul knew that being a Christian meant being under scrutiny both for him personally and the company he kept. He did not want to be endorsed nor be associated with the demon in this girl.

The owners of the slave girl used her for profit as a fortune teller. Paul had now ruined this opportunity for them, so they sought to get rid of this new trouble. Paul and Silas were obviously the leaders, so they were also the targets.

The courts were already weary of this new religion and Paul and Silas, being obviously Jewish, made it easy for the magistrates to rule against them. They were whipped and then put in prison and their feet in stocks. The stocks were typically made not just to secure a prisoner, but to make them painfully uncomfortable. Their legs would be spread apart as wide as possible and locked in that position. Cramping and muscle fatigue usually set in quickly.

### **The Jailer**

Read 25-40

While in prison, Paul and Silas continue to preach to their fellow prisoners, singing hymns and worshipping Jesus. In the middle of the night an earthquake sets them free, but they remain. Their attitude and actions both spoke volumes to the jailer and rather than killing himself for having let prisoners escape (a capital offense in the Roman Empire) he is instead introduced to Christ.

There are two sets of laws during this time period, one for Roman citizens and one for non-Romans. For the non-Roman magistrates to have treated Roman citizens this harshly would be punishable even up to death in some cases. Paul had saved a trump card for later.

## **Chapter 17**

### **Jason in Thessalonica**

Read 1-9

Paul continues to go into synagogues where there are open hearts and minds, but also Jews in authority who would work against him. In verse 9, it says that Jason and the others had to give a pledge. *What is this pledge that is mentioned?* The Roman authorities typically did not care what the people believed so long as the peace was kept. If there was a disturbance, then those that caused the riot would be charged a fee for the services provided by the Romans to return the population to order. In this case, the Jews

were able to persuade the Romans that Jason and these new Christians were the cause of the disturbance and a fine was paid.

### **Berea**

Read 10-15

Paul and Silas escape Thessalonica by night and head to Berea where they are welcomed and find many open hearts and minds without much resistance. But the Jews from Thessalonica are having none of it. The new faithful helped Paul escape, but Silas and Timothy remained behind to help strengthen the new church. Luke doesn't mention whether he went with Paul or remained with Silas and Timothy. Once Paul reaches Athens, the rest of the group joins him.

### **Athens**

Read 16-34

In Athens, there were Jews, Gentiles, Greeks, philosophers and idols galore. Paul finds an idol labeled 'to an unknown god' which was there to cover any deity that the inhabitants may have forgotten so that no godly wrath would come upon them. Paul uses this idol to proclaim the Hebrew God, which was unknown to them.

His teachings are new and different from what the city usually hears, so he is brought to the Areopagus, a temple on Mars Hill. This was a central location for philosophers and typically speakers had to be invited there to present their views or stories, so Paul being asked to come before them meant that his stories of Jesus stood out among the rest of the views presented.

## **Chapter 18**

### **Corinth**

Read 1-4

Paul leaves Athens and heads to Corinth. Corinth was a busy sea-port town that was well versed in philosophy, spirituality, art and loose-living. Having a 'Corinthian companion' meant engaging a prostitute. 'Acting like a Corinthian' was a common term for having no sexual morals.

Aquila and Priscilla would become great friends of Paul and are mentioned in several locations throughout his writings. Paul worked with Aquila as a tentmaker to help support his own ministry and to show that he was not preaching to make money. It was customary for Jewish rabbis to have a trade for the same reason.

Claudius had banned Jews from Rome due to constant riots and disturbance of the peace. Most historians agree that this was because of the unsettling of the Jewish religion from Christian converts and that this would play a role in the persecution of Christians.

Read 5-11

Silas and Timothy return and give Paul word of how well the church in Thessalonica is doing. Paul sends a letter to them encouraging them in their faith (1 Thessalonians, Paul's first letter).

*Why did Paul receive a vision at this point? Why did Paul spend so much time in Corinth?*

Paul did not have as much success in the synagogue as he had hoped despite winning over Crispus, the leader of the synagogue. Paul was possibly discouraged that he was not able to win as many converts from the Jews as he had hoped or he was worried that he would be run out of the city by Jewish leaders again. Yet he was able to teach and convert many Gentiles living in the city. The new converts would need much support in a city with such a sinful and godless reputation.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:8-9

Paul was able to devote himself solely to teaching because of a large monetary gift from the church in Philippi. He did not need to work to support himself, but still lived very humbly and was a good steward of the gift given to him and his fellow travelers. This supposedly was a large enough gift to support him for months. Paul spent roughly a year and a half in Corinth.

Read 12-17

God keeps His promise that He made in Paul's vision and allows him to stay in Corinth without harm. The local government is trying to keep the peace again but does not want to take up religious matters. However, Sosthenes, the new leader of the synagogue once Crispus converted, was allowed to be beaten by Greeks/Gentiles even in full view of leadership. This indicates a severe dislike of the Jews in this region.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1

It is believed that this very Jewish leader who was beaten later becomes a believer, making it two heads of the Corinth Jewish synagogue that converted.

Read 18-22

His friendship with Aquila and Priscilla is a strong bond and not wishing to be without him, they follow Paul out of Corinth.

*What is the vow in verse 18?*

Although not stated directly, this is most likely a Nazirite vow, a traditional consecration before God having to do with allowing the hair to grow freely for a certain period of time and then cutting it at the end of the vow.

Paul, Aquila and Priscilla stop in Ephesus and preach there. Paul is asked to stay but continues on with the promise of returning to them later. Aquila and Priscilla stay to help grow what has started. It is believed that Ephesus is one of the places Paul was prevented from speaking at earlier in his trip.

And Paul heads back to Antioch, officially the end of his second mission trip.

### **Third Mission Trip**

Read 23

Paul's third missionary journey is summed up in one verse. There is not a definite timeline nor list of places traveled, but it is most likely that this journey was a return to places that he had already visited in an effort to strengthen the churches that had been established.

## **Apollos**

Read 24-28

Apollos is a converted Jew that is following the teachings of John the Baptist but has no other training in the life of Christ. While in Ephesus, he encounters Aquila and Priscilla and they teach him what Paul has taught them. Apollos is highly thought of, a strong and passionate teacher and is on his own missionary journey. He is often compared to Paul in this regard.

## **Chapter 19**

### **Paul's Arrival in Ephesus**

Read 1-10

Paul is on his third journey and stops in Ephesus just as he promised previously. There are two points of significance in this section.

*What is the significance of this group of 'disciples'?*

This group of Christians were in the same place Apollos was when he came to Aquila and Priscilla. They had heard of Jesus and knew that this was something better, they simply didn't know the whole story. Paul remedied that.

*What is the significance of Paul's time in Ephesus?*

Paul starts again in the synagogue as he is prone to do and even spends a few months there which is longer than most synagogues allowed him to speak, but he eventually wears out his welcome. Instead, he ends up at a school run by a Gentile named Tyrannus.

In those days, the typical work day was broken into two parts, early morning and late afternoon. There was a 'siesta' period from 11am to 4pm that allowed workers to rest during the heat of the day and prepare themselves for the second part of the workday, which would last until dark. Instead of resting, Paul and his fellow Christians spent *everyday* studying the Word of God. This went on for two years and was highly successful. Take two hours a day, six days a week for two years and that comes out to over one thousand five hundred hours of preaching time. Paul's students would go on to spread the news of Jesus throughout Asia.

### **Miracles in Ephesus**

Read 11-22

Paul is having so much success in leading people to Christ that even the Jews attempt to call upon the name of Jesus. Magicians who would make their living from their practice turned away from their dark magic and became members of The Way. The incident with the sons of Sceva convinced many in Ephesus to turn away from superstition and magic and follow Christ. This was a huge and publicly visible conversion in Ephesus.

In today's market, the 'fifty thousand pieces of silver' would be worth somewhere between one million and five million dollars.

Paul is preparing to leave Ephesus and sends Timothy and Erastus on ahead of him into Macedonia. Paul would make his way there eventually, but there were other stops to make first.

## **Riot in Ephesus**

Read 23-41

*Do you have a job or hobby that supports the opposite of what you believe in?*

The temple of Diana/Artemis is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was a magnificent structure of its time. Inside this temple was a meteorite that either resembled or was fashioned to resemble a female with many breasts. This led to the worship of the god Diana and subsequently led to the temple being a tourist attraction and the sale of idols and shrines. With Paul and the Christians becoming prevalent in Ephesus, the sale of related artifacts was rapidly decreasing so the people who made their living from this trade were upset.

This stirs up a crowd and almost turns into a riot before the city clerk gets involved. The city clerk would be something of a local mayor under Roman authority. He would be a high ranking and important figure. For him to get personally involved meant that this event had brought unwanted attention and that everyone was in danger of raising the ire of the Roman soldiers. The city clerk borders on defending Paul by saying he has done nothing to offend Diana, just promote Christ.

## **Chapter 20**

### **Paul Leaves Ephesus**

Read 1-6

After two years in Ephesus, Paul leaves for Macedonia (Modern Greece). Paul arrives in Philippi where he meets up with Luke and the two travel together. Luke is once again able to give first-hand accounts of Paul's journey. The journey goes on from Philippi to Troas.

### **Resurrection of Eutychus**

Read 7-12

*Why is it of importance to mention the first day of the week?*

“The first day of the week” is used here indicating that it was becoming common practice for Christians to meet together on Sunday as opposed to the Sabbath (Saturday). They met in the evening because Sunday was a normal working day.

*What made Eutychus fall asleep?*

Paul was giving a prolonged message because he knew it was likely he would never see these people again. It was a working day, so this meant many people would have come to this gathering straight from work. Also, it was late, so the oil lamps were lit for lighting which would have caused fumes to spread in the confined spaces.

With the death of Eutychus this would put quite a damper on the gathered Christians and what could be Paul's last night with them. Paul calls upon the Lord to raise Eutychus back to life. After a break for a meal which also allowed time for the miracle of resurrection to sink in, Paul continued to speak until sunrise when everyone had to go back to work.

### **Paul Says Farewell to Ephesus**

Read 13-38

Paul did not wish to stop in Ephesus on his return trip because he knew he would not be able to stay for just a short time and he wanted to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost. This section gives a heart-felt picture of Paul the Pastor. He calls for the leaders of the Ephesian church and meets with them briefly so he can reassure them and see them one last time. He spent years with them and watched them grow and now it was time to say goodbye.

## **Chapter 21**

### **Journey to Jerusalem**

Read 1-16

Paul is warned twice in this section not to go to Jerusalem, but he cannot be dissuaded.

There is a church in Tyre that is not previously mentioned. The book of Acts is not all-inclusive of the events, it simply highlights some of the events that took place during this time period.

The practice of escorting a traveler to the edge of the city was a common practice but kneeling and praying with them was a Christian practice not seen before.

In verse 8 we see Philip again who baptized the Ethiopian before being whisked away. He settled in Caesarea and at this point had been there many years. Philip has 4 daughters with the gift of prophesy. Although not recorded in the Bible, it is stated elsewhere that these daughters all survived to an old age and were highly regarded in the early years of the church.

*With two prophesies about what would happen in Jerusalem why was Paul adamant on continuing?*

Notice that the prophesies tell of what will happen to Paul but did not mention that Paul shouldn't go. Only those surrounding Paul tried to convince him otherwise.

### **Paul in Jerusalem**

Read 17-26

For reference when Paul arrives in Jerusalem it is largely believed that this is roughly 25 years since the beginning of the book of Acts and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*What was the purpose of Paul observing and participating in a Jewish ritual at this time?*

The church in Jerusalem was made up mostly of Jewish converts who still observed some of the old customs and traditions. The Jewish population had been spreading rumors about Paul and trying to persuade those Jewish converts away from Christianity by saying Paul was 'anti-Jew'. Paul had no problems observing Jewish traditions as was seen with his Nazarite vow so long as it was not used as a replacement for a relationship with Christ. The additional 4 men would be seen as fellow Jewish-Christians from Jerusalem and would help Paul establish himself among the converts there, many of whom had never met Paul before.

### **Paul Taken at the Temple**

Read 27-40

Paul is in Jerusalem for a holy feast so there would be many Jews from all over in the city during this time. It would be easy for the Jewish leaders to stir up a sizeable crowd and spread falsehoods among the visiting people.

A historical note concerning the temple: The Tower of Antonia was at the northwest corner of the temple with more than 500 Roman soldiers. It would not take long for a group of guards to be dispatched to the temple.

When the crowd shouts, “Away with him!” the literal translation is *away from the earth*. As in they wanted him dead.

*Why was the Roman commander surprised when Paul asked if he could speak to him?*

The commander was surprised at numerous things, the first being that Paul could speak Greek. Another was that Paul asked politely and not with anger or yelling. The commander was tasked with looking for a recent terrorist and thought that this might be him, so he was also surprised that Paul turned out to not be the person they were looking for.

*Why would the commander allow Paul to address the mob?*

Paul turned out not only to not be the terrorist they were looking for, but an educated man. Also, there was an angry mob outside the barracks gates that would have to be dealt with one way or another. The commander had nothing to lose by letting Paul speak to them.

Instead of a group of Roman soldiers, the crowd is greeted by the very man they sought to kill. This was a source of confusion and helped quiet the crowd.

## **Chapter 22**

### **Paul Addresses the Crowd**

Read 1-21

Paul recounts his own conversion.

Read 22-30

*Why would the crowd be mad at this point?*

In verse 21, the word ‘Gentiles’ sets off the crowd. Jesus was a familiar anomaly and even a curiosity to the crowd, but the Jews did not want to hear about the rest of the world being in God’s favor when they were the chosen people.

With the failure to calm the crowd, the commander decides to have Paul flogged. It was at this point that Paul reveals he is a Roman citizen. Once the commander realizes Paul is Roman he decided to bring him before the Jewish council.

## **Chapter 23**

### **Paul Before the Council**

Read 1-11

*Why did Ananias have Paul struck?*

Paul opens with saying he is of clear conscience, not that he is perfect or without sin, but that he acted according to what he thought was right. Ananias perceives this as blasphemy since Paul is acting outside of the will of the temple leaders.

*What does the term whitewashed wall refer to here?*

To whitewash a wall was to cover over its impurities. He was calling Ananias a hypocrite for putting up a Godly show but actually living in sin. Having Paul struck as he did was illegal in both the Jewish law and the Roman law.

Paul may not have recognized Ananias because he had been away from Jerusalem for so long and quite possibly because of bad eyesight.

*What was the purpose behind Paul claiming to be a Pharisee?*

There were distinct 'party lines' among the Jews of this time. The Sadducees, despite being Jews, did not believe in spirits, angels or even life after death. Paul saying he was a Pharisee was correct in both his heritage and in the fact that he believed in the resurrection of Christ.

In saying this statement in the council, Paul divided the council against each other instead of having the whole council focus on him.

The Roman commander and his men are in attendance and willing to stay out of the Jews' business up until this point and the commander then has Paul removed and brought back to the barracks for safe keeping.

That night, Paul has a vision of God or is visited by God (there are differing views on this) and is comforted and told that his work is not yet done. Rome awaits.

### **Conspiracy to Kill Paul**

Read v12-35

A nephew of Paul learns of a conspiracy by some Jewish assassins to kill Paul.

*Who are these Jewish assassins?*

It is not clearly stated, but it is believed that these are the same Jews known as the 'dagger-men' who would secretly or discretely kill Roman soldiers and Roman supporters. These men are also believed to be associated with the Jewish zealots of the time. The leaders of the Jewish council agree to lie for these men in order to kill Paul.

*Why does the Roman commander decide to remove Paul from Jerusalem?*

The commander is first introduced to Paul by an angry mob ready to kill him. The commander mistakes him for an uneducated leader of rebels but continues to be surprised by Paul in his education, his demeanor, his citizenship and now in the way that the Jews want to kill him. As the Romans are most interested in keeping peace, the commander has Paul escorted out of the city to the governor under guard of 470 Roman soldiers with a letter to the governor explaining the situation. Since Paul has not

been found guilty or even charged with anything, Paul is allowed to live under house arrest in the 'common hall' of the governor's house.

## **Chapter 24**

### **The Accusations**

Read v1-9

Ananias, other elders and the lawyer Tertullus bring their case before Felix against Paul. Being a lawyer, Tertullus starts off with flattery for Felix and then the charges against Paul.

### **Paul's Defense**

Read 10-23

Paul defends himself by saying that he has barely been in Jerusalem before being brought up on charges by the Jews. Paul simply tells the truth about who he is and why he ministers to people.

*What does it mean that Felix had a more accurate knowledge of 'the Way'?*

Christianity was becoming more popular and recognized by the Roman government. It was still undetermined whether it was a threat or not, but there was no concrete evidence against it. Felix was unwilling to make a legal decision concerning this new religion and bought some time by saying he was waiting on more evidence.

### **Paul In Custody**

Read 24-27

Paul remained in custody under Felix for two years. Felix was hoping for a bribe, but instead was met with Paul's teachings. Paul's honesty made Felix feel uncomfortable. He was unwilling to make a decision about his own place in eternity. Although Felix knows Paul is innocent, he keeps him prisoner as a favor to the Jews who were very influential in this region even under Roman rule.

## **Chapter 25**

### **Paul and Festus**

Read 1-12

Festus replaces Felix as governor and Paul is still held prisoner. History indicates that Festus was a better ruler than Felix, but he is still a Roman politician. Festus is trying 'clean up' after Felix and is trying to decide what to make of this prisoner Paul living in the governor's household. He seeks out the accusers in the case and retries Paul in front of them with no clear outcome. The case will go to Rome.

### **Festus and Agrippa**

Read 13-22

King Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice (and according to non-biblical historical documentation, his lover) ruled a 'client kingdom' near Festus' province. They simply came to visit the new governor and establish relations. Agrippa's great-grandfather was the Herod who killed the babies during the birth of Jesus in order to prevent a new Jewish king. His grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded. His father killed the apostle James, the first apostle to be martyred. Agrippa was an expert in Jewish tradition and

law and had been granted the right by Rome to oversee the affairs of the temple in Jerusalem and the appointments of the high priest. For this reason and also because Festus is new to the region, he seeks out Agrippa's counsel and agrees to allow Paul to have a hearing before Agrippa.

### **Paul and Agrippa**

Read 23-27

There is an event welcoming the visiting Agrippa to the newly appointed governor's mansion and this is to be where the hearing will take place. Paul has an audience once again. Festus opens the hearing by declaring that he does not know specifically what the charges are against Paul and why he is imprisoned.

## **Chapter 26**

### **Paul Addresses Agrippa**

Read 1-23

Agrippa allows Paul to open the hearing and Paul does not disappoint.

### **Paul and Agrippa Spar**

Read 24-32

Agrippa tries to dismiss Paul as mad, but Paul is very reasonable and even Agrippa realizes it. Agrippa might have allowed Paul to continue and convert to Christianity himself were he in a more private position rather than surrounded by dignitaries.

Agrippa is even persuaded to find Paul innocent, but Paul has appealed to Caesar and the case must move forward.

## **Chapter 27**

### **Journey to Rome**

Read 1-12

Luke and Aristarchus accompanied Paul to Rome. Julius the centurion allows Paul to take companions with him so Paul was held in some regard by this Roman authority. Julius also allows Paul some freedom on the journey being able to visit friends in Sidon.

The company changes ships in Myra to an Egyptian vessel, most likely a grain freighter carrying wheat to Italy. These ships were sturdy but could not navigate into the wind very well.

In verse 9, Luke mentions that a fast had ended. This is most likely the Day of Atonement in October of 59 A.D. This meant that winter was approaching. Most ships stopped sailing this particular route from mid-September through mid-November because the weather was too dangerous.

*Why does Paul feel it necessary to advise the ship's company against sailing?*

Read 2 Corinthians 11:25

Paul wasn't just being a complaintive passenger. He has genuine knowledge of travel by sea because of the unusually large amounts of traveling he had done. So much traveling that he had already been shipwrecked three times by now.

The harbor of Fair Havens wasn't actually a suitable harbor during the winter months because it faced the oncoming winter weather. The crew wished to wait out the storm in a different port, Phoenix, which was on the same island and only 40 miles away.

### **Shipwrecked**

Read 13-44

On the journey from Fair Havens to Phoenix, the winter storm Euroclydon raised up. This is the Mediterranean seasonal equivalent to 'El Nino'.

Verse 16 mentions the ship's boat or skiff. This would be a transfer boat which was usually towed but brought on board during inclement weather.

The storm is so severe that they are tossed about for 14 days. Paul has an angelic vision that they will survive but be shipwrecked. Some of the sailors try to escape by night, but Paul informs the centurion and he now has full trust in Paul.

Throwing the wheat overboard is an act of desperation. This was the ship's cargo and the sale of this cargo was to be the crew's pay. When death was near, only then would they throw over their precious cargo.

The crew didn't know where they had run aground at first but the island they landed on was Malta. This place is now known as St. Paul's Bay. If they had missed Malta, there was nothing else but open sea for 200 miles.

There is talk of killing the prisoners so they would not escape, but the centurion refuses after Paul has gained his favor.

## **Chapter 28**

### **Malta**

Read 1-10

Although they were on Malta, the sailors didn't recognize the island because the main waterways passed on the other side of the island. The natives are welcoming and become first hand witnesses to miracles performed by Paul.

In verse 4, it mentions that the natives thought Paul was a murderer and 'justice' was being served. Some translations capitalize Justice because this is actually a reference to the Greek god Dikee whom the natives worshipped along with other Greek gods.

Instead of dying from the viper, Paul survives and goes on to heal the local Roman authority's father and then heal others, as well. Once again, Paul is in the role of missionary and wins people over to Christ.

### **Rome**

Read 11-31

Paul visits with the Christians and Jews in Rome. There are already Christians there due to other missionaries, possibly from one of the apostles or from Paul's school in Ephesus. Paul is in Rome for 2

years and does not stop his work. Paul survives this encounter, but his second imprisonment in Rome does not end as well.

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<https://www.biblestudytools.com/acts/>

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