

1 Acts: Who, What, Why and When?

Written by whom?

Generally attributed to Luke, who was a companion to Paul on his travels. This book, as well as the Book of Luke, begins with a greeting to Theophilus. Stylistically and structurally, the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are extremely similar.

Written from where and when?

There is no location known for the writings, though some believe that it was written in Rome as Paul waited for his trial. In that case, it may have been meant as a kind of court brief for Paul's defense. It is generally accepted that it was written approximately 64 A.D., before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Written to whom?

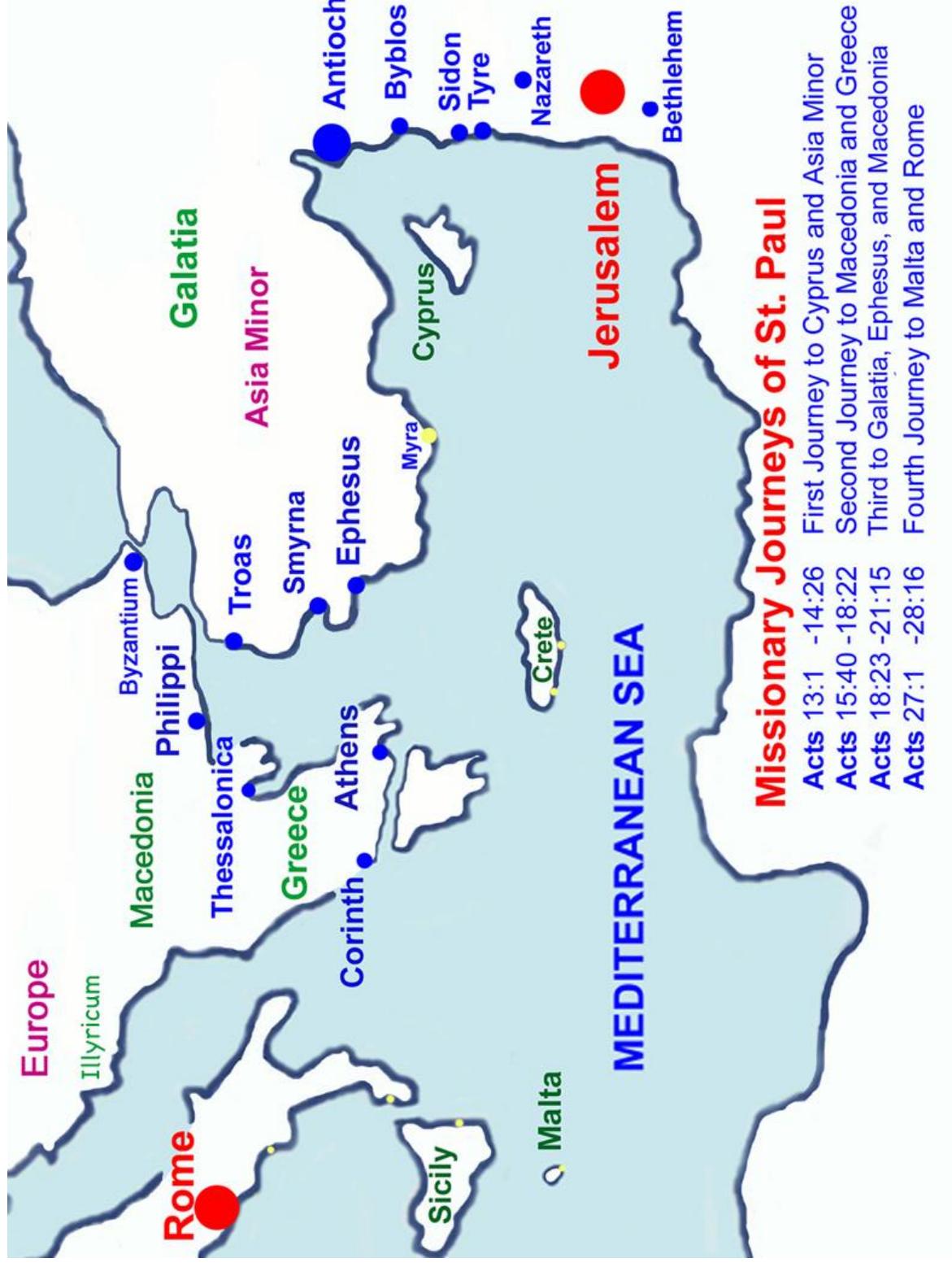
While the book is addressed to Theophilus, it has been preserved for all believers as a clear history of the beginnings of Christianity. There were many people who, while believing in Jesus, were vague about how this belief was lived out among the apostles and believers. In short, the book was written to those who had questions about how faith in Jesus was put into action.

Why was it written?

Acts describes the infancy period of the early Church, a narrative of the growth of the Church. It starts with Jesus' ascension, moves to the formation of the first community in Jerusalem, Pentecost and the descent of the Holy Spirit. The spread of Christianity is seen primarily through the actions of Peter and Paul, led by the Holy Spirit.

In Luke's Prologue to the Book of Luke, he says that he wrote in order to "proclaim the certainty of what his audience had been taught". (Like most ancient writers, he is more concerned about meaning and purpose, less concerned about strict chronology.) This book also shows how basic principles are applied to specific situations, in the context of problems, conflicts between believers and persecutions.

2 Spread of Christianity after Ascension



3 Acts: Chapter 1 – Scripture Questions

1. To whom is this book written? (vs. 1)
2. For how many days did Jesus appear to the apostles? (vs. 3)
3. Where did Jesus tell the apostles to go? For what were they waiting? (vs. 4, 5)
4. What did the apostles think was going to happen, now that Jesus was resurrected? (vs. 6)
5. What did Jesus say was going to happen to his followers? (vs. 7, 8)
6. How did they pass the time while waiting for the Holy Spirit? (vs. 14)
7. Who is the first preacher? (vs. 15)
8. How many people are numbered as Christian? (vs. 15)
9. What were the requirements for this replacement apostle? (vs. 21-24)
10. Who is selected as the twelfth apostle? (vs. 26)

Verse 8 and 9 are a kind of summary of the Book of Acts. The apostles were to be witnesses first in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria. In this Book, 'the ends of the earth' are Caesarea, Antioch, Asia Minor, Greece and then Rome. However, they were not to begin this immense task until they were given the ability to accomplish it—until they were given the power of the Holy Spirit.

4 Acts: Chapter 1 – What Did it Mean to Them?

The first chapter in this book serves several purposes. As is usual in sequels, in the beginning there is a kind of summary, a restatement of ‘how did we get to this point’. Specifically, it summarizes the end of the Gospel of Luke. Originally these two books were together. Evidently they were separated at some point, making this summation necessary.

We can see in verse 6 that the apostles were concerned about the ‘Kingdom of God’. They were, even now, hoping for an earthly kingdom. However, in the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT), the phrase ‘kingdom of God’ was primarily referring to God’s rule over human life and history. While his rule was universal, it is specially shown in the life of the nation of Israel; it is witnessed through the church and through the lives of Christians; it will be fully expressed in eternity. In this book, and in the Gospels, the kingdom is presented as having been brought into time and space by Jesus’ presence and ministry. “The Kingdom of God” usually appears as a convenient way of summarizing the preaching and proclamations of the early Christian community.

Next there is the story of how the apostles waited, in obedience, for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. They didn’t just sit around. Verse 14 says they joined ‘constantly’ in prayer. Though we don’t know exactly how long they were waiting, it is easy to imagine their state of mind. Jesus had arisen from the dead! They had seen him, talked with him, eaten with him, and watched him go up into heaven. Not only that, they had been given a mandate that must have seemed overwhelming. How would they be able to ‘go into all the world’? No doubt they spent a good deal of time talking about this last command.

At some point, Peter takes the lead. He reminds them of Scriptures which foretold Judas’ actions. Peter tells them that it is necessary to choose someone to replace Judas. Two men who fit the criteria are proposed, and the followers (presumably the entire group of 120 people) watch as Matthias is chosen by the Holy Spirit. Now, they wait for the sign that will begin the next phase of ministry.

5 Acts: Chapter 1 – Application Questions

1. The apostles (and other followers) were told that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and that they would receive power to be witnesses about Jesus. What do you think it means, to be a 'witness' about Jesus? How can we accomplish this?
2. Can you imagine the walk back to Jerusalem after Jesus had gone into heaven, right in front of their eyes? One of the reasons their witness was so powerful was that they were EYEwitnesses. That was a long, long time ago. Is there any way to make this news exciting today? If so, how?
3. When the apostles needed to choose a twelfth man, they essentially nominated two and then drew straws to choose. How could we adapt this method to our church? Or, is there any way in which the Holy Spirit influences our choice of church leaders?
4. The apostles and other followers waited for the gift promised by God through Jesus. They weren't going to start until the gift arrived. When you are making plans in your life, how do you know when to stop waiting and start acting?

6 Acts: Chapter 2 – Scripture Questions

1. What did the followers of Jesus see and hear on the day of Pentecost? (2:2, 3)
2. What change came over the followers? (2:4)
3. Why were the people who heard the apostles speaking amazed? (2:6-13)
4. Which Old Testament prophet does Peter quote? (2:16-21)
5. What events does Peter recall from the life of Jesus? (2:22-24)
6. How do the apostles know of the Resurrection? (2:32)
7. What is the result of Peter's preaching? (2:37)
8. To whom is the promise of forgiveness available? (2:39)
9. How many are baptized that first Pentecost? (2:41)
10. To what do these first believers devote themselves? (2:42)
11. How does the writer of Acts characterize the Christian community? (2:44-46)
12. How are Christians viewed by outsiders? (2:47)

7 Acts: Chapter 2 – What Did it Mean to Them?

One word that Luke's readers would have heard over and over was 'witness'. It comes directly from Jesus himself. Everything that we read in Acts is the result of Jesus' own intent and the determination of his followers to fulfill this command. Luke, and the Apostles, laid an obligation on all Christians—but this obligation came with a gift, a promise. The apostles and other early believers knew the person of Jesus, and so they knew his authority; the power of the Holy Spirit was to come, and it was essential for their mission; they were given a program that began at Jerusalem and moved out to the entire world. Luke was reminding his readers that the Christian church was a missionary church, called to obedience to Jesus' commission, acting as Jesus had acted in ministry, focused on announcing and proclaiming the kingdom of God.

The following statements are the Kerygma, or essential beliefs, of the early church.

1. The promises by God made in the OT have now been fulfilled with the coming of Jesus the Messiah
2. Jesus was anointed by God at his baptism as Messiah
3. Jesus began his ministry in Galilee after his baptism
4. His ministry was spent doing good and performing mighty works by the power of God
5. The Messiah was crucified according to the purpose of God
6. He was raised from the dead and appeared to his disciples
7. Jesus was exalted by God and given the name "Lord"
8. The Holy Spirit was given to form the new community of God
9. Christ will come again for judgment and the restoration of all things
10. All who hear the message should repent and be baptized

Peter's call to repentance and salvation is famous: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." The Church has historically used this verse as the answer to the question "How do I respond to Jesus?"

8 Acts: Chapter 2 – Application Questions

1. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and followers was extremely dramatic and life-changing. Later in the chapter, Peter promises that all who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Obviously we don't see tongues of fire over the heads of those who are baptized today, so how can we recognize the Spirit in ourselves and others?
2. The crowd that Peter spoke to on Pentecost were either Jews or Gentiles who had converted to Judaism. They were familiar with the scriptures Peter quoted, even if they didn't understand (at first) how the scriptures applied to Jesus. Since we no longer have a common understanding of Scripture in our society, what should we use to explain Jesus? What common experiences could be used to show people who Jesus is?
3. Peter assumes, in his famous answer to the question "What shall we do?" that the promise of salvation is for "all whom the Lord our God will call". In your own life, what did that 'call' feel like? If we believe that only those called by the Lord will respond, how does that affect evangelism?
4. In the happy, early days of the church, the new converts spent most of their time together praising and learning and praying. Is it possible to recreate this joyous feeling? Do we have any congregational times that approach these feelings?

9 Acts: Chapter 3 – Scripture Questions

1. Who goes to the temple to pray? (3:1)
2. What was the beggar expecting? (3:5)
3. In whose name is the crippled man healed? (3:6)
4. What was the reaction of the man who was healed? How did the witnesses react? (3:8-10)
5. Peter declares that neither personal power nor piety healed the lame man. Who does Peter claim healed the man? (3:13-16)
6. Peter says that it was Jesus' name and "the faith that comes through _____" that gave complete healing. (3:16)
7. What was the purpose of repenting and turning to God? (3:19-21)
8. Peter reminds them of a warning from Moses. What was this warning? (3:23)

Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecies made relative to Moses, David and Abraham. He was to be a prophet like Moses, he was foretold in Samuel's declaration about David, and he was to bring blessing to all people as promised to Abraham.

10 Acts: Chapter 3 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Luke begins with an episode of healing from the history of the early Jerusalem congregation to bring the reader into the picture. Probably the episode at the time was well known, maybe even often retold in the early church. At any rate, Luke tells it as if telling a familiar story to his listeners.

It was considered a 'good deed', or an act that gave you merit before God, to give to a beggar. That is one reason the man was taken to a gate that led into the temple court, so that people coming in or out could give him a few coins and earn favor from God. The gift of healing that he received was truly life-changing.

Peter and John invoke the 'name' of Jesus for this miracle. Using the 'name' of someone was more than just a kind of identification. It was a way of using the authority and power of the person invoked. In a sense, Peter brought Jesus himself and his healing power to that place. When the healed man leaped, it was a fulfillment of prophecy about the power of the Christ.

Peter takes advantage of the crowd that gathers to tell the story of Jesus. He is a little kinder than on Pentecost: he says that they acted in ignorance, that God used them to fulfill prophecies. Since Peter is speaking to Jews, he uses familiar prophets and phrases to teach them. The language he uses is sometimes referred to as 'remnant theology'. In other words, he speaks to his hearers as if they were the faithful few, those who would naturally be receptive to the gospel because of their devotion to God. No speaker of the time could expect to be heard unless they used the prophets (and especially Moses) to back up their words, and Peter does this. He uses a few well-chosen quotations and shows how they apply to Jesus.

Peter always seemed to assume that his hearers would want to respond. They are told to repent and turn. Strictly speaking, repentance is turning FROM sin, and faith is turning TOWARD God.

11 Acts: Chapter 3 – Application Questions

1. While the crippled man was, no doubt, thrilled to be healed, you have to wonder how he felt when he realized that his livelihood was gone. Should the Jerusalem church have supported him somehow? What is our responsibility toward people that follow God and lose their old livelihood? Should we help them find work? Should we feed them, or pay their bills, or provide child support?
2. Peter and John met the beggar on their way to worship. In fact, they seem to have continued their forms and habits of worship as Jews. Today, there are varying opinions on how much change should be expected of people who convert from non-Christian religions. How important are cultural styles and forms of worship? If someone converts from Islam to Christianity, is it okay if they praise Allah and ‘Isā ibn Maryam (Jesus’ name in Islam)?
3. Peter and John didn’t have silver or gold to give the beggar, so they gave him healing. What lesson is this for us about helping the poor?

12 Acts: Chapter 4 – Scripture Questions

1. Which group of Jewish leaders is disturbed by Peter's preaching? (4:1-2)
2. Why are the leaders disturbed? (4:2)
3. What question do the leaders ask Peter and John at their hearing? (4:7)
4. How does Peter use this opportunity to speak to the Sanhedrin? (4:8-12)
5. Why didn't the rulers have a response to Peter's testimony? (4:14)
6. What do the authorities decide to tell the apostles? (4:18)
7. What is the apostles' response to the charge to remain silent? (4:19-20)
8. What occurs in the place where the apostles and their friends pray? (4:31)
9. How does the community care for those in need? (4:32-35)
10. Who sells a field in order to share with the apostles? (4:36-37)

In Luke 21:12-15, Jesus says, "...they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict."

13 Acts: Chapter 4 – What Did it Mean to Them?

The earliest opposition to the gospel came from the priests, Sadducees and the temple guard captain (the commanding officer of the temple police force, second only to the high priest). The Sadducees began as political rulers when the nation turned over power to them after the revolt of the Maccabaeus two hundred years earlier. They believed that the Messiah was an ideal, not a person. They believed that the age of God's promise had begun with the Maccabean heroes and was continuing on under their supervision. As priests from the line of Levi, they saw themselves as representing ancient truth and were not interested in any 'new' ideas. So they opposed the Oral Law, rejected any speculation about angels or demons or the doctrine of resurrection. Most important, they rejected what they thought were foolish hopes for God's heavenly intervention into the life of the nation. For practical reasons they stressed cooperation with Rome. They wanted to maintain the status quo.

When Peter and John are brought before this group, it is a fulfillment of a prophecy made by Jesus (Luke 21:12-15). For the rulers, it is the beginning of a problem. Jewish law required that (for non-capital offenses) the law-breaker be given a warning and a clear explanation of the consequences to continued offenses. As it happens, they could not decide what the punishment should be. Peter takes this opportunity to proclaim Christ to them in unmistakable terms. Not only that, he also makes it clear that they will not obey the rulers. Peter uses two points that become early motifs in the early church: (1) he speaks of Christ as 'the capstone', which used a wordplay between the words for "stone" and "son". This was a familiar messianic phrase, and here the idea is that Jesus is the rejected stone which completes the building. (2) 'Salvation' and 'God's Salvation' were very familiar to the Sanhedrin as a way of speaking of the Messiah. Jesus was unique, and the apostles never wavered from this fact.

In the prayer of the church after Peter and John's release, there are two things that stand out. First, these Christians saw in Psalms 2 the persons and groups involved in Jesus' crucifixion. Second, in the prayer the sufferings of Christian believers are related directly to the sufferings of Christ, and indirectly to the sufferings of God's righteous servants in the Old Testament. This theme of suffering is seen throughout the New Testament.

Luke highlights an extraordinary (and voluntary) act of Christian sharing. From time to time, in response to special needs among the believers, goods were sold and the proceeds shared. Barnabas is introduced as an example of this kind of generosity. He becomes an important figure in Luke's account of the church and its growth.

14 Acts: Chapter 4 – Application Questions

1. As far as the Sanhedrin was concerned, the apostles were dangerous: dangerous to the faith of the Jews, dangerous to their own power, dangerous to the political stability of their nation. Are there any spiritual/religious groups today that are a threat to established religions? How should we respond to these groups? Does our government today feel threatened by any religious groups? How should the government respond? How should those groups respond?
2. Peter is very blunt. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Do we really believe this? If so, how should we respond to those who claim otherwise? Consider this statement: “There may be truth in other religions, but only Christ offers salvation.” What do you think about this?
3. When Peter and John reported back to the church, everyone reacted with praise and prayer. They did not ask for protection, but courage and boldness. Should our public prayers be less soothing and more rousing? How?
4. While the early church members evidently had personal households and possessions, there is no question that when there was a need people would sell things and give the money to take care of the need. How could we implement this kind of caretaking in our church? Should we? What are the pros and cons of doing this?

15 Acts: Chapter 5 – Scripture Questions

1. Which two people sell a field and (secretly) keep some of the proceeds for themselves? (5:1-2)
2. Who were Ananias and Sapphira actually trying to deceive? (5:4)
3. How do the Christians react to the sudden deaths? (5:5, 11)
4. How was the Holy Spirit showing itself among the people? (5:12)
5. Why were people flocking in from the town and countryside? (5:15, 16)
6. Why did the Sadducees have the apostles brought to the jail? (5:17)
7. How were the apostles rescued? Where did they go? (5:19-21)
8. How do the apostles answer the complaints of the Sanhedrin? (5:29-32)
9. What is Gamaliel's counsel to the Council? (5:34-39)
10. How did the apostles behave after they left the Sanhedrin? (5:41, 42)

During this time, the Pharisees were not actively opposing the Christians. They were in general more affectionate with the people and more likely to be lenient in punishments. Also, given the theological differences between them and the Sadducees, it was entirely likely that politics played a part in the defense of Peter by Gamaliel. The people (in general) were more aligned with the Pharisees, so Gamaliel could have been 'representing' his constituents as well as speaking wisely.

16 Acts: Chapter 5 – What Did it Mean to Them?

The opening story of this chapter is shocking, especially on the heels of the story about Barnabas. Barnabas sells property in Cyprus and gives it to the apostles to care for those in need. Evidently the praise and approval he received were alluring to Ananias and Sapphira. They discussed it, sold property and gave some (but not all) of the money to Peter. The property was theirs, the money was theirs, and there was no compulsion to give any or all of the money. They were struck dead because they tried to deceive God. This could not be permitted. This early in the history of the church, it would have sent a message that God could be deceived without consequence. Peter attributes their sinful actions to inspiration by Satan. Whatever the origin of the impulse, God cannot be tricked, and it was important to build trust among the church members.

The apostles and believers (old and new) gathered on a regular basis at the Temple. We are told that other people were afraid to join them there at Solomon's Colonnade. This could have been for a number of reasons: the story of Ananias and Sapphira probably got around, so some would be afraid to pretend interest. Some may have feared the wrath of the Sanhedrin. Some may simply not have been ready to risk joining such a new group of people. There was no question that divine power was working. People were coming from all over to be healed, and these demonstrations of power made the rulers extremely uneasy and jealous.

Eventually the apostles were arrested (again) because they clearly had no intention of stopping their preaching. Since they had already been warned, they were simply picked up and put in jail, to wait for trial in the morning. When the Sanhedrin convened, they were surprised and dismayed to learn that the apostles had been freed—and according to the stories, freed by God himself in the form of an angel. What were they to do? It was important to follow through on the threats. To back down would be to lose face before the people. They might even have lost political power over the Pharisees. Peter's answer was not really a defense. He said that they would obey God, not man, and that Jesus (killed by them) was alive. The Sadducees did not respond well to these statements. They were enraged, and the charge of contempt of court (failure to obey the previous warning) was enough for them. They wanted the apostles to die.

What happens next is a little surprising to us. A Pharisee holds them back! This Pharisee, however, was a well-respected and well-loved Rabbi named Gamaliel (who had been one of the teachers of the Apostle Paul). He was either the son or grandson of a great Rabbi named Hillel. Gamaliel reminded them of previous rabble-rousers who had failed. His words to the Council (which were essentially 'Let God and time sort it out) saved the lives of the apostles, if not their backs. The Christians, of course, took this as a further sign that they were being obedient to Christ. Their fervor and devotion were encouraged and enlarged.

17 Acts: Chapter 5 – Application Questions

1. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira left no doubt that God would not tolerate such hypocrisy and deceit. What happens nowadays to people who are hypocritical and deceitful in the church?
2. The acts of healing, the rescue from prison—these were important to establish the authority and power of the apostles. If you could choose, what miraculous ability would you want God to give to people today? Who do you think should have this ability?
3. Gamaliel suggested to the Sanhedrin that they let God and time settle the issue of the Christians. How can we apply this to issues in the church today? Can we extend this principle to issues in society?

18 Acts: Chapter 6 – Scripture Questions

1. Who are the people who are upset about suspected prejudice? (6:1)
2. How did The Twelve deal with the problem? (6:2)
3. Who are chosen as servers? (6:5)
4. How are the servers authorized for their work? (6:6)
5. Which (surprising) group of people become obedient to the faith? (6:7)
6. With whom does Stephen come into conflict? (6:9)
7. Why could these people not stand against Stephen? (6:10)
8. What did they do in order to bring Stephen before the Sanhedrin? (6:12)
9. What is the charge against Stephen? (6:14)
10. How is Stephen's appearance described? (6:15)

Luke's account of the way the apostles handled the conflict could be useful today: (1) They refused to get involved with assigning blame, preferring to spend their energies on correcting injustices, praying and proclaiming the Word, and (2) showed a willingness to give authority for working out solutions to others (in this case, to those who feel most strongly about the problem).

19 Acts: Chapter 6 – What Did it Mean to Them?

The first six verses of this chapter show a pattern for church life. In the first place, the early church took seriously the combination of spiritual and material concerns in carrying out its God-given ministry. People needed to hear the gospel, and to learn what it meant in their lives, but they also had very real physical problems. Here, the problem was with hungry widows. The Diaspora Jews (those who were living in different countries) often came back to Jerusalem in their later years, in order to be buried in Jerusalem. However, this often left their widows without any nearby family to care for them. Many of the Jews who returned had become very Greek in their culture and especially language. These widows, then, were isolated by their language and by their lack of family. While the city of Jerusalem had a policy of providing for the needy in their midst, these Hellenistic Jews could be, and often were, neglected. Evidently this was carrying over into the life of the early church. It had become necessary to divide internal responsibilities and assign different functions, but these functions were seen as aspects of one total ministry.

Second, the early church seems to have been ready to change its procedures, alter the organizational structure and develop new posts of responsibility in response to existing needs and for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. Luke's account seems to suggest that it is important to be constantly engaged in adapting traditional methods and structures to meet existing situations, both for the sake of the welfare of the whole church and to ensure the spread of the Gospel.

After Luke summarizes the earliest days of the church in Jerusalem, he begins a new section that will focus on three people: Stephen, Philip, and Saul of Tarsus (Paul the apostle). He starts with Stephen, who becomes the first martyr of the new church.

Stephen is one of the seven men selected by the Jerusalem church and authorized by the apostles to care for the distribution of food to the widows. As a Greek-speaking Jew, he seems to have naturally become a teacher and preacher as well to that community. He is spoken of as 'full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom', so much so that those who oppose him are unable to answer his eloquence. Stephen is even spoken of as performing miracles and signs, which were signs of the authority given to him by the apostles. Undoubtedly he spoke of the changes of Jewish life in terms of the lordship of Jesus the Messiah. He probably also spoke of the lessened significance of the Temple, the fact that sacrifices were no longer needed. That is not the same as advocating the destruction of the Temple.

Stephen was finally brought to the Sanhedrin to answer the (false) charges against him. As Luke describes the setting, Stephen radiated a presence marked by confidence, serenity and courage. According to Luke, Stephen's listeners were raptly attentive.

20 Acts: Chapter 6 – Application Questions

1. When the problem of fair distribution of food came up, the Apostles dealt with it. How do we address problems in our church? Is there a better way?
2. The men chosen to care for the distribution of food were most likely Hellenistic (Greek culture) Jews. In other words, the group most concerned about the issue were given the responsibility for solving the problem. Is there any way to adapt this method to our way of 'doing church'?
3. The Apostles and the early church seemed to be able to change their structure and way of 'doing church' when it was necessary, in order to keep the spread of the Word progressing. What (if anything) should we change about the way we 'do church' in order to facilitate the spread of the gospel and adapt to culture?
4. The early church was taught how to believe and live by the apostles and preachers like Stephen. In a way, their faith was very uncomplicated. Is there any need to make our faith today less complicated? If so, how would we go about this simplification?

21 Acts: Chapter 7-8:1 – Scripture Questions

1. What question did the high priest ask Stephen in the trial before the Sanhedrin? (7:1)
 2. What was God's promise to Abraham? (7:5, 6)
 3. How did God protect Joseph after his brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt? (7:9, 10)
 4. How did the new king of Egypt attempt to control the population of Hebrews? (7:19)
 5. In the first third of Moses' life, he lived in the _____ court. In the second third of Moses' life, he lived in _____ as a foreigner, married and had two sons. (7:20-22, 29)
 6. When Moses met God at the burning bush, how does God describe the ground? (7:31-33)
 7. What was God's purpose for Moses? (7:35-36)
 8. What prophecy did Moses give to the Israelites? (7:37)
1. When the Hebrews refused to obey Moses, what demand did they make of Aaron? (7:40, 41)
 2. Stephen recognized the origin and value of the tabernacle and Temple. However, what does he say about God's dwelling place? (7:48)
 3. At the end of his speech, what condemnation does Stephen throw at the Sanhedrin? (7:51-53)
 4. What final thing did Stephen say that drove the Sanhedrin insane with fury? (7:56)
 5. While he was being stoned to death, what did Stephen do? (7:59, 60)
 6. Who was watching, giving approval to Stephen's death? (8:1a)

22 Acts: Chapter 7-8:1 – What Did it Mean to Them?

When Stephen begins to speak, it is not a defense. It is a proclamation of the Christian message using familiar terms from Judaism of the day, and an indictment of the Jewish leaders for their failure to recognize Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah.

Before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, there were three major beliefs in the religious faith of the majority of Jews: 1) The Holy Land was the only place where God met his people, 2) the Law and the days of Israel in the desert were idealized, and 3) the Temple was the peak and final form of worship of God.

Stephen used three famous Israelites to dispute the beliefs about the Holy Land. Abraham, Joseph and Moses were all discussed, and Stephen points out the facts about the location of these people. Abraham was from Ur, called to follow God, but never owned land in Palestine. Joseph spent the majority of his life in Egypt, and was instrumental in saving his family (who lived out their lives in Egypt). Moses spent the first third of his life in Egypt, the second third in Midian (where he married and had sons) and the last third wandering the wilderness, never being allowed to arrive in the Holy Land.

This led into the discussion of the Law. Moses was given the Law, but prophesied that a greater prophet would come. The Israelites rejected Moses and the Law, going so far as to ask Aaron to construct gods for them. This, Stephen said, was evidence that Moses had known God would be sending someone like him—but that someone, Jesus, was rejected by the people as Moses had been rejected.

Stephen did not mock or despise the tabernacle/Temple worship. He acknowledged the origin and value of this worship, but quoted from Isaiah to show that God did not, could not, live in something made by man. Technically, Jewish teaching did not say that God lived in the Temple. Practically, though, the people lived as though God was confined to the Temple.

Stephen strongly (and insultingly!) said that God was not constrained by the Holy Land, or limited by the Law, or contained in the Temple or tabernacle. Stephen made the connections to show that God had acted outside of human convention by bringing Jesus as Messiah.

When Stephen had a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, it threw the Sanhedrin into a murderous rage. They dragged him outside and stoned him to death, with Saul of Tarsus holding the cloaks of the witnesses. Stephens last act was to ask God to forgive them, in an eerie echo of Jesus' words on the cross.

23 Acts: Chapter 7-8:1 – Application Questions

1. One of the points that Stephen made was that God was able to, and did, act outside of the Holy Land to put his plans into action. Why do you think we want to limit the places and areas where God can work?
2. The Jews of Stephen's day idealized the Law and their days in the desert. There was a great deal of argument over what the Law meant, but the importance of that Law was never in doubt. This made it hard for them to believe that God could have any more 'words' to give them. How is our attitude and understanding of the Bible similar? How is our attitude and understanding of the Bible different?
3. Stephen insisted that neither the tabernacle nor the temple was intended to be such a rigid institution that they would stop God from his redemption activity. Would it help us keep Jesus in the center of our worship if we changed up the style and place on a regular basis? What are some practical ways we can stay focused on the purpose of worship and stop worrying about the style of worship?

24 Acts: Chapter 8:2-40 – Scripture Questions

1. Why did the Christians scatter? Where did they go? (vs. 1b, 3)
2. What did the Christians do in these new places? (vs. 4)
3. How did the Samaritans react to Philip's preaching and miracles? (vs. 6, 7, 12)
4. Why did the Samaritans follow Simon? (vs. 9-11)
5. What was Simon's reaction to Philip? (vs. 13)
6. When Peter and John came to Samaria, what did they do? (vs. 14-17)
7. What did Simon want from Peter and John? How did they answer Simon's request? (vs. 18-24)
8. Where did the Lord send Philip? (vs. 26)
9. What did Philip ask the Ethiopian? (vs. 30)
10. Which scripture was the man trying to understand? (vs. 32, 33)
11. What did the Ethiopian want to do in response to the gospel message? (vs. 36)
12. Where did Philip go after the baptism? (vs. 39, 40)

25 Acts: Chapter 8:2-40 – What Did it Mean to Them?

As a direct result of Stephen's preaching and death, there was a scattering of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem out into the cities and regions around that city. More than likely it was the Hellenistic, or Greek-speaking, Jewish Christians who left. It is likely that the Hebraic Jewish Christians kept a low profile, especially since Saul began to target them.

Philip, one of the deacons selected to care for the Greek widows, ends up in Samaria (north of Jerusalem but "down" from the city on the hill). No doubt he was accompanied by other Greek Christians. In Samaria they would find kindred spirits. The Jews in Jerusalem considered the Samaritan Jews to be half-breeds both physically, politically and spiritually. The Samaritan Jews also felt, as Stephen had, that the Jewish emphasis on land, law and temple was out of balance. They were looking for the Messiah to come who would be a type of Moses, and so they were ready to hear the message of Jesus.

The person of Simon is interesting. In this scene we see him as a man of power, a sorcerer. Magicians specialized in secret knowledge. When Simon sees the power and abilities displayed by Philip, he does what is necessary to become an insider of the new religion. More than likely he does this not as a matter of belief but as a way to absorb more knowledge and powers. When he is rejected by Peter, his response is not repentant but instead sounds almost formulaic, a spell to ward off trouble. One of the later church fathers identifies him as 'Simon Magus', an arch heretic and 'father' of Gnostic teaching. This teaching claimed to possess secret knowledge that would lead to God's favor.

When words gets back to the Jerusalem church of the conversions in Samaria, two apostles come to check it out. When Peter and John arrive, they not only teach alongside Phillip, they lay hands on the believers there and confer on them power from the Holy Spirit. This may seem odd, but seen in context of the early church it makes sense. The Jerusalem believers had powerful prejudices against both Greeks and Samaritans. If Peter and John came back with a personal witness of the power of the Holy Spirit working in these new believers, the Jerusalem church could be reassured. This would also pave the way for the coming time when Gentiles would be fully accepted as believers.

Philip is transported by the Holy Spirit to teach an Ethiopian eunuch. The term eunuch could either refer to a person emasculated at puberty or to a person who was a high official in a court. Either way, this man was the treasurer to the Candace, the queen of Ethiopia. He had the responsibility to handle the secular parts of the realm. The eunuch was possibly a convert to Judaism, traveling from Jerusalem (either a proselyte or a God-seeker) and was trying to puzzle out the references in Isaiah about the Messiah's suffering and humiliation. After he is taught and baptized, Philip is whisked away to Gaza where he stays and preaches for twenty years.

26 Acts: Chapter 8:2-40 – Application Questions

1. Persecution drove the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians out of Jerusalem, but the result was the spreading and multiplication of believers. If there is value in persecution, should we welcome persecution? What does it mean to us as a church if we NEVER endure persecution?
2. Do you think Peter misjudged Simon? Simon went on to become an enemy of the early church and founded Gnostic Christianity. Did Peter go too far? What should he have done differently (if anything?) What do you do when (or if) you misjudge someone? Do you apologize to them or let it go?
3. Philip's encounter with the eunuch is notable: he went to a specific place, directed by the Holy Spirit, and he began teaching in answer to the man's questions. Good communications depends on tailoring your message to a specific audience. How should we tailor our gospel message to individuals?
4. The Ethiopian man did not receive very much in the way of instruction—just the bare bones of the gospel. How can we—or should we—simplify the gospel?

27 Acts: Chapter 9 – Scripture Questions

1. Why was Saul headed to Damascus? (vs. 1, 2)
2. What did Jesus say to Saul? (vs. 4-6)
3. How did Saul live for the next three days? (vs. 9)
4. Why did Ananias object to helping Saul? (vs. 13, 14)
5. Why was Saul chosen by Jesus? (vs. 15, 16)
6. What did Saul do after his healing and baptism? (vs. 18, 19)
7. How did the people in Damascus react to Saul's conversion? (vs. 21-25)
8. What sort of reception did Saul receive in Jerusalem? (vs. 26-30)
9. How did the church fare during the next period of time? (vs. 31)
10. How did the towns of Lydda and Sharon react to the miraculous healing of Aeneas? (vs. 35)
11. Why was Tabitha well-loved in Joppa? (vs. 36, 39)
12. What happened in Joppa after Tabitha's resurrection? (vs. 42)

28 Acts: Chapter 9 – What Did it Mean to Them?

This recounting of Saul/Paul's conversion is the first of three in the book of Acts. His charge was to carry the Gospel directly to the Gentiles. This was a responsibility given to him directly by Christ, and he had no choice but to obey. Luke emphasizes the supernatural nature of this call and the miraculous circumstances of the conversion. Though Paul had some variations in detail in his own recounting of his conversion, they were essentially in agreement.

As the story begins, Saul is so assured of the rightness of his faith that he ferociously pursues the Christians. The rabbis of the day believed that keeping the Law of Moses was vitally important for the coming of the Messiah. Saul, as a devout student of a prominent rabbi, would have considered himself as commendable to God for his zeal.

The supernatural meeting of Saul and Jesus completely shifted Saul's understanding, mission and life. From passionately defending the Jewish faith to passionately promoting 'The Way', there were no half-way measures in the heart of Saul. When he hears Jesus identify himself and tell him to 'get up and go into the city', he goes and waits. In blindness caused by the brilliance of the risen Christ, he revises his whole understanding of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of the Nazarene because God had, beyond any question, vindicated Christ. Paul had a mission that transcended everything.

Ananias, as the agent of Christ to heal and direct Saul, is naturally hesitant. Luke emphasizes this, not just to humanize his story, but to impress on his readers how much Saul's life had changed, and to point out that he was a 'chosen instrument' for Christ. It was Ananias who would tell Saul that there was suffering to come, in the name of Jesus.

The next section is (no doubt) a summary of the next several years of Saul's life. Paul says later in Galatians that he spent three years in Arabia. This time is what Luke calls "after many days had gone by". Still, it seems that Paul's fiery nature makes it difficult for him to connect with both believers and Jews in the beginning of his ministry: in Damascus he is rescued by being (literally) lowered over the city wall in a basket, and in Jerusalem he is sent out of town by the apostles. Luke, perhaps humorously, says that there was a 'time of peace' in Galilee and Samaria. While Paul was accepted as legitimate by the apostles, he was still evidently hard to have around!

Luke now begins showing the gradual widening of Christianity, from strictly Jewish to include outreach to the Gentiles. He begins with Peter's miracles at Lydda and Joppa. Peter's actions are a dramatic beginning to the movement of Christianity out past the walls of Jerusalem.

29 Acts: Chapter 9 – Application Questions

1. One way of reading verse 31 is to say that after Saul left Jerusalem, everything calmed down and became peaceful. Think of the zealous people you know or have known. Are they annoying? What are the benefits of having people like Saul around? What is the down side of living with people like Saul? What do we lose when folks like this leave our church?
2. Saul started his career among people who feared and distrusted him. What are some advantages to serving outside your comfort zone? How can we overcome fear and distrust of other Christians?
3. Saul's conversion story is extremely dramatic. Have you ever felt God calling you to do something different or important? Describe.
4. Ananias was understandably reluctant to help Saul, but when Jesus sent him he obeyed. Are we allowed to say 'no' to Jesus? Why or why not?

30 Acts: Chapter 10 – Scripture Questions

1. What was the background and reputation of Cornelius and his household? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Why did Cornelius send for Peter? (vs. 3, 4)
3. What happened to Peter as he was on the roof praying? (vs. 9-16)
4. How did the heavenly voice answer Peter's objection to eating unclean animals? (vs. 15)
5. "While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for _____." (vs. 19, 20)
6. Who went along with Peter the next day as he traveled to Cornelius' house? (vs. 23)
7. When Cornelius knelt before Peter, how did Peter react? (vs. 26)
8. Why had Cornelius gathered his household together? (vs. 33)
9. What was the first, most important statement that Peter made to Cornelius and his household? (vs. 34, 35)
10. What were the high points of Peter's teaching, as recorded by Luke? (vs. 38-43)
11. Why were the Christians from Jerusalem astonished? (vs. 44-46)
12. How did Peter show his complete acceptance of these Gentile believers? (vs. 47, 43)

31 Acts: Chapter 10 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Christianity was beginning to expand into the known world. Luke tells the story of the conversion of Cornelius to show the breaking of the barrier that separated Jews from Gentiles. There are four areas of special emphasis. (1) The early church did not want Gentiles to be directly taught or accepted into Christianity unless they also accepted Judaism. (2) God himself, through miracles, showed his approval of Gentile believers. (3) Peter, the leader of the Jerusalem (Jewish) apostles, not Paul, was the person chosen by God to open the door to Gentiles. (4) The Jerusalem church, given the proof of God's approval, accepted that a Gentile's conversion to Jesus the Messiah did not need to include allegiance to Judaism.

Cornelius was a good, devout man, descended from slaves freed 100 years earlier by Cornelius Sulla. He was a non-commissioned officer in the Italian regiment of the Roman legion. During a time of prayer, he received a vision of an angel of God, a vision that was the start of a new era in the young church. The angel told him to bring Simon Peter to his house. This was frightening to Cornelius. He probably sensed that his life was going to be changed, even though he was 'tuned in' to God and obedient to God. At the same time, Peter was receiving a vision. Peter was being taught by the Spirit that nothing cleansed by God was impure. He was not being taught that all people were clean, but that if they were called and obedient to the gospel then they were acceptable to God. This was hard for Peter, requiring him to let go of his instinct to hold all converts to Jewish beliefs. Seen through Luke's eyes, this is a pivotal moment in the history of the early Church.

Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his family and friends was more detailed, in some ways, than his previous messages. This was in part because, as Gentiles, the background of prophecies and religious expectations would be (at best) sketchy. They would have heard of Jesus of Nazareth since they were living in Palestine. They simply wouldn't understand the implications of what they had heard. The message is (at least as reported by Luke) concise: God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power; he went around doing good and healing; the apostles were eye witnesses; Jesus was killed on a cross; God raised him from the dead; the apostles were commanded to preach the message; everyone who believes in Christ receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

The evidence of the Holy Spirit descending on Cornelius and his household was galvanizing to the Jewish believers from Jerusalem. When they heard the speaking in tongues and praising, there was no question but that these people had been accepted by God and saved by his Spirit. The testimony carried back to Jerusalem would open hearts and minds to God's vision and plan for the world.

32 Acts: Chapter 10 – Application Questions

1. Cornelius was described as a good, devout, God-fearing man—but he (and his family) still needed salvation. Through a miraculous intervention Peter was brought to this Gentile household. How can we show the world that ‘being good’ isn’t enough? **(For personal reflection: Who are the people in your life who are good but don’t think they need to believe in Jesus?)**
2. The vision that Peter experienced changed not only his life and mind but the whole approach to understanding Christianity’s reach into the world. The message of Jesus and his saving grace was the same, but the way the message was spread was changed. What sort of changes have we seen in the way the gospel is shared? How do we avoid compromising the message while being flexible about the method?
3. Peter’s sermon was delivered to a group of people gathered by the Spirit. How could we change in order to rely more upon the power of the Spirit to strengthen and grow our congregation?
4. Peter’s preconception of who was acceptable to God was shattered. “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.” What preconceptions does our congregation have about those who are acceptable here? How does this apply to those who are devout members of other religions? **(For personal reflection: What preconceptions do you have about people who should be members of our church?)**

33 Acts: Chapter 11 – Scripture Questions

1. What criticism was leveled against Peter when he returned to Jerusalem from Cornelius' home? (vs. 2, 3)
2. How did Peter respond to this criticism? (vs. 4)
3. How many times does the voice from heaven command Peter to 'kill and eat'? (vs. 5-10)
4. Who told Peter to go, without hesitating, with the three men? (vs. 12)
5. The angel told Cornelius that Peter would bring a message. What would this message accomplish? (vs. 14)
6. What happened to the people of Cornelius' household as Peter began to speak? (vs. 15)
7. With the Holy Spirit as evidence of God's approval, what final question did Peter ask his listeners? (vs. 17)
8. How did the believers respond to Peter's question? (vs. 18)
9. Some of the Greek believers went to Antioch and began teaching the gospel. What were the results? (vs. 21)
10. When the Jerusalem church heard about Antioch, who did they send to check it out? What did he think? (vs. 23)
11. Who did Barnabas bring to Antioch to help with the teaching? (vs. 25)
12. What was the result of the prophecy by Agabus? (vs. 29, 30)

34 Acts: Chapter 11 – What Did it Mean to Them?

The conversion of Cornelius showed that God was not going to be boxed in by traditional forms of Judaism. He could (and did) bring a Gentile directly into relationship with himself through Jesus Christ, with no commitment of Jewish beliefs or lifestyle. Luke emphasizes this story to show the lines of continuity and agreement in the early church. This is important because it leads directly to the specific mission to the Gentiles. We take this for granted now, but it was a big change of view for the Jewish Christians.

One of the practical implications of Peter's validation of the Gentile acceptance before God was that the Jerusalem church could lose their standing before the Romans. Up to this point, they had been considered a sect of Judaism. To alter the makeup of the church, to include Gentiles, was to possibly lose this legal protection. Even though Peter's explanation of his actions made God's intervention clear, it did not address all of the questions that arose. For example, what lifestyle was appropriate for Gentiles coming to Christ directly out of paganism? How should they relate themselves to Christians who were living a Jewish lifestyle? **God's plan for the growing church was to grow outside of its beginnings, to become a place for all who placed their faith in Jesus.** This created uneasiness among the Jewish believers.

Antioch of Syria was an important, large city. It had a population of more than 500,000, making it the third largest city (after Rome and Alexandria). It was a place where Western and Eastern cultures mingled, with Greek and Roman traditions mixed with Semitic, Arab and Persian influences. The Jewish population was estimated at about one seventh of the total population. In Christian history, only, Jerusalem plays a larger part. It was the birthplace of foreign missions and the home base for Paul's outreach to the eastern half of the empire. This was where Jesus' followers were first called Christians, and where the questions about circumcision arose.

With the conversion of Samaritans, Gentiles in Caesarea, and now a mixed congregation in Antioch, many of the Jerusalem believers were understandably concerned about the faith spiraling out of control. That is why they sent Barnabas, a faithful, generous man full of the Spirit, to help organize and report on this new congregation. As a result of his help, the work that was started at Antioch was strengthened.

At some point Barnabas brought Saul in to help with the ministry work in Antioch. They worked together for about a year, and were very effective together. While they were working together a prophet named Agabus came to Antioch. His foretelling of a coming time of famine spurred the Christians to take up a collection for the Jerusalem church. Although there is no record of a single famine in the empire during the reign of Claudius, the historian Josephus refers to famine relief sent from northern Mesopotamia to Jerusalem.

35 Acts: Chapter 11 – Application Questions

1. The Christians in Jerusalem accepted that Cornelius and his family were saved by God, but it disrupted the status quo. How can we adapt to societal changes while remaining faithful to Jesus?
2. Antioch was a ‘melting pot’ city—different nationalities, different religions, different politics. In fact, it was much like any large city of our time. The church in Antioch was composed of many different kinds of people. What benefits do churches gain from this kind of variety? What challenges do churches face with this kind of variety?
3. Barnabas recognized that he (and the church in Antioch) needed help in preaching and teaching, so he went to Tarsus and brought back Saul. How can a congregation tell when they need help? If our church needs help of some kind, where should we look?

36 Acts: Chapter 12 – Scripture Questions

1. Who did King Herod Agrippa have killed? (vs. 2)
2. This beheading made the local Jewish leaders happy. Who else did King Herod arrest? (vs. 3)
3. On the night before his trial, how was Peter rescued? (vs. 7)
4. Where did Peter go when he realized he was free? (vs. 12)
5. What comic series of events happened at the door of Mary's house? (vs. 13-16)
6. After telling his story, what instructions did Peter give? Where did he go? (vs. 17)
7. How did Herod react to Peter's escape? (vs. 19)
8. What happened to King Herod after he was praised by the delegation from Tyre and Sidon? (vs. 22, 23)
9. How does Luke summarize the activity of the church? (vs. 24, 25)

37 Acts: Chapter 12 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Before Luke turns to his description of the Christian mission to the Gentile world, he takes the time to show two glimpses of how God continued to work on behalf of the believers at Jerusalem. Luke seems to want to make the point that God was not finished with Jerusalem Christianity, or that his activity within the Jewish world was finished.

There are some chronology problems with the stories that Luke tells. It is probably best to remember that ancient historians were more concerned about the point of the story than they were about the order. These two stories seem to be mainly concerned with God's continued activity on behalf of the Jerusalem church.

The Herod of Acts 12 is Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great and son of Aristobulus. He grew up in the imperial court and was something of a playboy. At one point he was so heavily in debt that he had to leave town to escape his creditors. He received asylum and a pension from his uncle Herod Antipas (with whom he later quarreled). He went back to Rome, offended Tiberius and was imprisoned. When Tiberius died, he was released by Caligula and was given the title of king and the responsibility for areas in northern Palestine. Agrippa eventually ended up with rule over Herod Antipas' lands. After Caligula died, Claudius came to power and gave Agrippa Judea and Samaria. Agrippa ruled this territory until his death.

the family of Herod Agrippa was fervently hated by the people they ruled. Agrippa took every opportunity to woo them. When in Rome, he lived as a Roman. When in Jerusalem, he acted the part of an observant Jew. His main concern was to preserve the Roman peace, and he would use any means possible to accomplish this task. Considering the Christians to be disruptive and divisive, he arrested some and had James, one of Jesus' original disciples, beheaded. Finding that this made the local leaders happy, he arrested Peter and planned to kill him publicly in an effort to discourage the Christian community.

When Peter was miraculously rescued from jail, Agrippa's plans to squash the local believers was thwarted. However, he was still oppressing the church. Luke gives us a second scene in his account of God's intervention on the church's behalf. He does this not only to show how far-reaching this intervention was but also to reinforce by a second witness the idea of God's continued interest in Jewish Christianity. The account of Agrippa's death is paralleled by a story from the historian Josephus. These accounts are different in detail but similar in outline. The reference to worms suggests an infection by intestinal roundworms, a painful and gruesome way to die. In contrast to this awful end, Luke speaks of the growth and spread of the Gospel.

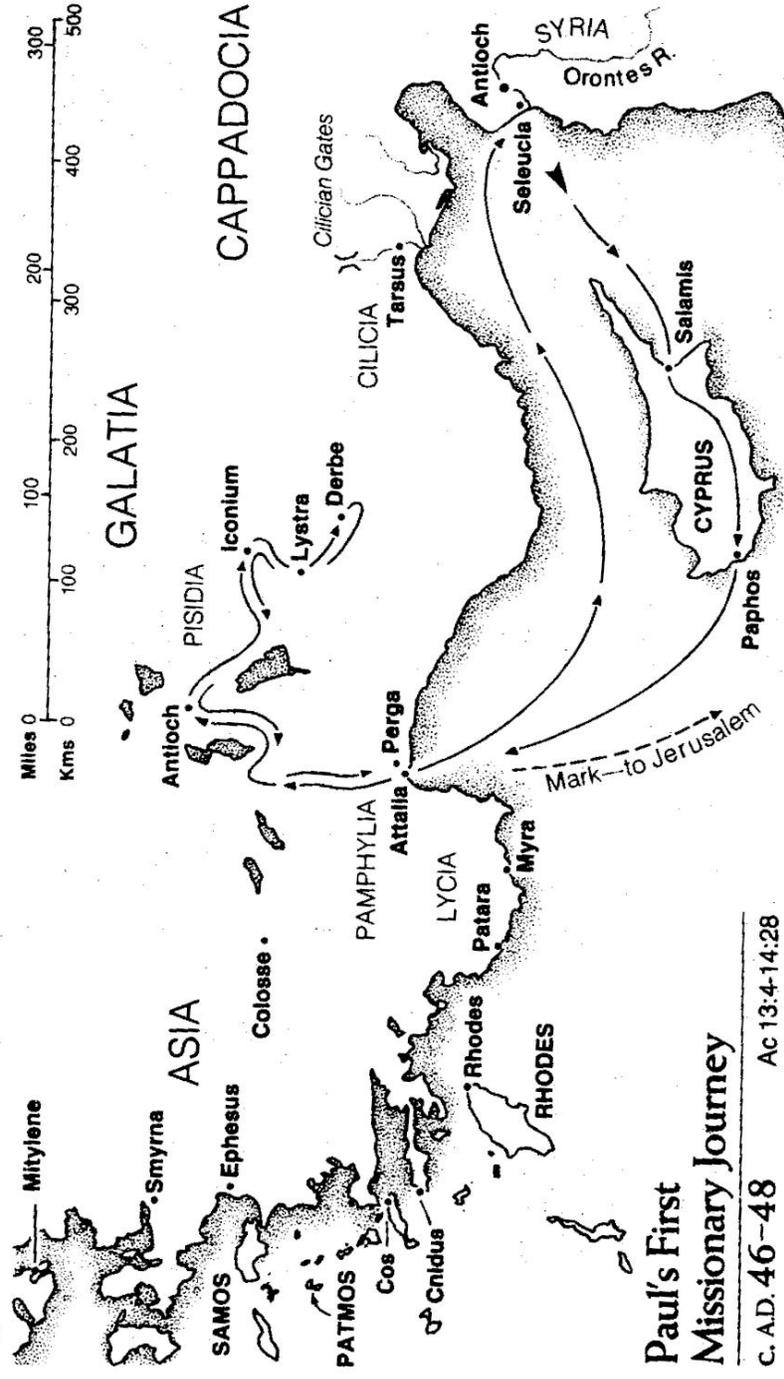
38 Acts: Chapter 12 – Application Questions

1. King Herod Agrippa saw the local Christians as divisive and troublesome. He didn't really care what they believed, he just wanted quiet. If the Christians had to be killed to keep the peace, so be it. While Christians in other countries face death or persecution for their beliefs, in our country we tend to be mostly shielded from this. Is safety and comfort better for the church, or is persecution? How does our safety and comfort affect our faith?
2. Peter recognized that, while his life had been saved, it was time to get out of town. Sometimes it is for the best to leave a place, even if there is a history of good works. How can you know when the time has come to move on?
3. Herod's death—a particularly gruesome death—probably had the effect of loosening the pressure on the local Christians. Can you think of some prominent religious people who seem to be 'in it' for their own gain, people whose influence reflects badly on Christians? How do they help? How do they harm?

39 Acts: Chapter 13 – Scripture Questions

1. What happened while the prophets and teachers in the Antioch church were worshipping and fasting? (vs. 1-3)
2. As Paul, Barnabas and John Mark were traveling, what did they do? (vs. 5)
3. How did Paul confront the Roman proconsul's sorcerer? (vs. 9-11)
4. How did this miracle affect the proconsul? (vs. 12)
5. When Paul and his companions visited the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, how were they received? (vs. 15)
6. How does Paul begin his teaching in Antioch of Pisidia? (vs. 16-25)
7. What is the 'good news' that Paul gives to his listeners? (vs. 32)
8. What did Paul want them to understand? (vs. 38, 39)
9. How did the people of the synagogue respond? (vs. 42, 43)
10. What happened on the next Sabbath when the whole city gathered to hear the Word? (vs. 44, 45)
11. In reaction to this abuse, what announcement did Paul make? (vs. 46)
12. Paul and his companions were kicked out of town, but the word of the Lord spread "through the _____." (vs. 49)

40 Acts: Chapter 13 – Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey



A typical first-century synagogue service would have included the *shema* (a reading of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:37-41), the liturgy of "The Eighteen Benedictions" (prayers of praise, petition and thanks), a reading from the Law, a reading from one of the prophets, a free address given by any competent Jew in attendance, and a closing blessing.

41 Acts: Chapter 13 – What Did it Mean to Them?

It is hard for us to believe, now, but at this point in the history of the church the question of allowing Gentiles free access to the gospel and to salvation was still very much in doubt. Luke uses this story of the conversion of Sergius Paulus as the pivot point of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. Until now it had been assumed that the call was to the Jews, the fulfillment of all their prophecies. The conversion of Cornelius may have opened the door to full participation of the Gentiles: Sergius Paulus was the door flung open.

There is no clear reason for the path that Paul, Barnabas and John Mark took. They bypassed some cities, visited others. There is also no reason given for John Mark's return to Jerusalem, though there is a great deal of speculation. It is certainly possible that Mark was unhappy with Paul's assumption of leadership over Barnabas. It is also possible that there was conflict in the group about preaching directly to the Gentiles. Later in Acts Paul strongly opposes Mark's return, so it may be that his departure was on less than good terms.

Pisidian Antioch was a Roman community. It was the most important city of southern Galatia and included a melting pot of Greek, Roman, Oriental and Phrygian traditions. It also had a sizable Jewish population. Whatever Paul's intent about preaching to the Gentiles, when they arrived in Antioch they went first to the synagogue. Paul and his teaching were very well received, so much so that they were invited to come back on the next Sabbath and speak again. On that day, however, a huge group – almost the entire city, verse 44 said – came to hear. The jealousy that sparked in the Jewish hearts caused them to begin speaking against Paul and against the gospel. Paul's blunt response: "You had the word first. Since you rejected it (and eternal life), we are now preaching to the Gentiles." The end result of the opposition was flight from the city, though it seems to have been an expulsion based on appeals to the city rulers rather than a mob action. More than likely Paul and Barnabas were charged with promoting an 'illegal religion', a charge that would require Roman action. In spite of the rejection, the gospel spread through the whole region.

Jews of Paul's day believed that there were two 'ages', or periods of world history: the present age and the 'age to come'. All devout Jews longed to be alive in this 'age to come', and the phrase 'life of the age' is what we usually see translated as 'eternal life'. When we hear this phrase, we often think of a final state which is beyond space and time; this is not what Paul and others of his time meant. They meant God would bring about a whole new period of a history, when everything would be put right. This age began when Jesus came out of the tomb on Easter morning, and it will be complete when God does for the whole world what he did for Jesus on that day.

42 Acts: Chapter 13 – Application Questions

1. The Antioch church had a crowd of prophets and teachers. How many current or former Sunday School teachers are in our class? What do you think would happen if we all got together, fasted and prayed? What do you think the Holy Spirit might say to us?
2. When Paul began to teach in the synagogue, he began with their history and teachings, moving from the known to the new. Where should we begin today, when we speak to others about Jesus?
3. Paul and Barnabas waited until they were asked to speak, in spite of the fact that they had deliberately come to this town to spread the gospel. How can modern missionaries copy this method? How could we do this in everyday life?
4. Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul, had brought Paul to himself (probably to make sure they weren't in town to be divisive or subversive). Paul taught him directly, with no Jewish cultural or religious filter. What would it mean today if we talked about Jesus without using a church background? How would we do it? What would be the benefits? Drawbacks?

43 Acts: Chapter 14 – Scripture Questions

1. How did the people of Iconium respond to the Word? (vs. 1, 2)
2. How did the Lord confirm the message of his grace? (vs. 3)
3. When a plot arose against Paul and Barnabas, where did they go and what did they do? (vs. 6, 7)
4. What miracle occurred in Lystra? (vs. 8-10)
5. Who did the local people believe Paul and Barnabas were? (vs. 11-13)
6. How did the apostles react to the attempted sacrifices? (vs. 14-18)
7. Some of the people in Lystra were convinced to stone Paul. Who were the instigators? (vs. 19)
8. Along the return path to Antioch, what did Paul and Barnabas do? (vs. 21-23)
9. After they arrived back home in Antioch, how did Paul and Barnabas finish their missionary journey? (vs. 27, 28)

Iconium had been transformed by the Greeks into a city-state. It was on a plateau surrounded by fertile plains and forests. It was resistant to Roman influence. Lystra was an ancient village, in a different political region from Iconium. It had been a Roman colony since 6 BC, and it was the farthest east of the fortified cities of Galatia. The people in Lystra would have been relatively uneducated. Derbe was about sixty miles southeast of Lystra, still in Galatia. It was a provincial border town, but still a place where different cultures mixed.

44 Acts: Chapter 14 – What Did it Mean to Them?

The missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas has a striking juxtaposition of two things: wherever they went, they encountered dangerous opposition, and the gospel flourished. The opposition, at this point in the history of the church, was largely from Jewish people who felt that this new Gospel was threatening them. They felt as if their religion and national identity were being damaged, and they feared that their standing as a 'legal' religion under Roman rule was endangered. When Paul and Barnabas entered a city, they always started at the synagogue. They spoke the 'confessions' of their faith: the history of God's intervention and care for the people of Israel. Of course, it didn't stop there, but continued with the explanation of how Jesus was the fulfillment of all the prophecies held dear for centuries. These prophecies had (in a sense) held the nation together in the face of wave after wave of conquerors.

The Jews didn't mind hearing these prophecies again. And in the cities where the Word was being proclaimed, they were interested and happy to find out that they were being fulfilled. The problem came when Paul made it clear that the Gentiles would be accepted by God. The problem compounded when Paul made it clear that salvation was not because of their attention to the Law, but by the grace of Christ. These ideas were liberating to some and threatening to others.

In Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, the preaching and teaching of these two apostles was always fruitful—and divisive. Even at this early time it was becoming clear that to follow Jesus was to change allegiance. For the Jews, it meant giving up adherence to the Law as the center of their identities (both personally and nationally) and embracing Jesus as their new center. For the Gentiles, it meant giving up culturally acceptable religious beliefs and embracing an obscure Jewish rabbi as their new Lord. For everyone, it was a change not only in their religious practices but a change in direction for their lives.

In a way, both the positive and negative reactions to the Gospel were a testament to the authenticity of Paul's preaching and teaching. Everyone believed that what he said was true. For some, it was life-giving and redemptive. For the others, it was life-destructive and dangerous.

45 Acts: Chapter 14 – Application Questions

1. Paul and Barnabas continued to preach and teach even in the face of considerable opposition. What are some effective ways we could guard against discouragement in our church's ministries?
2. The locals in Lystra believed the evidence of the miraculous healing, but they totally misunderstood the source of the power. What are some of the barriers for people today which keep them from seeing God as the source of all good things?
3. After Paul and Barnabas completed their journey and returned to Antioch, they gave a report to the church about their success. How are these types of reports helpful to the church? What are some of the reports that we hear in our church? What kind of good reports could we give about our congregation?
4. Paul and Barnabas said "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." Why do you think they said this? If it is still true, what hardships do you think we must endure?

46 Acts: Chapter 15 – Scripture Questions

1. What were some brothers from Jerusalem teaching in Antioch? (vs. 1)
2. How did the Antioch church decide to solve the problem? (vs. 2)
3. During the assembly to welcome Paul and Barnabas, who insisted that the Gentiles must be circumcised and follow the law of Moses? (vs. 5)
4. What answer did Peter offer to counteract the demand of the Pharisee believers? (vs. 7-11)
5. Who else spoke in favor of the Gentiles' acceptance? How did he support his opinion? (vs. 18)
6. James said, "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not cause _____ for the Gentiles who are turning to God." (vs. 19)
7. In the letter that was sent to Antioch, the apostles and elders apologized for the turmoil caused by the unauthorized Judaizers. Then they asked them to do four things. What were these requests? (vs. 29)
8. How did the people in Antioch react to this letter? (vs. 31)
9. What did Paul want to do? (vs. 36)
10. Why did Paul and Barnabas break up their partnership? (vs. 37-41)

47 Acts: Chapter 15 – What Did it Mean to Them?

It is helpful to understand the context of the Jerusalem church, so that we can understand the importance of the decision made by the Jerusalem Council.

The Jewish Christians, by and large, still lived as Jews, with all the dietary laws and restrictions. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They believed that he brought them salvation. They also believed that this salvation was through and because of their religion. Many of the Jerusalem Christians believed that they were in the ‘end times’, and that was why it was acceptable for Gentiles to join them. However, their understanding of the teachings of the prophets was that the Gentiles would **join them in following the law, with salvation by Christ as a part of that obedience**. Therefore, it was very dismaying to them to hear that Paul was teaching Gentiles directly and claiming their salvation through Christ without any commitment to following the law of Moses. Their understanding of faith and salvation were shaken by this possibility.

The Christians from Jerusalem who came to Antioch were probably well-meaning in their mission. They wanted to make sure that these new Gentile Christians lived an obedient and lawful life before God. So they taught them that they needed to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses. After some very contentious interactions, Paul and Barnabas decide to go to Jerusalem and let the apostles and elders decide what was to be done. As it turned out, the entire church became involved, becoming what was called (much later) the Jerusalem Council.

After listening to the reports, there was a great deal of discussion. Soon the ‘big guns’ of the church spoke up, Peter and James. Peter was no longer the administrative leader of the Jerusalem church, having given that position over to James, but he was still of primary importance to the believers. **Peter reminded them of his experience ten years earlier with Cornelius**. He spoke of the direction given to him by God, the evidence of the Holy Spirit. Most importantly, he said “We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as are they.” James, a sharp legal mind as well as the brother of Jesus himself, supported Peter’s statements with Scripture.

The council agreed to this new idea. Salvation was by the grace of Christ, not by following the law. James did have requirements for the Gentiles, but these were necessary moral and social requirements. Since there were such differences between the communities, obedience to these requests (stay away from food offered to idols, stay away from sexual immorality, avoid meat of strangled animals, avoid blood) made it more possible for the communities to live and work together. This theological concession on the part of the Jerusalem Christians was the beginning of an explosion in the preaching of the Gospel.

48 Acts: Chapter 15 – Application Questions

1. Unauthorized people from Judea were telling the Gentile believers something that was wrong. How do you test the truth of things that you hear? How should we test the truth of things that are told to the church? Have you ever heard anyone say something in church that you thought was plainly wrong? What was it?
2. James said that the council should not make it 'difficult' for the Gentile Christians to turn to God. How do we make it easy for people to turn to God? How do we make it difficult?
3. The Jerusalem Christians were totally committed to Jesus, but they had cultural and religious baggage that they had to release when it came to other believers. (There is never any indication that they had to give up their lifestyle.) What cultural and/or religious baggage do we need to either let go or keep to ourselves?
4. Peter firmly stated that the Gentiles were saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus. However, he agreed to behavior requirements for the Gentiles. Some churches still forbid drinking and swearing. What types of behavior would it be okay for us to demand of Christians today? What types of behavior should we NOT forbid?

49 Acts: Chapter 16 – Scripture Questions

1. Luke makes a point to tell us that Timothy's mother was a _____ and his father was _____.(vs. 1)
2. What did Paul and Silas deliver to churches along their journey? (vs. 4.)
3. Where did the Holy Spirit keep them from preaching the word? (vs. 6 and 7)
4. What did Paul see and hear in his vision? (vs. 9)
5. How was Lydia described? (vs. 14)
6. What did the slave girl with a foretelling spirit shout after Paul and the rest? (vs. 17)
7. What did the owners of the slave girl tell the authorities about Paul and Silas? (vs. 20,21)
8. What punishment did Paul and Silas receive? (vs. 22-24)
9. What did the jailer almost do after he thought his prisoners had escaped? (vs. 27)
10. When the frantic jailer ask how he was going to get out of the mess, how did Paul answer? (vs. 31)
11. Why was Paul indignant with the authorities? (vs. 37)
12. After leaving the prison, where did Paul and Silas go? (vs. 40)

50 Acts: Chapter 16 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Paul and Silas continued to travel through Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and came to a city named Lystra. As was their custom, they looked up fellow Jewish Christians. They met a young man named Timothy whose mother was a Jew and whose father was a Greek.

Because of the many Jews in that area who knew Timothy's father was Greek, Paul reasoned that it would be best for Timothy to be circumcised so he would be able to work effectively with other Jews.

As they traveled, the Holy Spirit warned them of certain regions where their work would not be effective, so Paul, Silas and Timothy skipped past several unwelcoming areas such as Bythina.

Paul had a vision of a man that called to them to come to Macedonia (a region in Greece) and they took this as a sign from God that they should travel there.

Outside of Philippi, they met with Jewish worshippers at a place of prayer by the river and met a woman named Lydia. She was a "dealer in purple" which was an extremely expensive type of dyed clothing. The purple dye came from the ink gland of a type of sea mollusk that was very rare. Lydia was likely a wealthy merchant. Lydia and her household became believers after listening to Paul. She insisted that Paul and his companions come stay at her house.

Paul and Silas were met by a slave girl that was possessed with a spirit that gave her foretelling abilities. This skill made her owners rich because they hired her out as a fortune teller. She followed them around shouting that they were servants of God. Paul lost patience with her shouting and cast the spirit out of her. This got them in trouble with her owners and the authorities who had them beaten and thrown in jail.

During the night, an earthquake destroyed their jail and the jailor almost committed suicide when he thought the prisoners had escaped. Paul stopped the man who then converted to Christianity. The authorities sent word that they were to be freed, but Paul scared them when he revealed he and Silas were Roman citizens (who had a right to a court trial). Paul and Silas returned to Lydia's house.

51 Acts: Chapter 16 – Application Questions

1. Timothy was circumcised (though he had a right to refuse) so he could more effectively work with Jewish believers. How far should we go in compromising our rights and principles in order to be effective for God?
2. The Holy Spirit warned them away from certain areas – perhaps because they wouldn't have been effective there. Have you ever felt God was nudging you to avoid some place or situation? Did you obey the nudge? What happened afterward?
3. Lydia was probably a wealthy merchant woman who helped Paul and Silas and opened her house to them. What is our responsibility to God if we are well-off? Do the poor have different responsibilities to God? Why or why not?
4. Paul and Silas were Roman citizens yet they were flogged and thrown in prison. Afterward, Paul protests their treatment, saying they should have been given a court trial. Why do you think he didn't tell them sooner, before all of the beatings started? How, and when, should Christians use advantages that they have?

52 Acts: Chapter 17 – Scripture Questions

1. What did Paul do when he came into a new town? (vs. 2, 4)
2. How did some of the Jews react in Thessalonica? (vs. 5-6)
3. After Jason and the other brothers posted bail, where did they send Paul and Silas? (vs. 10)
4. The Bereans are described as ‘noble’. What did they do to make Luke say this? (vs. 11, 12)
5. Who came to Berea to agitate the crowds? How was Paul protected? (vs. 13-15)
6. Why was Paul distressed in Athens? (vs. 16)
7. Who engaged Paul in discussion? (vs. 18)
8. How does Luke describe the Athenians? (vs. 21)
9. What does Paul use as a starting point in his message to the city leaders? (vs. 24-26)
10. Which idea causes the listeners to reject Paul’s message? (vs. 32)

The two primary philosophers followed in Athens were Epicurus (342-270 BC) and Zeno (340-265 BC). Epicurus taught that pleasure was the chief goal of life; tranquility, freedom from pain or disturbing passions, freedom from superstition or anxiety about death. He believed in gods but taught that they had no interest in the lives of people. Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, taught that people should live harmoniously with nature. He emphasized using rational abilities and individual self-sufficiency. He thought of God as “the World-soul”.

53 Acts: Chapter 17 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Thessalonica was an important city. It had perhaps two hundred thousand people, including a substantial Jewish population. It linked the rich agricultural plains of the Macedonian interior with the land and sea routes to the east. It was a free city, which meant that it ruled itself. Paul and Silas likely thought of it as the ideal place to begin the spread of the Gospel throughout this area.

Luke gives special attention to the way Paul preaches, using both proclamation and persuasion. He would speak the Gospel to all hearers, then use his skill with logic to pull people in. In this city they begin (as always) with the Jewish synagogue. He and Silas could be reasonably certain that they would encounter not only Jews but devout Gentiles. In Thessalonica, the most receptive hearers were the devout Gentiles and ‘prominent women’. Once again, the Jews who were angered by Paul’s message tried to stir up a riot, using the argument that they were preaching an illegal religion. Unable to find Paul and Silas, Jason (a new believer) and some other Christians were hauled up before the authorities. The bail bond posted, and the agreement for Paul and Silas to leave town, did not stop the spread of the Gospel.

The next town that the missionaries visited was Berea. It had no political or historical importance, though it was a fairly large town. However, Luke makes them immortal by his praise of their reception of the Gospel. They didn’t just listen, they searched Scripture themselves in order to understand and test what they were being told. Among those who accepted the Gospel were ‘Greek men’. These were pagan Greeks, and the beginning of the spread among these people.

When the Thessalonian Jews tried to cause trouble for Paul in Berea, he was smuggled to Athens. Paul saw that Athens was overwhelmed with idolatry. He not only spoke in the synagogues, he spoke in marketplaces, anywhere that people would listen. Athens attracted intellectuals from all over the world. Politically, it was a democracy. Spiritually, it housed two main philosophies, Epicureanism (pleasure and tranquility was the chief goal of life) and Stoicism (centered on living harmoniously with nature, being rational and self-sufficient). The city leaders listened to Paul, ready to decide if he would be permitted to preach in their city.

Paul speaks to the Athenians from the point of common ground, the Altar to the Unknown God. It is worth noting that he said nothing about fulfillment of Scripture or God’s presence in nature. Instead, he began with their curiosity and willingness to entertain new ideas. He even quoted from Greek poets in his message. It seems, though, that he was unable to convince them. He was not allowed to preach there, and there is no indication that any church was established.

54 Acts: Chapter 17 – Application Questions

1. The Bereans were commended for checking scripture to see if what Paul said was true. What sort of checkup should we do for Dan's sermons? What exactly would we be checking on?
2. Luke says that the Athenians spent most of their time discussing new ideas. It was a point of pride with them to be intellectually busy. How important do you think it is to explore new ideas? What is the danger of this kind of mental exploration?
3. What was the point and the result of the Berean's study? What was the point and the result of the Athenian's study? Which of these is more like us? Is that good or bad?
4. Some of the ideas from the philosophers Epicurus and Zeno sound extremely familiar: searching for tranquility, giving up superstitions, living in harmony with nature, thinking rationally, being self-sufficient. These philosophies were developed as a way of making sense of and dealing with life. What are the good points of these ideas? What are the dangers?

55 Acts: Chapter 18 – Scripture Questions

1. Who did Paul meet in Corinth? Why were they there? (vs. 2)
2. What did Paul do when some Jews became abusive to him? (vs. 6)
3. How was Paul encouraged by the Lord? (vs. 9, 10)
4. What was the result of Paul being taken to court in Achaia? (vs. 14-17)
5. Where did Paul travel with Aquila and Priscilla? (vs. 18)
6. What was Paul doing on the next missionary trip? (vs. 23)
7. Who came to Ephesus in Paul's absence? (vs. 24)
8. How did this learned, educated man speak of Jesus? (vs. 25)
9. What did Priscilla and Aquila do for Apollos? (vs. 26)
10. How was Apollos helpful to the believers in Achaia? (vs. 28)

The proconsul Gallio was the son of Seneca, a famous Roman philosopher. (Seneca was also a tutor to Nero.) Gallio was admired as a man of exceptional fairness and calmness. From an inscription found at Delphi, it is known that Gallio was proconsul in AD 51-52. This information makes it possible to pinpoint the date of Paul's visit to Corinth.

56 Acts: Chapter 18 – What Did it Mean to Them?

The population of Corinth in NT times was probably over 200,000. Because it had a strategic land and sea location, there were every sort of persons living there: local Greeks, freedmen from Italy, Roman army veterans, businessmen and governmental officials, and East Asians, including a large number of Jews. It was wealthy and luxurious, but there was also immorality of every kind. Beginning with the fifth century BC, the verb “to corinthianize” meant to be sexually immoral. The city was the center for the worship of the goddess Aphrodite, whose temple at one time boasted of a thousand sacred prostitutes. There were many other pagan shrines there as well. This might seem to make the city a bad place to teach and preach, but it turned out to be a very fruitful place for Paul. He not only taught both Jews and Greeks, but made some very important friends in the church: Priscilla and Aquila.

Paul's practice was to work as a tentmaker (either actual tents or head coverings) when he came into a new city. Aquila and Priscilla owned a tentmaking business and took Paul in as an employee. He worked there until a gift of money came from Philippi (carried by Silas and Timothy). Then he was able to devote himself to preaching and teaching. Things went in the usual manner for Paul: an initial teaching in the synagogue, rejection by the Jews, then a direct outreach to Gentiles.

The Jews in Corinth who opposed Paul took him to court. Unfortunately for them, the proconsul Gallio was not interested in what he saw as a religious squabble. He didn't even need to hear Paul's defense, but had his accusers thrown out of court. The importance of Gallio's decision was profound. No Roman authority had yet rejected Christianity's claim to share in the “legal religion” status of Judaism. If Gallio had accepted the Jewish charge that Paul was teaching an illegal religion, provincial governors everywhere would have had a precedent to follow, and Paul's ministry would have been severely restricted. As it was, Gallio's response had the effect of officially recognizing Christianity as a “legal religion”. For at least a while, the Christian message could be proclaimed without fear of coming into conflict with Roman law.

Between the time of Paul's stopover at Ephesus and his return to the city on his third missionary journey, Apollos came to Ephesus. He was a native of Alexandria (a city second only to Rome in the empire). He was highly educated and extremely knowledgeable in the Jewish scriptures. Somehow (probably through John's disciples) he had learned about Jesus and was fervent in his preaching. He didn't know everything he needed to know, but was willing to learn. Priscilla and Aquila took him into their home and taught him the Way more accurately. When Apollos wanted to visit Achaia, he was sent along with a letter of recommendation. The believers at Corinth welcomed him, as he was an excellent debater.

57 Acts: Chapter 18 – Application Questions

1. Luke says that Paul “strengthened” the churches. How do you think this is done? How can we strengthen each other?
2. Corinth sounds a lot like New Orleans, famous for immorality (as well as great music and food). Paul didn’t go to town and put on a huge rally: he went to one synagogue and started teaching. And he certainly wasn’t trying to create a “Christian Nation”. In his teaching, what were his priorities? What are some ways that his method could be applied today?
3. Apollos was welcomed in Corinth, partially because he was a vigorous debater with the Jews, publicly proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. Have you ever heard any public debates about Christianity? Do you think it is a good way to teach people? Why or why not?
4. N. T. Wright says, “At times of cultural, political, and religious tension, logical precision isn’t nearly as important as moods and feelings.” This certainly describes our times now. What do you think: should we focus on being right? Why or why not?

58 Acts: Chapter 19 – Scripture Questions

1. When Paul arrived at Ephesus, what did he ask the disciples there? (vs. 1-3)
2. What happened when these disciples were taught about Jesus? (vs. 5-7)
3. What were some of the miraculous things that happened in Ephesus? (vs. 11, 12)
4. There were Jewish magicians who tried to duplicate Paul's results. What happened to the sons of Sceva? (vs. 14-16)
5. What effect did this rout have on other magicians in Ephesus? (vs. 17-20)
6. Why were the silversmiths angry about "The Way"? (vs. 23-27)
7. Where did the rioters end up? (vs. 28, 29)
8. What did Paul want to do? Why was he not allowed to do this? (vs. 30, 31)
9. How did the assembly work out? (vs. 32-35)
10. Who was finally able to stop the rioting? What was he (mainly) concerned about? (vs. 35-41)



Artemis of Ephesus

Ephesus was a stronghold of the occult. The phrase "Ephesian writings" was common in ancient times for documents containing spells and magical formulae. The use of magical names in spells to drive out evil spirits was common. Jewish practitioners of magic were highly regarded, because people believed they had command of extremely effective spells. Their reluctance to speak the divine name was often misinterpreted as reluctance to say their most powerful magical name. They often called themselves 'priests'.

59 Acts: Chapter 19 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Ephesus was past its prime, commercially. It was situated at a strategic pass leading into Asia, but deforestation and bad land management had ruined the area. Because of silt, it was a constant struggle to keep the port open. By the time Paul was there, the main business of the town was the worship of Artemis, the multi-breasted goddess of fertility whose temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The city had become more and more dependent on the tourist and pilgrim trade. The temple was surrounded with all sorts of tradesmen and hucksters who made their living supplying visitors with food and lodging, temple offerings and souvenirs. The temple was also a major treasury and bank for merchants, kings and even cities. They made deposits, trusting that the goddess would keep their money safe.

Luke begins this section of Acts with a very brief description of Paul's encounter with a few disciples. They knew of Jesus only because they knew about John and his baptism. Paul teaches them about Jesus, they are baptized (both water and the Holy Spirit) and then Paul jumps into evangelizing the city. There were over a hundred free cities around Ephesus, so a successful campaign here would—and did—result in believers branching out into the countryside.

Luke gives us an insight into the way Paul works. He speaks first in the synagogue, of course, but when the inevitable opposition occurs he moves to a nearby hall and speaks DAILY to all who come—and there are very many people who come. There are miracles here, too. Some Paul performs himself, some are the result of contact with his sweaty work clothes. This seems odd to us, until we understand how steeped the city was in superstition and magic. This would have seemed like a perfectly reasonable way to receive power from a deity to the people of Ephesus. What we learn is that Paul did what was necessary to reach people. If he could, he spoke in synagogues. If he couldn't, he spoke in local halls. If people needed to see miraculous healings, he healed. If they could see the power of God through sweaty work clothes, then Paul sent sweaty work clothes.

The riot caused by the silversmiths is notable for Paul's absence (for once). Paul's work had been so effective that business was falling off for those who made their living selling goods related to the worship of Artemis. They were losing their income, and a madness seemed to fall over them. Running down the streets, they gathered up bystanders until they filled a 25,000 seat arena! Paul wanted to go but was prevented, and it was probably for the best. After the crowd had worn themselves out, their highest civil servant sent them home.

Paul worked in Ephesus for two years and three months, and God blessed him and his work.

60 Acts: Chapter 19 – Application Questions

1. The men Paul met when he first came to Ephesus had been baptized with John's baptism. Paul taught them about Jesus, baptized them and they received the Holy Spirit. When we meet people in church whose knowledge about Jesus seems lacking, what should we do? How should we do it?
2. In Ephesus, the people had a strong belief in the supernatural, so miraculous healings were a good way to reach them. What do you think Paul would do in Garland? Why do you think it would work?
3. Many people in Ephesus gave up, literally burned, valuable 'magic' items because of their new faith in Jesus. What do people nowadays use for 'magic' items? What are the benefits of disposing of items like these?
4. When people in Ephesus and the surrounding area turned to "The Way", the local economy started to suffer. How would passionate devotion to Christ affect our local economy? Would it be positive or negative?

61 Acts: Chapter 20 – Scripture Questions

1. After the uproar ended, where did Paul go? (vs. 1)
2. Who joined Paul and his group in Troas? (vs. 5)
3. Why did Paul and the disciples come together on the first day of the week? (vs. 7a)
4. Why did Paul speak until midnight? (vs. 7b)
5. What happened to Eutychus? (vs. 9, 10)
6. Why was Paul hurrying to Jerusalem? (vs. 16)
7. What was the Gospel that Paul declared to both Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus? (vs. 21)
8. What passion ruled Paul's life? (vs. 24)
9. How did Paul encourage and instruct the elders of the church in Ephesus? (vs. 28-31)
10. What words of Jesus did Paul remember? (vs. 35)
11. Why were the elders grieved? (vs. 38)

62 Acts: Chapter 20 – What Did it Mean to Them?

In this chapter Luke gives a brief report of Paul's return visit to Macedonia. In other Pauline letters (2 Corinthians, Romans) more information is found to fill in the blanks, because these letters were written during the time period described here by Luke.

When Paul left Ephesus, he went north hoping to find Titus at Troas. Titus had been sent to Corinth to deal with and report on the situation there. Paul seems to have been so concerned about the Corinthian church that he was either unwilling or unable to give his full attention to a missionary venture. Paul and Titus finally connected in Macedonia, and the report was good enough that Paul sent a letter back to the church at Corinth. We don't know how long Paul stayed in Macedonia, but Luke seems to suggest that it was a fairly long time, perhaps as long as a year. During this time, Paul was especially concerned about collecting money for the relief of poor believers in Jerusalem.

When Paul left Macedonia, he went to Corinth, where he stayed for three months. This was probably during the winter, when shipping would have been limited. During this time he wrote his letter to the Romans. Since Paul wanted to move his ministry, hopefully as far west as Spain, he planned to use the Roman church as his base of operations. Since his plan was to go to Jerusalem first to deliver the collection, he sent the formal letter to the Christians at Rome to prepare them for his future visit.

Though Paul had not himself preached or taught at Troas, the gospel had spread there. So he and his travelling companions met with a group of believers to share communion (break bread) and to share instruction about the Christian life. Since his time with them was short, he preached all night long. Poor Eutychus! Whatever the reason, he fell from the window and died. Paul, in an action that is reminiscent of Elijah and Elisha, he throws arms his around the young man and brings him back to life. Then they went back upstairs, had a snack, and spoke till dawn.

Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders is the closest thing in the book of Acts to one of Paul's letters. He encourages, warns and exhorts the elders, pumping them up to go back and care for the church in Ephesus. He also defends himself and his teaching by appealing to his hearers' knowledge of him. He finishes his lecture with a blessing and to follow his example. Finally, he prays with them. After a deeply affectionate and sad goodbye, Paul and his traveling companions board the ship.

63 Acts: Chapter 20 – Application Questions

1. In this part of Luke’s story, he spends a lot of time with what seems to be a travelogue. It may not be interesting to all of us. Is it possible that some parts of our Bible are just not that important or interesting? What should we do with these parts of the story? Edit them out? Why might these parts have been included?
2. Because he wasn’t going to be there very long, Paul preached to the believers in Troas all evening and all night. Christianity was still a new religion, so preaching and teaching was extremely important. How important is preaching now? What function does it fulfill? When is preaching crucial? When is it damaging?
3. Paul says he is going to Jerusalem because he is “compelled by the Spirit”. Have you ever felt compelled to do something? Did you fight against it? Did anyone try to stop you? What was the end result?

64 Acts: Chapter 21 – Scripture Questions

1. How does Luke describe the way he and Paul left the Ephesian elders? (vs. 1)
2. Who did the travelers stay with in Caesarea? (vs. 9)
3. What did Paul's friends want him to do? Why did he refuse? (vs. 10-14)
4. How were the travelers received in Jerusalem? (vs. 17-20)
5. Why were the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem unhappy with Paul? What did he do to try to calm their fears? (vs. 21-26)
6. Who rescued Paul from the riot that out-of-town Jews started? (vs. 31-35)
7. How did Paul surprise the commander of the Roman troops? (vs. 37-39)
8. What did Paul want to do? (21:40-22:1)

65 Acts: Chapter 21 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Luke's description of Paul's journey to Jerusalem seems to parallel Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem. There is the plot by the Jews; a handing over to the Gentiles; predictions of trouble and handing over; steadfast determination to go on; resignation to God's will. Luke knows, of course, that Paul did not die at Jerusalem.

Paul's determination to go to Jerusalem and to be there on the day of Pentecost was troubling to his friends and traveling companions. They were well aware of the trouble that followed him, and there were three separate predictions of what would happen to him in Jerusalem. However, Paul knew that it was important to hand-deliver the money gifts to the church leaders. As committed as he was to Gentile teaching and conversion, he did not want that group of believers to split away from the mother church in Jerusalem. A personal appearance would mark his commitment to unity between the two groups.

The Christians in Caesarea (including Philip, one of the original Seven appointed to serve the Greek widows in Jerusalem, and his four prophetess daughters) sent some people with Paul to Jerusalem. They went to the house of a Greek believer who gladly provided hospitality to the mixed group of people traveling with Paul. This gave him a safe base from which to live and work while in Jerusalem.

As happy as James and the other elders were to see Paul (and the collection), they were between a rock and a hard place when it came to the Jewish and Gentile believers. They affirmed their support of Paul and his ministry, but it was important to calm the fears of the Jewish Christians. They had to encourage and support those believers who were still committed to following Jewish traditions and rituals, and they had to accept the Gentile believers who did not follow these traditions and rituals. The solution, which was accepted by Paul, was this: they took the money and affirmed the Gentiles, and Paul followed a Jewish ritual which affirmed his commitment to Judaism.

Unfortunately, this solution did not work. The riot stirred up by Jews (who were in town for Pentecost) was so violent that the Roman military had to be called out. Many of the rioters were not completely certain why they were angry. Certainly the Roman commander got mixed messages about the problem since he had Paul taken to the barracks for questioning. Paul, who never passed up an opportunity to speak, wanted to talk to the people who had tried to kill him. In the next chapter we will see the results of his speech.

66 Acts: Chapter 21 – Application Questions

1. Some Jewish visitors at the Temple in Jerusalem were so upset to see Paul, the man they believed to be actively trying to destroy their religion, that they started a riot and tried to kill him. What topics or people today rouse Christians to fury? How is this fury bad? How is it good?
2. Paul put himself through the wringer, ritually speaking, in order to appease the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. He knew very well that this wasn't necessary, but he did it anyway, at personal expense. How far should we go to appease other Christians, to calm their fears? When is it a bad idea to try and calm them down?
3. Trouble seemed to follow Paul wherever he went. The riot in Jerusalem even required military intervention. What does this say about the Gospel? Can we claim to be a people of peace when these kind of things happen? Are there parallels in any other religions?
4. Whatever else is true about the Jews who rioted in Jerusalem, there is no question but that they felt their religion was central to their lives. There are books, blogs and studies beginning to surface that address the question of why people are leaving churches, and one of the reasons given is that church doesn't seem relevant to their lives. What can we do to change this idea?

67 Acts: Chapter 22 – Scripture Questions

1. When Paul began to speak, he started by telling them about his upbringing. What was his background? (vs. 3)
2. What did Paul do when he was defending Judaism against “The Way”? (vs. 4, 5)
3. What did Paul describe to his listeners? (vs. 6-11)
4. How does Paul describe the man who healed his blindness? (vs. 12)
5. Why did Jesus tell Paul to leave Jerusalem? (vs. 18)
6. Where did Jesus send Paul? (vs. 21)
7. How did the listeners respond to the revelation that Paul was sent to teach the Gentiles? (vs. 22, 23)
8. Why didn't the Roman commander flog Paul? (vs. 24-29)
9. What did the commander do in order to find out why the Jews were in an uproar? (vs. 30)

68 Acts: Chapter 22 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Paul's speech to the Jews out for his blood may seem odd because he doesn't directly address the main charge, that of bringing a Gentile into the Temple court. Paul goes instead to the heart of the matter, that he has given up or fallen away from his Jewish roots and faith. He does this by setting in a Jewish context all that had happened in his Christian life and by insisting that what others might see as apostasy (abandoning his religion) was really the result of a revelation from heaven.

Paul's speech is carefully attended by the now-calm rioters. He uses distinctly Jewish terms, for example Ananias is described as “a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there” when Paul speaks of his conversion experience. During most of the defense, the people hear him with a certain respect, for he had spoken mostly of their hope of a messiah. Even his identification of Jesus as the messiah might have been accepted. When, however, Paul spoke of being told by Jesus to leave Jerusalem and preach to Gentiles that did not need to become Jewish before being saved, that was too much. He was shouted down, and the people called for his death.

The Roman commander was now in the position of needing to find the truth of the uproar. (He probably didn't understand the speech, as Paul spoke in Aramaic (or Hebrew, depending on the translation.)) As a shortcut to this truth, he ordered Paul to be flogged. For ordinary people this was allowed, but Paul was not an ordinary citizen. As they were preparing him to be tortured he claimed Roman citizenship. Since Roman citizens were exempt from examination, and since no one claimed this citizenship falsely, Paul's torture was immediately cancelled.

Roman citizenship was a highly prized right. It was only given to those of high social or government standing. It could be received as a result of bribes to imperial or provincial administrators. After it was received, it stayed 'in the family'. Most likely one of Paul's ancestors received citizenship as a reward for valuable services.

Paul could not be tortured, but the commander still needed to know what was going on. As a Roman military commander he had no right to participate in the Sanhedrin's deliberations. But as the Roman official charged with keeping peace in Jerusalem, he could order the Sanhedrin to meet to determine the cause of the riot, and this is what he did.

69 Acts: Chapter 22 – Application Questions

1. In the early days of Christianity, when it was called 'The Way', there was painful friction between those who held on to their Jewish traditions and those who did not. What modern religious movements or activities are happening today that are uncomfortable or cause friction?
2. Paul was highly trained, what we would think of as professional clergy. This made him uniquely suited to interpret the Hebrew scriptures in terms of Christ. Today, there are many churches that reject trained ministers, preferring that lay people speak 'from the Spirit'. What are the benefits of trained clergy? What are some of the disadvantages?
3. After Paul gave his resume to his listeners, he told the story of his conversion. What is your story? Write down (or at least think through) a few words that summarize your commitment to Christ.
4. Paul used his Roman citizenship to get out of (yet another) beating. How much effect does citizenship in America affect our religion? What about in other countries?

70 Acts: Chapter 23 – Scripture Questions

1. What did the high priest Ananias order be done to Paul? (v. 2)
2. How did Paul react to this? (v. 3-5)
3. Paul said that he was on trial because of what? (v. 6)
4. What was the Roman commander afraid of? (v. 10)
5. What did the plotters against Paul intend to do? (v. 12-15)
6. What did the Roman commander order his troops to do? (v. 23-24)
7. Who did the Roman commander write to? (v. 26)
8. What did the Roman governor say to Paul? (v. 34-35)

71 Acts: Chapter 23 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Paul was sent by the Roman commander (Claudias Lysias) to testify before the Jewish Supreme Court (the Sanhedrin). There was no high priest at the moment. The Roman Governor Felix had been annoyed one time too many by the preceding Jewish high priest and had sent assassins to kill him.

Ananias had been high priest in the past and so was acting as high priest, though he technically was not. By saying he didn't know Ananias was the high priest, Paul was being accurate and probably tweaking Ananias at the same time for having ordered him slapped.

Paul proceeded to change the subject and said he was accused because of his belief in the resurrection. He knew very well this statement would stir up a hornet's nest because the Pharisees and the Sadducees disagreed violently about whether there was an afterlife. Things broke down into a violent uproar between the two factions.

Paul was taken to safety and a group of conspirators made a pact to assassinate Paul. Word got to Paul and then to Claudia Lysias who sent Paul in the night to Caesarea under heavy guard (200 foot, 70 cavalry, 200 spear) to the Roman Governor there named Felix (the same who had the last high priest assassinated).

Felix had Paul cool his heels and placed under house arrest at Herod's palace until a delegation arrived from the Jews (his accusers).

72 Acts: Chapter 23 – Application Questions

1. Paul wasn't very meek with his accusers. How should we act when people accuse us wrongly? How much should we stand up for ourselves – shouldn't we just turn the other cheek?
2. Paul did a tricky thing to the Jewish leaders by getting them arguing amongst themselves. When is it alright to use tactics like this and when isn't it?
3. Some people conspired to murder Paul but when he heard of it, he notified the Romans who protected him. Paul seems to be playing his enemies against each other (Romans against the Jews, Jews against Jews). Is this alright to do or should we meekly submit to people who oppose us?

73 Acts: Chapter 24 – Scripture Questions

1. Who showed up for Paul's trial before the Roman Governor, Felix? (v. 1)
2. After buttering up Felix, what do Paul's accusers say about him? (v. 5)
3. Paul says he is "a follower of the ____ which they call a sect" (v. 14)
4. Why did Paul say he had returned to Jerusalem? (v. 17)
5. When did Felix say he would decide Paul's case? (v. 22)
6. Who provided for Paul's needs while he was held prisoner? (v. 23)
7. Who listened to Paul discuss his faith in Christ? (v. 24)
8. What was Felix hoping to receive from Paul? (v. 26)
9. How long did Paul remain in prison in Caesarea? (v. 27)

74 Acts: Chapter 24 – What Did it Mean to Them?

A delegation arrived from Jerusalem to press the case against Paul. They brought a lawyer named Tertullus with them to present their case to the governor Felix.

Tertullus began by praising Felix and then claimed that Paul was a troublemaker who had been stirring up Jews all over the world. He claimed that Paul was a “ringleader” of the Nazarene sect and wanted to desecrate the temple. Felix asked Paul to defend himself and so Paul said that he was a follower of the Way (the original term for the Christian Church). He said that he’d come to Jerusalem to bring gifts for the poor and that he had been peacefully worshipping in the temple.

Paul claimed that he’d committed no crime and that the real reason he’d been brought before Felix was his belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Felix adjourned the court and said he would decide Paul’s case when he heard from the Roman commander Lysias about some of the facts in question. Felix actually was after a bribe from Paul and kept him prisoner for two years hoping for a payoff. Felix and his wife Drusilla (who was Jewish) often spoke with Paul while he was under arrest.

Felix was finally replaced with a new governor, Porcius Festus and Paul was still in prison.

75 Acts: Chapter 24 – Application Questions

1. Paul is a victim of a corrupt political system where the governor kept him imprisoned, hoping for a bribe. Are Christians bound to obey even corrupt governments? How much should we accommodate our government and when should we try to change it?
2. Paul tried to be as smart as he could about his case before Felix, but he didn't try to come up with bribe money to get free. Why? Should he have? Should we “play the game” that officials sometimes demand?
3. Paul talked about his faith frankly, so much so that Felix sometimes became uncomfortable. Are we too worried about making people uncomfortable?

76 Acts: Chapter 25 – Scripture Questions

1. What did the Jewish leaders want Festus, the new governor, to do for them? Why did they want this favor? (vs. 3)
2. What was the problem with the charges they brought against Paul? (vs. 7)
3. Paul protested his innocence before Festus. To whom did he appeal? How did Festus answer? (vs. 11, 12)
4. Why did Festus refuse to turn Paul over to the Jews? What surprised Festus? (vs. 16-19)
5. What did King Agrippa say to Festus? (vs. 22)
6. What kind of an entrance did King Agrippa and his sister, Bernice, make in Festus' court? (vs. 23)
7. Festus didn't think Paul deserved to die. Where did he decide to send him? (vs. 25)
8. What did Festus think was unreasonable? (vs. 27)

Herod Agrippa II became king at age 17 but his territory was ruled by Roman procurators until he reached his majority. He was gradually able to increase his territory until it covered north and northeast of the Sea of Galilee, over several Galilean cities and over some cities in Perea. Bernice was his sister. Officially married to Polemon, king of Cilicia, rumors were that she was living in an incestuous relationship with Agrippa II.

77 Acts: Chapter 25 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Festus became governor because a Jewish delegation had demanded Felix be replaced. Therefore, when Festus arrived he inherited a government in turmoil, with factions fighting one another. Judea was a mess, and Rome wanted it fixed. This is why as soon as Festus arrived in Palestine he quickly went up to Jerusalem to try to smooth things over.

The Jewish leaders apparently wanted to take advantage of Festus' inexperience. He did not know the motivation behind their demands for Paul to be returned to Jerusalem, and was bewildered by the charges they pressed. No doubt his return to Caesarea was as much to put the whole thing in Roman surroundings as it was to find out what was going on.

Since Festus didn't understand the religious and political maneuverings of the Jews, it seemed simple to him; he was ready to turn Paul over. Then Paul confused everything by demanding to be tried in Rome. This was his right as a citizen, and he saw it as the only way to stay out of the hands of the Sanhedrin. If he was successful in Rome and was acquitted, the potential was that Christianity, or The Way, would be recognized as a legal religion. Festus was in a difficult position. As a new governor he did not want to antagonize the leaders of the people he was tasked with governing. His decision was more political than legal, and he gladly agreed to the appeal.

Marcus Julius Agrippa, while firmly in the Roman court, was considered a Jewish authority by them. This was why Festus appealed to him for help in writing the charges which would accompany Paul to Rome. Luke is setting the stage for Paul's defense, one in which Paul will not answer the charges. Rather, he preaches the gospel.

78 Acts: Chapter 25 – Application Questions

1. The Jewish leaders strongly objected to Paul and his teaching. They felt he was twisting their religion into something wrong. What sorts of religions teachings are being “twisted” today? Where do we draw the line between something different and something wrong?
2. Agrippa was considered an authority on Jewish matters, though he didn’t seem to believe. How important is it that our leaders understand Christianity? If their lives seem to show that they are not followers of God, how much can we trust their judgment?
3. Paul’s fate was completely out of his hands. Why do you think God allowed this for him? Why does God allow our fates to be determined by other people?

79 Acts: Chapter 26 – Scripture Questions

1. To whom did Paul present his defense? (v. 2)
2. With what was Agrippa well acquainted? (v. 3)
3. To which sect did Paul belong? (v. 5)
4. Paul felt that he should oppose which name? (v. 9)
5. Paul even went to foreign _____ to persecute Christians. (v. 11)
6. What did the voice from heaven say to Paul? (v. 14)
7. In the vision that Paul had, from whom did Christ say he would rescue Paul? (v. 17)
8. Paul was not disobedient to what? (v. 19)
9. Paul was saying nothing beyond what the _____ and _____ would say. (v. 22)
10. Festus interrupted Paul and said what? (v. 24)
11. What did Paul ask Agrippa if he believed? (v. 27)
12. Paul wished all could be like him except for what? (v. 29)
13. Paul could have been set free if he had not done what (v. 32)

80 Acts: Chapter 26 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Luke’s account of the history of the church reaches a high point in this chapter. After languishing for two years in Caesarea (about which time we know very little), Paul finally has his opportunity to plead his cause. The description of the listeners was a microcosm of the world that Christianity addressed: fervent Jewish leaders who believed that Paul was a destructive force, one that threatened both their way of life and their political stability; pagans whose knowledge of Yahweh and Christ was nearly nil; Romans who had knowledge of God’s people and their ways but no personal belief. The outcome of this hearing would affect not only Paul’s personal existence but also the relative safety of those who followed Christ.

Paul does not address the charges against him. Rather, he tells his own story; his training, his fervent obedience to God’s law, his persistent aggression against the followers of The Way. Then he describes the point of change in his life, his encounter with Jesus. Now Paul sees the prophets and law as signs and teachings pointing directly to Jesus. As Paul reminds King Agrippa, none of Jesus’ activities were hidden, and the followers of Jesus had lived openly. There was simply no evidence that Jesus had been preaching against Rome, and there was no evidence that his followers were living in opposition to Rome.

Paul’s appeal to King Agrippa has become famous. The King James Version translates the king’s reply as “Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian.” While this verse is more accurately translated to mean that King Agrippa wasn’t going to believe anything in such a short time, we still are able to see the power of Paul’s evangelistic passion. Luke’s summary of Paul’s speech gives a powerful succession of ideas, showing the authority of Paul’s teaching, the authenticity of the path from prophets to the Messiah, and the intended audience of the Gospel—all people, everywhere.

81 Acts: Chapter 26 – Application Questions

1. Paul had to defend himself against many false accusations. Have you ever had to defend yourself to others? Sometimes we get too defensive when others accuse us. How can we defend ourselves well without hurting others?
2. Paul told how he had his conversion experience when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. He admitted to everyone that he had been wrong about Jesus and his followers. Why is it so hard to admit we were wrong? How could we get better at doing this?
3. Paul is speaking to the King of the Jewish nation and the Roman Governor. These people rank pretty high. How should we speak to those higher than ourselves? Should we tell them whatever they want to hear? Why or why not?

82 Acts: Chapter 27 – Scripture Questions

1. Who sailed to Italy with Paul? (vs. 1, 2)
2. What kind of travel did they experience? (vs. 9, 10)
3. Why did they leave Crete? (vs. 13)
4. What kind of storm blew up? (vs. 14, 15)
5. How did Paul encourage everyone, after they had given up hope? (vs. 21-26)
6. When the ship finally drew near to land, what did the sailors attempt to do? (vs. 30)
7. What did Paul tell everyone to do? Why? (vs. 33-34)
8. When morning came, what did they see? (vs. 39)
9. Why didn't the soldiers kill the prisoners? (vs. 43)
10. How many of the 276 ship passengers made it safely to land? (vs. 44)

83 Acts: Chapter 27 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Luke's story of Paul's voyage to Rome is extremely vivid. It has details about seamanship from this time which are extremely precise. He speaks of the conditions on the eastern Mediterranean in ways that have been shown to be remarkably accurate. All of this detail certainly implies that Luke was traveling with Paul!

Luke's most striking description, however, is of Paul. He shows Paul as a man with a strong personality, one who was respected by those around him. What is most clear is that he was an apostle of God, one who had been tasked with the important mission of preaching to the Gentiles. No storm or shipwreck would stand in the way of God's completion of this mission.

84 Acts: Chapter 27 – Application Questions

1. This travel/storm/shipwreck story is very interesting. It would probably make a great action movie. Stories are the easiest thing to understand and remember. What other New Testament stories come immediately to mind? Do you have any vivid story memories of our church?
2. The centurion in charge of Paul and the other prisoners seemed to trust Paul, even if he didn't always take his advice. What sort of relationship does our church have with local officials? Is this a relationship that we should put more effort into?
3. After the storm hit, the people on board the ship with Paul had very little control over where the ship blew. Sometimes our lives seem like this ship, simply blown about with no control on our part. Are there any of Paul's actions that we could use in our own lives to help us weather life-storms?

85 Acts: Chapter 28 – Scripture Questions

1. What opinion did the islanders have of Paul? Why? (vs. 1-6)
2. How did Paul interact with the people of Malta? (vs. 7-10)
3. Where did Paul live when he was in Rome? (vs. 16)
4. Why did Paul wish to speak to the Jewish leaders in Rome? (vs. 17-20)
5. How did these Jews respond to Paul? (vs. 21, 22)
6. What sort of arrangement did Paul and the Jewish leaders make? (vs. 23)
7. How did his listeners react to Paul's teaching? (vs. 24, 25)
8. From Isaiah, Paul tells them: "Otherwise they might see with their _____, hear with their _____, understand with their _____ and turn, and I would _____ them." (vs. 27)
9. What final, thematic statement does Luke report from Paul? (vs. 28)
10. How long did Paul preach "boldly and without hindrance" in Rome? (vs. 31)

86 Acts: Chapter 28 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Through the story of the storm and shipwreck, Luke shows that Paul is following the destiny and path set out by God. No matter the obstacle, this plan cannot be stopped. In the beginning of chapter 28 we see more evidence to support this picture of Paul. The shipwrecked prisoners, sailors and soldiers are welcomed and cared for by the islanders (literally ‘barbarians’). Seeing Paul survive an (apparently) poisonous snake bite, they are ready to believe anything of him. Miraculous healings result in honorable treatment for Paul and the others, and when they do finally leave Malta after the winter season they are given gifts to help them along the way.

Luke makes a point of the meetings with Christians along the way. This must have been very encouraging to Paul, especially since he had been under house arrest for the past two years. It is surprising that the centurion was so willing to let these meetings happen. Perhaps he had business in the city, or perhaps Paul’s past behavior made it clear that Paul was trustworthy. When they finally arrived in Rome, Paul was allowed to live in private quarters, even though he was chained to a guard. As Luke describes it, however, there is almost a sense of triumph. Through his coming the Gospel would enter official circles in the capital of the empire. The two years of Paul’s imprisonment were fruitful, both in converts and writing.

Paul needed to know about the local Jewish attitude towards him. The Jews had only recently returned to Rome after the expiration of the Emperor Claudius’ law against them, so it appears that they did not wish to get involved with the dispute between Paul and the Jerusalem Jews. Though Christianity had been known in Rome for some time, these Jews claimed not to know about the ‘sect’ as they called it. There were good reasons for their reluctance: (1) there had been no request from Jerusalem for them to get involved, (2) Paul was a Roman citizen who had had essentially a favorable hearing before Roman rulers, and (3) he was going before Caesar. While they were willing to listen (and debate), only a few chose belief.

Luke doesn’t tell us much about these two years. And he seems to end the book abruptly. Tradition says that Paul was released and went on to further ministry. For Luke, it is enough that Paul preached to the Gentiles, and that God blessed Paul’s ministry.

87 Acts: Chapter 28 – Application Questions

1. The people who saw Paul bitten by the snake assumed that he was being punished by Justice. Then, as now, it was common to believe that what happened to a person was determined by what they had done. What assumptions do we make about poor people? What assumptions do we make about rich people? What assumptions do we make about people in jail? Are assumptions always bad? How can we retrain ourselves to avoid assumptions?
2. Paul spoke to the Jews in Rome extensively. While some believed, many did not. He quoted Isaiah to them, showing that they had only an intellectual interest instead of a genuine interest in salvation. Our denomination has to be very cautious, as we lean towards this same direction. What can we, as a class, do to practice an active belief?
3. Paul had vigorous discussions with the Jewish leaders. What sort of benefit would we receive if we deliberately brought in speakers with whom we disagreed?