



## Summary Of The Book of Acts

### Introduction

Once we have read the OT, especially the messianic prophecies, and the four Gospel accounts, we have all the evidence about Jesus of Nazareth to know that he is the Son of God, the Son of David, the Messiah or Christ, and the Son of Man. In essence, in him we have the Capstone or Rock of our faith. In the Book of Acts, we now move on to an account of how the foundation of his church was laid and built upon that Rock.

The grain of wheat that died and fell to the ground has sprouted to produce a magnificent crop; a mustard seed that has produced the great tree that is the Kingdom of God.

This book, the second canonical work of Luke, has been called the Acts of the Apostles but we will simply refer to it as Acts. Church tradition and other historical documents show that the eleven original apostles all continued the work they had been trained to do, although the author of Acts focuses primarily on Peter and, in part, John. These men had gone from the insecure, timid apostles, who frequently failed to grasp what was being taught to them, and who had debated who among them would be the greatest, to becoming bold evangelists, true fishers of men, and a light to the world, just as Jesus commanded them to be.

The author resumes the account in Jerusalem, with Jesus giving some final instructions before his ascension into heaven. This was followed almost immediately by the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Word is preached in Jerusalem and the early church starts to blossom and spread, as the apostles and new disciples become the witnesses Jesus had trained and nurtured them to be. It seems likely that some of these new disciples, especially those who were drawn from the early church of 120 believers in Acts 1:15, were from the group of 72 disciples sent out on mission by Jesus in Luke Chapter 10.

The early church is established and there is great unity among all those who were joining this fast growing church, despite the persecutions and even martyrdom of Stephen and James.

We are introduced to Saul of Tarsus, who will have an encounter with the risen Christ, which would change his life forever, as he becomes the apostle Paul and travels far and wide to spread the Gospel of Christ, suffering much as he does so.

We also see the emergence of Jesus' half-brother James as a senior figure in the church in Jerusalem. One of his letters is included in the canon of scripture and he is seen to have apostolic authority.

As commanded by Jesus, the Gospel is preached in Jerusalem, Judæa, Samaria, and to the centre of the Roman Empire, where this part of the story concludes.

## Theme

In Acts, believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ among both Jews and Gentiles, and in doing this they establish the church. In addition to this, Acts explains how Christianity, although it is new, is in reality the one true faith, rooted in God's promises from the beginning of time - his providential plan. In the ancient world, it was important that a faith or religion should be shown to have stood the test of time. Thus Luke presents the church as the fulfilment and extension of God's promises.

## Purpose of the Book of Acts

Luke's stated purpose for both of his books is provided at the beginning of the first (Luke 1:1-4). He had an historian's interest in providing 'an orderly account' - 'of the things that have been fulfilled among us'. One would assume the latter statement applied both to the ministry of Jesus (Luke's Gospel), and to that of the early church (Acts). Dedicating the work to Theophilus, he wanted him to have 'certainty' for, and confidence in, what he had been taught. The exact nature of Luke's purpose depends on how one identifies Theophilus. He evidently had already been instructed in the Christian way and may have been a new convert or a seeker on the verge of commitment. Since Theophilus means 'lover of God', it is also possible that Luke is challenging the devotion of his readers rather than addressing his book to just one of them, although most hold Theophilus to be a real person.

Luke probably had a number of purposes for writing Acts. These are best determined through the emphases and themes found throughout the book.

## Chapter One

Luke writes to Theophilus and provides a summary of proof for the resurrection of Jesus, through his discourses with his disciples over a period of 40 days. During that time, Jesus gave encouragement and final instructions to his followers before ascending, in their presence, into heaven. Two angels appear to confirm that Jesus would return to earth in the same way that he had departed.

We are introduced to the embryonic church of 120 people, who had taken to meeting regularly in Jerusalem, to offer thanks to God and to enjoy fellowship with one another. On one such occasion they decided it was proper to replace Judas Iscariot, and they did so by drawing lots. This was not a form of gambling, but a way of ensuring this key post was fulfilled by a divinely approved candidate.

## Chapter Two

When the day of Pentecost came, the church was meeting in the upper room. Suddenly, a violent wind struck the house, displaying itself as if it were tongues of fire. The noise was so great that it attracted a great crowd from the surrounding area.

This wind was the Holy Spirit being poured out, in an abundant, stream upon all the disciples who immediately were enabled to proclaim the Gospel truth to the crowd in their own native languages, something that really grabbed their attention.

Peter then gave an excellent discourse, probably to those who spoke Aramaic, with the other disciples proclaiming the same message in other languages, explaining what this phenomenon was and what it meant for them.

Peter used a well-known Scripture from the prophet Joel to explain what had happened, and from Davidic Psalms to say why it had happened. He gave convincing proofs that Jesus was the Christ, that they, the people of Jerusalem, had been guilty by supporting the authorities in crucifying Jesus but that he had overcome death because God had raised him back to life, and

in accordance with the scriptures, he was now at the right hand of God, with authority over everything in heaven and on the earth.

He also let them know that, despite their guilt, salvation and forgiveness were still open to them through the risen Lord. Peter concluded his message by stating eternal salvation was not just for the Jews but for Gentiles too.

The men who heard this were convinced and cut to the heart at what they had done. They believed the message, repented of their sins and were baptised.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the early church, telling of their unity, generosity and genuine love for one another, through a determined effort to share all they had with each other. As a result, God grew the church.

### Chapter Three

This is a brief but highly relevant section in the work of the Apostles. Peter and John were working openly in the temple complex, just as Jesus had done a few weeks earlier. This was the domain of the Pharisees, chief priests and the Teachers of the Law. Thus they would be putting themselves in great personal danger by coming here to do their work.

On their arrival at the Beautiful Gate, Peter and John encountered a crippled man, who was begging - his only means of support. This would have been a fairly common site, not just in Jerusalem, but around the country and Jews would tend to be compassionate and fairly generous in their giving. It was their pious duty towards God.

However, on this occasion, Peter and John gave the man far more than he could ever have hoped or dreamed of. They proclaimed, quite openly and publically, that he was healed in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and so it was.

Just as with the sound of the violent wind at Pentecost, a crowd of people, who had gathered in the temple area for the afternoon prayers, were attracted to this miracle and amazed at what they saw, as this man was well known to them and had been an invalid for more than forty years.

Again, the miracle was used both to enable the Gospel to be proclaimed and to demonstrate its truth and authenticity. The first part of Peter's message opens up the wound; the second part offers a solution to heal it. Peter used this opportunity to prove, from scripture, that Jesus was the Christ that their generation was responsible for killing him, even if it was done in ignorance, but that they could still have repented and shared in the promise that had been handed down from Moses and all the subsequent prophets that followed him.

### Chapter Four

Following the healing of the lame man in the temple complex, and the subsequent proclamation of the Gospel to the crowd that had gathered as a result, which grew the church by a further 5,000 men, Peter and John were arrested by the priests and Captain of the Temple Guard. As it was late afternoon, they were placed in prison and brought before the Sanhedrin the following morning.

The Sanhedrin, with many, if not all, of the senior figures present, had the two apostles brought before them and quizzed them as to what authority, i.e. in whose name were they proclaiming resurrection from the dead, a topic that infuriated the majority Sadducean leadership of the Sanhedrin.

As Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit equipped the two men to speak boldly to the elders and leaders of their country, which amazed these men as Peter and John were only comparatively

uneducated, Galilæan fishermen. They spoke boldly that it was the power of Jesus that had healed the lame man as an act of kindness.

They went on to accuse the Jewish leaders of being responsible for the murder of the long awaited Christ by handing him over to the Roman authorities for crucifixion. This enraged the leaders but the proof of the miracle was evidence against them, and they could not punish Peter and John for fear of antagonising the people. Instead, they instructed the apostles to preach no more in the name of Jesus, an instruction Peter and John said they would not be able to comply with.

Peter and John then returned to their church to inform them what had occurred and to spend time in prayer, thanking God and asking for a fresh anointing to give them strength to continue in the work they were called to do. Their prayers were answered and the Holy Spirit once again came upon them in power.

The section concludes with an account of the unity of the church and the generous spirit that was upon believers who had land, property or other possession they could sell; making the money available to the apostles to distribute to those who had need. A man called Joseph is particularly highlighted to us. Also known as Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, he would become a significant figure in the early church.

## Chapter Five

If the church were a train then, at this time, it goes from its amazing express journey head-long into the buffers; all because hypocrisy had entered into it! It was not what Ananias and Sapphira gave or didn't give that was the issue; it was what they pretended to give that grieved the Holy Spirit. It is sad that some people feel the need to try to raise their own profile in the church in this way, by pretending to give more than they do, pretending to speak in tongues, or to show off other gifts they have not been given, pretending to be slain in the spirit to impress others, or pretending they are serving out of a heart for God and others, rather than for their own gratification. Such people are mocking God and the dangers of doing so are evident in this story. But the tares will be in the wheat until harvest.

This sad tale does, however, hold out hope for the church, as it brought reverent fear to those in the church, and made those outside take note as well.

The apostles were greatly empowered, and worked openly in the temple and other parts of the city. The Holy Spirit performed many healing miracles and people started to gather in large numbers, not just from the city but from the surrounding towns and villages as well. The church continued to grow and prosper because of the Name.

The success of the church and its powerful message filled the religious leaders with jealousy and they had all the apostles arrested and put in prison. But man cannot counter God and an angel was sent to release them; not to set them free but to give them further opportunities to 'Tell of this Life' to all the people in the temple area who would listen.

The men were brought back in before the Sanhedrin but not for a fair trial, as the Jewish leaders only wanted one outcome - the death penalty. However, the great Pharisaic teacher Gamaliel was a voice of reason and he advised his peers not to act hastily but, citing historic precedence, to wait and see if this teaching was of human origin, in which case it would fail. If, on the other hand, it were from God, which of course it is, then the Jews could not prevail against it.

They had the apostles severely flogged and ordered them not to teach any more in the name of Jesus. Again, Peter explained that they could not comply as this would be against the commands of God. The men left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing at having been considered worthy to suffer for the glory of their beloved Lord.

## Chapter Six

We see here an example that could have brought disharmony to the church, but what we see and can learn from it, is not the problem that had arisen, but how the apostles and church leaders found and implemented an appropriate solution.

The chapter starts on a note of potential conflict between the native Jews and those who had come to Jerusalem from various Greek-speaking countries. The problem was that, probably due to language difficulties, the poor among the Greek-speaking Jews were overlooked in the daily distribution of food and other basic necessities.

The apostles did not feel they were best equipped to deal with the issue, as their calling was to continue teaching the Word of God and to spending time in intercessory prayer for the growing church. Therefore, they had the church appoint seven God-gifted and Spirit-filled men, from among the Greek-speaking Jews, to deal with these issues.

One of the seven, Stephen, was also gifted in teaching and the Holy Spirit produced many miracles through him. He came into conflict with some of the Greek-speaking Jews, who opposed the faith and they made false accusations of blasphemy against Stephen, who was then arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin to face trial.

## Chapter Seven

When the Lord Protector of England, Oliver Cromwell, was outlining the education he thought necessary for his son Richard, he said: 'I would have him know a little history'. It was to the lesson of history that Stephen appealed, clearly believing that the best form of defence was attack, he took a 'bird's-eye' view of the history of the Jewish people and cited certain truths as condemnation of his own nation. They were clearly shocked and surprised at just how much of God's activities took place outside of the Promised Land.

Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin, falsely charged with blaspheming against Moses (the Law) and against God (the temple). He would show that it was the religious leaders who were actually the guilty ones.

He gave an extended and detailed summary of Israel's history from the time that Abraham was first called out of the land of Mesopotamia, through Israel's time of slavery in Egypt and wandering in the wilderness, their arrival in the Promised Land up until the time of David and Solomon, who was the one who built the temple for God.

Stephen's purpose was to show that God never intended the Law to last forever, especially the ceremonial law, but that it was a pointer to the coming of the Christ, who would be the one to establish the eternal kingdom. Also, he showed that God did not need a special building, i.e. the Jerusalem temple, a special land, i.e. Canaan or even a particular people, i.e. the Hebrews, as he never intended to restrict salvation to such a narrow selection but to offer it to the whole world. Although he had chosen the Jews to be a special people through covenant promises, the Jews had forfeited many of the privileges he had given them but he had and would never abandon them.

Finally, Stephen linked his discourse to the present time, showing that the failings of the religious leaders from the past was reflected in them, as they had killed the Righteous One of God, Jesus the Christ, who had been long promised by the prophets, whom their fathers had persecuted and killed for such proclamations.

This angered the Jewish authorities, who then took him outside and stoned him to death, whether legally or not is disputed. Stephen had a vision of Jesus in heaven and died with words of prayer on his lips, both for himself and for his killers. The passage introduces a young man named Saul who would continue to persecute the church until his encounter with the risen Lord on the Damascus Road.

## Chapter Eight

Verse 1a, although part of Chapter Eight, has already been covered and involved Saul's role in the execution of Stephen; an event which precipitated a wide-spread persecution of the church that saw most of the disciples, but not the apostles, dispersed from Jerusalem. But they did not run and hide. Instead, they travelled throughout Judæa and Samaria, preaching the Gospel message in fulfilment of the Lord's instructions recorded in Acts 1:8.

One of the seven chosen to support the Hellenistic widows in Jerusalem, the evangelist Philip, travelled into Samaria and the Lord used him magnificently, and many of the Samaritans believed the Gospel and were baptised.

Philip encountered a magician, Simon Magus, who was so impressed with the work and wonders Philip was doing that he too became a disciple.

Due to the successes of his ministry, the church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to give apostolic oversight to the work and to ensure that the correct message was being preached. They found it to be so and they baptised believers with the Holy Spirit.

While they were there, Simon Magus requested they sell him the gifts of the spirit, so that he could perform the wonders and signs himself. Peter strongly rebuked him, indicating the wrath of God that would come upon him if he did not repent of his ways.

An angel appeared to Philip and instructed him to travel south, to the road that leads to Egypt, where he encountered a God-fearing Ethiopian, who had been to Jerusalem to worship God. Philip was instructed by the Spirit to come up beside the man, and he heard him reading from Isaiah Chapter 53, which states the Christ must suffer. Philip explained the scripture to the man and, using other scriptures, told him about Jesus.

At that time they came to a rare watering hole on the journey and the Ethiopian was baptised. The Spirit immediately took Philip away to leave the Ethiopian to travel on home, his heart filled with joy.

Philip turned up at Azotus on the Mediterranean Sea coast, where he proclaimed the Gospel and eventually settled.

## Chapter Nine

The church's persecutor-in-chief received authority from the High Priest to travel to Damascus to arrest any Christians that he could find there, to bring them back to face trial. On his journey the Risen Lord Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light that left him totally blind. During this encounter, Jesus made it clear that he was the object of Saul's persecution.

After this encounter, Saul's companions, who witnessed the light but could not understand the sound of Jesus' voice, led him into Damascus, where he remained alone and blind for three days.

Jesus appeared to a local convert called Ananias and instructed him to go to Saul with a message of all that Saul was now required to do in taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. After a moment of apprehension, Ananias complied, went to Saul, prayed for him and he instantly regained his sight. Saul was baptised and started to preach the Gospel to the Jews and Gentiles in Damascus.

The Jews, with the help of the local governor, hatched a plot to kill Saul and so his companions helped him to escape from the city.

Some time later Saul arrived in Jerusalem, where Barnabas introduced him to Peter and James. He stayed there for about two weeks before the Hellenised Jews tried to kill him so he was instructed to go to Cæsarea and from there to his home city of Tarsus, in Cilicia.

The focus then shifts to Peter, who had left Jerusalem and travelled towards the Mediterranean Sea coast, where he healed a Paralytic called Aeneas in Lydda. He was then called to nearby Joppa, where a woman named Tabitha had died and Peter was used by the Holy Spirit to raise her back to life.

These two miracles were once again used to help in the spreading of the Gospel message and many of the local inhabitants from that region came to faith.

Peter remained in Joppa, in the house of a tanner called Simon.

## Chapter Ten

The conversion of a Gentile soldier, with his relatives and close friends, is the longest narrative in Acts. The importance of the story is highlighted through repetition. The visions of Cornelius and Peter are repeated several times, and in Acts 11:1-18 is a detailed retelling of the events of Chapter 10. The incident put Peter at the centre of the mission to the Gentiles.

The account starts at the house of a Gentile, God-fearing Roman Centurion, named Cornelius, who was based in Cæsarea. He was visited by an angel, who acknowledged the centurion's prayers to God and gifts to the poor. The angel gave a detailed instruction of the location of the apostle Peter and instructed Cornelius to send for Peter to come to Cæsarea. Cornelius immediately complied and sent three of his men to Joppa, where Peter was staying with Simon the Tanner, following the resurrection of Tabitha (Chapter 9).

While waiting for his lunch to be prepared, Peter went up onto the roof of the house to pray and had a vision of all kinds of animals, reptiles and birds being lowered down in a sheet from heaven. He was instructed three times to 'kill and eat', which would be contrary to Jewish dietary laws so Peter declined, but the voice from heaven instructed him that nothing God has made clean can be called unclean.

Just then, the three men from Cæsarea arrived and the Holy Spirit instructed Peter to go with them. Peter welcomed them into Simon's house as guests, something unheard of for a Jew, and then travelled with them to Cæsarea the following day.

On arrival at Cornelius' house, Peter was apprised of everything the angel had instructed Cornelius to do and then Peter started to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to Cornelius and his household, friends and family, who were gathered with him. All of them were Gentiles.

Peter's Gospel account was cut short by the Holy Spirit, who descended on the Gentiles, imparted his gifts on them and they immediately started to speak in tongues. This amazed the Jewish converts who had travelled from Joppa with Peter. At this, Peter instructed them to baptise these new believers with water.

Following their conversion, Peter agreed to stay for several days, probably living in the same house and sharing fellowship meals with these Gentiles; thus showing full acceptance of them into the church of Christ.

## Chapter Eleven

We should not dismiss the significance of the event described at the end of Chapter 10 and here in vv.1-18. For those who were Gentile sinners were in the dark, living in complete hopelessness until this moment shone a bright light into their lives forever. Such historic occasions should be sources of great joy and thanksgiving for all of us who have subsequently benefitted. Firstly, our

praise goes to God and then our thanks to the faithful disciples, who were the vehicles God used to make it all happen.

Having stayed with Cornelius for several days, no doubt explaining the Gospel to a captive audience of Gentiles, Peter returned to Jerusalem to inform the church leaders there what had occurred. Initially, he met with opposition as the conservative believers were horrified that Peter had even associated closely with uncircumcised men. But after Peter had explained the full reality of what God had done, they came to realise the full truth of the Gospel message and praised God for his amazing grace.

The story then moves to the growing church in Antioch, where God was clearly building a strong community. When the apostles and elders in Jerusalem heard of the work that was occurring in Antioch, they sent Barnabas there to verify and authenticate the work of the disciples. He found the church there to be very healthy.

Barnabas then travelled to Tarsus and persuaded Saul to accompany him back to Antioch, where the two of them worked successfully for at least a year. During this time, some prophets came from Jerusalem and one of them, Agabus, told of a severe famine that would strike the region. In response to this, the church organised collections in their region and would have Paul and Barnabas take it to Jerusalem to ease the suffering of the poor in that area.

## Chapter Twelve

The chapter opens with a brief account of the martyrdom of the first apostle, James the brother of John, who had been a fisherman in Galilee when the Lord Jesus had called him to service. The man responsible for his death was King Herod Agrippa I and he appeared to do so for no other reason than to please the local population of Jews.

Having achieved this objective, Agrippa then had the apostle Peter arrested with the same intended outcome in mind. But it was the time of Passover, an eight day holy festival, and it would not have been appropriate to hold an execution during this time, so Peter was put in prison and heavily guarded.

The church held a prayer vigil throughout this time, God clearly heard their prayer and sent an angel, who miraculously freed Peter from the chains that bound him and led him out of the prison, past armed guards and through locked doors, into the streets of Jerusalem. Up until this point, Peter thought he was dreaming, but when the angel left him he realised his situation and went to his church to tell them what had happened. After this, he left and went into hiding for a while to escape the clutches of King Agrippa.

King Agrippa was fuming at the loss of this prize prisoner and had the city thoroughly searched. When he could not find Peter, he had the sixteen guards executed instead.

Agrippa then left Jerusalem and went to Cæsarea to hold discussions with leaders from the cities of Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia. Judæa supplied much of the grain to feed the populations of these cities and Agrippa was in dispute with these leaders, threatening not to supply food and thus condemning thousands of people to starve.

The leaders had managed to befriend Blastus, a key official of the king. When the king sat before them, dressed in regal splendour, the listeners proclaimed him to be a god. Despite worshipping as a Jew, he accepted their acclaim to his deity and an angel of the Lord struck him down in painful death.

Saul and Barnabas, who had been in Judæa delivering the offerings of the Antioch church to their poor brothers in Jerusalem, completed their mission and returned to Antioch.

## Chapter Thirteen

The first section concludes the account of the activities of the church at Antioch. Saul and Barnabas had returned from their humanitarian mission to Jerusalem and, after giving a brief account of some of the gifted men in the church, Luke tells how Jesus instructed them to send out Saul and Barnabas, along with Barnabas' nephew John Mark, into a wider and new mission field.

The first part of their journey took them to Barnabas' native Cyprus. They travelled the full length of the island. Although we are given few details of their work, we do know they taught in the Jewish synagogues, until they reached the western end of the island. In Paphos, they met with the Roman proconsul, the senior official on the island, who had a Jewish sorcerer as an aid. The proconsul, possibly a proselyte but clearly a man who was interested in God had a Jew named Elymas as his aid and advisor in such matters. Elymas was as sorcerer and had been misleading the proconsul.

Saul, now called Paul, through the Holy Spirit, recognised the wickedness of Elymas and called out for him to be struck blind, which he immediately was. This miraculous action opened the proconsul's heart and he came to believe in Jesus.

After this, they sailed for Pamphylia, in modern day Turkey, where Mark left them to return to Jerusalem. Travelling inland to Pisidian Antioch, they immediately started teaching in the synagogue. Paul gave a lengthy speech on the history of how God had raised up leaders for his chosen people, from the time of Moses to King David, and how he had promised a king, who would be of the line of David, who would rule them forever. This, he claimed from the same scriptures, was Jesus, who is the Christ. Many Jews, and especially the Gentiles there, believed their message and came to faith but even more of the Jews opposed their message.

The following week, the whole city turned out to hear Paul again and this enraged the Jews further through jealousy. Due to this opposition, Paul announced that he would focus his time and efforts on those Gentiles who wanted to come to salvation and so he did. The Jews then stirred up further opposition to Paul and Barnabas but the number of disciples continued to grow and they were full of joy.

The opposition in Pisidian Antioch grew so fierce from the Jews and some of the prominent Gentile men and women, who were also God-fearers from the synagogue, that Paul and Barnabas were expelled from the city and so they travelled on to Iconium.

## Chapter Fourteen

We left Paul and Barnabas being expelled by jealous Jews from the city of Pisidian Antioch, where they had established a strong church base, with the majority of its members being Gentiles, and were then heading for the city of Iconium.

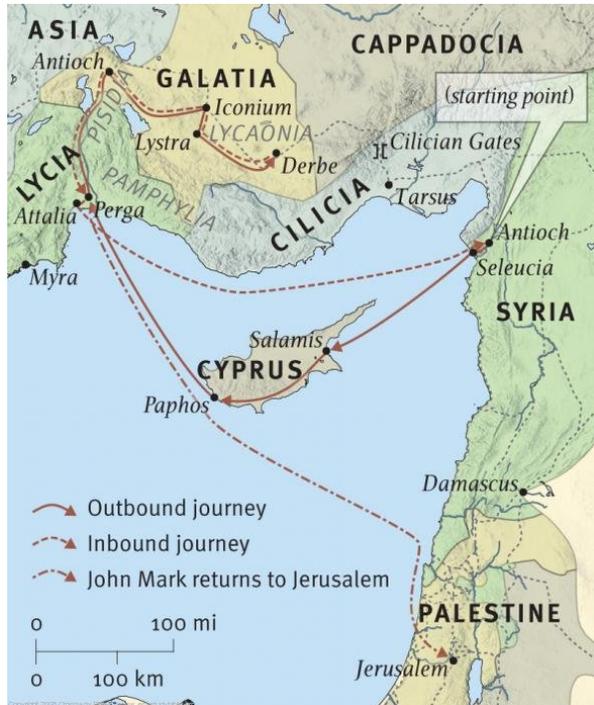
In Iconium we see the familiar pattern of Paul's journey. They went to the synagogue on the Sabbath to speak to the Jews and God-fearers first; their audience was polarised between those who accepted the message and those who rejected it outright. The former group started to build the church, while the latter tried to destroy it. When a plot to harm them by both Gentiles and Jews was discovered, they moved on to the Lycaonian city of Lystra.

There was no synagogue in Lystra so it appears that they took to the streets to proclaim the Gospel. Paul encountered a man who had been crippled from birth and identified that he had faith to be healed. Paul simply said to him, 'Stand up on your feet', which the man immediately did.

This caused great delight and amazement among the population, but they had misunderstood what had happened and believed Paul and Barnabas to be Hermes and Zeus respectively, who had come down to them in human form. As this was proclaimed in the local language, the

apostles did not at first know what was happening but when the local idolatrous priest tried to sacrifice an animal to Paul and Barnabas, they realised what was going on, tore their clothes and identified themselves as mere mortals, proclaiming it was God who created everything and not their idols.

The map details the journey undertaken by Paul and Barnabas. John Mark travelled with them throughout their time in Cyprus but left them as soon as they reached Perga on the mainland, to return to Jerusalem.



Jews, who opposed the faith, had travelled from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, with the express purpose of harming Paul. They incited the crowd against the apostles and, as a result, they stoned Paul and took him outside of the city, believing they had killed him. But Paul miraculously survived and went back into the city that same night before leaving for Derbe the next day.

They preached successfully in Derbe before retracing their steps, checking on the churches they had established and appointing elders to oversee them. This was an extremely courageous thing to do, given the opposition, mistreatment and death threats they had consistently received. They then sailed back to Syria and arrived in Antioch to report to their home church all that had occurred on their journey. They then stayed in Antioch for some time.

## Chapter Fifteen

The peace of the Antioch church was shattered by conservative Jewish Christians, probably of the Pharisaic tradition or perhaps priestly descendents of Aaron, who had travelled to Antioch and started proclaiming to the Gentile converts that they cannot be saved unless they also observed the Law of Moses. Although Paul, Barnabas and others strongly contested this with them, it caused a great deal of unrest and so it was decided to send Paul and Barnabas to the church in Jerusalem to resolve the issue.

A meeting, which later became known as the Jerusalem Council, was attended by elders, apostles and other church leaders. The issues were fully debated, with each side having the chance to put their case. Peter spoke strongly of his experience with Gentiles at Cornelius' house, a decade or so earlier, and how the Holy Spirit had been poured out on Gentiles, with no attempt made to Judaize the Gentiles first. The church in Jerusalem fully supported this at the time. Paul defended Peter, then he and Barnabas gave a briefly reported description of all they had seen, both at Antioch and during their recent missionary journey through many Gentile regions.

Probably after further debate, the apostle James, the younger brother of the Lord, proposed a solution that was fully accepted by the church, and which should not offend Jewish Christians, but would also place no unnecessary burden on Gentile Christians either. A letter was written recommending Gentile churches to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, blood products in their food and from sexual immorality.

Two men from the Jerusalem church, Judas and Silas, were chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to deliver the letter to the Gentile churches there and further afield,

probably through copies made at Antioch to be delivered onward by local men. This letter was received with great joy at Antioch, helping to heal any wounds and forming a bond between the two sister churches.

After a while, Paul proposed a second missionary journey to revisit the churches they had planted on their first journey, and he invited Barnabas to again accompany him. Barnabas agreed but wanted to take his nephew John Mark with them. But Mark had left them part way through the last journey and Paul felt it inappropriate to take him along. This was the cause of a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, who took Mark with him and sailed to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas and headed, on foot, for Derbe on the start of another epic adventure.

## Chapter Sixteen



The map indicates the route taken by Paul and his companions on their second missionary journey, which took the Gospel into Europe for the first time. Although dates cannot be certain, this journey occurred circa AD49-52.

Having departed Antioch in Syria, Paul and Silas travelled into Cilicia, through the Gülek Pass, or Cilician Gates, over the Taurus Mountains into Cappadocia, before arriving in Derbe and then Lystra. Here they were joined by a young disciple named Timothy, who would become a faithful companion for the remainder of Paul's life.

Although Paul would normally speak passionately against circumcising new believers, Timothy was the son of a Jewess and his family situation was well known in the region, so Paul had Timothy circumcised in order to make him acceptable to any Jews they encountered on their journeys, thus ensuring this did not become an issue of contention with opponents or a barrier for Jews who wanted to come to faith.

They travelled generally northwest across modern central Turkey, stopping in some places but being guided by the Spirit to avoid others. Eventually, they reached Troas on the Aegean coast, where Paul received a vision of a man of Macedonia, who asked the evangelists to come over to bring the word to them.

Immediately, Paul and his team set out by sea across the Aegean, arriving in its principle city, Philippi. There was no synagogue in Philippi but after several days, on the Sabbath, Paul encountered a group of women, probably God-fearers, who were holding a worship meeting by the river outside of the city. Paul and the disciples spoke with the women and many of them, including their leading lady, came to faith. Their leader, called Lydia, was a wealthy woman and offered to accommodate the whole group, and her whole household came to faith.

One day, when they were on their way to pray, Paul encountered a demon-possessed slave girl, who had the power to predict the future. She had been following the group for several days, making a scene about their ministry, apparently quite factually as the spirit who possessed her recognised the Holy Spirit's power in the apostolic group. Paul eventually lost patience and commanded the spirit to leave the girl in the name of Jesus, an instruction it immediately complied with.

This upset the girl's owners, who had made a good living out of her spirit-possession, so they roused a mob against Paul and Silas. They were taken before the magistrates, who had them severely beaten and put in prison.

Paul and Silas found themselves in a dire situation yet, around midnight, they were still praising God and singing hymns, which had the attention of the prisoners. The prison was suddenly struck by an earthquake, the prisoners' chains were broken and the prison doors opened by the force of it.

The jailer awoke, feared all the prisoners had escaped and, as this would cost him his life at the hands of the magistrates, he was going to commit suicide. But the prisoners had not left the prison, and Paul called out to the jailer not to harm himself. The jailer then went into the prison and saw for himself what had happened, recognised the hand of God in it all and asked the two men to help him come to faith.

Paul and Silas spent the rest of the night with the jailer and his family, having their wounds tended to. They baptised the jailer and his household, sharing and explaining the Gospel message with them all.

The next day, the magistrates sent word for Paul and Silas to be released, hoping they would leave Philippi quietly, but Paul revealed that the two of them were Roman citizens, thus the magistrates had transgressed Roman law and could themselves face trial for not giving Paul and Silas a fair hearing and treating them so harshly without a conviction against them. So the magistrates, out of fear, came personally, requesting Paul and Silas accompany them out of the city. They did so, stopping at Lydia's house first to say goodbye to the church, thus ensuring they left Philippi with their heads held high.

## Chapter Seventeen

Having left Philippi, Paul, Silas and Timothy headed generally southwest through Macedonia, coming to the major city of Thessalonica by way of Amphipolis and Apollonia.

Thessalonica had a thriving Jewish community and Paul followed his standard pattern of taking the Gospel to the Jews first, speaking boldly and passionately in their synagogue on three Sabbath days, proving, from scripture, that Jesus was the Christ. His work was successful with some Jews and many God-fearing Greek men and women coming to faith. But, as we have seen in Jerusalem, Pisidian Antioch and elsewhere, many Jews, fearful of their own wealth and status in the community, opposed the ministry team and the Gospel.

The Jews raised a mob and started a riot in the city. They went to the house of Jason, where Paul was thought to be staying. Not finding him there, they dragged Jason out instead and took him to the authorities, making up charges that they were defying Cæsar and causing trouble everywhere they went. The authorities took a financial surety from Jason and the others against there being any further trouble caused by Paul's teaching. Therefore, Paul and his companions had to leave, as the Jews would continue to oppose him; thus Jason and others would lose a significant amount of money.

Paul's group travelled on to Berea, where the local Jews were much more willing to hear the message and to search the scriptures in response, in order to validate Paul's claims. This time many of the Jews, as well as Greek men and women, came to faith. When the Thessalonian Jews heard about this, they travelled to Berea, stirred up the crowds there, and forced Paul to leave. But Timothy and Silas remained to continue the work as the focus of the antagonism by the Jews was against Paul.

Some of the Berean brothers took Paul to the coast. From there, he travelled either by ship or by road to Athens, where he would work alone for a short period of time before travelling on to Corinth in nearby Achaia.

Paul's spirit was stirred and he became extremely concerned as he saw the level of idolatry in Athens. Initially, he spoke publically in the city, mostly in the market places, but then he had the opportunity to speak to the prominent and powerful Areopagus, a group who controlled many aspects of life in Athens. They were mainly philosophers.

Paul produced a remarkable message showing how futile idolatry is and that everything, including humans, are made by a single God. This God had also brought Jesus into the world to teach us how we should seek God and turn to him for the forgiveness of our sins. He gave conclusive proof of his authenticity by raising Jesus from the dead, after the Jewish Religious leaders and Romans had killed him.

Some of his listeners dismissed the message outright, some wanted to hear Paul again, and some came to believe in Jesus, including one of the Areopagus' judges, Dionysius.

## Chapter Eighteen

After Paul's relatively short stay in Athens, he went further west to Corinth, the main city of Achaia, where he would build a thriving church in the 18 months or so of his stay.

He met two Jews, Aquila and his wife Priscilla, who had been recently expelled from Rome due to Claudius' edict against the Jews. It seems they were already converts to the faith when Paul met them. They were fellow tentmakers with Paul, and would become close companions of his as well.

Timothy and Silas re-joined Paul in Corinth from their recent visits to Macedonia, reporting that the churches there were doing well, despite the persecution they faced. Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians during the early part of his time in Corinth.

The pattern was now emerging that Paul went first to the synagogue, where some Jews and proselytes believed, including the synagogue ruler and his family, but most opposed Paul's message, so he moved to the private house next door, and proclaimed the Gospel on a daily basis, drawing many Greeks and some more Jews to the faith.

However, most Jews continued to oppose Paul and they brought charges against him before the Roman proconsul Gallio, who dismissed the case without even hearing Paul's defence, as he judged it to be a matter of Jewish law and not an issue for the Roman legal system to take any interest in.

Paul left Corinth, heading for Syria, accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla. They stopped off at Ephesus, where Paul taught in the synagogue for a short while before continuing his journey, saying he would return if it was God's will, which it was, as Paul would spend three years or so there on his next missionary journey.

Aquila and Priscilla remained behind to build the ministry in Ephesus, but Paul continued his journey, going probably via Jerusalem to greet the church there, before returning to his sponsoring church in Syrian Antioch, where he arrived probably by the autumn of AD51.

The following spring (AD52), he set out again overland on his third missionary journey, visiting the churches he had established on his previous visits, reaching as far as Galatia and Phrygia. He would then continue west to arrive in Asia as reported in the next chapter.

Meanwhile, an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos arrived in Ephesus and started proclaiming the word of the Lord boldly in the synagogue, but he knew only John's baptism, so Priscilla and Aquila invited him to stay with them, to teach him more effectively about Jesus and the resurrection. After this, he travelled to Corinth, with letters of recommendation from Ephesus and had an effective ministry there, enhancing the work established by Paul.

## Chapter Nineteen

The last chapter saw Paul heading overland from Syrian Antioch towards Ephesus, where he had left Aquila and Priscilla the previous year. In the meantime, a gifted Alexandrian Jew named Apollos had been adequately taught by Aquila and Priscilla, and had them moved on to successfully teach in Corinth.

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he immediately encountered a group of a dozen or so disciples who knew only the Baptism of John, so Paul instructed them in the ways of Jesus, laid hands on them and they immediately received the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and prophesying, an outward indication that the Spirit now indwelt them.

As usual, Paul went first to the synagogue, where he had been well received on his previous but brief visit. He taught effectively in the synagogue for three months, but some of the Jews became abusive and so Paul relocated in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, where he could teach daily to both Jews and Greeks.

God produced many miracles in Ephesus through Paul, especially healing the sick and driving out evil spirits, which allowed many others to believe the message and come to faith.

There were some Jewish exorcists who practised their mystical arts and they tried to drive out spirits in the name of Jesus and Paul. On one occasion, seven sons of Sceva tried this and the spirit ended up giving them a beating, which had a profound impact on the local people, who themselves dabbled in sorcery and witchcraft, so they came to faith as they realised only God could save them from the Devil's arts. As a result, they burnt many of their own mystical objects and books.

The silversmiths and related tradesmen made a great deal of money by crafting and selling objects, related to the goddess Artemis, to pagan worshippers, who came to Ephesus from all around the region. Paul's teaching was having an adverse affect on their business, as people turned away from idolatry to worship the one true God. One of the silversmiths, Demetrius, rounded up a group of tradesmen and other interested parties, stirred them up into a riotous mob, then went into the main theatre, protesting noisily and illegally against Paul, and the message he proclaimed. Eventually the city clerk persuaded them to disband as Paul had not broken any laws, or spoken improperly against the goddess. He advised them that if they had any complaints, the proper procedure would be to lay charges against Paul before the proconsul, as the Jews had tried to do in Corinth. He dismissed the assembly before they came to the attention of the Roman army, who may have otherwise intervened.

## Chapter Twenty

Following three years of mostly fruitful mission in Ephesus, which saw not just the city churches grow but many more in the province of Asia, Paul set off to visit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, intending to collect the substantial offerings made by the churches in those provinces, in order to take the money for the poor in Jerusalem. Paul departed soon after the riots in Ephesus, but he had planned to go before they had started. Even if his 'fighting with beasts in Ephesus' comment in 1 Corinthians 15:32 refers to this incident, it was not the cause of his departure.

Paul initially headed north, probably to Troas, before crossing over to Macedonia, visiting the churches there and being joined by Titus, who had come up from Corinth. He then headed south and spent three months in Corinth. He had intended sailing directly from Achaia to Syria but another plot by the Jews forced a change of plans and he again headed for Macedonia, where he stayed for Passover. He then crossed the Aegean Sea to Troas.

Paul spent a week in Troas, and on his last night there he hosted a large gathering in a room on the third floor of the building. A young man named Eutychus had chosen to sit by an open

window and then fell asleep. He toppled out of the window, fell to the ground and was killed. Paul went down to him, laid on him and the Holy Spirit restored Eutychus back to life, totally unharmed.

The disciples departed the next morning by ship but Paul decided to walk to Assos, where he joined the ship before continuing the journey. Having spent 3 years in Ephesus, Paul knew that if he called in there, it would be difficult to make a quick exit, as many people would want to meet with him. So he sailed past there and stopped at Miletus instead, sent for the Ephesian elders and held a final meeting there. Paul's discourse in Miletus is the only example in Acts of him speaking to a purely Christian congregation and it reads more like one of his epistles than the other speeches he made that are recorded in Acts. It was a very emotional meeting with people who had become good friends of Paul. He was clearly loved and respected, and many knew this would probably be the last time they would ever see him. They sailed the next morning for Syria.

## Chapter Twenty One

Paul's group and their friends from Ephesus found parting very difficult, particularly as the Ephesians believed they would never see Paul again. Then Paul's group made their way by ship through the islands from Miletus to Patara, the chief port of Lycia, where they boarded a larger ship that could take them directly to Syria.

They arrived in the main port of Tyre, where they stayed with the church for a week. The church had the gift of prophecy, and they warned Paul of what awaited him in Jerusalem pleading with him not to go. But Paul already knew what was in store for him, through the Spirit, but it was his duty and his destiny in Christ, so they left Tyre and called in at the next port of Ptolemais. There they met with the church for the day, before continuing on to their final port of Cæsarea, where they stayed with the evangelist Philip and his family.

During Paul's time there, the prophet Agabus came down from Judæa and, with the aid of Paul's own belt, he prophesied what was in store for Paul at Jerusalem. Again, he was advised strongly not to go but rather forcefully told them he must go. They then travelled to Jerusalem and stayed with a disciple called Mnason.

Paul received a warm welcome in Jerusalem and the following day he met with James and the church elders to report all that had happened in the last six years or so since he was last with them. He emphasised what God was doing to extend his Kingdom through the Gentiles. They all praised God for this and in return informed Paul of how many Jews had now come to faith in and around Jerusalem. However, these believing Jews had heard reports about Paul that concerned them. In order to show that he was not speaking out against their heritage and traditions, they suggested Paul should publically undergo purification rites, part of the ceremonial law, and pay the cost for four other young men as well, which would prove his sincerity toward Judaism. Paul agreed.

On the seventh and final day of his purification, Paul went to the inner temple courts to offer sacrifices as part of these rites. Jews from Ephesus recognised Paul and had seen him earlier in the city with Trophimus, who was not a Jew. They immediately pounced on Paul, requesting local Jews to help them, claiming that Paul had stirred up people against the Jews and had brought a Greek into the inner temple. The mob grabbed Paul, dragged him outside of the temple, had the inner court gates locked, and began to beat Paul, intending to kill him. The Roman commander immediately intervened to stop the riot and arrested Paul, more because he was seen as the cause of the commotion than for his personal safety. They chained Paul to two guards and headed for the fortress. As Paul was about to be taken inside, he requested that the Roman commander should give him leave to address the crowd that were still baying for his blood. The commander acceded to his request.



The route of Paul's third missionary journey

## Chapter Twenty Two

In the last chapter, Paul had been dragged out of the synagogue and beaten by a mob of angry Jews, who had falsely accused Paul of defiling the temple by bringing a Greek to the inner courts. Paul was rescued and arrested by the Romans. As he was being taken into the Antonia Fortress, the Roman barracks, Paul requested the Roman Commander give him leave to speak to the crowd.

As Paul started to speak to them in Aramaic, the crowd fell silent and gave him their full attention. Paul explained to them that, as a Pharisee, he was a devout and zealous, if perhaps bigoted, Jew. He was born in Tarsus in Cilicia but had moved to Jerusalem, and was trained by the renowned Pharisaic teacher Gamaliel. He told them of his obsession in seeking out any followers of Jesus in order to arrest them and to see them killed, if necessary. This included both men and women.

While on his way to Damascus, with the authority of the chief priests, he was blinded by a brilliant light, which was the glory of God. This was the risen Lord Jesus himself, who then accused Paul of persecuting him personally by persecuting his church. Paul was then instructed to continue into Damascus, where, after three days, a devout Jewish convert named Ananias came to him. He healed Paul through the Holy Spirit of his blindness, baptised him and then Paul received instruction on what he was to do.

On his return to Jerusalem, he received a vision of the Lord in the temple, who told him that the Jews would not accept Paul's testimony and that he was to leave the city. Paul initially protested, saying that the people knew what he had done, even giving approval for Stephen to be executed. The Lord told him to go and be an apostle to the Gentiles.

On hearing him mention the Gentiles, the Jewish mob again erupted, so the Roman commander took Paul inside the prison and ordered that he be flogged, so they could get the truth out of him. Paul then told the centurion that he was a Roman citizen and, as he had not been tried and convicted of any offence, his treatment was itself illegal. The centurion told this to the commander, who came to find out if Paul's claims were true. The commander had had to purchase his own citizenship at a high price, but Paul told him that he had been born a citizen. The commander then had Paul's chains removed but kept him in custody overnight, probably for his own safety, intending to take him before the Sanhedrin the following day. The next morning the commander instructed the Sanhedrin to gather, ready to try Paul's case in his presence.

### Chapter Twenty Three

Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin by the Roman commander Lysias, in the hope that he would have this matter resolved to the satisfaction of all. Paul boldly and confidently stated his innocence and clear conscience of all the matters they had raised against him. This apparently angered the high priest Ananias, who ordered Paul to be struck in the face, contrary to Jewish law. Paul challenged him over his actions and then showed some contrition toward the office rather than the man, for the sake of appeasing the Sanhedrin.

Knowing that the Sanhedrin was a mix of Sadducees and Pharisees, and that the former did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, then Paul, a Pharisee himself, let it be known that the main charge against him was his proclamation of the resurrection. This was a viewpoint strongly held by all Pharisees and a fierce debate then erupted between the two groups, with the entire Sanhedrin in uproar. Fearing for Paul's safety, the Roman commander had him extracted and taken back to the fortress.

More than forty zealous Jews then sought permission of the chief priests and elders to assassinate Paul. Part of the plan was to get the leaders to request Paul's further appearance before them, and the forty or so men would kill him as he was brought out of the prison. Paul's nephew heard of the plot, went to the prison and told Paul, who instructed his nephew to tell the commander as well.

On hearing of the plot, the commander wrote a letter to Governor Felix in Cæsarea, and instructed a large force of his men to take Paul to the Governor that very night, where he would be safe from the mob that planned his death, and as a way of ridding himself of the problem. Paul was taken to Cæsarea under strong military guard, handed over to the Governor, who bound him over in Herod's palace, where he was to await trial before Felix.

### Chapter Twenty Four

Five days after Paul's arrival in Cæsarea, the high priest, Jewish elders, the lawyer Tertullus, and others arrived to bring charges against Paul in the court of Governor Felix. After an exhibition of servile compliance by the lawyer toward Felix, he laid three main charges against Paul: the first was that he was the cause of sedition across the whole city of Jerusalem, which was something the Roman's would take very seriously; and the second was being a ringleader of the Christian's, something that had been shown in other Roman courts not to contravene Roman law; and thirdly, bringing disrepute to the temple, of great importance to the Jewish nation but of little interest to their Roman occupiers.

Paul was then allowed to give his defence, which he was content to do in Cæsar's court as a Roman citizen, although it is likely he would have preferred it if he could have had a fair trial before the Sanhedrin, which was not possible due to their hard-heartedness in this matter. He again stood before the court and God with a clear conscience that he had performed his duties, both as a follower of Jesus and a Pharisaic Jew, to the best of his ability. He was easily able to refute the charges he faced; clearly stating they would have no proof to offer on any charge. He did, however, freely admit to the second charge as being a dedicated follower of Jesus, noting

they referred to it as a sect, but that he determined it to be the fulfilment of the hope of Israel.

Paul was outlining his true reason for coming to Jerusalem after an absence of several years, explaining that his short time in the country made it impossible for him to raise sedition in the city. In fact, he had brought an offering for the poor, and had undergone purification rites in the temple, showing proper deference to the Jewish tradition in doing so. At this point he realised that the true accusers, the Asian Jews, were not in court and they should be the ones to lay these charges. He challenged the Jerusalem Jews to bring charges of their own, which they could not.

Felix was not persuaded by the Jews' case and dismissed the court. However, although Paul was clearly innocent, Felix did not release him but kept him under relatively relaxed imprisonment in Herod's Palace. He would call Paul from time to time to hear what he had to say, and Paul took these opportunities to fully proclaim the Gospel, which Felix heard with trepidation. The governor was also hopeful of receiving a bribe to secure Paul's release, which was never forthcoming, so Paul remained his prisoner for two years and was still in chains when Felix was relieved as governor by Porcius Festus.

## Chapter Twenty Five

In AD59, two years after Paul was first arrested in Jerusalem and taken to Governor Felix in Cæsarea, a new governor, Porcius Festus, arrived to take over. Although his seat of government was in Cæsarea, he immediately travelled up to Jerusalem, as it was still the dominant city in the region and the main centre for Jewish religion. If the governor was to encounter any opposition in his region of responsibility, the place that any trouble was most likely to occur would be in Jerusalem. While he was in the city, the Jewish leaders requested he release Paul into their custody for trial, but he refused as this was not proper procedure under Roman law, and stated they should return to Cæsarea with him, where he would try the case himself.

About ten days later, Festus returned to Cæsarea and the Jewish leaders travelled with him. The following day he called Paul before him and heard the charges the Jews laid against him, none of which contravened Roman law, but seemed more a dispute over their religion. In his defence, Paul made reference to the lack of proof they had for any charges and that it was the resurrection, which was at the heart of the issues between him and the Sadducees. Festus could not decide the case and, wanting to do the Jews a favour, he asked Paul if he would be willing to stand trial in Jerusalem. Paul declined and invoked his right, as a Roman citizen, to appeal to be tried before the emperor in Rome. Festus had no other option than to comply.

A few days later, King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice paid a visit to Festus, who outlined the case against Paul to them. As Jews themselves, they were interested in all that Festus had to say about Paul and said they would like to hear him for themselves. The chapter concludes as the courtroom is prepared and with Festus giving his opening address for the hearing to begin.

## Chapter Twenty Six

At the end of the previous chapter, Festus had convened an informal investigative hearing of Paul's case in the presence of King Agrippa, his sister Bernice, court officials and many prominent men from the city of Cæsarea. Paul was then called to give his defence.

Paul seems primarily to have given his address to King Agrippa, as he was a Jew and was well acquainted with the issues Paul wanted to proclaim. However, it is also clear that it was a message that he wanted all those present to hear. He started by outlining his pious lifestyle as a Pharisaic Jew, living totally in service to and in awe of the God of Israel. He particularly emphasised his determination not only to persecute but to destroy all those who were Christians.

He was on his way to Damascus to conduct such a mission, with the written authority of the high priest, when he was struck by a brilliant light from heaven, brighter than the noonday sun. He and his travelling companions fell to the ground. Then the Lord Jesus spoke to him in Aramaic, accusing him of persecuting Jesus the Messiah, and instructing him that he would now be a light for the Christ to the Jews but especially to the Gentiles. It was his fulfilment of the main part of his calling that had so antagonised the Jews, which was the primary cause for his being arrested in Jerusalem, and now appearing before them in court. Paul concluded his argument by stating that the Gospel was not in opposition to, but actually the fulfilment of the law and promises, that the Jewish people had longed for since time itself began.

At this point, Festus cut Paul's monologue short and claimed his great learning had driven him insane, a claim that he calmly refuted, stating that the king would understand that what he was saying was true. It appears that Agrippa was perhaps close to believing Paul and may have come to faith, if he had heard any more.

The hearing was then ended. As Festus, Agrippa and Bernice left the hearing, they discussed what they had heard and concluded that Paul was clearly innocent. He would have been set free had he not appealed to Cæsar at a previous hearing, which had taken the matter out of Festus' jurisdiction.

## Chapter Twenty Seven



The route of Paul's journey to Rome

It was now probably the autumn of AD59. Having appealed to Cæsar, Paul was taken by the centurion Julius, a member of the emperor's cohort, on board a ship at Cæsarea; he travelled with Luke, Aristarchus, other soldiers, their prisoners and the rest of the ship's company. They initially sailed north to Sidon, where Julius graciously allowed Paul to stay with friends before rejoining the ship to continue the voyage. They followed the Turkish coastline until they came to Myra in Lycia, where they boarded a larger Alexandrian vessel bound for Rome. The ship then

sailed as far as southern Crete, where Paul suggested they should spend the winter, but the ship's captain and owners decided to sail on.

Although the weather was set fair when they sailed, they soon found themselves battling to save the ship in a hurricane force wind and surging seas. They tried everything humanly possible but were at a loss to do more, and it seemed that, as the ship was driven relentlessly onward, the ship and all those aboard would be lost. After about two weeks of this, Paul had a vision from an angel of the Lord, who stated that Paul and all those aboard the ship would survive but the ship itself and its cargo would be lost.

Around midnight, the sailors, by taking depth soundings, realised they were approaching land and decided to take their chances in the sea, but Paul realised this and informed the centurion, who stopped them. Paul then advised them that they would need something to eat in order to have the strength and energy they would need for what lay ahead. As dawn broke, they saw land and tried to steer the ship to a sandy bay, but the ship's bow stuck on a sandbar. The relentless sea soon destroyed the stern of the ship. The Roman soldiers, as was their custom, were going to kill all the prisoners to prevent their escape but the centurion intervened, and so everyone had to jump into the sea. Those who could swim were told to make for the island, while the others were to cling to the ship's debris and allow the sea to wash them ashore.

## Chapter Twenty Eight

With the drama of the storm and shipwreck behind them, all the ship's crew and passengers found themselves safely ashore on the island of Malta. The islanders, although heathens, were particularly gracious and welcoming, making them feel like guests. While building a fire for warmth, Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake. All the local people who witnessed this expected him to die, presuming him to be a criminal and that providence had caught up with him. When he did not die, they proclaimed him to be a god!

Paul's group were welcomed into the home of the island's chief official, Publius, whose father had an acute illness. Through Paul, the Holy Spirit instantaneously healed the man. After this, Paul would be involved in many other miraculous healings. Coupled with this, the snake bite and their survival from the shipwreck, these events would no doubt have impressed the local inhabitants, who would then have listened attentively to Paul's proclamation of the Gospel. When the winter was over it was time for them to leave Malta and the islanders provided all their needs for the journey ahead.

They sailed north via Sicily and southern Italy, before moving up the western coast to come to Puteoli, the main port for Naples. They stayed there for a week with the local church before continuing on to Rome. They were met by Roman believers up to 40 miles south of the city, who warmly welcomed Paul and travelled the final part of the journey with him.

Once in Rome, Paul was placed under guarded house arrest in his own rented apartment. After just three days, the leading Roman Jews came to see him, stated they had heard no bad reports about Paul but had heard negative reports about the Gospel message he proclaimed, so they arranged to come back on another occasion to hear Paul. When they did return, Paul spent much time explaining and proving that Jesus was long awaited Christ, who had been written about in their law and by the prophets. Once again, the group of men was divided between those who believed and those who didn't.

The story ends with Paul boldly proclaiming the Gospel to anyone who would come to listen to him, and he did so for at least the next two years, still a prisoner of the Romans but for Jesus. Paul is then lost to history except for those letters he wrote during or after this time. However, he has left the world with a remarkable legacy, he would finish the race!

## Epilogue:

And so this amazing story comes to an end. We read that: <<Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written>> (John 20:21), and it is likely this could be said of the apostles of that era too. Although there are many stories held in church tradition that tell us what the original apostles did to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, only the work of the inner core of Peter, John and James are mentioned in scripture.

James is mentioned briefly in Acts at his martyrdom. We see John working with Peter in the temple and in Samaria; that he stood bravely before the Sanhedrin, and we know he spent many years as an elder in Ephesus in later life. He ended up in exile on the island of Patmos for his service to Christ, where he would receive Jesus' Revelation.

Peter's story is given in more detail and we saw his work of healing, and the raising of Tabatha to life. We have a detailed account of his miraculous escape from Herod Agrippa, his vision in Joppa, showing that the Gentiles had equality with the Jews, and subsequently his bringing Cornelius' household to faith. Peter was also a key figure at the Jerusalem Council.

In Acts, we are also introduced to new characters, such as Barnabas, who came to our attention through his generous gift to the early church, his acceptance of Paul as a disciple, and for bringing Paul out of obscurity in Tarsus to work in Antioch, and then sharing his first missionary journey.

Two of the Hellenist believers are also prominent. Stephen for his bravery before the Sanhedrin and his subsequent martyrdom for defending the Gospel, and Philip, who took the word to Samaria, converted an Ethiopian official, and then of his work around the plains of Sharon.

But the main focus in the second half of this great adventure is the work of Paul. His testimony, courage, conviction and perseverance, through unbelievable hardships, stand out as the brightest of all beacons for the Gospel. There has never been another like him and, as we read about Jesus, the world could not contain all the books had Paul's full story of 30-plus years as a Christian been told.

However, the story does not end with the deaths of these great men and women that we read about in scripture for, as many teachers and pastors will say, Chapter Twenty Nine of Acts is still being written. It contains all the work that is being done by disciples of Jesus throughout the world in each generation from then until now, and will continue until the Lord returns.

For our part, we must remain faithful in the traditions of those who went before us, and pass on the baton to those who will follow, and perhaps our prayer will be like that of John in Revelation 22:20b:

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**