

Acts Overview

By James West

Chapter 1: Judas is replaced

After witnessing Jesus' ascension, the 11 disciples obey his command to wait at Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Ghost. A twelfth apostle, Matthias, is chosen to replace Judas, who had hanged himself.

Chapter 2: God's power demonstrated at Pentecost

The 12 apostles receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and speak the wonderful works of God in foreign languages. Peter preaches the Gospel. About 3,000 souls are saved. Wonderful unity and fellowship prevails among the brethren, and they share their goods.

Chapter 3: Peter heals lame man at temple

While going to the temple with John to pray, Peter encounters a lame man at the gate, and heals him in the name of Jesus. This becomes another opportunity for Peter to preach the Gospel to the Jews who saw that the man had been healed.

Chapter 4: 5,000 men believe; Peter and John arrested and released

The priests and Sadducees came and arrested Peter and John while they were thus speaking to the people. However, 5,000 men believed the message. The next day, the priests held a council, with the two men in their midst. When questioned, Peter took the opportunity again to preach the Gospel to them. The priests then threatened them and sent them away.

Returning to their brethren, they called on God for boldness. The Holy Ghost filled them and shook the place. The apostles testified with boldness. Many sold their lands and houses, and donated the money to the apostles to distribute to the needy. Barnabas was a prominent example of such self-sacrifice.

Chapter 5: Ananias and Sapphira struck dead; The apostles arrested, beaten, and released

Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession, but lied about the money they were giving, secretly keeping back part of it. Peter condemned their actions, and God struck them down dead.

The apostles performed many signs and wonders, and many sick folk were healed, and those who had unclean spirits. All the apostles were then arrested by the priests and Sadducees (probably while they were in Solomon's porch), and put into prison. The angel of the Lord freed them by night, and as He commanded them, they went and taught in the temple. They were again arrested (without violence). Peter took the opportunity to preach the Gospel to the council. The council became angry and wanted to kill them, but a Pharisee

named Gamaliel diffused the situation. They beat the apostles instead, who departed rejoicing, and continued their work, both in the temple, and in houses.

Chapter 6: Men deputed to care for widows; Stephen arrested

Because the Grecian widows of the church found themselves neglected in material things, strife arose between the Greek and the Hebrew believers. The apostles therefore instigated a plan to assign men to care for the business of looking after the widows. Seven men were chosen. Stephen was one of them. Stephen also testified mightily for the Lord. In the process, he came into conflict with the synagogue of the libertines, who set up false witnesses against him, and brought him before the council.

Chapter 7: Stephen tried and martyred

Stephen rehearses snapshots of God's hand working throughout Jewish history, and then proceeds to rebuke the council for their persecution of the prophets and of Jesus. They allow Stephen to proceed no further. He looks up, and sees the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. The council ran upon him, cast him out of the city, and stoned him to death. The man who looked after the garments of the perpetrators of this act was Saul, later to become the apostle Paul.

Chapter 8: Persecution at Jerusalem; Philip ministers in Samaria and to Ethiopian eunuch

Great persecution scattered the church of Jerusalem throughout Judaea and Samaria. Saul is a great perpetrator of this persecution. Philip went down to Samaria and preached to them. This would have been a big step for a Jew to take, and persecution seems to have been the catalyst for this. Many were saved, and Philip did miracles there. There was a sorcerer who lived there, called Simon, who watched the miracles and signs that Philip did.

The apostles at Jerusalem heard about the success of the ministry in Samaria, and sent Peter and John, who prayed that the Samaritan believers might receive the Holy Ghost. This would have served to humble the Samaritan mindset, soften the hearts of the Samaritan and Jewish believers to one another, underscore the authority of the apostles, and reinforce that 'salvation is of the Jews' (John 4:22).

Simon the sorcerer offered money to Peter, hoping to buy the power to confer the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter rebuked him. God's missionaries then returned to Jerusalem, preaching in Samaritan villages along the way.

God commands Philip to go toward the south of Jerusalem, to the desert region. There he saw an Ethiopian eunuch, treasurer to the queen of Ethiopia, riding in a chariot, having left Jerusalem. The man was reading the book of Isaiah. At God's command, Philip ran to him, and offered to explain what the man was reading. After witnessing to him, the man believed. Philip then baptised him. Philip was then transported by the Spirit, and was found at Azotus. He preached in all the cities between there and Caesarea.

Chapter 9: Saul's conversion; Peter works miracles

Saul is journeying to Damascus, with intent to capture believers. Jesus shines upon him with a bright light. Saul encounters the true Messiah, and is converted. Blinded by the light, he is led into the city by the men travelling with him. After three days of blindness, neither seeing nor drinking, a disciple named Ananias comes and lays hands on him, and Saul receives his sight. Saul began to preach in the synagogues at Damascus. After many days, the Jews took counsel to kill him. Saul escaped from the city, let down from the city wall in a basket by night. When he came to Jerusalem, the believers were afraid of him. Barnabas introduced him to the apostles, and he spent time with them. After disputing with the Grecians, Paul's life was again endangered. The brethren brought him to Caesarea, and sent him to Tarsus.

The churches had rest around about this time in all Israel, probably because Saul had been a main instigator of the late persecution.

Peter came to Lydda, and healed a man named Aeneas of the palsy. Many in Lydda and Sarron saw the healed man, and turned to Christ. Peter was then called to Joppa, because a lady named Dorcas, who was a believer, had died. He was used of God to raise her from the dead. Many believed there. Peter continued to stay in that city many days with Simon the tanner.

Chapter 10: Cornelius' conversion

A centurion called Cornelius, who is living in Caesarea is told by an angel of God to send to Joppa for Peter. He does so. While his servants are drawing near to the city of Joppa, Peter is praying on the housetop. God shows him a vision of unclean animals let down from the heavens in a sheet. Peter is told to kill and eat of these. Peter argues that he has never eaten anything common or unclean. God does this three more times for Peter. While Peter wonders concerning the meaning of the vision, Cornelius' men called for Peter at the gate. At God's command, Peter receives the men, they lodge there, and then he departs with them the next day for Caesarea.

Upon arriving at Cornelius' house, Cornelius tries to worship Peter. Peter stops him. Peter understands that the significance of the vision was that he was no longer to count any man common or unclean, and that he could therefore freely enter this man's house and preach the Gospel to him and his acquaintance. When Peter preached to them, the Holy Ghost fell on them, and they spoke with foreign languages. This would have served to show Peter and the brethren that accompanied him from Joppa that God could save the Gentiles without proselytising them to Judaism. The new converts were then baptised.

Chapter 11: God's work expands among the Gentiles

Peter went and related this incident to the church at Jerusalem. Some of the Jews contended with him. Peter explained the vision and the incident to them. The brethren then accepted what Peter said, and glorified God.

Some who had been scattered preached only to the Jews, but others preached also to the Grecians. The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to see the part of this work that was happening in Antioch. He strengthened the work. He then departed to Tarsus, and brought Saul from there back to Antioch, where they stayed a whole year. The disciples are first called Christians here. A prophet named Agabus came from Jerusalem to Antioch, and prophesied a coming famine. The disciples at Antioch therefore sent relief to the brethren in Judaea by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Chapter 12: Persecution fails to stop the spread of the Gospel

Herod then began to persecute the church, and killed James, the brother of John. He also captured Peter, and delivered him to sixteen soldiers to guard him. The brethren prayed for him. The angel of the Lord set him free during the night. Peter came to Mary's house (she was the mother of John Mark), and knocked on the door. Disbelievingly, the brethren received him.

Herod commanded to put the keepers to death. He then departed to Caesarea. The inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon tried to win Herod's favour by calling him a god. Seeing Herod did not give glory to God, he was eaten by worms and died. But God's Word prospered. Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch with John Mark.

Chapter 13: Paul's first missionary journey begins

While the church at Antioch prayed and fasted, the Holy Spirit directed them to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work He had called them to. They did so, and the two men departed with John Mark to Seleucia, then sailed to Cyprus. After arriving at Salamis (a city in Cyprus), they preached in the synagogues. Travelling through the island, they got to Paphos. There they preached to Sergius Paulus, the deputy, and were resisted by Elymas the sorcerer. Saul (now Paul) rebuked Elymas, and Elymas became blind. The deputy believed.

The men then sailed from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia. At this point, John Mark left them (probably out of discouragement/disillusionment), and returned to Jerusalem. They then came to Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath day, Paul preached in the synagogue there. The Gentiles asked him to preach again the next Sabbath, and many Jews and proselytes followed them. When the men preached the next Sabbath, the Jews became envious at the multitude, and began to oppose the teaching. Paul and Barnabas rebuked them. The Gentiles glorified God, and God's Word was published through all the region. The Jews expelled the two men, who came to Iconium.

Chapter 14: Paul's first missionary journey ends

The two men preached in Iconium, and after seeing fruit there, they had to flee persecution instigated by the Jews. They came to Lystra and preached the Gospel. At Lystra, Paul healed a crippled man. The people who saw it called Barnabus: Jupiter, and Paul: Mercurius. The apostles had to restrain them from doing sacrifice to them. But after some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, the people were persuaded to stone Paul. After dragging him out of

the city, he stood up, and came back into the city. The next day they departed to Derbe. After preaching there, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples. They ordained elders in every church. They passed through Pisidia, Pamphylia, then preached the Word at Perga. Then they went to Attalia, and sailed from there to Antioch. They shared what God had done, and remained there for a long time.

Chapter 15: The Jerusalem Council (Settling the matter of circumcision)

(v. 1) Judaizers came down to Antioch, and began to teach that circumcision was necessary for salvation.

After verse 1: 'At this point let us insert the incident between Peter and Paul (Gal. 2:11-14) regarding Peter's eating with the Gentile Christians, then withdrawing when the Jewish brethren from Jerusalem entered. We would suppose that the Galatian letter was written about this time, all just before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. In Galatians Paul makes no mention of the Jerusalem Council nor of the decision they sent to all the churches, which is really inexplicable since those facts, had they already taken place, would have been key pieces of evidence to present to the Galatians. The likely scenario is that the Judaizers immediately caused disaffection with the Gospel of faith among the Galatians when Paul left for Antioch. When the "Peter incident" occurred at Antioch, and upon hearing that the Jewish brethren were teaching and promoting the necessity of circumcision, Paul wrote the Galatian epistle to try to stop the slide. He immediately in the first chapter of the epistle expresses amazement that they have "so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ into another gospel (Gal. 1:6)." Then the matter at Antioch moved to Jerusalem to settle the issue with the Jerusalem church which would be followed by sending emissaries from the Council informing these new churches about the decision of the Council.' (*New Testament Bible History*, Hester, p. 117.)

(v. 2-3) Paul and Barnabas contended with the Judaizers, and it was determined that these two men should go to Jerusalem and formalise the whole matter with the apostles there. On their way, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles. This indicates that they entertained no doubts concerning the error of the Judaizers.

(vv. 4-21) The apostles settled the matter, and a common understanding was established that the law of Moses was not necessary for salvation. James' sentence was: (vv. 19, 20) '...that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood.'

(vv. 22-35) Two men called Judas and Silas (who was a Roman--16:37) were then sent with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch with a letter, to establish the report of the council's discussion. Judas and Silas stayed and taught there for a while, and then Judas returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas taught the Word in Antioch with many others.

Paul and Barnabas part ways:

(vv. 36) Paul proposed another trip, but Barnabas was determined to take John Mark with them. Paul disagreed because of John Mark's prior unfaithfulness to the task. There was sharp contention concerning this man who was Barnabas' nephew. Pro 13:10 'Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.' Barnabas was not willing to follow the Apostle's lead in the matter. They could not both be right in the dispute, otherwise we have Hegelian philosophy, which even now permeates the whole of Christendom, and is even polluting Independent Baptists. We do see that John Mark is useful to Paul later on (2 Tim 4:11), but it doesn't mean that Barnabas did the right thing by insisting that Mark go. Should Barnabas have gone to Cyprus? I don't know for sure, but the Scripture does not say that Barnabas went with the people's blessing, where it does say so of Paul (v. 40).

(vv. 40, 41) Paul chose Silas, and the second missionary journey began as they travelled through Syria, then Cilicia.

Chapter 16: The beginning of Paul's Second Missionary Journey

(vv. 1-3) Paul and Barnabas come to Derbe and Lystra. A younger man called Timothy, who is also a disciple, lives there. His mother was a Jew, and his father was a Greek. We know that his grandmother and mother were saved (2 Tim 1:5). Timothy was a good example of the believers (See 1 Tim 4:12), and had a good testimony. Paul had him circumcised, and so he was becoming all things to all men (here the Jews), so that he might save some (1 Cor 9:22). Paul no doubt saw God's hand on Timothy. Timothy could well have been the direct fruit of Paul's first mission trip to Lystra, when Paul was stoned. Timothy may have seen/heard about and admired Paul's testimony. Timothy now travels with them.

(v. 4) The decrees: The instructions of James from 15:19, 20.

Journey toward Philippi; subsequent ministry and persecution experienced there:

When Paul began this work in Philippi it was probably around the same time that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in AD 49. It seems that Jews were not popular in Philippi, which was a Roman colony, because of what we read was said about Paul and Silas in Acts 16:20, 21 '...These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.'

(v. 10) The pronoun 'we' is being used now instead of 'they.' 'We' is dropped after the time in Philippi finishes, and is used again when Paul and his helpers return to Philippi later (20:5-6). 'It is fairly evident that the writer joined the party at Troas for the trip to Philippi and remained there to direct the work when Paul and the others went on to Thessalonica. He chose not to disclose how he came to join the others at Troas. Possibly he felt that Paul needed him because of his medical skill (cf. 2 Co 12:1-10), but since he included himself as one who was to preach the Gospel to the Macedonians (Ac 16:10), it is obvious that he was more than an attending physician.' (*Acts--The Expanding Church*, Everett F. Harrison, p. 248)

(vv. 16-18) 'Spirit of divination' translates two Greek words: 'spirit' and 'python.' 'This concept goes back to the Greek city of Delphi where the god Apollo was believed to be embodied in a python snake. The original priestess at Delphi was purported to be possessed

by Apollo and thereby able to predict the future; therefore anyone possessed by the python spirit could foretell coming events.’ (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Walvoord and Zuck)

(v. 25) Praising God in the midst of suffering is a key lesson that God set before the Philippian believers, both here and in Paul’s epistle to them later on.

Don’t forget that Timotheus has probably seen the whole ordeal. Maybe he is staying at Lydia’s house while Paul and Silas are in prison.

(v. 30) Here is a genuine conversion experience. A man who was no doubt a hardened jailor, and determined to kill himself in despair, does not hesitate to humble himself straight away before the God of mercy, believe, get baptised, and take good care of the two men.

(vv. 35-39) Paul’s and Silas’ complaint to the magistrates was probably designed to spare the church in Philippi from further persecution.

(v. 40) If Luke was the author of this book, then it seems probable that he stayed behind to pastor the church in Philippi.

Chapter 17: Mission to Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens

(Paul’s second missionary journey continued)

We must not forget that Timothy is getting a firsthand view the hardships of mission work. He has seen the sufferings at Lystra and Philippi, and now he is to see the sufferings at Thessalonica.

Being a witness in those days was tough. No wonder Paul has to say to him later on: 2Ti 1:8 ‘Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.’

It was God’s intent that Timothy should be fully acquainted with the sufferings of Paul: 2Ti 3:10-12 ‘But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.’ Timothy was to take courage from the fact that God sustained Paul through these sufferings, and follow steadfastly in his steps.

Thessalonica:

‘Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia and was located some 100 miles (160 kms) west of the city of Philippi on the Egnatian Way (the major east-west highway that led west to Rome and east to Asia)...Its harbor was highly developed and well-located...it was one of the world’s great dockyards...The city was declared a free city in 42 A.D. because of its loyalty to a Roman emperor against his opponents. This meant it had its own popular assembly and magistrate and thus was ruled by its own local officials (Acts 17:6). No Roman soldiers were quartered in Thessalonica. Nearby was Mt. Olympus (the mythical mountain

of the gods), and this accounted for the city's devotion to the gods of the Greek pantheon. In New Testament times the city's population was about 200,000 (*New Testament Bible History*, p. 201, H. Richard Hester).'

Interestingly, Thessalonica means 'Victory of God' (*Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible and Christianity*, David Cloud). According to the 1 Thessalonians, there had been an obvious demonstration of the Holy's Ghost's power to convince and convert these people (1 Thess 1:5). They recognised the truth, and became followers of the example of the three men who ministered to them. They suffered for receiving the Word of God, but they received it with joy of the Holy Ghost (1:6). They turned to God from idols (1:9). They boldly proclaimed the Gospel, and their witness spread throughout Macedonia, Achai, and all other places—That is a huge area, if you look on the map! They received the teaching, not as the word of men, but as the Word of God (2:13). They were persecuted for their faith (2:14). Satan tried to discourage them by causing them to think that they had missed the rapture (2 Thess 2:2).

(v. 3) Opening = Expounding; Alleging = declaring.

Berea:

(vv. 10-13) Fleeing to Berea to save their lives, the missionaries taught in the synagogue there. The people in that synagogue more 'more noble than those in Thessalonica.' The reason for this is given: 1. They received the truth with all readiness of mind. i.e. They were willing to promptly and honestly investigate what was put in front of them. 2. They searched the Scriptures daily. i.e. They took the Scriptures seriously. Lost and saved would do well to follow their example.

The Jews of Thessalonica got wind of this, and came to stir up trouble. Paul then departed with certain brethren for Athens. Silas and Timotheus stayed in Berea, until Paul soon summoned them.

Athens:

It was said that there were more gods in Athens than in all of Greece!

(v. 16) If we are walking with God, our spirits will be stirred in indignation against the idolatrous practices of society around us. Psa 119:158 'I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.'

(v. 18) Epicureans: 'Epicureanism taught that there is no future existence and that pleasure is the chief thing in life. It was the philosophy of "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."' (Acts, p. 161, D. Cloud) Stoics: 'Stoicism emphasized self-mastery through an ascetic lifestyle. Stoics attempted to be "unmoved by joy or grief, pleasure or pain." The result was self-righteousness and pride.' (Acts, p. 162, D. Cloud)

(v. 19) 'Areopagus was also called Mars' Hill (Acts 17:19, 22) and was the place where the court of Athens met.' (Acts, p. 161, D. Cloud)

(v. 22) ‘Too superstitious’ (Deisidaimonesterous): This Greek word is made up of three smaller words, which together literally mean ‘to fear demons rigidly.’

(v. 23) ‘There were a number of altars to unknown gods in Athens. Six hundred years before this a terrible pestilence had struck the city which nothing could halt. A Cretan poet, Epimenides, formulated a plan: a flock of black and white sheep were loosed throughout the city from the Areopagus. Wherever each lay down it was sacrificed to the nearest god; and if a sheep lay down near the shrine of no known god, it was sacrificed to ‘The Unknown God.’ From this background Paul takes a starting point for his sermon.’ (New Testament Bible History, p. 119, H. Richard Hester)

(v. 26) “The Athenians boasted that they sprung out of their own earth, were aborigines, and nothing akin by blood to any other nation, which proud conceit of themselves the apostle here takes down.” (Matthew Henry)

(v. 26) Times: i.e. history; Bounds: i.e. places

(v. 27) Contrary to Calvinism, this verse teaches ‘prevenient grace’—i.e. the ability of every person to seek after God.

(v. 30) ‘Winked at;’ i.e. God overlooked it in patience, waiting for them to repent. Now they are more accountable, since the Gospel has been preached to them.

(v. 31) Jesus has been appointed King and Judge, and his resurrection gives assurance to us of this. The Greeks didn’t believe in a resurrection, and so this was truly a marvellous proof to mention to them.

(v. 34) ‘Dionysius the Areopagite was possibly one of the 12 judges of the court of Areopagus.’ (Acts, p. 169, D. Cloud)

Chapter 18: The beginning of the ministry in Corinth

(Paul’s second missionary journey continued, and the beginning of the third)

(v. 1) Leaving Athens, Paul came to Corinth, some 50 miles away. It was a Roman colony, and the capital of Achaia. All travellers going north or south through Greece had to pass through Corinth, and so it became a centre of commerce. Here was a melting pot of all kinds of beliefs and fashions, and they prided themselves in their open-mindedness. The city was also renowned for its immorality, especially seeing that here, the Greeks worshipped Aphrodite, the goddess of love. At the top of a rock plateau called the Acropolis, which towered above the city, was a temple devoted to the worship of Aphrodite. This temple employed about one thousand prostitutes to aid in pagan worship.

We read in 1 Corinthians 2 that it was a struggle for Paul to minister in this city. Maybe he was naturally daunted by the worldliness, sophistication, and fleshly wisdom that pervaded the place. He says: ‘...I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.’ Paul no doubt sensed his great need for the Lord’s help as he entered into this dark place.

(vv. 2-4) In Corinth, Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla, the Jewish tent-makers, recently expelled from Rome. It seems that Paul stayed in their house with them, while he worked. They possibly made tents from goats’ hair and leather. We are not told if this couple were saved before or after their acquaintance with Paul. No doubt, he took every opportunity that he could to testify to customers, and in the marketplace. He made a special point, however, of taking the opportunity to testify of Christ to both Greeks and Jews in the synagogue every Sabbath day.

(vv. 5-8) Soon Silas and Timotheus arrived. Paul most likely had sent these two men back to Macedonia while he was at Athens, and now they were rejoining him. 1 Thessalonians 3 possibly fills in some of the blanks for us, and shows us the good report received from Thessalonica in Macedonia, which would have been a great encouragement to Paul. It seems evident that Paul was now able to give himself fully to his missionary endeavour, probably because of funds sent by the hands of these two men. As the needs of the ministry increased in Corinth, so God supplied the need.

The Jews did not accept Paul's message, but opposed him. Paul then declared that he would go to the Gentiles, and so began to use the house of one Justus, which joined hard to the synagogue. Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, as well as many of the Corinthians believed and were baptised.

(vv. 9-11) It seems that Paul was battling fear at this time, for the Lord reassured him in a vision concerning the ministry in Corinth. Paul then stayed a year and a half, second only in length to his stay in Ephesus, which was about two to three years. God will stand by those who serve Him, and will always enable them to do His will in the place where He has placed them.

(v. 12) During the governorship of Gallio, the Roman proconsul over Achaia, the Jews banded together against Paul. They could bear his teachings no longer, and so they made insurrection against (signifying that they rushed upon him) him, and brought him to court before Gallio. Notice they did this 'with one accord' – a phrase we see repeated in the book of Acts. Various kinds of evil will often unite against truth. However, we see that God is about to intercept, by placing His finger on an old division within Corinth – the natural division between Jew and Gentile.

(vv. 13-17) The Jews complained to Gallio, but he would not recognise any distinction between Judaism and Christianity. Paul was about to answer for himself, but Providence ordained that this was not necessary (recall God's promise to Paul in verse 10), for Gallio quickly told them that if it was not of a criminal nature, they ought to deal with it themselves. He would not allow them any further hearing on the matter. The Greeks, observing Gallio's attitude, saw an opportunity to vent their anti-Semitism toward the Jews, and beat Sosthenes. Gallio showed utter indifference to the situation.

It seems that Sosthenes had taken Crispus' place as ruler of the synagogue, Crispus having been converted in verse 8. Paul calls a certain Sosthenes 'our brother' in 1 Corinthians 1:1, so it could be that Sosthenes was later converted also.

(v. 18) After a while, Paul sailed for Syria, taking with him Aquila and Priscilla. At this point, he must have left Timotheus and Silas to take care of the work in Corinth. Before Paul left, he shaved his head at Cenchrea, the eastern deepwater port of Corinth, because of a vow that he had. We do not know anything about this vow. Cenchrea was also where a woman called Phebe lived. If you look at Romans 16, it seems apparent that she was the one who actually delivered the epistle of Romans.

(vv. 19-22) Paul came with Aquila and Priscilla to Ephesus, where he was to have a very fruitful ministry, ultimately staying there for the space of about three years (20:31). After reasoning with the Jews for a short time in the synagogue, he left Priscilla and Aquila at Ephesus, in order to travel to Jerusalem for the feast there – probably Passover. He was later to return. After landing at Caesarea, he journeyed to Jerusalem, greeted the church there, and then went down to Antioch (down, that is, with reference to elevation, for Antioch is north of Jerusalem). We see Paul's selflessness in his acute sense of responsibility to others, in greeting the saints, and also in reporting to his home church in Antioch.

(v. 23) Here we see the beginnings of Paul's third missionary journey mentioned with great brevity. In Paul's seeking to strengthen the disciples in the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, we see that the care of the churches rested heavily upon the apostle's heart (2 Cor 11:28).

(v. 24) While Paul was abroad, a man called Apollos came to Ephesus. He was born in Alexandria, and was a good speaker. He also knew the Scriptures very well. Alexandria, situated in Egypt, contained the greatest library in the world. It was second to Rome in wealth, and second to Athens as a centre of literature and science. This is also where the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, called the Septuagint was made. One million Jews lived there. It was from such high society that Apollos came.

(v. 25) He did not know about the believer's baptism. He only knew about John's baptism, which signified repentance and washing away of sin. Believer's baptism signifies the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and the immersion by the Spirit into the body of Christ. There were some gaps in Apollos' knowledge, but he was fervently preaching the truth that he knew and understood. God saw fit to bless him with more knowledge, through his acquaintance with Aquila and Priscilla, for they heard him speak. Being greatly gifted as an orator, he was nonetheless willing to humble himself to receive more perfect instruction in the way of God, from the mouths of these tent-makers.

(v. 26) Romans 16:3-4 says, 'Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.'

Verse 2 told us that Aquila and Priscilla had left Rome because of Claudius' decree that all Jews must leave. It is interesting that they were tent-makers. While they made tents, did they sometimes think that in this world we have no permanent dwelling place? Although ostracised by the world, they were beloved of their brethren. They travelled around with Paul, and were a great blessing to him. They simply desired to be fellow-helpers of the truth. We read of Apollos, the gifted speaker, who was used mightily of God to convince the Jews that Jesus was Christ, and was a great blessing to many in Corinth. Yet he came under the influence of these humble tent-makers, and was thus better equipped to preach the ways of the Lord more perfectly.

We read 1 Corinthians 16:19 that there was a church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. It seems that their entire lives were moulded around the work of the Lord, and that they were content to follow God wherever He led them, setting aside personal comfort, and were willing to work in the background. Paul described them as 'my helpers in Christ Jesus.' There is great reward in being a helper—and what better kind of helper than to be a helper of another person's joy in the Lord (2 Cor 1:24)?

Notice that being a help to Paul was a sacrifice. They 'laid down their own necks' for Paul's sake, and the Gospel's. What this means, we are not told, but here is a commendation, not simply from Paul or the churches of the Gentiles, but from the Spirit of Christ Himself, who inspired Paul to write this commendation.

I may not see hundreds or thousands of people saved, but if I can be a faithful help to a few, I will not lose my reward. Maybe those that we help will be used of God to do many things that we cannot do ourselves.

(vv. 27-28) Apollos was ready to pass over to the region of Achaia, possibly at the advice of Aquila and Priscilla, who may have felt that he could be very useful in that place. Being fitly prepared by

God for the task, he was sent with the blessing and commendation of the brethren at Ephesus. God gave him a fruitful ministry at Corinth, as can be seen both from this text, and from 1 Corinthians 3:6.

Chapter 19: Paul's ministry in Ephesus

Paul returned to Ephesus. He baptized some who knew only the baptism of John, and they received the Holy Ghost. Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus for the space of two years. Paul wrought miracles. The seven sons of Sceva were defamed while trying to cast out a demon. There was a riot in Ephesus over Paul.

Chapter 20: Paul's final visit to the churches

Paul travelled into Macedonia, then Greece. Then he returned back through Macedonia, and visited churches he had planted on the way going back. It was his last time to see them. Eutychus fell from the third loft at Troas. He preached a farewell address to the elders from Ephesus at Miletus.

Chapter 21: Paul runs into trouble at Jerusalem

Paul continues his journey to Jerusalem. Certain disciples and Agabus warn Paul about what will befall him in Jerusalem. Paul meets with James and the elders at Jerusalem, and they devise a plan to show the Jews that Paul is not lawless. Paul purifies himself with certain men. The Jews nonetheless apprehend him while he is in the temple, and begin to beat him. The Roman chief captain rescues him, and Paul is carried into the castle. Paul explains that he is a Jew, and is granted permission to address the Jews.

Chapter 22: Paul's defence at the Antonia Fortress

'Paul's defense was in three parts: (a) his conduct before his conversion (22:1-5), (b) his conversion (22:6-16), and (c) his commission to minister (22:17-21).' (Toussaint, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*—N.T., Edited by Walvoord and Zuck, p. 417)

Paul respectfully addressed the Jews with 'Men, brethren, and fathers'. The languages that the Jews of that day spoke were most probably Hebrew, Aramaic, and to a certain extent, Greek. The fact that Paul spoke to them in Hebrew caught their attention, for they probably didn't expect him to be able to speak it fluently, he having spent so much time in Gentile regions.

In this chapter, Paul gives his testimony. He wanted to show that for such a radical persecutor of Christians to be turned from Judaism to Christianity, there must be a cause that was worth their serious consideration.

Paul's baptism did not actually wash away his sins, but it pictured it. Peter makes it clear that baptism does not cleanse from sin (1 Peter 3:21).

When Paul begins to explain his departing from the Jews to minister to the Gentiles, the Jews become outraged. Paul is taken into the castle again, and the chief captain commands to examine him by scourging. 'The Roman scourge was inflicted with shorter whips embedded with pieces of metal or bones and attached to a strong wooden handle.' (Toussaint, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*—N.T., Edited by Walvoord and Zuck, p. 419)

God was allowing such a stir to be created around his faithful servant Paul, so that many could be held accountable for their actions toward the Gospel.

Chapter 23: Paul is taken to Caesarea

(vv. 1-5) The chief commander (captain of 1,000 Roman soldiers) had commanded Paul to be set before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court, in order to understand more clearly what their grievances against Paul were. So, the day following Paul's apprehension by the Jews, Paul addressed the Jewish high court. As soon as Paul had spoken of his good conscience, Ananias the high priest commanded that he be struck on the mouth. History tells us that this Ananias was hot-tempered and profane man. God allowed Paul to be humbled in this contest, for His own good purposes.

(vv. 6-10) Paul perceived that the Sanhedrin were partly Sadducees, and partly Pharisees, and that he could actually get the advantage by dividing his enemies! Therefore, he slightly readjusted the focus of his address onto the resurrection. Verse 8 explains: 'For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.' It becomes apparent that both sides were simply interested in gaining advantage, and holding the balance of power. The chief captain thought it necessary to rescue Paul with the chaos that ensued, and the meeting came to an abrupt halt.

(vv. 11-15) The Lord stood by Paul in the night and cheered Him, promising that He would testify in Rome also. More than forty Jews bound themselves to kill Paul. This is the kind of zeal which animated radical Jews. It was fuelled by pride, unbelief, men's approval, and a distorted understanding of the character of God. Paul himself used to be like this. No doubt, they felt that this would please the chief priests and elders, and maybe gain them some measure of credibility in their eyes.

(vv. 16-35) Paul's nephew somehow found out about the plot, and was able to notify the chief captain. At the chief captain's command, Paul was then escorted to Antipatris by two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen, beginning at 9 p.m. The chief captain (Claudius Lysias) sent a letter with them to Felix, the governor in Caesarea. Caesarea, not Jerusalem, was the centre of Roman government for the area. After the whole band came to Antipatris, all but the horsemen returned to Jerusalem. The horsemen brought Paul to Caesarea. Since Paul was from Cilicia, it meant that Felix would have to deal with the case. But Felix wanted to give time for the accusers to come as well, so for five days, Paul waited in Herod's judgment hall.

'...Felix...had governed Judaea for five years. The two years before that he had been stationed in Samaria; he now had still two years to go before being moved from his post. He had begun life as a slave. His brother, Pallas, was the favourite of Nero (Nero later became emperor). Through the influence of Pallas, Felix had first become a freedman and then he became a governor. He was the first slave in history ever to become the governor of a Roman province. Tacitus, the Roman historian, wrote of him: "He exercised the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave." He had been married to three princesses one after another. The name of the first is not known; the second was a grand-daughter of Anthony and Cleopatra; the third was Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa the first. Drusilla had been married to Azizus, King of Emesa, but Felix, with the help of a magician called Atomos, had seduced her from Azizus and persuaded her to marry him. Felix was totally unscrupulous and didn't hesitate to hire thugs to murder his closest supporters. It was to face such a man that Paul was taken to Caesarea!' (H. Richard Hester, *New Testament Bible History*, p. 123)

Chapter 24: Paul's defence before Felix

(vv. 1-9) Paul's accusers decided to use the services of a trained speaker, Tertullus, who spent almost half his address trying to flatter the unworthy Felix! Tertullus accused Paul of disturbing the peace (something important to the Roman government), of inciting rebellion, of promulgating a religion which was not allowed by Rome (Judaism had been permitted by Rome), and of profaning the Jewish temple.

(vv. 10-21) Paul's defence used no such flattery. He simply acknowledged that Festus had a history of first-hand experience, and was therefore confident that he could make a knowledgeable judgement on the situation. Paul argued that he had not been in Jerusalem long enough to create any uprising (he had only arrived in Jerusalem twelve days previous to the present time), and he denied their charges against him, stating that they themselves could not prove them. He showed wherein he was in line with traditional Jewish faith, and stated that he came to bring alms to his nation (see Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:25-28; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4), and offerings. The fact that the original Jews from Asia who apprehended him in the temple were not there to accuse Paul was a fact that he now used as leverage.

(vv. 22-23) Felix deferred the case, saying that he would wait until Lysias (the chief captain of chapters 21-23) should come. Whether Lysias came or not, we do not know, but this points to the corrupt character of Felix in the situation. This was exactly how the Lord Himself was treated. Men wanted to defer and put off making a judgment (for personal advantage), but God will ultimately hold men accountable for such actions. Felix committed Paul to be kept by a centurion, stipulating that Paul be allowed visitors.

(vv. 24-27) After some time, Felix came again with his wife Drusilla, in order to hear Paul speaking about the faith in Christ. Maybe he felt that it would be interesting for Drusilla to hear, seeing she was a Jewess, and would be able to compare the Christian faith with what Jews commonly believed. Paul did not shrink from preaching to Felix on such matters as righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come (see John 16:8), even to the extent that Felix trembled! Although Felix was convicted in his conscience, he deferred doing any real business with God. Instead, he saw such discourse as mere entertainment, all the while hoping for a bribe from Paul. This game on Felix's part lasted for two years, but God wasn't playing any games!

'There was a long-standing argument as to whether Caesarea was a Jewish or a Greek city and Jews and Greeks were at odds over the issue. There was an outbreak of mob violence in which the Jews came out winners. Felix sent his troops to aid the Gentiles, thousands of Jews were massacred and the troops, with Felix's consent and encouragement, sacked and looted the houses of the wealthiest Jews in Caesarea. The Jews did what all Roman provincials had a right to do—they complained to Rome. That was why Felix left Paul in prison, even though he knew full well that he should be set free. He was trying to win favour with the Jews. But it didn't work, and Felix was dismissed from his governorship, and only the influence of his brother Pallas saved him from execution.' (H. Richard Hester, *New Testament Bible History*, p. 123)

So, in God's sovereign plan, Felix was removed, and Festus was placed into his office.

Chapter 25: Festus Refers Paul to Nero

(vv. 1-7) Festus was placed into Felix's office of Roman procurator over Judea, and was eager to start by visiting Jerusalem, the capital of the Jews. While he was there, the Jews informed him against

Paul, and tried to trick him into sending Paul to Jerusalem, so as to assassinate Paul by lying in wait on route. Festus would not comply, but insisted that Paul's accusers should pursue their case in Caesarea. This they did, making many false accusations.

(vv. 8-12) Paul denied the allegations. Festus didn't know what to make of it all, so he suggested bringing Paul to Rome, to sort it out there. Paul was unwilling to comply with this request, as it was unreasonable, and he probably felt it would not end well. No doubt, Paul desired to get to Rome, as the Lord had told him he would (23:11). It must have seemed providential to Paul that he should now appeal to Caesar (Nero), and so he did. Festus agreed to this, after conferring with his own advisors.

(v. 13) After this, King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice (with whom he had an incestuous relationship) came to pay their respects to Festus, seeing that Festus was the new procurator of Judea. King Agrippa's father had killed James, and his grandfather (Herod the Great) was the one who killed the infants of Bethlehem after the birth of Christ. Agrippa II would have been around 30 years old when he met Paul. He mainly ruled over territories in the northeast of Palestine. As Agrippa's rulership was conferred by Rome, he naturally wanted to keep peace with Rome.

(vv. 14-21) While Agrippa was at Caesarea, Festus mentioned Paul's situation to him. Festus was probably interested in finding out what he could from one who was an expert in all the customs of the Jews, and in particular, as it related to Paul's case. Festus had felt that the Jews' accusations against Paul were superstitious, and he had no idea what to make of Jesus and the resurrection. He explained that Paul had appealed to Augustus (Nero).

'The successors of Octavius assumed *Augustus* as a title... It was more imposing than "Caesar" which was originally a family name (always official in the N.T.) and it fell in with the tendency toward emperor-worship...' (*Robertson's Word Pictures*)

(vv. 22-27) Agrippa expressed his desire to hear Paul for himself, to which Festus agreed. And so, the next day, there was such a grand display of pomp and fluff when Agrippa, Bernice, the city dignitaries, and the Roman captains of thousands came into the place of hearing. Five cohorts of 1000 soldiers each were stationed at Caesarea, and so these five captains were likely present to hear Paul speak. The costumes and regalia of these folk would have appeared in stark contrast to the humble prisoner who was now brought forth. While Paul stood before them, Festus briefly explained what he knew about Paul, and expressed his hope that Agrippa might be able to advise Festus on what to write to Caesar concerning Paul, after hearing Paul speak for himself.

Chapter 26: Paul's Defence Before Agrippa

(vv. 1-3) Paul began his defence before Agrippa by way of a conciliatory introduction. It is interesting to note that Agrippa was expert in all the customs and questions among the Jews.

(vv. 4-7) Once again, Paul showed how zealous he had been in the religion of the Jews, in order to prove the necessity of some solid reason for converting to Jesus Christ. At a certain stage in Paul's early years, he moved from Tarsus of Cilicia to Jerusalem to study at the feet of the Pharisee Gamaliel, a doctor of the law. Among the Jews, the religion of the Pharisees was the most strict, and it was the sect of the Pharisees that Paul joined. The Pharisees' hope was a resurrection, and many unsaved Jews tried to live righteous lives in vain hopes of attaining to it. However, seeing that Jesus was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Paul now saw it as totally self-contradictory for the Jews to reject the resurrection of Jesus. We also see from this that it was Jesus' resurrection which was central to Paul's Gospel.

(vv. 8-11) Paul challenged Agrippa to consider the possibility of Jesus' resurrection. He then showed how he himself had been a persecutor of the followers of Jesus, until he had been confronted by Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul was wise to relate his own conversion experience. Nobody can justly deny your own experience, even if they come up with a different explanation for what you experienced. Paul's conversion experience, however, was clearly genuine, in that he was converted from being a maniac and a persecutor to being a loving and zealous disciple of Jesus Christ, even though it meant endangering his own life, and losing his high standing among the Pharisees!

(vv. 12- 15) When the bright light shone upon Paul, and he fell to the ground, it is interesting to note that Jesus spoke to Paul in the Hebrew language. Into Paul's confused and maniac mind, Jesus spoke His rebuke in the pure language that Paul respected. The very One that Paul had been persecuting now apprehended Paul, bringing to him such an acute awareness of his guilt in doggedly vexing Christ's beloved disciples. '*...It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*' was the statement of the reality Paul was experiencing. The more he tried to please God by persecuting Christians, the more God resisted him with the convicting goad of conscience and Holy Spirit. Paul had continued to resist, to the point where he was becoming insane with rage. The German reformer, Martin Luther, testified to a similar kind of pre-conversion struggle within:

'Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue [ten commandments], without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.' <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/fortress-truth-martin-luther/>

(vv. 16-26) Jesus then told Paul to stand upon his feet. When God shows us that He has a job for us, we need to be willing to stand up and get ready, because it will require all our strength to engage ourselves in the purpose He has for us! A similar instruction was given to Ezekiel, and also to Daniel. Jesus now told Paul that he was to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Rather than hang around, Paul obeyed straight away, evangelising both Jews and Gentiles, and with such zeal, that it had brought him into the case he was now in. He testified that God was the One who had sustained him until now, and that his message was in line with Moses and all the other prophets, namely, 'That Christ should suffer, *and* that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.' Festus (being Hellenistic in thought) felt that the resurrection was a ridiculous thing (1 Corinthians 1:23), and interrupted Paul's defence rudely, accusing him of being mad. It is typical of Satan to try and discourage us while we are bearing witness to the truth, and to turn away the principal hearers from the truth also. We see that Paul's answer is truthful, yet respectful. He answered the fool according to his folly, lest he should be wise in his own conceit (Proverbs 26:5).

(vv. 25-32) Paul was quick to get back to challenging Agrippa. And he was not afraid to put Agrippa in a corner, for the sake of Agrippa's eternal soul. Agrippa evaded Paul's question, and his words will eternally ring out to all who turned down their opportunity to become a Christian. Later, Agrippa stated to Festus that Paul could now have been released, if he had not appealed to Caesar. But God had a different program for Paul, and Paul would find his deepest satisfaction in simply doing the will of God.

Chapter 27: Paul's Journey to Rome – Part 1

(vv. 1-2) We notice the prominent pronoun 'we', showing that Luke was travelling with Paul on this journey. The centurion in charge of bringing Paul and some other prisoners to Rome was Julius, and he belonged to Augustus' band. It appears that there were more than one legion identified as such in history, and they probably consisted of elite soldiers who served to protect the emperor and procurators. 'Some bands were couriers responsible for communications between Caesar and his armies in the provinces' (David Cloud, *Acts*, p. 220). The ship's home base was in Adramyttium in north-west Asia Minor, which was supposedly advantageous to their bringing Aristarchus (Acts 2):4; Col 4:10) of Thessalonica (in Macedonia) part of his way home on their route to Italy.

(vv. 3-4) The following day they stopped at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly by allowing him liberty to visit some of the disciples in that place. After leaving Sidon, and not being able to take a more direct course because of the direction of the wind, they sailed underneath Cyprus instead. This was probably around late September, early October. 'After that time of year the unsettled weather patterns over the Mediterranean Sea made sailing hazardous. In those days sea traffic ceased by early November' (Toussaint, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, edited by Walvoord and Zuck).

(vv. 5-9) Their next stop was at Myra, a city of Lycia, where they changed over to an Alexandrian (Egyptian) ship – probably for carrying grain primarily (see verse 38). 'Egypt was Rome's breadbasket. The grain ships would commonly sail north to Asia Minor and then make their way west across the Mediterranean using the islands for as much protection as they could obtain from them' (Toussaint, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, edited by Walvoord and Zuck).

The wind continued to be unfavourable for sailing. The next stop was The Fair Havens in Crete. Sailing was now a dangerous affair, 'as the fast was now past,' probably signifying the Jews' Day of Atonement, after which the weather became dangerous for sailing in those parts.

(vv. 10-17) Having possibly received divine insight, Paul gave a warning (probably to the captain of the ship and the centurion) concerning sailing in so perilous weather. Although the centurion respected Paul, he was not willing to take his advice in this matter, but rather trusted the judgment of the ship's captain. The Fair Havens was judged by all to be an inconvenient place to stay, and so they tried to sail to Phenice on the same island. However, a mighty wind, called 'Euroclydon' (which typically blew from the north-east) caught them and drove them 25 miles south of Crete to a place below an Island called Clauda. The sailors were afraid that the vessel would get stuck in the quicksands. These were the sandbars of Syrtis, off the coast of Libya, North Africa. These sandbars '...could not be seen and guarded against, and especially in a storm; or from their drawing of vessels into them, which they retain, suck in, and swallow up...' (John Gill). It seems that after the sailors had lifted up a life-boat, which was usually in tow behind the larger vessel, they wrapped ropes around the ship in order to strengthen it against the force of the waves. They 'strake sail' which some interpret to mean that they removed the sail, in order that the winds should not drive them further in the direction of the quicksands.

(vv. 18-26) The storm continued, and the next day they began to lighten the ship by throwing things overboard. They were unable to navigate by sun or stars for many days, and everyone lost morale. People had stopped eating, either from sea-sickness, anxiety, or despair. However, Paul's fasting was no doubt accompanied with much prayer. He finally stood forth in the midst of everyone, and pointed out their failure to heed his previous warning at Crete. He delivered to them a prophecy that God had given him the previous night, telling them that he would stand before Caesar, that no lives would be lost, and that they would be driven into a certain island.

(vv. 27-32) After fourteen days of tempestuous weather (see verse 33), after having been driven by the wind up and down the Adriatic Sea, they landed upon an island called Melita (28:1—present day Malta). It was night-time, and the sailors were concerned that the vessel might be destroyed upon the rocks, and that they would lose their lives. They let down anchors from the rear of the ship, and wished for the first rays of daylight, so that they could see more easily. The sailors then secretly decided they would try and abandon ship in the lifeboat, pretending that they were simply letting anchors out of the front of the ship. They were discovered, and Paul told the centurion and soldiers that if these didn't stay in the ship, nobody else could be delivered. At this word, the soldiers cut the ropes of the lifeboat, hindering the plans of the sailors, and also helping to lighten the ship. This shows what great faith they now had in Paul's words.

(vv. 33-41) As the morning light dawned, Paul encouraged everyone to eat. Imagine Paul speaking to some 275 persons on deck! What an awesome circumstance God had positioned him in! Apparently people had not been eating for two weeks! Imagine the low morale, and the state of weakness everyone was in. Oftentimes God has to bring people to a low state, before they will be willing to receive what He wants to show them. Paul assured everyone that there would be no loss of life, and he encouraged everyone to eat something for their health. He led by example! After publicly thanking God for the food, and began to eat in front of them. God used his servant to put morale back into the hearts of the passengers. They all followed his example, and then lightened the ship some more.

Imagine the sailors, much humbled after having been discovered as cowards! People are now ready to look to a man who truly cares for their welfare, and they find Paul to be that man. Truly, God works in mysterious ways. After taking up the anchors, They set sail, and loosed the rudder bands. These rudders were probably oars sticking out of the side of the boat, secured with a rope when the vessel was stationary. Hoping to steer the ship into a certain creek, they ran aground instead, and made shipwreck. The front of the ship was stuck, but the rear of the ship was exposed to the waves, and was smashed.

(vv. 42-44) The soldiers could see that the prisoners might escape from the ship at this point, and so they talked of killing them. This was because they would be blameable for the escape of their prisoners, and they did not want to be exposed to punishment, which may have meant death. However, God gave divine wisdom to the centurion, and he, being willing to save the life of the prisoner Paul, would not allow the soldiers to do so. Under the centurion's wise leadership, every single person was able to escape safely to land. Thus we see that God fulfilled the prophecy which Paul made in verses 24-26, in a way that was plain for all to see.

Chapter 28:

(vv. 1-2) When everyone had escaped safe to land, they discovered that the island was called 'Melita', probably because some of the inhabitants told them. This seems to be the equivalent of present day Malta, which is about 20 miles long, and 12 miles wide. The inhabitants are described as barbarous people, which probably only implies that they did not speak Latin or Greek, even though Melita was under the jurisdiction of the Roman empire at that time. The Melitans showed a lot of kindness to the travellers by kindling a fire and receiving them all. They probably provided shelter (it was cold and raining) and food for them, and helped them with other necessary items.

(vv. 3-6) Paul was a willing worker. After gathering and placing a bundle of sticks on the fire, a viper came out of the fire and bit him. The creature was actually hanging from his hand, which would indicate that it was able to penetrate deeply with its fangs. The islanders saw it, and superstitiously

concluded that he was a murderer. Paul shook the snake off into the fire, and suffered no harm from the experience, although they watched for a great while to see if he would swell or fall down dead suddenly. Seeing that nothing happened, they claimed that he was a god instead.

(vv. 7-9) In the same part of the island there was land belonging to the ruler of Melita, whose name was Publius. This was a common name among the Romans. Publius actually provided housing for them for the first three days. That they should find themselves wrecked so near to a man of means and benevolence was an evidence of the kindness of Providence towards them. God's kindness towards Publius was that Paul visited his father, and by praying and laying his hands upon him, healed him of his dysentery. This opened a door for others in the island to come and see Paul and to be healed also. No doubt, Paul was sharing the faith of Christ to all.

At this point, we ought to consider the wonderful works of God. God ordained the shipwreck, in order that all the travellers should see the mighty hand of God working through Paul. The calamity was instrumental in bringing the Gospel to Publius and his father, and to the rest of the inhabitants of the island, as well as healing them of their diseases. And God preserved Paul through this shipwreck, intending for him to pen more of the New Testament Scriptures: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus. Humanly speaking, how easily could the lives on that fragile vessel have been swallowed up in the Adriatic Sea, or in the sandbars of Syrtis, never to be heard of again! But in the sovereign plan of God, it was not to be.

(vv. 10-11) Out of gratefulness for Paul's ministry, the islanders honoured the travellers in some way, maybe by giving money – we don't know. We are not to suppose that Paul accepted money as payment, but rather that he accepted it as a token of their gratefulness, probably recognising God's intended provision for all the travellers on the ship. Yes, they had lost much in the shipwreck, but God furnished them again, so that after three months they were ready to sail once more. Their ship was probably another grain-ship (being from Alexandria). The sign on the side of this ship was Castor and Pollux. 'The twin gods Castor and Pollux on the ship's figurehead were the heavenly twin sons of Zeus and Leda according to Greek mythology; supposedly they brought good fortune to mariners. If their constellation, Gemini, was seen during a storm it was an omen of good luck. Possibly Luke included this detail to contrast the superstition of the people of Malta, Rome, Greece, and Egypt with Christianity' (Toussaint, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, edited by Walvoord and Zuck).

(v. 12) Their first stop was Syracuse on the island of Sicily. From there they sailed to Rhegium (today Reggio) in Italy, and from there to Puteoli (modern day Pozzuoli). Here Paul was allowed to stay seven days with certain disciples who desired him to do so. Maybe this was where the ship was to unload its cargo. Maybe the centurion had business to do here, before accompanying Paul to Rome by land. The travellers then proceeded on to Appii forum (a market town situated 43 miles from Rome), and then to The Three Taverns (a town 33 miles from Rome). Some of the brethren from Rome came as far as these two towns to greet Paul. How they knew about Paul's arrival, we are not entirely sure. Notice Paul's response: He thanked God, and took courage. God be thanked, that we can meet with fellow-believers for worship, teaching, and edification! What a long and arduous journey it had been. Hope deferred had made Paul's heart sick for the company of the Roman brethren. Now that the desire had come, it was a tree of life (Proverbs 13:12)! Truly, God knows how to teach holy desire, and how to reward it (Romans 8:25).

Upon arrival in Rome, Paul was handed over to the captain of the guard, who was probably the leader of the Praetorian guards at the palace of Nero. Paul was allowed the privilege of dwelling by himself with a soldier that kept him. Paul right hand would have been attached by a chain to the soldier's left hand (see verse 20).

After three days, Paul called the leaders of the Jewish community together, and began to give his defence of the Gospel. He explained that he had not committed any offence against the Jews or their customs, but had been examined by the Romans, who would have let him go. The Jews, however, had spoken against such a decision, and he was therefore forced to appeal to Caesar, although he himself had no accusation to make against the Jews.

Paul went on to explain that he wanted to tell them about his faith, 'the hope of Israel'. By this, Paul meant the hope of national Israel, which included a Messiah and a kingdom. Paul knew that this meant a coming resurrection, and a participation in the kingdom of Jesus of Nazareth in His millennial reign.

The Jews replied that they had heard nothing about Paul, but that said that the 'this sect' (Christianity) was everywhere spoken against. After appointing a day, many Jews came to where Paul was living, in order that he could explain his faith. Paul taught them for the whole day, using the Old Testament to teach them about the kingdom and Jesus. Some believed (the Greek expresses that they were beginning to believe), and some didn't. The whole spirit of the gathering became controversial, until Paul quoted from Isaiah, exposing their unbelief.



TAMWORTH BIBLE
BAPTIST CHURCH

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