



# PRAXIS

## THE EARLY CHURCH

PART 2

GRACEWAY COMMUNITY CHURCH

# PRAXIS

on

# The Early Church

Acts of the Apostles  
Part II

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are taken from the English Standard Version Bible.

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## Welcome to this monthly edition of Praxis!

*The readings are brief*, in order to cover the Scripture, present the thought, and allow time to take it in through *meditation, contemplation*, and *prayer*. We encourage you to record your responses and the things that the Holy Spirit shows you. The readings are set up according to the ancient practice of the *daily office*, with a reading for morning hours, and a reading for evening hours. Of course, when and how you do this is completely up to you, but we do encourage you to do it at the same time and place each day, in order to simplify and develop the habit.

**Take your time to soak in the Word. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you each day. Even the simplest of things can bring revelation when we dedicate attention to the Spirit and the details.**

This compilation has been designed to lead us into the Scripture each day, to help empower us in the Holy Spirit and Truth, and to culminate in the Home Church experience.

*Make special note* of the pages given to each Sunday, take time to review your readings and responses from the week. This will help prepare you for a richer experience in Home Church, through both sharing and receiving.

*If you are not yet part of a Home Church*, we would love to have you experience it for yourself! Find out more from the person who gave you this book, or reach us at [www.GracewayRI.org](http://www.GracewayRI.org)

The commentary that accompanies each reading is written by Ed Pichette Sr., who serves as an elder and a Home Church Leader at Graceway Community.



## Day 1

## Morning Reading

*The book of Acts is Luke's attempt to tell the story of what the Apostles did after Jesus ascended and the Holy Spirit came to them.*

*As you read, remind yourself of what these men were like before the day of Pentecost. They were confused and acted cowardly during the time of Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion. After His resurrection, they constrained themselves to stay quietly in Jerusalem as He had commanded them **to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me."***

*The contrast between the apostles' behavior before and after the coming of the Spirit is beyond remarkable. Once the Spirit indwells them, they become assured and confident in what they should do and say. They live out their convictions, willingly putting themselves into direct conflict with the Jewish leaders. It is a testament to the power of the Holy Spirit within a believer.*

*This book, then, is more than a history of what the apostles did. It is a demonstration with power of what every believer is capable of doing if s/he will walk in step with the Lord's leading each moment of every day.*

<sup>1</sup> But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." <sup>2</sup> And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. <sup>3</sup> So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. <sup>5</sup> But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses." <sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. <sup>7</sup> And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, <sup>9</sup> and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." Acts 15:1-11

*Chapter 15 opens with a story about how some believers claimed that the new Gentile believers needed to be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas, unable to convince these people otherwise, go to the apostles in Jerusalem to settle the matter. Peter reminds the group that God had sent His Holy Spirit to the first Gentile believers at Cornelius' house. Peter argues that since God did not require circumcision before accepting these Gentiles as true believers then neither should they place any such burden on Gentile converts.*

*Sometimes, as believers, we can expect that other Christian believers must go through the exact same process and circumstances that we did on our journey to faith in Christ. This story raises a good and valid question. Exactly what must a person do or believe to be able to claim that they are a true believer and follower of Jesus? While it is clearly a most important question, even today, I'm not really sure that all believers share the same common conviction about the precise answer to this question. As you pray today, consider what you think is required of a person to claim to be a follower of Jesus. Exactly what do you mean when you say that you are a believer? What must one believe and/or do?*

**<sup>12</sup> And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. <sup>13</sup> After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. <sup>14</sup> Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. <sup>15</sup> And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, <sup>16</sup> "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, <sup>17</sup> that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things <sup>18</sup> known from of old.' <sup>19</sup> Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, <sup>20</sup> but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. <sup>21</sup> For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."** Acts 15:12-21

*Paul and Barnabas begin their argument by recounting the miracles that God had worked among the Gentiles. The proof of God's acceptance of them is the fact that He Himself sent His Spirit to confirm their faith as genuine. James, a prominent leader in the church, speaks up and confirms the words of Paul and Barnabas. The decision is that some few requirements will be made for new believers. But they decide not to burden new believers with the all the details that had been so important for the Jews. Note that a new believer had to refrain from any kind of idol worship. The first commandment is never violated by any true believer. New believers also had to abstain from sexual immorality. In other words, a person's mores concerning their sexual behavior are a fundamental indicator of whether or not their faith is genuine. A third requirement was that the Gentile believers should abstain from blood. Remember that in the OT, blood was fundamentally connected with all life.*

**<sup>11</sup> For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. Lev. 17:11**

*All life is to be respected and valued because it is the gift of God. In fact, to become a believer is to receive new life – life in Christ who valued you so much that He was willing to give His life, His blood, as a ransom for you. Lev. 17:11 also looks forward to Jesus' sacrifice, the blood that makes atonement for our lives. Jesus' life was offered in place of each of ours.*

<sup>22</sup> Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,<sup>23</sup> with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.<sup>24</sup> Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions,<sup>25</sup> it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,<sup>26</sup> men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.<sup>28</sup> For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." Acts 15:29

*The fourth requirement for believers had to do with abstaining from things strangled. When death comes by strangulation, the blood, no longer able to sustain life, remains trapped within the corpse. It then becomes polluted. So this requirement is related to the command to abstain from blood.*

*The apostles send two men as witnesses with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to confirm the apostles' letter. Their desire is that there should be no question about the authenticity of this response. The apostles want to see this matter resolved so that the spread of the gospel message will no longer be impoverished by the false doctrine that circumcision is required of a new believer.*

*As we, led by the Spirit, work to spread the gospel, we would do well to consider a) precisely what is required of a new believer, b) what things, though not required, are helpful to a new believer, and c) what things are forbidden to a new believer. Understanding these things can help to make us better witnesses for our Lord and better supports for those to whom we witness.*

<sup>30</sup> So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. <sup>31</sup> And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. <sup>32</sup> And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. <sup>33</sup> And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. <sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup> But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. <sup>36</sup> And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." Acts 15:30-36

*Judas and Silas perform their role as witnesses to the letter. As prophets, they continue on and encourage the congregation. Paul and Barnabas also continue on in Antioch supporting and helping the church there to grow. After a while, they are led by the Spirit to revisit the places they'd gone earlier and see how they are doing.*

*Notice how the church is growing and missionary work is increasing being considered part of the norm. In the earliest days, the apostles stayed for the most part in Jerusalem. Following Stephen's martyrdom in chapter 7, the gospel was spread outside Jerusalem. Here in chapter 15, we see Paul and Barnabas not only continuing to spread the good news but also deciding to go to places they had already evangelized to check and see how they are doing. The early believers are taking more and more responsibility to see that the church not only grows, but that it would remain healthy as it grew.*

*As God led through His Holy Spirit, the church redefined itself and became more and more what God had always intended that it should be.*

**<sup>12</sup> Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. <sup>39</sup> And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, <sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. <sup>41</sup> And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.**

**Acts 15:37-41**

*A division now arises between Paul and Barnabas. As they decide to move on in their attempt to spread the good news, they have a disagreement about whether to take Mark along with them. You may remember that they'd taken Mark with them earlier and he had left them. Paul is unwilling to take Mark along a second time while Barnabas desires to do so. The end result is that instead of Paul and Barnabas going together to one place they separate and each take others with them as they go to two different places. God uses their disagreement to reach two different locations rather than just one. Here we see an example of how God can use any situation to further His goals.*

<sup>1</sup>Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. <sup>2</sup>He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. <sup>3</sup>Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. <sup>4</sup>As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup>So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. <sup>6</sup>And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. Acts 16:1-6

*Now Timothy, the same Timothy to whom Paul would address letters later, is introduced. Luke tells us that his father was a Greek. The implication is that since his father was Greek, Timothy would not have been circumcised at birth. Luke tells us that Paul circumcised Timothy. Paul does this because he knows that Timothy will become a leader in the church as he matures. If Timothy is not circumcised, then he will face opposition from Jewish believers who still hold to the belief that their Jewish customs must still be fully believed and integrated into the lives of Christian believers. Timothy submits to this painful procedure knowing full well that it is not necessary in itself. Rather it is necessary because of the false beliefs of others.*

*Sometimes it is necessary for us to give up rights which are lawful for us as believers in order to protect our reputation as faithful believers. If I insist on some behavior that I truly believe to be acceptable before God and at the same time I harm the conscience of another believer, then I have sinned. The sin is not because of what I did but rather because I have been flippant and insistent about doing something that harms another's faith. I have done harm by failing to love my neighbor in such a situation. James goes even further, I think, in determining what sin is.*

**<sup>17</sup> So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. Jas. 4:17**

*Sin is simply choosing your own way over God's way. God always does what is good. He is graceful and just. We need to model that behavior as well. When we come up short of it, we sin.*

<sup>7</sup> And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. <sup>8</sup> So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:7-10

*Luke clearly demonstrates for us how particular the apostles were in following the leading of the Holy Spirit. They clearly expected that God would lead them day by day. So every dream became a means by which God could speak to them. I have a good friend to whom God speaks through dreams. He has learned to pay attention whenever he has a vivid and unusual dream. His expectation is that this is more than just a random dream. His expectation is that God is speaking to him through this dream. He has learned to hear the voice of God in such dreams. We need to sensitize ourselves to hear the voice of God in whatever way He may choose to speak to us. Sometimes exceptional and weird circumstance happen to us and they have nothing to do with God speaking to us. But we need to recognize that it is possible that in extraordinary circumstances God may be trying to get a message through to us. Stay open to the possibility. Be listening all the time so that when He does speak you won't miss it. If you're never listening then don't expect that you will ever hear. Stay open and available to the Spirit's working within your life!*

<sup>11</sup> So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. <sup>13</sup> And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. <sup>14</sup> One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. <sup>16</sup> As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." <sup>18</sup> And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. Acts 16:11-18

*Paul goes to Macedonia as God has asked him. There he meets a woman named Lydia who receives the Word with joy. Notice how Luke mentions that she was a worshiper of God. It was the fact that God opened her heart that led immediately to her reception of the Word. God had brought Paul to Macedonia to use him in the fulfilling of His desire for Lydia. That is a good example of how God leads His faithful followers to work. He puts us in the right place at the right time. Only He knows all the details and is able to make all things work together for good.*

*Next Luke tells us the story of a young slave girl possessed by a demon. She follows Paul and keeps repeating how these men are servants of the Most High God. When Paul has had enough of this, he rebukes the spirit and sets the young woman free.*

<sup>19</sup> But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. <sup>20</sup> And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. <sup>21</sup> They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." <sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. <sup>23</sup> And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. <sup>24</sup> Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. <sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, <sup>26</sup> and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. <sup>27</sup> When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." <sup>29</sup> And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Acts 16:19-30

*When the men who owned the slave girl saw that their opportunity to profit through her was gone, they turn Paul and his friends over to the authorities claiming that Paul is encouraging sedition. The magistrates punish Paul and Silas and put them in jail. About midnight, God brings an earthquake and unloosens all the prisoners' bonds. When the jailer awakes, he decides to kill himself rather than face his punishment for losing all the prisoners. Paul stops him from harming himself. Paul tells him that all the prisoners are still there. All of this leads to the jailer recognizing that God is at work here. He asks Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?"*

*What a powerful testimony God had provided for this jailer. That Paul and Silas had remained in prison may not be so amazing, but Luke tells us that all the prisoners, whose chains had been opened, stayed in prison as well. You would expect that these unbelievers would have been all too happy to take this opportunity to be free. But God keeps them all there. The jailer recognizes the hand of God in all this and asks Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved. God had shown His love and grace to this jailer in a way that was very personal for him. How has God spoken His grace and love and mercy into the details of who you are and what you do?*

<sup>31</sup> And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." <sup>32</sup> And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. <sup>34</sup> Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. <sup>35</sup> But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." <sup>36</sup> And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." <sup>37</sup> But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." <sup>38</sup> The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. <sup>39</sup> So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. <sup>40</sup> So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed. Acts 16:31-40

*Paul and Silas explain the way of salvation to the jailer and he and his household are saved. The jailer then tends to their wounds. Next there is a baptism for the new believers.*

*When morning comes, the magistrates tell the jailer to let Paul and Silas go. Paul tells the jailer that he (and Silas?) is/are Roman citizen(s). Roman law forbid the punishment of a Roman citizen who was not condemned of any crime. When the magistrates learn this they become fearful and ask Paul and Silas to leave. Paul and Silas seek no revenge but rather simply leave prison, visit Lydia and then go on their way.*

*There is no time or place for Paul to try to avenge himself on those who worked to harm him as he ministered. He wanted only to use all his time and ability to spread the gospel. Revenge may satisfy prideful desires, but it can offer nothing of value in the long run.*

<sup>1</sup>Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." <sup>4</sup>And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. <sup>5</sup>But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. <sup>6</sup>And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, <sup>7</sup> and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." <sup>8</sup>And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. <sup>9</sup>And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. <sup>10</sup>The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.

**Acts 17:1-10**

*Next Paul travels to Thessalonica. As he was wont, he first attended the local synagogue and preached Jesus as the Messiah. While some were persuaded to join Paul and Silas, others created an uproar and acted to have Paul and Silas condemned. The brothers send Paul and Silas away for their protection and they move on to Berea.*

*In many if not most of the cities where Paul traveled he met opposition and faced condemnation from local authorities. There seemed to be an unofficial sequence of events as he went from place to place: a) he attended the local synagogue, b) he preached Jesus as the Messiah there, c) some believed, d) those who did not believe opposed him and sought the aid of local authorities to rid themselves of Paul and his friends, e) Paul suffered some sort physical punishment and f) Paul left and went on to the next place where God led him.*

*It is difficult to imagine how Paul could have been content settling his life into a pattern like this that repeated time and again without any break. But Paul was not a man of half measures. When he committed himself to something, he did so with no reservations. See Phil. 3:8-12.*

<sup>11</sup> Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. <sup>12</sup> Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. <sup>13</sup> But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. <sup>14</sup> Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. <sup>15</sup> Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. <sup>16</sup> Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup> So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup> Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"-- because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. <sup>19</sup> And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? <sup>20</sup> For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." <sup>21</sup> Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. <sup>22</sup> So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. Acts 17:11-22

*The Bereans received Paul's message much more hospitably than most. Rather than simply reject him, they tested his message against the scriptures and many found him to be true. But, as usual, many unbelievers challenged Paul and stirred up opposition so that the brothers quickly moved Paul on to Athens. In Athens, Paul confronted the pantheon of Greek gods. He preached in the synagogue there as usual. He argued with the Greek people in the marketplace. At least they were willing to give him a hearing. Paul begins his remarks by declaring to them that he sees that they are quite a religious people. While the Greeks may have perceived this as a compliment, I don't think Paul meant it that way. Religion is often associated with superstition and lists of do's and don'ts that are superficial and never get very deep into a person's soul. Paul's experience of faith is much more interwoven into his life than that. For Paul, faith is more than a religion, it is an entire way of life.*

<sup>23</sup> For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup> And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, <sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, <sup>28</sup> for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." <sup>29</sup> Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. <sup>30</sup> The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." <sup>32</sup> Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." <sup>33</sup> So Paul went out from their midst. <sup>34</sup> But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them. Acts 17:23-34

*Paul finds an opportunity when he sees an altar to an unknown god. Paul seizes on this idea to introduce a new god to them. Paul proclaims that this new god is the true and only God of the universe. But when Paul preaches about Jesus' resurrection from the dead even these sophisticated Greeks become skeptical. Luke ends this passage by telling us that here, as in most places where Paul went, some people believed.*

*The gospel, as Paul presented it, was an attractive idea to many. For others, it was nothing more than a dangerous attack against what they had always believed. Paul realized that he had to present the gospel in as attractive a way as possible to win as many as possible.*

**<sup>19</sup> For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 1 Cor. 9:19**

<sup>1</sup> After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup> And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, <sup>3</sup> and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. <sup>4</sup> And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. <sup>5</sup> When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

**Acts 18:1-6**

*When Paul arrives in Corinth he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla - fellow Christians who were tent makers as was he. Again Paul first goes to the synagogue and preaches Jesus there. When he is rejected there, Paul turns his missionary activity over to the Gentiles. There is nothing new in this story so far. We'll see very shortly that Corinth was very unique in at least one way.*

<sup>7</sup> And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. <sup>8</sup> Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." <sup>11</sup> And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. <sup>12</sup> But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, <sup>13</sup> saying, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law." <sup>14</sup> But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. <sup>15</sup> But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things." <sup>16</sup> And he drove them from the tribunal. <sup>17</sup> And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this. <sup>18</sup> After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. Acts 18:7-18

*Here we see what made Corinth so special. Paul did not face opposition quite as quickly here as in other places. For God told him, "I have many in this city who are my people." When opposition did finally arise, Paul was brought before Gallio, the local leader who refused to get involved with Jewish religious contentions. Then Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, was beaten. Finally, some time later, Paul decides to leave for Syria along with Priscilla and Aquila.*

*Corinth was a cosmopolitan city in the Paul's day. God allows him a longer stay there than in most places he went. Perhaps the influence of a city like Corinth on the ancient world motivated God to leave Paul there longer. In Corinth Paul could become much more in tune with the spirit of the age. In the two letters that we have today which Paul wrote to the Corinthians we gain a glimpse into the world as it was in their day. In some ways we can see the same attitudes and ideas that are popular in our world today. Paul's dealings with the people of Corinth may offer us some valuable ideas about how to interact with our world.*

<sup>19</sup> And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. <sup>20</sup> When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. <sup>21</sup> But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus. <sup>22</sup> When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. <sup>24</sup> Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. <sup>27</sup> And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, <sup>28</sup> for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. Acts 18:19-28

*Paul goes next to Ephesus. He visits the synagogue there where he is asked to stay on for a time. Paul uncharacteristically declines and moves on to Caesarea. He greets the church there and goes on to Antioch. He continues visiting local churches in that area strengthening and encouraging them. Have you noticed how, from time to time, Paul takes a break from trying to go to some area that has not yet been evangelized. In those times, he visited cities where he had founded other churches and spent time building them up in the faith. For Paul, it was not simply a matter of always increasing the number of new places where he could preach the gospel. For Paul, it was a matter of building strong churches which would be doctrinally sound and would continue to grow. When Priscilla and Aquila meet Apollos they instruct him in the baptism of the Holy Spirit which he did not know. Apollos becomes another of those who would continue to effectively spread the good news of Jesus Christ. So we see Jesus' followers living out their faith in various ways: a) they brought the gospel to places where it not been presented beforehand, b) they returned to places which had been evangelized to strengthen and encourage them and c) they were on the lookout for believers whose doctrines were not completely accurate so that they might teach and instruct them in all the things that God had revealed to them.*

**<sup>1</sup> And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." <sup>3</sup> And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." <sup>4</sup> And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all.**

**Acts 19:1-7**

*As the story continues Paul finds a group of believers in Ephesus who are unaware of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in NT believers. What a handicap for these relatively new believers to be unaware of the availability of God's Spirit in their lives! Paul quickly remedies the situation and the Spirit is poured out in Ephesus as He had been elsewhere with the evidence of speaking in tongues and prophesying. The full gospel message is more than salvation in Jesus' name. The full gospel also contains the message of the coming of the Spirit to indwell believers and enable them to effectively witness for their new Lord. People must be taught to believe and to powerfully live out their belief in obedience to the leading of God's Spirit in their lives. God has not saved any of us to simply put us in the trophy case until we should die and then go to be with Him. We are to be His ambassadors in a fallen and broken world.*

**<sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 2 Cor. 5:19-20**

**<sup>8</sup> And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup> But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. <sup>11</sup> And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, <sup>12</sup> so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.**

**Acts 19:8-12**

*Here in vv. 8-12, Luke summarizes Paul's ministry to this point. He repeats for us again the recurring pattern of Paul preaching with the effect of some becoming believers. This is followed by unbelievers causing problems for Paul. Ultimately, all the cities of ancient Asia (modern day Turkey) were evangelized. Luke also reminds us of how effectively the Holy Spirit was working through Paul – to the point where handkerchiefs that he'd touch were placed on the sick and people were being miraculously healed and restored.*

*The kingdom of God was advancing in Asia. While it met opposition, it continued to grow and spread. God's purposes in the world were being furthered by the faithful work of Paul and others who allowed the Spirit to move through them.*

**<sup>13</sup> Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." <sup>14</sup> Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. <sup>15</sup> But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" <sup>16</sup> And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. <sup>17</sup> And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Acts 19:13-17**

*Next Luke recounts a short story to emphasize that it is the work of the Holy Spirit that is bringing these changes into the world. In vv. 13-14, he tells us that seven sons of Sceva were invoking Jesus' name over evil spirits. These seven called on "Jesus whom Paul proclaimed." The evil spirits responded to them saying, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"*

*We, as believers, are to depend on the Spirit of God alive within us. We should not look to the Jesus that Paul preached, but rather to the Jesus who is dwelling right within us by His Holy Spirit.*

*Your effectiveness may be encouraged by how you see God working through others. But, ultimately, your effectiveness is based on your dependence on the power of God working in you. Anything else will leave you vulnerable and ineffective.*

<sup>18</sup> Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. <sup>19</sup> And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. <sup>20</sup> So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. <sup>21</sup> Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." <sup>22</sup> And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. Acts 19:18-22

*When someone becomes a believer they seldom realize all that a commitment to Christ will require of them. Here in Acts 19:18-22 we read of some who, apparently motivated when they heard what had happened with these exorcists, decide to do away with some "magic arts" that they had practiced before becoming believers. I know that in my own life I've grown and developed a far better understanding of what it means to be a Christian over the years.*

*I have not arrived yet. I need to reevaluate myself from time to time to actively look for things that remain in me that should not be. And vice versa. What practices do I lack that might greatly benefit my walk with Jesus? Everything that is alive is in a constant state of change. Being vital Christians our lives are alive and so will change also. Do all you can to be sure any and all changes are for the better, as God leads you!*

<sup>23</sup> About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. <sup>24</sup> For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. <sup>25</sup> These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. <sup>26</sup> And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. <sup>27</sup> And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship." <sup>28</sup> When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" <sup>29</sup> So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. <sup>30</sup> But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. <sup>31</sup> And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. Acts 19:23-31

*Now an incident arises involving a silversmith who makes idols. He becomes worried that he will lose business if Christianity keeps growing and people turn away from belief in their old idols. So this silversmith, Demetrius, stirs up a crowd against Paul and his companions. When Paul himself tries to go into the crowd to make a defense for himself and his friends, others of his friends try to stop him. They are afraid for Paul's safety and so they try to protect him. What do you think? Should Paul's friends have stopped him as they did or should they have allowed him to go out and a defense of the gospel?*

<sup>32</sup> Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. <sup>33</sup> Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. <sup>34</sup> But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" <sup>35</sup> And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? <sup>36</sup> Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. <sup>37</sup> For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. <sup>38</sup> If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. <sup>39</sup> But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. <sup>40</sup> For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." <sup>41</sup> And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly. Acts 19:32-41

*The first few verses here help us to see how out of control this crowd was. When a Jew, Alexander, tries to quiet the crowd and answer them, he is shouted down and the crowd praises Artemis, an Ephesian goddess, for two hours. Finally, the town clerk is allowed to speak. He confirms for the crowd that the whole world knows about Artemis and her great glory. He warns them that they are about to bring trouble on themselves if they continue. He manages to calm the storm and break up the assembly.*

*Sometimes God works through believers to bring His will about. But, at other times, He demonstrates that He is Lord even in the lives of those who refuse to put their faith in Him. That is what happened here. Rather than allow Paul to again put himself in harm's way, God works through a town clerk and brings His peace to a possibly dangerous situation.*

<sup>1</sup> After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. <sup>2</sup> When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. <sup>3</sup> There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. <sup>4</sup> Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. <sup>5</sup> These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, <sup>6</sup> but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days. <sup>7</sup> On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. Acts 20:1-7

*After encouraging the believers in Ephesus, Paul moves on to Macedonia. After spending some time there encouraging believers he moved on to Greece. Wherever Paul went he encountered those who wanted to stop him. When a plot is made against him by the Jews he learns of it and leaves, sailing for Syria. Several companions go on ahead of him. Five days later, Paul arrives in Troas. Again Paul speaks to them and his talk continues until midnight.*

*The ministry of evangelism that God gave to Paul was always at the forefront of his mind. He used each and every opportunity to either bring the gospel to unbelievers or encourage those who had already given their lives over to God. Paul never wavered from that way of life. I wish that I could say that I was as dedicated and, in every moment, as in tune with the Spirit's leading as I live my life. I must confess that I get distracted more than I'd like to admit. Paul mastered himself and did not allow distractions to disrupt his mission.*

<sup>8</sup> There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. <sup>9</sup> And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. <sup>10</sup> But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." <sup>11</sup> And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. <sup>12</sup> And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted. Acts 20:8-12

*When a young man at the meeting falls asleep and plummets to his death, Paul intervenes and miraculously picks him up alive. Can you imagine how encouraged those who were present must have been when this young man's life is restored to him? Paul worked hard to keep himself on track in the work God had given to him. God blessed Paul by being with him and making His presence with Paul plain to all. Paul honored God in all that he did. God responded by blessing Paul's work all the more. Let's all of us be encouraged and take a lesson from Paul on how to live a faithful life.*

<sup>13</sup> But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. <sup>14</sup> And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. <sup>15</sup> And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. <sup>16</sup> For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. <sup>17</sup> Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. <sup>18</sup> And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, <sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; <sup>20</sup> how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. <sup>24</sup> But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:13-24

*Paul moves on yet again. He takes steps to hasten his arrival in Jerusalem by Pentecost. In vv. 18-23, Paul recounts how the Spirit is driving him to Jerusalem while also revealing to him that he will face affliction there. Paul understood that persecution was to be expected if he was to be a faithful follower of Jesus. If Jesus was not immune from persecution, how can any of His believers claim to be?*

<sup>29</sup> Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. Mk. 10:29-30

**<sup>25</sup> And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, <sup>27</sup> for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. <sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. Acts 20:25-28**

*Paul knows that he is approaching the end of his ministry. So he calls together many to whom he had witnessed and with whom he had worked. He affirms for them that he has done what God asked of him to the best of his ability. He encourages them to be good and faithful leaders in the churches where God has appointed them.*

*Paul will be leaving his ministry behind as a time of imprisonment and death draws near. He does not try to avoid a difficult future. He faces his fate with courage encouraging those who will remain when he is gone.*

<sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup> I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. <sup>35</sup> In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" <sup>36</sup> And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. <sup>37</sup> And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, <sup>38</sup> being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

**Acts 20:29-38**

*Paul admonishes these leaders to stay alert. Threats against them and the church will come from within and without. He reminds them of how he lived among them. He never tried to get rich at their expense. Rather he made his way working hard to supply his needs. Those in the gathering kneel and pray. They weep knowing what awaits Paul in Jerusalem. Then they see him off.*

<sup>1</sup> And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. <sup>2</sup> And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. <sup>3</sup> When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. <sup>4</sup> And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup> When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed <sup>6</sup> and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home. <sup>7</sup> When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. <sup>8</sup> On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. <sup>9</sup> He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. Acts 21:1-9

*Paul arrives in Tyre and spends a week there. The brothers there warn Paul not to go to Jerusalem. They mean to spare him the trouble that lies ahead. Paul is aware of the coming danger, but he also knows that it is God's will for him to endure it. Paul goes on unconcerned for himself – wanting only to accomplish the Father's will.*

<sup>10</sup> While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. <sup>11</sup> And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" <sup>12</sup> When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." <sup>14</sup> And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done." <sup>15</sup> After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. <sup>16</sup> And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge. <sup>17</sup> When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. <sup>18</sup> On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup> After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. <sup>20</sup> And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, <sup>21</sup> and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. Acts 21:10-21

*In Caesarea a prophet named Agabus warns Paul yet again of what is coming in Jerusalem. His friends try to stop him but desist when he remains firm in his decision. When he arrives in Jerusalem, Paul reports to James and the other leaders how God has grown the church through his ministry. The leaders glorify God for what He has done. They go on to tell Paul that many believing Jews in Jerusalem remain zealous for the law. They tell Paul that he is seen as a traitor because he refuses to teach the Gentiles that they too must observe all the law.*

*Paul's undoing will come from Rome, but it will not be instigated by Rome. The source of Paul's condemnation seems to include fellow Jewish believers in Jerusalem. (See vv. 20-21) Because of their background in the law, they cannot believe that God would allow Gentile believers into the church without placing the same restrictions and requirements on them as He had placed on the Jews. Of course, they are wrong. They refuse to accept the fact that God is working out a new way in the NT. The law remains. It is not allowable for any NT believer to break the moral law of the OT. Holiness is still necessary. At the same time, NT believers will no longer be required to keep all of the OT ceremonial law. In particular, circumcision will no longer be necessary.*

**<sup>22</sup> What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. <sup>23</sup> Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; <sup>24</sup> take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. <sup>25</sup> But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality." Acts 21:22-25**

*The church elders devise a plan that they hope will prevent the believing Jews from acting against Paul. They ask Paul to pay the necessary costs for four men who have taken a vow. Their hope is that the Jews will see that Paul still keeps all the law. As we'll shortly see, their plan will not succeed. God's word spoken through several prophets will hold sway.*

*Why is God allowing Paul to be treated in this way? Why doesn't God keep Paul from such opposition? In reality, God is being faithful to Paul. Paul wants with all his heart to be faithful to God and seek His purposes in his life. God wants all believers to be complete and accurate in all their doctrine. God allows this to happen so that the church might learn the danger of holding on to old traditions once they have served their purpose and become obsolete. We cannot say that things must remain as they have always been. Living things change. We must walk the middle road. We cannot hold slavishly to the past and its ways. On the other hand, we cannot blindly rush forward into the future forgetting or dismissing all that has happened in the past. We must remain sensitive and responsive to God's leading as we follow His Spirit through life.*

<sup>26</sup> Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them. <sup>27</sup> When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, <sup>28</sup> crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." <sup>29</sup> For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. <sup>30</sup> Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. <sup>31</sup> And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. <sup>32</sup> He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Acts 21:26-32

*Paul follows the church leaders' advice. Nevertheless, when he is seen in the temple, some Jews from Asia stir up a crowd against him. These Asian Jews (remember that references in NT to Asia are references to what we know as modern day Turkey) lead this crowd to seize Paul and try to kill him. When the tribune hears that a riot is developing in Jerusalem, he comes with soldiers and stops the crowd from beating Paul. Ironically it is Roman forces which come to Paul's rescue and save him from death on this occasion.*

<sup>33</sup> Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. <sup>34</sup> Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. <sup>35</sup> And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, <sup>36</sup> for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!" <sup>37</sup> As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? <sup>38</sup> Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" <sup>39</sup> Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people." <sup>40</sup> And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying: Acts 21:33-40

*The tribune then arrests Paul. The tribune thinks that Paul is a rebel whom Rome should probably prosecute. When Paul finally has an opportunity to speak with the tribune he tells him that he is a Jew and a Roman citizen. He tells the tribune that he would like to speak to the crowd. The tribune grants Paul's request - probably because he does not want to be accused of mistreating a Roman citizen. Paul then addresses the crowd in Hebrew. Paul's choice of Hebrew is another way he can show his faithfulness to the OT and the law. Remember that Hebrew was no longer the most common language spoken in Jerusalem. After returning from exile, most Jews spoke Aramaic. Hebrew was seen as a sort of spiritually important and valuable language since the OT was originally written in Hebrew. Paul is doing all he can to convince the crowd of how important he thinks the OT really is. The crowd simply will not believe him. It may happen, when you try to witness for Jesus, that the crowd will not believe you. What will you do if and when you face persecution from a crowd who will not believe you when you attempt to speak with them?*

**<sup>1</sup>"Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you." <sup>2</sup> And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said: <sup>3</sup>"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. <sup>4</sup>I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, <sup>5</sup>as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. Acts 22:1-5**

*Paul begins his defense. He recounts his beginnings as a faithful Jew who sought to be a true defender of Israel and the law that God had given. He tells them that he started out persecuting followers of the Way – as Christianity was called in its earliest days. He went so far as to obtain the permission of the Jewish leaders to go Damascus and take prisoner any members of the Way. Paul's intent was to bring these people to Jerusalem for punishment. Paul is trying to show how intent he was on protecting and establishing the letter of the law as he understood it.*

**<sup>6</sup> "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. <sup>7</sup> And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' <sup>8</sup> And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' <sup>9</sup> Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. <sup>10</sup> And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' Acts 22:6-10**

*Paul explains how God met him as he was on his way to Damascus. Notice how God spoke to him. When Paul asks who it was that was speaking with him, God could have answered saying, "It's me, Yahweh, the God of the OT whom you worship." But in contrast to that, God answers, "It's me Jesus of Nazareth - to one you're persecuting!" Even as He names Himself, He is trying to get Paul to understand who He is. As we well know, God does get through to Paul and Paul comes to understand more accurately who Yahweh is. Paul's hope here is that as he tells this story, the Jews will also gain a better understanding of God - just as he had done.*

<sup>11</sup> And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. <sup>12</sup> "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, <sup>13</sup> came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. <sup>14</sup> And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; <sup>15</sup> for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.' <sup>17</sup> "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance <sup>18</sup> and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' Acts 22:11-18

*Paul goes on to tell how God sent Ananias to restore his sight. Ananias also told Paul how God would use him as a powerful witness for His glory. After returning to Jerusalem, God told him to get out of Jerusalem quickly because people would not accept his testimony about Jesus.*

*Paul had effectively become a persona non grata. No one wanted him around. The Christians were afraid of him because of his reputation for opposing them. Now the Jews didn't want him because of this new story of his conversion to Christianity. No one was sure of what the truth was. And no one was willing to take any chances on Paul - so God took him out of that situation and, in so doing, protected him.*

<sup>19</sup> And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. <sup>20</sup> And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' <sup>21</sup> And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" <sup>22</sup> Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live." <sup>23</sup> And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, <sup>24</sup> the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this. <sup>25</sup> But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?" <sup>26</sup> When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen." <sup>27</sup> So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." <sup>28</sup> The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth."

**Acts 22:19-28**

*Paul tried to convince God to allow him to stay in Jerusalem at that time, but God insisted that he leave. God told him that He would eventually send Paul to the Gentiles. When Paul tells the crowd that God was sending him to the Gentiles, they decide that they've heard enough. Before the crowd can do anything to Paul, the tribune orders him back to the barracks. The tribune decides to flog Paul to get the truth out of him. When Paul tells his Roman guards that he is a Roman citizen, the guards tell the tribune. The tribune approaches Paul and tells him that he bought his citizenship. Paul tells the tribune that he is a Roman citizen by birth. The fact that Paul was a Roman citizen protected him from several potential beatings during his years of ministry.*

**<sup>29</sup> So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him. <sup>30</sup> But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them. Acts 22:29-30**

*The tribune relents because he recognizes that Paul is a Roman citizen. But he still wants to understand what is actually going on and why this crowd wants to do him harm. So the tribune has Paul unbound and brings him before the Jewish council. He puts Paul in their midst. The implication here is that the tribune fully expects the council to explain the matter to him.*

<sup>1</sup> And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." <sup>2</sup> And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. <sup>3</sup> Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" <sup>4</sup> Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" <sup>5</sup> And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" <sup>6</sup> Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." <sup>7</sup> And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. <sup>9</sup> Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?"

Acts 23:1-9

*Paul opens his defense claiming to have lived his life before God in all good conscience. At this remark, the high priest orders that Paul be struck. When he is hit, Paul chastises the high priest without knowing he was high priest. When he learns that it was the high priest who commanded that he be struck he repents as the law demanded. Even with this obvious clue by his behavior about who Paul was and what he believed, the council is still opposed to him. Now Paul recognizes that there is a better way to defend himself. Rather than try to prove his innocence, he will pit one part of the council against the other. The council is composed of both Sadducees and Pharisees. Sadducees say that there is no resurrection from the dead. Pharisees claim that there is a resurrection from death. So Paul claims that he is being put on trial because he is a Pharisee and believes in resurrection. In particular Paul believes in Jesus' resurrection. But here he mentions only resurrection and not Jesus' resurrection per se. Once he's said this he need say no more. The Sadducees and Pharisees will all too gladly oppose one another over this issue. Since the Pharisees will defend Paul, the issue will be dropped and the council will not be able to condemn Paul. Paul uses the pride and arrogance of the council members against the council. For all intents and purposes, the council makes itself ineffective and unable to come to any conclusion about Paul. Satan will sometimes trap and frustrate himself in his own lies.*

<sup>10</sup> And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks. <sup>11</sup> The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome." <sup>12</sup> When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. <sup>13</sup> There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. <sup>14</sup> They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. <sup>15</sup> Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near." <sup>16</sup> Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. <sup>17</sup> Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him." <sup>18</sup> So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you." <sup>19</sup> The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" <sup>20</sup> And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. <sup>21</sup> But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent." <sup>22</sup> So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things." Acts 23:10-22

*As the council gets out of control, God confirms to Paul that he will not die here. He tells Paul that he will testify about God in Rome. The tribune steps in to control the situation and removes Paul.*

*A group then commits itself to killing Paul. Their plot becomes known and Paul's nephew goes to the tribune and tells him about it. The tribune hears him and sends him away telling him to tell no one about the matter.*

*It is interesting, I think, to see how God works out the details here. First God had confirmed to Paul that he would be ok. Then God works through Paul's sister and nephew to insure that this group that has sworn to kill Paul will be thwarted in their efforts. Again we see God's sovereignty as He works all these details together to keep Paul safe. He is the same God who does similar things today!*

**<sup>23</sup> Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. <sup>24</sup> Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor." <sup>25</sup> And he wrote a letter to this effect: <sup>26</sup> "Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. <sup>27</sup> This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. <sup>28</sup> And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. <sup>29</sup> I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. <sup>30</sup> And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him." Acts 23:23-30**

*The tribune sends Paul to Felix overnight. By acting so quickly, the tribune denies Paul's enemies any opportunity to harm him. The tribune tells Felix that the issue has something to do with Jewish law but he knows nothing about any details. He also lets Felix know that Paul is a Roman citizen. The tribune is effectively protecting himself from any accusations either by the Jews or by Paul. He also rids himself of the matter by sending Paul to Felix. The matter will keep getting pushed up the Roman chain of command to the point where Paul feels he needs to appeal to Caesar. It will be his appeal to Caesar that leads to his imprisonment and ultimately to his death.*

<sup>31</sup> So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. <sup>32</sup> And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him. <sup>33</sup> When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. <sup>34</sup> On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, <sup>35</sup> he said, "I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive." And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium. Acts 23:31-35

*Felix knows nothing about Judaism, but he does know Roman law. Paul has been brought to him as an accused prisoner. So Felix wants to wait until Paul's accusers arrive so he can learn about the charges against Paul. Watch as Paul's fate is determined in the next couple of chapters.*

*When his accusers arrive, their arguments will contain elements of truth and lies. They don't concern themselves with knowing all the details. All they care about is that Paul be stopped from furthering any gospel that excludes the prerequisite that all of the Torah be kept as they understand it must be.*

<sup>1</sup> And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. <sup>2</sup> And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: "Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, <sup>3</sup> in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. <sup>4</sup> But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. <sup>5</sup> For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. <sup>6</sup> He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him." <sup>9</sup> The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so. Acts 24:1-9

*Felix begins by asking Paul's accusers to voice their charges. Tertullus, a spokesman for the Jews, claims that Paul is stirring up trouble. He also claims that Paul tried to profane the temple. The other Jews who accompanied Tertullus agree with all that he says. It may be too harsh to accuse these people of lying. They are under the impression that Paul tried to bring a Gentile into a part of the temple where Gentiles don't belong. But they don't understand what was really happening here.*

*Paul was going into the temple to pay the fees for four men who were completing their vows as the leaders had advised him. In no way was he trying to bring a Gentile into some forbidden part of the temple.*

*The Jews here simply want to accuse Paul and have him arrested. They'd prefer that he be killed but that is beyond their reach presently.*

<sup>10</sup> And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. <sup>11</sup> You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, <sup>12</sup> and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. <sup>13</sup> Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. <sup>14</sup> But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, <sup>15</sup> having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. <sup>16</sup> So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. <sup>17</sup> Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. <sup>18</sup> While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia-- <sup>19</sup> they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. <sup>20</sup> Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, <sup>21</sup> other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: 'It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.'" Acts 24:10-21

*Paul makes his defense. He answers the charges brought against him. He also brings up the issue of resurrection again. Perhaps he hopes to have his accusers argue with one another as had happened before the council in Jerusalem. But no such argument ensues here. We'll shortly see how Felix will deal with this situation.*

**22** But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case." **23** Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs. **24** After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. **25** And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you." **26** At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. **27** When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. Acts 24:22-27

*Luke tells us that Felix did have a good idea about the Way. But Felix isn't ready or willing to make any quick judgment here. He decides to wait for Lysias, the tribune who had sent Paul to him in the first place. As we've already seen Lysias has tried to wash his hands of the situation. So no one will be in any hurry to pursue this matter. Felix does leave Paul in custody, yet he allows Paul some freedom as well. Felix does summon Paul a few times, but apparently all Felix wants is that Paul should bribe him to set him free. The story does give the impression that Felix might have set Paul free in exchange for a bribe.*

*Paul remains in prison for two years. When Felix is succeeded by Procius Festus, he leaves Paul in prison. Felix hasn't been bribed by Paul as he'd hoped and he wishes to do the Jews a favor – so Paul is left sitting in prison.*

<sup>45</sup> Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. <sup>2</sup> And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, <sup>3</sup> asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem-- because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. <sup>4</sup> Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. <sup>5</sup> "So," said he, "let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him." <sup>6</sup> After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. <sup>7</sup> When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. Acts 25:1-7

*Festus visits Jerusalem not long after replacing Felix. The Jewish rulers in Jerusalem approach and make their case against Paul. They ask Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem planning to kill Paul along the way. Festus refuses and keeps Paul in Caesarea. About 1½ weeks later, Festus returns to Caesarea. He quickly summons Paul before his throne. When Paul arrives, the Jews who'd accompanied Festus bring their charges against Paul – charges which they were unable to prove!*

<sup>8</sup> Paul argued in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense." <sup>9</sup> But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?" <sup>10</sup> But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. <sup>11</sup> If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar." <sup>12</sup> Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go." Acts 25:8-12

*Paul denies all the charges brought by the Jews. Festus, however, wants to do the Jews a favor. So he asks Paul if he'd like to go to Jerusalem and face these charges there. Of course, Paul knows that he'll be condemned in Jerusalem. He also knows that he'll probably never reach Jerusalem alive. So he refuses to go to Jerusalem and appeals to Caesar. Every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar if he felt he was being treated unfairly in some case where he stood accused. Once a citizen appealed to Caesar, then he would be brought to Rome and have to wait for an opportunity to appear before Caesar or some representative of his – nothing else could be done. Paul knew that the alternative – to go to Jerusalem and face the Sanhedrin – was a certain death sentence. So he appealed to Caesar and Festus sent him there.*

<sup>13</sup> Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. <sup>14</sup> And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, <sup>15</sup> and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. <sup>16</sup> I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. <sup>17</sup> So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. <sup>18</sup> When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. <sup>19</sup> Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. <sup>20</sup> Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. <sup>21</sup> But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar." Acts 25:13-21

*After some time, king Agrippa comes to Caesarea. While he was there Felix explained Paul's situation to him. Felix admits that he expected to hear that Paul had violated some Roman law and that was why the Jews had accused him. Festus further admits that the whole issue was some matter of Jewish religion and something to do with a certain Jesus. Festus continues and admits that he really has no idea how to handle this so he simply wants to send Paul back to Jerusalem and let the Jews handle it. Festus seems to have had no idea about what would happen to Paul if he went to Jerusalem.*

*Luke is showing how God can use the ignorance of an unbelieving Gentile to establish His will. God had already told Paul that he was nearing the end of his ministry. By putting Paul in a position where he thinks it is best to appeal to Caesar, God has effectively allowed Paul to make the call that will seal his fate. Ironically, God puts Paul in a position where Paul's decision about what to do will put Paul in the very place where God had foretold that he would be!*

<sup>22</sup> Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," said he, "you will hear him." <sup>23</sup> So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. <sup>24</sup> And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. <sup>25</sup> But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. <sup>26</sup> But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. <sup>27</sup> For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."

Acts 25:22-27

*When Agrippa says that he'd like to hear Paul, Festus makes it happen. As Paul is brought before Agrippa, Festus admits that he has no clue about the charges brought by the Jews against Paul. Festus says that he hasn't sent Paul on to Caesar because he doesn't know what to accuse Paul of. Festus admits that he doesn't want to appear a fool and send Paul to Caesar without any charges. So he asks Agrippa to help him to understand what Paul is accused of.*

*What do you think of Festus given his own words in this passage? What does he really want or expect from Agrippa?*

<sup>1</sup> So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: <sup>2</sup> "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, <sup>3</sup> especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. <sup>4</sup> "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. <sup>5</sup> They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. <sup>6</sup> And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, <sup>7</sup> to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! <sup>8</sup> Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? <sup>9</sup> "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. <sup>10</sup> And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. <sup>11</sup> And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. Acts 26:1-11

*Once again Paul defends himself by saying that he is being accused because he is a good Pharisee who believes in resurrection. But note how he here ties the Pharisaic idea of resurrection in general with the specific resurrection of Jesus from the dead after His crucifixion. You'll remember that earlier Paul had claimed to believe in resurrection, but had made no specific mention of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Paul goes on to explain how he started out persecuting Jesus and His followers in the Way. In these verses, Paul explains the lengths that he'd gone to in his efforts to oppose and put an end to the Way.*

<sup>12</sup> "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. <sup>13</sup> At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. <sup>14</sup> And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' <sup>15</sup> And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. <sup>16</sup> But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, <sup>17</sup> delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles-- to whom I am sending you <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' <sup>19</sup> "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, <sup>20</sup> but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. <sup>21</sup> For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. Acts 26:12-21

*Paul goes on to tell Agrippa about his conversion experience. Then Paul goes on to explain how God called him to be a witness for Jesus. Paul details how he obeyed this vision from heaven and ministered the gospel in Judea and also to the Gentiles. He tells Agrippa that it is because of his effectiveness as an evangelist that the Jews have seized him and tried to kill him.*

<sup>22</sup> To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: <sup>23</sup> that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles." <sup>24</sup> And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." <sup>25</sup> But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. <sup>26</sup> For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. <sup>27</sup> King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." <sup>28</sup> And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" <sup>29</sup> And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am-- except for these chains." <sup>30</sup> Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. <sup>31</sup> And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." <sup>32</sup> And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." Acts 26:22-32

*Paul continues his defense claiming that Moses had said that the Christ would suffer and would be the first to rise from the dead. At this, Festus breaks in and tells Paul that he's a madman. Paul says he's perfectly sane and that Agrippa knows the matters that he's talking about. Paul then asks the king himself if he believes or not. Agrippa offers no answer but admits that Paul has all but convinced him.*

*Agrippa puts an end to this interview. He tells Festus that Paul has done and is doing nothing deserving of death. Agrippa admits also, that Paul could be set free except that he's appealed to Caesar! If Paul had not appealed to Caesar, then he might have been set free after his speech before Agrippa. On the other hand, if Paul had not appealed to Caesar before Festus, then he would most likely have been killed by the Jews in Jerusalem or on his way there.*

<sup>1</sup> And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. <sup>2</sup> And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. <sup>3</sup> The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. <sup>4</sup> And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. <sup>5</sup> And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. <sup>6</sup> There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board.

**Acts 27:1-6**

*Paul begins his journey to Rome. Note how Paul is usually not kept under a large guard. There is always at least one guard but often not more than that. The trip was made piecemeal – one step closer at a time. You didn't buy round trip tickets in the ANE. You moved slowly as opportunities came up getting closer to your goal at each step. A much more involved and painstaking undertaking than travel today!*

<sup>7</sup> We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. <sup>8</sup> Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea. <sup>9</sup> Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, <sup>10</sup> saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." <sup>11</sup> But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. <sup>12</sup> And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there. <sup>13</sup> Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. <sup>14</sup> But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. <sup>15</sup> And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. <sup>16</sup> Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. <sup>17</sup> After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. <sup>18</sup> Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. <sup>19</sup> And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. <sup>20</sup> When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned. Acts 27:7-20

*They travel slowly for some time. Since the winds were not helpful they set to port as the winter is about to set in. Not wanting to stay where he was, the centurion takes the advice of several others against Paul's advice and sets sail. They run into bad weather and when it continues storming several days, they give up hope that they will be able to survive.*

*Such risks were not all that uncommon. While we all live with the possibility of some mortal danger, there were more such occasions and they were more frequently encountered in the 1<sup>st</sup> century in the ANE than in our world today.*

**<sup>21</sup> Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. <sup>22</sup> Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. <sup>23</sup> For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, <sup>24</sup> and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' <sup>25</sup> So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. <sup>26</sup> But we must run aground on some island."** Acts 27:21-26

*Paul confronts his fellow shipmates. He tells them that God has assured him that they will survive this situation though the ship will be lost. Imagine how they must have responded to Paul. Some probably thought he was mad and they were all lost. Others, fearful of dying, wanted to believe that Paul was correct. As for himself, Paul knew the voice of his God. He had no doubt but that God would do as He had told Paul He would do.*

*After the event was over and things had turned out as Paul had said, no doubt they thought long and hard about this man Paul and his God. Know this for certain, if you claim to be a believer, then others are watching. Staying close to God and His will can bring you through situations that unbelievers will find remarkable. Trusting God and obeying His voice not only supports you, it is also a powerful witness to those around you.*

<sup>27</sup> When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. <sup>28</sup> So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. <sup>29</sup> And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. <sup>30</sup> And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, <sup>31</sup> Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." <sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go. Acts 27:27-32

*On the fourteenth night, the sailors become aware that they are entering shallower seas. They take steps to stop the ship before they hit rocks and some prepare to abandon ship before it breaks up. Paul warns them that if anyone leaves the ship they will be lost. The soldiers have so much trust in Paul that they cut loose the boats' ropes setting the escape boats adrift. They're afraid and Paul's certainty about what God will do is enough for them to forsake their trust in the normal way to try to survive and to trust in Paul's God.*

*It can seem risky to trust God in life and death situations. But the reality is that every believer has placed his/her trust in God in the most important life and death situation! We have placed our eternal fate in His hands. If we have truly trusted Him to that point then trusting Him for anything less should not seem nearly as difficult nor as important.*

<sup>33</sup> As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing." <sup>34</sup> Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." <sup>35</sup> And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. <sup>36</sup> Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. <sup>37</sup> (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) <sup>38</sup> And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea. <sup>39</sup> Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. Acts 27:33-39

*Paul encourages his shipmates to take some food. He leads them in a sort of unbelievers' communion. They follow his lead and refresh themselves with some food. They lighten the ship. They catch sight of some land and try to run the ship aground there. It begins to seem possible that things may turn out as Paul has predicted!*

<sup>40</sup> So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. <sup>41</sup> But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. <sup>42</sup> The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. <sup>43</sup> But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, <sup>44</sup> and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land. Acts 27:40-44

*The ship runs aground. The fore of the ship is stuck fast. The stern begins to break up as the waves continually pound against it. The soldiers decide to kill the prisoners so that none will escape alive. But Paul's centurion, desiring to keep Paul alive (perhaps believing that by keeping Paul alive he will keep himself alive?!?!), stops the other soldiers from killing anyone. Those who can swim are set off and then the rest cling to broken pieces of the ship to make their way ashore. Everyone manages to get to shore alive as Paul had predicted.*

<sup>1</sup> After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup> The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. <sup>3</sup> When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. <sup>4</sup> When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." <sup>5</sup> He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. <sup>6</sup> They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

**Acts 28:1-6**

*Once ashore they are welcomed by the islanders. They kindle a fire against the cold and Paul is bitten by a poisonous snake. Notice how the islanders interpret this. Since Paul has escaped the sea only to die by being bitten by a viper, they decide that he must be a villain – a murderer and divine justice will not allow him to escape death. Interestingly, they have some idea of divine justice. They believe that Paul is getting only what he must deserve. It seems that these islanders have some sort of belief in karma. But the tables turn on them. Paul simply shakes off the snake. He does not die. Since a deadly viper's poison cannot kill him, they change their minds and decide that Paul is in fact a god. These island inhabitants are a superstitious people. But they are simply doing the best they can to understand the world with their superstitions. Truly they are no different than people today. We are, all of us, simply trying to understand the world using the belief systems that we hold to be true.*

*For Christians, our belief system centers around our God who loves us. In His mercy and grace, He has surrendered His eternal Son over to a horrible fate in order to deliver us from eternal separation from Him. Our belief system is centered on the idea that there is one God and that He loves and values us far more than we have any right to expect. He has done all that is needed for us to enjoy eternity with Him even though we are all miserable sinners – if only we will trust and obey Him.*

<sup>7</sup> Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. <sup>8</sup> It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. <sup>9</sup> And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. <sup>10</sup> They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed. <sup>11</sup> After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. <sup>12</sup> Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. <sup>13</sup> And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. <sup>14</sup> There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome.

**Acts 28:7-14**

*Paul continues his ministry through the healing of several of the island inhabitants. The people are grateful and supply the shipmates with all they need. They set sail after three months in a ship that had wintered there. They continue their journey, ultimately finding passage all the way to Rome.*

*God had told Paul that he would minister in Rome before he died. Paul now sees another fulfillment of God's word in his life.*

<sup>15</sup> And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. <sup>16</sup> And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him. <sup>17</sup> After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. <sup>18</sup> When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. <sup>19</sup> But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar-- though I had no charge to bring against my nation. <sup>20</sup> For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." <sup>21</sup> And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. <sup>22</sup> But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against." <sup>23</sup> When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Acts 28:15-23

*Here as we approach the end of the book of Acts, we find Paul being asked by the people of Rome to tell them about "this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."*

*After all the trials that Paul has faced as he traveled about bringing the gospel throughout his world, God brings him to a place where he is not persecuted for his faith. In fact, the people here receive him well and ask him to tell them about "this sect." Paul still lives with a guard but he is not kept in prison. God has faithfully done all for Paul as He promised. For his part, Paul remains faithful and continues doing all that God asks of him.*

<sup>24</sup> And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. <sup>25</sup> And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: <sup>26</sup> "'Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." <sup>27</sup> For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' <sup>28</sup> Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." <sup>29</sup> <sup>30</sup> He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, <sup>31</sup> proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

**Acts 28:24-31**

*When Paul has finished his preaching some believe and some do not. So Paul answers them quoting Isaiah. Because some of the Jews rejected the gospel, God now offers it to the Gentile. Paul will have much more to say about this in the book of Romans.*

*Paul lived there two whole years supporting himself and continuing to proclaim "the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."*

## **Notes for 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month**

*What struck you most in this week's readings?*

**What questions or comments did you come away with?**

**How does what you learned relate to your life?**

**How does it relate to the Church family?**

**What can you share with your church family from what you've received?**

# Notes for 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month

*Notes from Home Church.*

## **Notes for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Month**

*What struck you most in this week's readings?*

**What questions or comments did you come away with?**

**How does what you learned relate to your life?**

**How does it relate to the Church family?**

**What can you share with your church family from what you've received?**

# Notes for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Month

*Notes from Home Church.*

## **Notes for 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month**

*What struck you most in this week's readings?*

**What questions or comments did you come away with?**

**How does what you learned relate to your life?**

**How does it relate to the Church family?**

**What can you share with your church family from what you've received?**

# Notes for 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month

*Notes from Home Church.*

## **Notes for 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month**

*What struck you most in this week's readings?*

**What questions or comments did you come away with?**

**How does what you learned relate to your life?**

**How does it relate to the Church family?**

**What can you share with your church family from what you've received?**

# Notes for 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month

*Notes from Home Church.*