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Acts

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Acts

A. Introduction and Overview.

1. Acts is the second book penned by Luke to Theophilus. Luke is the author, and this had been confirmed by many of the church fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen and Jerome. It is not known who Theophilus was as he is only mentioned in Acts and in Luke. Most likely he was a Roman official of some prominence as Luke addresses him as “most excellent Theophilus” in Luke 1:3. It is noteworthy that Luke is the only gentile author of any of the books of the New Testament writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
2. It is believed that Luke completed the book prior to Peter being tried and executed as he most certainly would have included that in his narrative. This would explain why Acts seems to end abruptly as it does not include Paul’s trial before Caesar. This would put Acts written sometime before 67AD, as this is the year of Paul’s execution according to early church fathers. Luke was a traveling companion and personal physician to Peter and is mentioned only three times in the New Testament (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon 24).
3. Acts is not a doctrinal book, as it does not set forth any major Christian themes such as is the case with the book of Romans. It is a narrative book, documenting the first decades of the church. It has been titled the “Acts of the Apostles” by many, but also it has been noted that it really should be called “Acts of the Apostles through the Holy Spirit” as it mentions the Holy Spirit more than 50 times. Acts does emphasize that Jesus is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah but also that the gospel is offered to all men and not just the Jews.

B. Chapter One.

1. Acts begins after Jesus’s resurrection when He gave His disciples many proofs that He was alive. “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (1:4-5). They ask Him if He was going to restore the kingdom of Israel, but He answers them that it is up to the Father who sets the times and the dates. He adds they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (1:6-8).

2. He is then taken up to heaven before their eyes into the clouds. Two angels are standing there and they tell them that in the same way that Jesus ascended, He will return. They return from the Mount of Olives where they continue in prayer with His mother Mary and his brothers who are now believers having seen the risen Christ. In those days, Peter stands up and makes reference to Judas, who betrayed Jesus as prophesied (Psalm 69:25) and that another would take his place (Psalm 109:8). They determine that it should be someone who was with them from the beginning. After prayer, they cast lots and Matthias was chosen. It is noteworthy that Scripture is silent about Matthias from then on and that this was the last time that decisions were made by casting lots.

C. Chapter Two.

1. Chapter two opens on the Day of Pentecost: “they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (2:1b-4). The gift of tongues has been a matter of division among believers. Some insist that without demonstration of the gift of tongues, no one is actually born again. However, others point out that there are several instances recorded in the book of Acts where tongues do not accompany salvation such as the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) or the salvation of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-40). The Apostle Paul gives us guidance on speaking in tongues in 1st Corinthians 14:2-19 and elsewhere referring to a church and public meetings.
2. At that time, there were many Jews from many countries who were amazed that the Galileans were speaking and glorifying God in their languages. Peter stands up and delivers a powerful message about Jesus. Many received his message, were baptized and about 3,000 were added to the church that day. They then devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and to prayer (2:42). “And the Lord added to their number daily those that were being saved” (2:47b).

D. Chapter Three.

1. Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray about 3:00PM. A man lame from birth sees them and asks them for money. Peter tells him to look at them. He does so, expecting to receive money. “Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not

have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God” (3:6-8).

2. This provides Peter another opportunity to preach the gospel. He ends it with telling them: “Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed. ‘When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked way’” (3:24-26).

E. Chapter Four.

1. The priests, temple guard and Sadducees come up and are disturbed they are proclaiming in Jesus’s resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. They arrested them and as it was late in the day and then imprisoned them until morning. But many who had heard Peter’s message believed and the number of men in the church grew to 5,000 (4:1-4).
2. The next day, the rulers, elders and teachers of the law and questioned them: “By what power or what name did you do this?” (4:7b). Peter responds that it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth that the lame man, who was standing there before them, was healed. He repeats the prophecy that the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. He then proclaims: Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (4:11-12).
3. They were astonished that these, who were unlearned men who were with Jesus, had performed such a miracle which could not be denied as the man was standing there before them. They had them withdraw while they discussed how to keep what had happened from spreading among the people. They brought them back in and commanded them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard (4:19-20).
4. “After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old” (4:21-22).

5. After their release, they went back to their own people and reported all that was said to them. The people prayed, and the place where they were meeting, was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.
6. The chapter concludes with the people having all things in common so that there were no needy persons among them. “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet” (4:36-37).

F. Chapter Five.

1. The chapter opens with the story of Ananias and Sapphira. They sold a piece of property, but kept back a portion to themselves. They took the rest and laid it at the apostle’s feet. They were attempting to deceive the Holy Spirit as well as the church by presenting themselves as something that they were not. Peter confronts Ananias and he falls down dead. Young men wrap him up and carry him out and bury him. Three hours later, Sapphira comes in and Peter confronts her also. She admits the mutual deceit and also falls down dead. The young men also carry her out and bury her beside her husband. A great fear seized the whole church as well as all that heard about it (5:1-11).
2. The chapter continues with the apostles performing many signs and wonders among the people including healings and casting out of demons. The believers would meet in Solomon’s Colonnade which was a covered porch on the eastern side of the temple. The High Priest and his associates, who were all Sadducees, became jealous and had the apostles arrested and put into the public jail. But during the night, an angel from the Lord came and released them telling them “Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people all about this new life” (5:20).
3. The High Priest and his associates called together the Sanhedrin and sent to the jail for the apostles. But when the officers arrived, they found guards stationed and the doors locked, but the apostles were gone. Then someone came and told them that the men they had arrested were standing in the temple courts teaching the people. The captain and officers went and without force, brought them to the Sanhedrin to be questioned. The High Priest tells them that they gave them strict orders not to teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and the other apostles reply: “We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance

and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (5:29-32).

4. The officials were furious when they heard this and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was a respected teacher of the law stood up and reminded them of others who had caused disturbances which came to nothing. He then said: “Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God” (5:38-39). His speech persuaded them. The apostles were flogged and told not to speak in the name of Jesus and were released after being flogged. “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (5:41-42).

G. Chapter Six.

1. The chapter opens with a complaint of the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews over the distribution of food in that their widows were being neglected. The early church had the practice of having all things in common as explained in chapter four of Acts and care of widows was part of that ministry. Hellenistic Jews were those who had come from areas impacted by Alexander the Great’s conquests where the Greek culture influenced society. They spoke Greek and used the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. The context of chapter six does not seem to indicate a purposeful neglect, but rather that it was something that had been overlooked. The apostles wisely decided to form the office of deacon to address the issue while they devoted themselves to prayer and ministry of the word.
2. They proposed to the disciples to choose men full of wisdom and the Spirit and turn the responsibility over to them. The disciples chose Stephen and six others. Included in the six was Philip, also called the evangelist. We will see him again in chapter eight. “Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke” (6:8-10). The Freedmen were a group of former slaves that had

obtained their freedom and are mentioned only here in the New Testament. They, along with Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria, conspired against Stephen accusing him of blasphemy.

3. They brought him before the Sanhedrin and produced false witnesses where they accused him of speaking against the holy place and Moses. Looking intently at him, they saw as it were, the face of an angel (6:15).

H. Chapter Seven.

1. The chapter opens with the High Priest asking Stephen if the charges brought against him are true. Stephen then goes into a lengthy narrative of how God worked through His people to bring the truth of the Messiah to them. Beginning with the call of Abraham down to the murder of Christ. He concludes with: "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it" (7:51-53).
2. The members of the Sanhedrin became furious and gnashed their teeth at him. "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (7:55-56). At this, they covered their ears and rushed at him dragging him out of city and began to stone him. The witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a man named Saul. "While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'" Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died (7:59-60).

I. Chapter Eight.

1. The chapter opens with Saul's approval of them killing Stephen. A great persecution of the church broke out that day in Jerusalem. All but the Apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Stephen was buried and mourned greatly. Saul went from house to house, dragging off men and women and putting them in prison (8:1-3).
2. The believers who had been scattered, preached the gospel wherever they went. Phillip went down to Samaria and preached the Messiah and performed signs

which caused the people to pay close attention to what he said. Impure spirits came out of many and many who were paralyzed, or lame were healed causing great joy in the city (8:4-8).

3. What follows is the story of Simon the sorcerer. He had impressed people with his dark arts. But when Phillip preached the good news, they believed and were baptized. Simon himself believed and was baptized. The Apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John there that they might receive the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them. Peter and John laid hands upon them and they received the Holy Spirit (8:9-17). Simon, seeing this, offered Peter and John money so that he too could lay hands upon people for them to receive the Holy Spirit. Peter strongly rebukes him and tells him to pray to the Lord for forgiveness. Simon asks them to pray for him so that nothing that was told him would happen to him, Peter and John return to Jerusalem preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages (8:18-25).
4. The question could be asked as to why the Samaritans had not yet received the Holy Spirit. It is important to remember that the book of Acts is a historical record of the early church and shows a transition between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Jewish believers received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts chapter 2). The event in Acts 2 was separate from salvation and baptism in water. The Gentiles received the Holy Spirit at the house of Cornelius (Acts chapter 10). Peter was present in both instances. It is believed that this was to show the unity of the Holy Spirit and that what happened at Samaria and at the house of Cornelius were not separate religious movements. 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us that we now receive the Holy Spirit upon our salvation. However, an additional event is available to all believers, if desired. This is often referred to as the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Not all denominations believe that an additional infilling is made available to believers. This special infilling may happen in conjunction with salvation or could happen later in the life of the believer. To learn more, please study the Joshua Nations Holy Spirit Manual.
5. The chapter concludes with the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip is told to go south from Jerusalem to a desert road leading to Gaza. He obeys and finds the Ethiopian in a chariot and hears him reading the book of Isaiah chapter 53. Philip asks him if he understands what he is reading. The Ethiopian does not, so Philip takes that passage and gives him the good news about Jesus. The Ethiopian receives salvation and Philip baptizes him. The Ethiopian goes on his way

rejoicing and Philip is caught away by the Spirit and preaches the good news on his way to Caesarea.

J. Chapter Nine.

1. Saul goes to the High Priest and asks for letters to the synagogues in Damascus to authorized him to take those who were of the Way (a name for the early Christians) to take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he approaches Damascus, a bright light from heaven flashed about him and he falls to the ground. He hears a voice say to him "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" (9:4).
2. Those with him, heard the sound but did not see anyone. They pick Saul up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could not see. They led him by the hand into Damascus, where for three days, he did not eat or drink and remained blind. The Lord gives a vision to a disciple named Ananias and told him to go to a street called straight and lay hands upon a man named Saul to restore his sight. Ananias initially objects because he had heard of Saul's reputation. The Lord told Ananias "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (9:15-16). He obeys and Saul, who previously had a vision that a man named Ananias would come and restore his sight (9:12).
3. "Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' "Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength" (9:17-18).
4. Saul spends some time with the disciples in Damascus. He preaches in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. After many days, the Jews conspire to kill him and set a watch at the city gates. But Saul's followers enabled him to escape by letting him down in a basket through an opening in the wall. He returns to Jerusalem where the disciples fear him. But Barnabas takes him to the Apostles and tells them of Saul's conversion. Saul stayed with them and moved freely about the city preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. The believers take him down Caesarea and then to Tarsus. "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers" (9:31). The

chapter concludes with the story of Peter healing a paralyzed man named Aeneas and raising a woman named Dorcas from the dead.

K. Chapter Ten.

1. Chapter ten is devoted to the story of Peter and the house of Cornelius. Cornelius was a centurion living in Caesarea. He was a devout man who prayed regularly and gave to the poor. He and his whole household were devout and God fearing. He has a vision where he is told that his prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial to God. He is told to send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Peter who was staying with Simon the tanner. He sends two servants and a devout soldier who attended to him.
2. The following day, as the men from Cornelius are approaching the city, Peter goes up to the roof to pray. He has a vision where a sheet filled with all sorts of unclean animals is lowered down from heaven and he is told to eat. He objects and says that he has never eaten anything unclean. He is told: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (9:15). The vision is repeated three times and then the sheet is immediately taken back up to heaven. While he is wondering what the vision means, the men from Cornelius arrive at Simon's gate and ask for Peter. They tell him of Cornelius's vision and Peter and several of the Jews accompany him and go to Caesarea.
3. Peter arrives at Cornelius's house and he falls at Peter's feet in reverence. Peter tells him to get up as he is a man like him. Cornelius had invited a large group of people to come and hear what Peter has to say. Peter tells them of his own vision and how although Jews are not allowed to visit or associate with a gentile, God has told him that he must not call anyone impure or unclean. He then shares the gospel with them and as he is speaking, the Holy Spirit falls upon the Gentiles, and they begin speaking in tongues. The Jews with Peter are amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles. Peter says that surely no one could stand in the way of their being baptized. He orders that they be baptized and then stays with them for a few days.

L. Chapter Eleven.

1. The chapter opens with the Apostles and believers throughout Judea hearing that the Gentiles had received the word of God. Peter is criticized for eating with them. Peter goes up to Jerusalem and explains what he had seen in his vision. One interesting detail is Peter adding a word to Cornelius's testimony that the

angel told him “He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved” (11:14). So, salvation was already in the understanding of Cornelius who was a devout and righteous man. “When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life” (11:18).

2. The chapter continues with an account of the believers being scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch but speaking only to the Jews. Some men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks and many were saved. News reached Jerusalem and Barnabas was sent and he encouraged the believers there. He went on to Tarsus to look for Saul. He found him and brought him back to Antioch where they both ministered to the believers there for one year. It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.
3. Several prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One named Agabus and predicted through the Spirit that a great famine would spread throughout the Roman world. This happened during the reign of Claudius. The believers in Antioch sent relief to Judea which they did by Saul and Barnabas.

M. Chapter Twelve.

1. Chapter twelve opens with King Herod arresting some of the church leaders including James, whom he executed with the sword. It is confusing to modern readers to keep those with the title King Herod straight as there are four with the title Herod mentioned in the New Testament. Part of the confusion stems from the fact that Herod became a common term for ruler. King Herod the Great was born about 72 BC, the son of a high ranking Hasmonaean official which once ruled Judea as an independent kingdom until it was conquered by the Roman general Pompey in 63 BC. The Hasmonaean were a mixture of Jews and Edomites which were descendants of Esau. Herod the Great identified himself as Jewish although he did not practice the Jewish faith. He was alive during Jesus’s birth and attempted to kill Him (Matthew 2:16-18). Herod was placed upon the throne by the Roman senate in about 41 BC which was the beginning of the Herodian dynasty. Herod the Great is known for his brutality, even killing members of his own household out of paranoia and fear of losing his throne. He constructed many projects and greatly expanded the temple mount and started construction of the new temple which continued after his death in about 1 BC.
2. He was succeeded by his three sons who were given authority by Caesar Augustus. One was Archelaus who was appointed as an ethnarch, or ruler of an

ethnic group over Samaria, Judea and Idumea. He was removed by Augustus allegedly for incompetence and replaced by a series of prefects or governors including Pilate who was governor at the time of Jesus's crucifixion. He is mentioned only once in the New Testament when Joseph hears that he is ruling in his father's place and moves his family, including Jesus to Nazareth in Galilee (Matthew 2:22-23). Another son, Herod Phillip, II was appointed Tetrarch, or ruler of Iturea and Tracoinus located northeast of Galilee. He is mentioned in the New Testament as being the one who lost his wife to his brother, Herod Antipas who was rebuked by John the Baptist (Matthew 14:3-4) and later had him executed (Mark 6:21-28). Herod Antipas was the one who was in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus's crucifixion and he and Pilate interacted with Jesus and became friends (Luke 23:7-12). But it was Herod Agrippa I, who was Herod the Great's grandson and nephew of Antipas, who was ruling over Judea from 41-44 AD in Jerusalem, who persecuted the Apostles and is the one referred to in Acts chapter 12.

3. Herod Agrippa seized Peter and put him in prison guarded by four squads of soldiers. He intended to bring him out for trial after the Passover. The church was earnestly praying for him. An angel appears and strikes him on the side waking him up. He tells Peter to quickly get up and follow him. Peter's chains fall off and he follows the angel thinking it is a vision. The prison gates open and Peter follows him for one street when he realizes that it is not a vision. He goes to the house of Mary, mother of Mark where the church is praying. He knocks, but the servant girl, Rhoda is so excited that she doesn't open the door but runs and tells the church that it is Peter. They tell her that she is out of her mind, but Peter keeps knocking and they open the door. He motions them to keep silent and then departs for another place.
4. The next morning, there is commotion about Peter's disappearance. Herod interrogates the guards but not finding out the answer, has them executed (12:18-19). He then goes to Caesarea where he had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon. They depended upon him for food and wanted peace. On an appointed day, Herod appeared before them dressed in his royal robes and delivers a speech. The people cry out that it is the voice of a god. Herod does not give glory to God and he is struck down, eaten by worms and dies. But the word of God continues to spread and flourish. Barnabas and Saul return from Jerusalem taking Mark with them.

N. Chapter Thirteen.

1. The church in Antioch worshiped and fasted and the Holy Spirit directed them to set apart Barnabas and Saul “for the work to which I have called them” (13:2b). After fasting and praying, the church leaders laid hands upon them and sent them off. This was the beginning of what would become known as Paul’s first missionary journey. They took John (Mark) with them and journeyed to Cyprus to the city of Salamis where they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.
2. They traveled throughout the whole island and came to Papos where they encountered a Jewish sorcerer named Bar-Jesus who was an attendant of the Proconsul Sergius Paulus. The Proconsul sent for Barnabas and Saul because he desired to hear the word of God. The sorcerer also named Elymas which has as its root sorcerer and he opposed the brothers. “Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun” (13:9-11). There was a strong demonic presence in that city and Saul demonstrated that the Holy Spirit was far more powerful. It is interesting to note from this time forth, Saul is called Paul (13:9).
3. From Papos, they sailed to Perga which was located on the southwestern Mediterranean coast of modern-day Turkey. Today, the city is in ruins but it was a thriving metropolis at that time. It was here that John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. This would later become a matter of dispute between Paul and Barnabas about taking him on a second journey. The brothers then went to Pisidian Antioch in the southern part of the province of Galatia. This Antioch is the second Antioch mentioned in the book of Acts, the first was in Syria where the Barnabas and Saul were first sent from. Both have great significance in the ministry of Paul. Both cities were built by a family of Syrian kings who ruled much of that territory under the name Antiochus.
4. On the Sabbath, Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue where they were invited to speak. Paul begins to speak of the history of the Jews beginning with their sojourn in Egypt. He presents the gospel of Jesus including His death and resurrection and the forgiveness of sins. They were invited to speak again the next Sabbath. The next Sabbath, almost the entire city came to hear them. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They heaped abuse upon Paul and contradicted him. “Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: ‘We

had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles” (13:46-47). When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad honoring the word “and all who were appointed for eternal life believed” (13:48b).

5. The chapter concludes with “the word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So, they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (13:49-52).

O. Chapter Fourteen.

1. In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue and preached effectively so that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. This stirred up opposition so that eventually, the brothers had to leave. They fled to Lystra and Derbe where Paul heals a man lame from birth. This caused the people to exclaim that they were gods come down into human form. When Paul and Barnabas heard this, they rushed into the crowd telling them that they were men just like them and bringing them the good news. Then some Jews from Iconium came and stirred up the crowd against them. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city thinking he was dead. The disciples gathered around him and he got to his feet and went back into the city. The next day, the brothers left for Derbe.
2. In Derbe, they preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. They then returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch to encourage the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust” (14:22b-23).
3. They journeyed back through Pisidia, to Perga on to Attalia where they sailed back to Antioch in Syria. The chapter closes with, “on arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples” (14:27-28).

P. Chapter Fifteen.

1. The chapter opens with certain Jewish believers coming to Antioch and placing a burden upon the gentile believers of circumcision, telling them that they cannot be saved otherwise. Paul and Barnabas disputed with them. The church appointed Paul and Barnabas to go up to Jerusalem along with some other believers to see the Apostles and elders about this question. When they arrived, they were welcomed by the church and told of all that God had done through them. But certain believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees insisted that the gentiles be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.
2. "After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are'" (15:7-11).
3. James, the half-brother of Jesus and an elder of the church in Jerusalem, spoke up and gave his judgement regarding the issue. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things" (15:28-29). This decision was accepted by the group and communicated to the believers in Antioch by means of a letter sent by Judas and Silas. The requirements seem somewhat strange to modern believers especially pertaining to the prohibition of eating food offered to idols, from blood, and meat that comes from strangled animals. Some bible scholars point out that it could be a concession to the Pharisees to achieve harmony.
4. The chapter closes with a dispute between Paul and Barnabas over taking John Mark with them on a second missionary journey to see how the believers were doing in the areas they visited during the first journey. Paul was most likely concerned over John Mark leaving them on the first journey. They could not agree and parted company. Barnabas takes John Mark to Cypress while Paul takes Silas and travels through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches.

Q. Chapter Sixteen.

1. In this chapter, we are first introduced to Timothy when Paul arrives in Lystra after traveling through Derbe on his second missionary journey. Timothy is the son of a Jewish believing mother and a Greek father. He is well thought of by the other believers in Lystra. Paul wants to take him with him on his journey so he circumcises him because of the Jews in that city who knew that his father was Greek. As they traveled from town to town in that area, they delivered the decision reached by the Apostles and elders and the churches were strengthened and grew in numbers daily.
2. Paul and his companions travel throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia but were prohibited by the Holy Spirit from preaching in Asia. They came to the border of Mysia, a region in western Asia Minor, and tried to enter Bithynia, in northwest Asia Minor, but the Spirit of Jesus Christ would not allow them (16:6-7). This raises the interesting question of why they were prohibited by the Holy Spirit from preaching the good news in those areas. One possible answer is that hearts were already prepared such as Lydia and others and if Paul had gone into the prohibited areas, it might have frustrated the work into which he was called.
3. The brothers travel to Troas where Paul has a vision of a man begging him to come to Macedonia and help them. The author of Acts who is Luke, never refers to himself by name but there are four instances of Luke using “we” indicating a shift from third person narrative to first. The first is here in 16:11. They sailed to Samothrace, an island in the north Aegean Sea, and the next day sailed to Neapolis, on the far eastern shore of Macedonia. From there they traveled to Philippi, northwest of Neapolis and which was a Roman colony and major city of that region. They stayed there several days, and, on the Sabbath, they went to the river expecting to find a place of prayer. In other places, the brothers went to the Jewish synagogues, but here they go to a river. There was a requirement that there must be ten men to have a synagogue, so apparently that was not the case here. They go on the Sabbath expecting to find prayer and begin speaking to the women gathered there.
4. One of the women, Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira a city in Asia Minor. Thyatira was a leading city of various craft guilds especially dyeing facilities and was a center of the purple cloth trade. Purple cloth was a sign of wealth and expensive so, Lydia most likely was prosperous. She also was a worshiper of God and responded to the message of salvation. She and her household were baptized, and she invited the brothers to come to her house and stay while they were in Philippi.

5. While in the city, a slave girl, who earned money for her masters by fortune-telling, followed them around for several days crying out “These men, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation, are the slaves of the Most High God” (16:17). Paul was greatly aggravated by this and commanded the demon to come out of her. Why a demon was proclaiming the way to salvation through the message of Paul is not clear. One possibility is that it knew that the attention that Paul was receiving would cause a great disturbance. Her owners, angry at losing their means of income, drag Paul and Silas before the magistrates and accuse them of disrupting the city. They are stripped of their clothes and beaten with rods and turned over to a jailer and their feet placed in stocks.
6. At about midnight, Paul and Silas are singing hymns to God and the other prisoners are listening. An earthquake shakes the prison opening the doors and all the prisoner’s chains fell off. The jailor wakes up and fearing the prisoners have escaped, is ready to kill himself with his sword. Paul cries out that they are all there. The jailor rushes in and falls at their feet. He says: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (16:30b). They tell him to believe in the Lord Jesus and he and his household will be saved. They speak the message of the Lord to his whole household. He washes their wounds and right away, he and his household were baptized.
7. The next morning, the magistrates send a message to him to release Paul and Silas. But Paul tells him that as they were Roman citizens, they were treated unjustly punished without a trial and demand an apology. The magistrates hearing this are fearful and apologize and urge them to leave the city. After leaving the jail, they return to Lydia’s house where they encourage the believers before departing. Lydia was a Gentile and the first convert in Europe.

R. Chapter Seventeen.

1. Paul and his companions then traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. They preached the good news there for three Sabbaths and a number of Jews and Greeks and believing women believed. This caused jealousy among the Jews and they stormed the house of a man named Jason who was the host for the brothers (17:7). This is the first time we are introduced to Jason in the New Testament and we know little about him. He may be either Jew or Greek as his name is Greek and he could have heard the gospel message on one of the Sabbaths and was

converted. Paul mentions a Jason in Romans 16:21 but it is not known if this is the same one.

2. Not finding Paul and Silas at Jason's house they drag Jason and some of the brothers before the city magistrates and accuse them of disturbance and calling Jesus as king instead of Caesar. The officials take a security bond from Jason and the others, release them. When it was night, the brothers send Paul and Silas off to Berea located about 45 miles to the west of Thessalonica. Here, they were received open mindedness listening to Paul's message and "examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (17:11b) resulting in many conversions. But Jews from Thessalonica upon hearing of Paul's proclamation of the gospel, came there agitating and disturbing the crowds. The brothers escorted Paul immediately to the sea and onward to Athens, but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. Paul sent instructions back to have Silas and Timothy join him as quickly as possible.
3. While in Athens, Paul's spirit is troubled seeing that the city is full of idols. He begins preaching in the synagogue and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers argued with him and took him to the Areopagus, a small hill northwest of Athens covered in stone seats. Later, this became known as Mars Hill. It was a place where different philosophies were discussed. "Now all the Athenians and the foreigners residing there spent their time on nothing else but telling or hearing something new" (17:21).
4. Paul begins a masterful message first addressing the city's obsession with idols. He then hones in on the essential point: "Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has set a day when He is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead" (17:30-31). Upon hearing of the resurrection, some ridiculed him, but among those listening "some men joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (17:34). Paul leaves their presence although some desired to hear from him again.

S. Chapter Eighteen.

1. After this, Paul travels to Corinth where he meets a Jewish man named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They had come from Rome due to Claudius evicting all Jews from that city. He joins them in their mutual trade of tent making. He continues to

speaking in the synagogue each Sabbath reasoning with the Jews and the Greeks that Jesus is the Messiah. But the Jews resisted and Paul shook his robe and told them that their blood was on their heads and that he was innocent and that now he would go to the gentiles (18:6). He left and went to the house of Titus Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. However, Crispus, the leader of the synagogue was a believer along with his household. Many of the Corinthians when they heard the gospel believed and were baptized.

2. "Then the Lord said to Paul in a night vision, 'Don't be afraid, but keep on speaking and don't be silent. For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city.' And he stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (18:9-11). The Jews later made a united attack against Paul and brought him to the judge's bench accusing him of teaching people to worship God contrary to the law. Gallio, who was proconsul of Achaia, refused to hear the case as it was a matter of the Jewish laws and customs and he drove them from his bench. The Jews then seized Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue and beat him in front of the judge's bench. Most likely Sosthenes replaced Crispus when he became a Christian and the Jews beat him because he had initiated bringing Paul in front of Gallio without success. There is an interesting mention of a Sosthenes in Paul's later salutation to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 1:1 where he calls Sosthenes a "brother". If this is the same man, it is a validation of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. It is also interesting that in Paul's discussion of divisions in the Corinthian church that he mentions that Crispus was among only a few that he baptized showing that he did not come to create division but to preach the gospel (18:14-17).
3. Paul later travels to Ephesus, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. He leaves them there and sails to Caesarea and then on to Antioch in Galatia where he travels from place to place in Galatia to strengthen the disciples. This begins Paul's third missionary journey (18:22-21:17). A Jew named Apollos who was a native of Alexandria, comes to Ephesus and begins to speak boldly in the synagogue. He was powerful in knowledge of the Scriptures and of the Lord, but only knew of John's baptism. John spoke of the need for repentance but apparently, Apollos did not know fully of Jesus's death and resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Priscilla and Aquila take him aside and teach him the way of salvation more accurately. "When he wanted to cross over to Achaia, the brothers wrote to the disciples urging them to welcome him. After he arrived, he

greatly helped those who had believed through grace. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating through the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah” (18:27-28).

T. Chapter Nineteen.

1. While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled eventually coming to Ephesus. There he found 12 disciples who he asked with what baptism they had been baptized with. He asked if they had received the Holy Spirit. They were not aware of the Holy Spirit as they had only received the baptism of repentance of John. Paul spoke of Jesus and they believed and received the Holy Spirit when Paul laid his hands upon them. Paul then spoke for three months in the synagogue until he received opposition. He then withdrew and met with the disciples in a hall belonging to Tyrannus. He taught there for two years and all of inhabitants of Asia heard the message about the Lord.
2. “God was performing extraordinary miracles by Paul’s hands, so that even facecloths or work aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, and the diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them” (19:11-12). Some itinerant Jewish exorcists attempted to expel those with evil spirits using the phrase “Jesus who Paul preaches”. Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. The evil spirit answered them, “I know Jesus, and I recognize Paul—but who are you?” Then the man who had the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them all, and prevailed against them, so that they ran out of that house naked and wounded (19:13-16). This became known and fear fell upon those in Ephesus resulting in many who practiced black arts coming and confessing. They brought their books worth 50,000 pieces of silver and burned them.
3. A major disruption occurred in Ephesus initiated by a silversmith named Demetrius who made shrines for the city goddess Artemis. He assembled similar craftsman telling them that Paul has misled many telling them that Paul says that gods made by hand are not gods. The crowd was enraged and shouted “great is Artemis of the Ephesians” (19:28). The city was filled with confusion and they dragged two of Paul’s Macedonian traveling companions Gaius and Aristarchus into the amphitheater where they continued to shout their praise to Artemis for two hours. The city clerk eventually was able to calm the crowd and instructed them that if they thought they had a legal case, they were to bring it before the courts. He then dismissed the crowd.

U. Chapter Twenty.

1. After the uproar, Paul sent for the disciples, encouraged them and left for Macedonia. He eventually comes to Troas and intending to leave the next day, spoke to the disciples until midnight. They were in an upper room and a young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in a window ledge, fell asleep and fell from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down and fell upon him exclaiming not to be alarmed that his life was in him. They broke bread and he continued to speak until morning. They brought the boy home alive and were comforted.
2. Paul continues his journey hurrying as he desired to reach Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost. He reaches Miletus which was on the coast of Greece and sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus. He tells them: "And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, bound in my spirit, not knowing what I will encounter there, except that in town after town the Holy Spirit testifies to me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me. But I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace" (20:22-24). He goes on to encourage them to shepherd the flock that the Holy Spirit appointed them to oversee. He warns them of savage wolves that will come in not sparing the flock as well as those from among them with deviant doctrines that will emerge designed to lure ones into following them. After this, he knelt down and prayed and there was much weeping upon his departure.

V. Chapter Twenty-one.

1. Paul and his companions continue their journey and arrive at Tyre in Syria. There, the disciples through the Spirit warn him not to go to Jerusalem. They then arrive in Caesarea and stay with Philip the evangelist, the same Philip who preached the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch. While there, a prophet named Agabus came and with the use of Paul's belt, tied his hands and feet telling Paul that the Jews would bind him in a similar fashion. Those around him begged him not to go to Jerusalem. Paul emphatically told them that he was ready to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.
2. When Paul reaches Jerusalem, he tells the brothers all that he has done through the Holy Spirit and they glorified God. But they instruct him that because of the Jews who are zealous of the law, that he should take four men who have purified themselves and along with them shave his head as a sign that he too is careful

about observing the law. Paul does so, but after seven days, he is recognized and the crowd is stirred up and begin to beat him. The commander of the Roman garrison, Claudius Lysias (23:26), hears the uproar and takes Paul from the crowd. Paul asks permission to speak to the crowd and is granted the request. He begins to speak to the crowd in the Hebrew language.

W. Chapter Twenty-two.

1. The chapter begins with Paul's testimony to which the crowd listens to him. But when he says that the Lord told him in a vision that He would send him far away to the Gentiles, the crowd erupts with cries of "wipe this person off the earth, it is a disgrace for him to live" (22:22).
2. The commander orders him to be brought into the barracks to be scourged. But as Paul is being laid out to be scourged, he reveals his Roman citizenship. The commander realizes that he has taken a Roman citizen prisoner without a trial. He releases him and calls for the entire Sanhedrin and the chief priest to come down the next day and places Paul before them.

X. Chapter Twenty-three.

1. Paul begins his defense saying that he had lived his life before God in a good conscience until that day. He is ordered to be struck by the High Priest on the mouth which causes Paul to call him a whitewashed wall. This causes others to ask him "do you dare to revile God's High Priest?" Paul claims ignorance of that fact. But then he realizes that part of them were Sadducees and part Pharisees, he announces his position as a Pharisee. This causes such an outburst that the commander is forced to rescue him again and take him once more into the barracks.
2. The following night, the Lord stood by him and said, "Have courage! For as you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (23:11). When it was day, the Jews form a conspiracy to kill Paul, and 40 men made an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed him. They ask the Sanhedrin to go to the commander and ask him to bring Paul down for further questions. But the son of Paul's sister hears of the plot and is able to inform the commander of it. He sends Paul under heavy guard to Antonius Felix, the procurator of Judea, along with a letter explaining the circumstances. Felix reads the letter and tells him that he will give him a hearing when his accusers come. Paul is kept under guard in Herod's palace.

Y. Chapter Twenty-four.

1. After five days Ananias the High Priest came down with some elders and a lawyer named Tertullus and presented their case against Paul. Paul was brought in and Tertullus began to accuse him in flowery language. He referred to Paul as a plague and an agitator throughout the Roman world. Paul begins his defense and ends with, "Either let these men here state what wrongdoing they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin, or about this one statement I cried out while standing among them, Today I am being judged before you concerning the resurrection of the dead" (24:20-21).
2. Felix delayed his verdict and kept Paul under guard with some freedom to allow his friends to minister to him. Felix would often converse with Paul hoping to receive money. But he became afraid when Paul spoke about righteousness and judgement. After two years, Felix received a successor Porcius Festus, "and because he wished to do a favor for the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison" (24:27).

Z. Chapter Twenty-five.

1. Festus goes to Jerusalem where the Jews accuse Paul and ask that he be brought to Jerusalem planning to ambush and kill him on the way. He goes to Caesarea and the Jews from Jerusalem accuse him of charges which they were unable to prove. Festus asks Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried before him. Paul responds that there is nothing in the Jews charges against him and he appeals to Caesar.
2. After a few days, King Herod Agrippa of Judea, who was the grandson of King Herod the Great and the last known king of the Herodian dynasty arrive with his wife Bernice and Festus tells them about Paul. Agrippa desires to see him and Paul is brought before them.

AA. Chapter Twenty-six.

1. Festus and Agrippa bring Paul out to hear his defense. Paul presents a summary of his life as a man who first persecuted the Christians and then became one of them. "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Instead, I preached to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance" (26:19-20).

2. At one point, Agrippa cries out that Paul is mad. But Paul replied, "I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. On the contrary, I'm speaking words of truth and good judgment. For the king knows about these matters. It is to him I am actually speaking boldly. For I am convinced that none of these things escapes his notice, since this was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe" (25:25-27). Afterwards, Agrippa tells Festus that Paul had done nothing that deserved death or chains and that if he had not appealed to Caesar, he could have been released.

BB. Chapter Twenty-seven. It was decided to sail to Italy. Paul was handed over to a centurion named Julius of the Imperial Regiment. They began their journey but it ended in a shipwreck. Paul prophesied that none of the crew or prisoners would lose their lives. The ship broke up on a reef but all 276 made it to shore.

CC. Chapter Twenty-eight.

1. They learned that the island upon which they came to was Malta. The natives treated them with much kindness. A leading man of the island named Publius provided them with hospitality for three days. His father was sick in bed with a fever and dysentery, but Paul healed him.
2. After three months, they sailed in a ship that had wintered at Malta. They arrived at Italy and Paul was greeted by disciples who had journeyed a distance of about 40 miles (Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns - 28:15) to meet him. Paul is interviewed by the Roman Jews who had heard nothing about him. "After arranging a day with him, many came to him at his lodging. From dawn to dusk he expounded and witnessed about the kingdom of God. He tried to persuade them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Some were persuaded by what he said, but others did not believe" (28:23-24).
3. The chapter and book closes with: "Then he stayed two whole years in his own rented house. And he welcomed all who visited him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with full boldness and without hindrance" (28:30-31).

DD. Discussion Question, Application and Passing it on.

1. Tongues (chapter 2) can be a divisive matter among Christians. What is the proper position to have regarding this issue? See 1 Corinthians chapter 14). How

would you respond to someone who insists that it is necessary to validate being born again?

2. The judgement of Annias and Sophira (5:1-11) seem very harsh to our modern concepts. Why was this so important in the early church? What unrighteous behavior do you see in churches around you that is worse than their sin? How would this be judged by Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 5:10).
3. During the Covid pandemic, many churches were forced to close their doors and some did not recover from the governmental edicts. How could the response of the apostles to the Sanhedrin in chapter 5 have been applied to this situation?
4. Throughout the book of Acts, we see that the Jews vehemently opposed Paul's mission to the Gentiles. Why was this? Do you see similar opposition to groups of people in your fellowship such as to the poor or those of other races? How would you address this?
5. Why did Paul make it a practice to go to Jewish synagogues in the cities he visited? What might you learn as to application to your own gospel outreach?
6. What is the practice of believers as described in the book of Acts? Do they meet in church buildings or in houses? Why and is this something we should consider today?
7. What do you see in the method Paul used to present the gospel in Athens? How could we learn from this?
8. Paul uses the fact that he was a Roman citizen. How might we use something similar in our defense?

This New Testament survey was provided by Joshua Nations (JoshuaNations.org)