



# ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

DR. CHRIS GNANAKAN

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**GOD, JESUS' CHURCH, THE HOLY SPIRIT!**

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# INTRODUCTION

## LUKE'S INTENTION

Luke 1:14; 24:44-49; Acts 1:1-8; 28:28-31

### Purpose

#### Bridges Luke builds in Acts:

1. OT/NT Promise & Fulfillment
2. Jew & Gentile
3. Theology & Ethics
4. Mission & Martyrdom

## COMPOSITION

**Progress Report:** The development of the Church Jesus is building – Its history, geography and spirituality; record of how the Gospel spreads, Spirit works, Christians witness and Church expands.

**Apologia:** Defense of the ministry and mission of Jesus and his Apostles, particularly Paul before Jewish Rabbis, Greek Philosophers, and Roman Magistrates; seeks to legitimize Christianity to demonstrate that Christians are 'radicals,' but not revolutionaries.

**Theological Treaty:** The risen Christ is Lord of all the earth – His Gospel is unstoppable and must be taken to all nations; He continues to work through His body, the Spirit-filled Church, whose unfinished task is to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (**Acts 1:8**).

**Mission and Martyrdom:** The sending out of Jesus' disciples and their willingness to suffer or die for Christ is shown to be central (**Acts 14:22**); Luke seeks to encourage believers to expect various hardships, trials and opposition, while taking advantage of them to propagate the Gospel and plant churches worldwide.

## THEMES

Luke demonstrates how the Church developed an ethic of martyrdom where suffering as a witness is a pervasive influence upon the Church's worship, work, and way of life. God normally protects Jesus' disciples but, as in the case of his own Son, there is no guarantee! The book of Acts is shaped by obstacles, disputes and various persecutions. Paul's call (Acts 8:1-4; 9:15-16), understanding of, use of (Acts 22:25 beatings; Acts 25:11 trials) and teachings on suffering provide a theological-literally framework. This framework shows the missional Church how unjust suffering for Jesus' name can serve as

**An Engine** to prime and propel the Gospel toward uncharted territories of Jerusalem (Acts 3:18), Samaria (Acts 8:4-24), and Rome (Acts 20:17-28:31), to the ends of the earth. Sufferings normally follows ministry and often create opportunities for more ministry.

**A Compass** to guide the Church's missionary enterprise through difficulties into all nations (Acts 13:48-52; 14:5-6; 19-20; 16:25-40; 17:10, 13-15). Rarely are believers (and often only apostles) given assurance of safety (Acts 9:31; 12:1-19; 18:9-11; 19:1-20). In Acts, it becomes obvious that wherever they went there was a definite pattern of growing opposition driving them out yet directing their paths.

**A Thermostat** with a thermometer within that measures the condition of a place (the heart) against a set standard. It is designed to regulate or correct it to the desired standard. Persecutions reveal and, if allowed, can restore the Christian's and Church's commitment to compassionate ministry and fulfillment of Jesus' Great Commission. God's greater purposes will ultimately be accomplished despite problems (Acts 20-28). Paul's life and ministry (Acts 20:24) is exemplary – a challenging model for missions today!

## OUTLINE

*The Church's mission to the whole world through suffering martyrdom*

**Ch. 1 – 12** are Peter's mission to and for the Jews (Acts 1-7). His two messages (Acts 2-3) trigger two persecutions (Acts 4-5), leading to Israel's final rejection of the Gospel, which is depicted in Stephen's stoning after his sermon (Acts 6-7). With "the keys of the Kingdom," Peter verifies the Gospel going into Samaria by Philip (Acts 8). After Paul's conversion, he takes it to the Gentiles (Acts 10-11, Cornelius). Note the results: Peter faces opposition and is arrested, but delivered (Acts 12)

**Ch. 13 – 28** are Paul's mission turning to the Gentiles. After defending the "Gospel of grace" to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15) he takes it to the ends of his known world. Paul's first (Acts 13-14), second (Acts 16-18:22), and third trips (Acts 18:23-21:17), aptly termed "missionary journeys" result in local churches everywhere. Note how through many afflictions, all nations or people groups enter God's kingdom through faith in Christ! This leads to Paul's arrest, which providentially takes the Gospel to the center of Rome (Acts 21:18 - 28:31)

# I. THE FOUNDATIONS OF JESUS' CHURCH. 1:1 - 6:7

## CH.1 INCEPTION: THE CHURCH'S FOUNDATION, PRIMARY FEATURES, AND MAIN BUSINESS

### 1 – 5 Preface

Part 2 of Luke's research begins here (Col.4:4; Acts 16:10; 20:6; 27:1; 2 Tim.4:11). Though not stated explicitly, Luke is most likely the author. This can be discerned by comparing Acts to the Gospel of Luke's introductions, writing style, and themes, as well as his long-term travel and companionship with Paul. Both were sent to Theophilus "lover of God", who was probably a wealthy patron and potentially an advocate.

### 6 – 12 Ascension of Messiah

Jesus instructs the apostles as to how they will continue his work, in spite of the fact that he will no longer physically be with them. Note the directional elements in the way this is portrayed: the Son taken UP, Spirit coming DOWN, and Church sent OUT into all the world. Acts 1:8 serves as a table of contents indicating where and to whom the Gospel must go (Isa.49:6). Instead of trying to figure out the exact time Christ will restore the kingdom, his disciples must redeem the time by focusing on the Spirit's leading, living out their faith, and getting the Gospel out.

### 13 – 26 Selection of Matthias

The restoration of "the twelve" is the main concern at the end of chapter one. The Gospel of the kingdom is that God's righteous rule is now a reality because of what Jesus did and his Spirit is doing (Matt.4:23). It is characterized by love, justice, and grace. The witness of the Church is that of a visible community demonstrating what it is to belong to such a heavenly colony on earth, in the name of Jesus.

### Mission and Martyrdom:

The sending out of Jesus' disciples and their willingness to suffer or die for Christ is shown to be central (**Acts 14:22**); Luke seeks to encourage believers to expect various hardships, trials and opposition, while taking advantage of them to propagate the Gospel and reach out to the furthest corner worldwide.

## CH.2 PROCLAMATION AT PENTECOST: THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT GROW THE CHURCH

### 1 – 13 Promised Spirit

The Holy Spirit is sent to empower believers for bold witness. An interesting dimension in the relationship of the members of the Trinity is displayed by the Holy Spirit's purpose. He does not come to elevate himself, but instead points to Jesus, assisting believers in taking Jesus' name to all nations. The empowerment of the Holy Spirit is the clothing, baptism, and equipment that John the Baptist said the disciples must have in order to spread the Gospel and plant churches at the farthest corner of the earth (Lk.3:16; 24:48-49).

### 14 – 36 Peter’s Sermon

This is the first of many messages in Acts. It is a model for preachers as it is faithful to God’s revealed truth (Old Testament Scriptures), centered on the person and work of Christ, and made relevant to the audience and context. The signs – wind, fire, tongues – and witnessing in many languages is explained as the fulfillment of God’s promise (Acts 2:15-16). Joel 2:28-32 prophesied of a time God would pour out his Spirit on “all people” so that whoever calls on the Lord’s name would be saved! Peter’s evangelistic sermon told of God’s promise to David of Jesus’ resurrection and future, glorious enthronement (Acts 2:34). People could then repent to receive God’s salvation in Christ, or reject it.

### 37 – 47 Participation in the Spirit

The believer’s faith was proven through baptism in water when they became a part of Jesus’ Church as new disciples. After this initiation, they continued in the Word and in good works. Their worship was doctrinally sound, and fellowship (koinonia) with Christ’s Spirit featured the breaking bread, fervent prayers and communal sharing.

Progress report #1: “. . . the Lord added to their numbers day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47)

## CH.3 POWER HEALING: CHRISTIANITY IS AN EMPOWERING RELATIONSHIP, NOT A POWERLESS RELIGION

### 1 – 10 Demonstration

Peter and John, now working together, clarify that Christianity is not another religion entangled with monetary gain. Representing the name of Jesus by its nature, the Gospel still had Jesus’ wonder-working power to heal a man who had been lame from birth.

### 11 – 17 Proclamation

The healing of the lame man was but a “sign,” prompting another sermon from Peter pointing, as always, to Jesus the Messiah as Savior! Miracles endorse God’s message and manifest his mercy. They serve to authenticate or validate God’s messenger, but must magnify God, not man.

### 18 – 27 Invitation

The Sanhedrin, Israel’s Supreme Court, ordered the apostles not to preach in Jesus’ name. Peter reminds them that God had vindicated Jesus through his resurrection, and pronounced these national leaders guilty. This brought judgment on them for rejecting Jesus Messiah, of whom Moses (Duet. 18:18) and all the prophets had testified. Peter graciously calls their rejections “acts of ignorance” and invites them to receive God’s salvation in Christ. He assures them of God’s “refreshing” in the gift of Holy Spirit now, and ultimately, in Jesus’ Second Coming (Acts 2:38). God had promised Abraham his people would become a blessing to all nations, and their acceptance of the Messiah would enable them to fulfill this mission (Acts 3:25). While some 2000 individuals had responded positively, Israel as a nation rejected the Gospel and increasingly opposed all who share it.

## CH.4 PERSECUTION: DRIVING THE GOSPEL FORWARD

The miraculous healing ends up bringing suffering upon the missionaries because it agitates and enrages the religious leaders. These leaders loved their rules and hated the Gospel of grace that can liberate and empower sinners. The evangelists are imprisoned, but the Gospel is not bound!

### 1 – 4 Agitation

The Jewish High Priest and Sadducees get irritated with the display of God's power now at work through this disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. They are enraged by the bold proclamation of the Gospel that warns of God's coming judgment on all who reject Jesus. As a result, Peter and John are arrested and thrown into prison.

### 5 – 22 Accusation

The traditional religious leaders now face a power-struggle. When they accuse the apostles of illegal acts, Peter confronts them with the murder of Jesus. He deems this crisis as an opening to share the Gospel before the high priests and all the religious rulers. With the healed man standing before them as evidence, the leaders could find no real grounds for accusation, beyond the apostles' proclamation of Christ.

### 23 – 37 Supplication

The Gospel that brings deliverance from sin, self, and Satan also brings threats from the religious leaders after the apostles' debate with them. They had been released, but not without warning! With these threats looming over them, the apostles go back to their friends to report what had happened and worship together. Missionaries know that prayer is as vital as breathe and a means of grace – not for their own deliverance, but endurance and valiance! (Acts 4:31)

## CH.5 IN-HOUSE CONDEMNATION: FIGHTING AND FEARS, WITHIN AND WITHOUT

### 1 – 11 Pretention

Problems arise within the Church, so the first judgment within the house of God begins. Ananias and Sapphira conspired with each other to tell leaders that they had given the whole price of the land, when they had not. The Church's first sin, and certainly not their last, was pretention, and related to money. Peter saw this as a work of Satan and considered it both lying to God and testing the Spirit. From the Church's earliest beginnings, punishment was severe to highlight how ministry is serious business. Christian mission must honor God, not people, and never project oneself!

### 12 – 28 Contention

The apostles, like Jesus, heal the sick and cast out demons. The Sadducees, with their unbelief in supernatural powers, were filled with jealousy, creating conflict (Acts 5:17; 13:45; 17:5). The apostles end up in jail. But that night the Angel of the Lord opens the door and sends them to preach "this life" in the temple (Lk. 2:46; 19:45-21:38). Their conflict does not end, however, as the council accuses them for disobeying their order to stop preaching Christ. While miracles may open the unbeliever's minds to the Gospel, they will not help those blinded by Satan, who willfully close their eyes, ears, and mind to it.

### 29 – 33 Progression

These unschooled disciples boldly face the hostility of religious hierarchy and advance the Gospel. Forced between the choice to obey human or divine orders, they choose the latter (Acts 5:29). These "radicals" get back to the root of what it means to take up one's cross to follow Jesus. They abandoned everything to fulfill the risen Christ's commission.

### 34 – 42 Resolution

Rabbi Gamaliel, honored for his wisdom (Acts 22:3, Paul's mentor) advised the leaders to take time to check if this was "of God." He pointed out that movements started by messiah-figures, like Theudas and Judas the Galilean, had short shelf lives. So, adopting his neutral, wait-and-see policy, the Sadducees resolved to release the apostles. Jesus' vision of his Church was for it to be a

movement, not an institution or a monument! The apostles were then flogged and ordered not to speak in Jesus' name. Yet without wasting time, they immediately went out and preached that name all day! Moreover, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for that name sake.

## CH.6 EXPANSION THROUGH PERSECUTION: FROM JERUSALEM TO JUDEA TO SAMARIA

### 1 – 7 Selection of the Seven

Another internal problem came up with the Church. Greek-speaking Jews began complaining that their widows were neglected by the Hebrews. There was disagreement on the distribution of money, indicating that the rapidly-growing community needed more assistants and a new kind of leaders. Language and cultural differences brought on these challenges, so instead of leaving their duty, the apostles appoint seven men to serve the needs of the poor in that church. Soon after, those deacons were given authority by “laying on of hands.” The Gospel kept spreading, numbers increased greatly, and a large number of priests (who earlier opposed them, Acts 4:1-2) now became obedient to the faith. What could possibly be next?

### Progress Report 2

The people suffer, but “the Word of God spreads” (Acts 6:7)

The Church continues to expand, this time because the Church came together and resolved their internal cultural clashes (Acts 6:2). Disunity always drains the Church of her energies that could otherwise be used to reach out to the unsaved. Besides that, our Christian unity in and of itself is our essential witness of Jesus' forgiving grace to a watching world!

# II. MISSIONED OUT: FROM JERUSALEM INTO JUDEA AND SAMARIA. 6:8 - 12:25

Jesus' Church crosses geo-political and cultural boundaries. The Gospel had to be preached first [but not only] to the Jew, however God's saving plan was always for "all nations." This middle section of Acts deals with Israel's final rejection of the Messiah, the first Christian martyr, the greatest missionary's conversion, and the Gentile Church's foundations and establishment. Jesus expected his

Church to rapidly expand into the whole world. This happens in several ways:

1. Supernaturally, by Spirit's power with signs-and-wonders
2. Through leaders solving internal conflicts
3. By God allowing persecution to scatter disciples
4. Through the planned "sending" of the Gospel to the unreached

## 8 – 15 Accusation of Stephen

Stephen, newly-chosen leader in the Church, soon faced conflict from outside visitors. Hellenistic Jews accused him of attacking their sacred traditions regarding the temple and the Law. They stirred up the Sanhedrin against him (like in Jesus' case; Lk.20:1) and brought this wise, Spirit-filled leader to trial. Unable to win any arguments with him, they hurled allegations that instigated the anger of the people towards Stephen, ultimately confirming their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

## CH.7 MOBILIZATION: SUFFERING MOVES THE GOSPEL OUTWARD

Martyrdom triggers outward movement; like Newton's Third law, every action has an equal, opposite reaction. Condemned by the Jewish council, Stephen seizes the opportunity to establish how Israel has been guilty of choosing to reject God's provision and blessings from the start. Typically, they would refuse to do God's will and then mistreat and kill his servants and prophets.

## 1 – 53 Accusation of Stephen

Christ came to be the fulfillment of the Law and to set up the Church as the temple of his Holy Spirit. Stephen explains to the religious leaders that though they claimed to be "sons of Abraham," they did not act like Abraham, a man who implicitly trusted God's promises and sacrificially obeyed his commands (Acts 7:1-8). They refused to see the evidence of God fulfilling his covenant to give them a land "to worship him freely" (Acts 7:5-7). God's blessing was for all families of the earth, and they rejected the sacrifice of his Son Jesus to make all this possible. Joseph's story illustrates how his brothers, in selling him out of hatred, were actually refusing God's choice and their deliverance (Acts 7:9-16). Eventually Joseph was exalted and became a savior-redeemer figure for his brothers and the whole world during the famine.

The law came through Moses, whose leadership the Israelites in Egypt refused. “Who made you our judge?” they boasted. Forty years later, God used Moses to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt and to lead them to their land of rest! Through Moses, God promised to raise up from among the Jews a prophet like him, but these stiff-necked leaders Stephen now addressed refused to accept the person, claims, and work of Jesus Christ (Acts 7:37; Deut. 18:5). God now replaces them with a new “Christian” leadership. These Jews claimed to be guardians of the temple and accused both Jesus and Stephen of speaking against it (Acts 6:14). This symbolized their continuous rejection of the true worship the Holy Spirit wants in the believer’s heart (his new temple; Isa. 66:1-2; 1 Cor. 3:16). This second-line leader of the Church shows remarkable knowledge of the Word and possessed wisdom, faith, bravery, and Christlikeness.

#### 54 – 60 The Martyrdom

Martyrdom is the epitome of bearing witness and testimony to the Truth in life and death (Lk.24:48; Rev.2:13). Stephen hoped his persecutors would open their eyes to the reality of who Jesus really is and accept God’s forgiveness. He was given a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, which he announced to the religious leaders (Acts 7:56). On hearing this, they dragged him outside the city and stone him. Imitating his Master, Stephen prayed for the forgiveness of his enemies with his dying breath (Lk.23:34). Peter was delivered from his persecutors, but Stephen is not – either way God is glorified! A martyr is a true witness (Acts 10:41; 22:20).

Question of Suffering: Is suffering God’s rod, Satan’s thorn or my cross? How should we pray?

Interestingly, signs and wonders and incontrovertible arguments (Acts 6:8-10) cause Stephen to be jailed and die for his faith. But before his death he establishes the correlation between God’s disobedient people and his righteous servants they killed (Acts 7:11, 19, 21, 34, 39, 52). Stephen, the Church’s first martyr, proves to be a true follower and demonstrates the ultimate witness in laying down his life for Jesus’ namesake. He endured to the end, faithful unto death, and is therefore assured a crown of life. Suffering for the Gospel reaches a critical point in Stephen’s stoning. Satan’s many attempts to destroy faith in the early Church were used by the Holy Spirit to take the Gospel further, beyond Jerusalem.

For the Church, success is seen in the Gospel’s progress away from “home” and in her undying witness amidst life-threatening situations as they boldly advance the Gospel to the unreached. As the disciples are scattered abroad like seed, the Word spreads and the Gospel and Church cross borders. Is Stephen’s prayer for his enemies answered? At the least it is answered in one who would become a champion of the Gospel (Saul; Acts 7:60). This man would be key in explaining the mystery of the Church functioning as Christ’s body. Thus, persecution propels the Church and provides her with her greatest missionary.

## CH.8 INTERNATIONALIZATION: THE GOSPEL TRAVELS FROM SAMARIA TO AFRICA

#### 1 – 8 Saul the Tormentor: Damascus, Judea

This transition leaves the Jerusalem phase from Acts 1:8, moving on to portray the Hellenistic leaders who are being expelled throughout Judea and Samaria because of persecution. Paradoxically, Saul, as an oppressor, is trailing them and causing havoc. Affluence may stop the rapid spread of the Church, but affliction will not. Samaria is significant as it represents a city that Jerusalem despised for its wrong views on worship. Historically, Jews remain hostile toward this mixed race of foreigners that live in their land after most of them had been exiled. Philip, another deacon, puts all animosity aside to preach here. Miracles, exorcism, and healings accompany his message.

### 9 – 25 Simon the Magician: Samaritan villages

When miracles are seen as magical and money associated with it, there is big trouble. Simon practiced a form of occult magic that pagans used to manipulate spirit forces for profit. Simon watches as Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit after the Apostles lay hands on them. He then wants to buy this power! This dangerously confuses Christian faith with power to heal (Acts 13:4-12; 19:11-19). God is the source of healing and he does so out of compassion. Here, Luke indicates this as a sign that God's grace and the Spirit's gifts are equally available to the Samaritans. The narrative does not teach that the receiving of baptism in the Spirit is a second, separate step to make one a complete or better Christian.

### 26 – 40 Philip the Evangelist: from Samaria to Ethiopia

True manifestations of the Holy Spirit's power draws humble people to faith in Christ. This is seen in Philip who was directed by an angel to share the Gospel with a foreigner from Ethiopia. This God-fearing African seeker was drawn to Jewish monotheism and morals. But because he is castrated, he is considered an unclean outcast and unable to approach the temple. So God's Spirit sends Christ's servant to meet him on the road to Gaza. The eunuch had bought a portion of Scripture (Isa. 53) and needed someone to explain its meaning and relevance to him.

Many principles are modeled for personal evangelism in this one-on-one soul winning event:

1. The knowledge of God's word.
2. Immediate obedience to the Spirit's leading.
3. Preaching Christ.
4. Inviting to make a decision.
5. Public demonstration of discipleship by water baptism.

Simply put, one person (Philip) tells another (the seeking Eunuch) about Someone else (Christ) being the offer of God's salvation (Acts 8:34-35). In all this, God is taking the initiative through grace in directing Philip through common means, as well as supernatural signs.

## CH.9 A VISION TO GO TO THE GENTILES: SENDING SAUL TO SUFFER AS PAUL

### 1 – 9 Saul the Tormentor: Damascus, Judea

Luke indicates the significance of this occasion as he pens three important phases of it (Acts 9:9, 22, 26). This incident is an enormous turnaround as Saul goes from being the local Church's menace to acting as its global mission advocate. Saul, the man responsible for arresting Christians, is now himself arrested by the risen Lord! Jesus recruits Saul to defend his disciples and be his apostle to take the Gospel to Gentiles. Saul learns about the profound truth and mystery that he will articulate – how Jesus Christ and the Church, his body animated by his Spirit, are inseparable. Whatever is done to one, is done to the other.

## 10 – 31

The Lord again takes initiative and speaks to his disciple Ananias in a vision, sending him to Saul in Damascus. Through Ananias, the Lord restores Saul's sight and reveals his two-fold missional task: to reach Gentiles, kings and Israel, and to suffer much for the name of the Lord (Acts 9:15-16). Though he has encountered Jesus in person, he needed to be filled with his Spirit, be baptized in water, and join the Church to grow with the other disciples. He wastes no time using his gifts – preaching and apologetics – to prove to authorities that Jesus is indeed God's Messiah (Acts 9:22).

Still fearful of persecution, the Church in Jerusalem doesn't trust Saul. The Lord uses another respected disciple, Barnabas (son of encouragement), to assure the Church of Saul's genuine conversion. Now the Hellenistic Jews turn on Saul the traitor, making accusations and attempts on his life. So the disciples help Saul to escape, first to Caesarea and then to Tarsus, his home city. After his departure, the Lord gives his Church a time of quiet peace; they were strengthened and continued to increase (Acts 9:31).

## 32 – 43

Peter, still the main character, has the keys to open and confirm the Gospel outside Samaria. He travels the Mediterranean coast to Joppa. He finds well-known Aeneas, paralyzed for eight years, and declares, "Jesus heals you, rise up and make your bed!" Such healings mirrored Jesus' mighty works, causing many to turn to the Lord. Peter then goes on to a greater miracle of raising Dorcas (or Tabitha) from the dead, resulting in more decisions to believe in Christ (Acts 9:43)! Yet the greatest miracle of all was that Peter gives the Gospel which gives eternal life to all who trust in Christ.

Jesus, as healer and life-giver, is still at work through his disciples who live in obedience to the Lord. Peter next receives a heavenly vision to go to Cornelius, the Gentile!

# CH.10 INAUGURATION OF GENTILE MISSIONS: FROM "US" TO "THEM"

## 1 – 33 Getting Peter to "Go"

Peter is sent as an apostle (sent one) to God-fearing Gentiles. This major turning point records another one of the Acts of Jesus' Spirit through his Church. Though we may be reluctant at first, all true disciples, like **Peter**, learn to do God's will and take the Gospel of grace to everyone – even those who they feel do not deserve it. **Cornelius**, a Roman centurion, fears God's word, prays, gives alms and has his needs met through other centurions. God gives both Peter and Cornelius separate, yet interlocking visions to orchestrate his plan. It involved painstakingly sending people across the worst cultural barrier: bigotry. But it results in the first Gentile convert and Church to be set up in Antioch.

## 34 – 48 Confirming the Key to the Gentiles

Cornelius fears God, but did not know about the Gospel that God was graciously about to reveal to him. Confident someone would be sent to him, he invites friends over and on Peter's arrival, bows to worship him. Peter clarifies he is only a man and God alone is to be worshipped. He now understands the vision of "unclean" meats in a net God thrice orders him to eat. God is no respecter of persons and does not show favor on one nation over another. He preaches Jesus as God's anointed (empowered for Missio Dei; Isa.61:1; Lk.4:18) and as Lord of all. In Christ alone, God offers all people peace. As soon as Cornelius and his friends receives Christ as savior, God pours out the gift of his Spirit on them and they speak "in tongues" as the Jews did at the beginning (Pentecost; Acts 2:11; 11:15). Peter and the six men with him, amazed at this sign, proceed to baptize them in water.

## CH.11 THE GENTILE PENTECOST

### 1 – 18 Getting Peter to “Go”

Peter’s trip from Joppa to Caesarea is a miniature of the Gospel going from Jerusalem to Rome. As with Paul’s conversion, Luke records three times how God gets Peter to “turn to the Gentiles,” who turn to God without any Jewish or other religious rites of passage. Peter explains this to the Jewish authorities and asks them, “Who are we to stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:17)

Three truths can be established from this event regarding salvation today:

1. Whether Jew or Gentile, response in faith to the Gospel is termed as being “saved” (Acts 11:14,18)
2. Salvation involves personally receiving and following Jesus as the risen Lord of life
3. John’s and Jesus’ promise of being ‘baptized with the Spirit’ (Acts 11:16; 1:5; Lk.3:16) must be understood in the light of his Spirit as the gift (Acts 11:17) to all who trust in Jesus.

### 19 – 30 Christians

Though Peter’s visits and his attestation to this first Gentile conversion are covered, not much is discussed about him from here on. Paul is now entrusted to take the Gospel to the uncircumcised, and is called “The Apostle to the Gentiles” (Gal.2:7). He best exemplifies missions as taking the Gospel to the nations and being a light to the Gentiles. Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists) who were followers of Christ from Cyprus and Cyrene in African Libya comes up to evangelized the Greek Gentiles at Antioch (Acts 11:20). The “mother” church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to confirm the faith and activities of the Antioch believers. He encourages them and brings Saul from Tarsus to help him as Saul had previous experience doing mission work in Antioch.

Ironically, peace brings internal problems in Jerusalem, but persecution brings salvation to Antioch. This emerging Jewish and Gentile community who worships together as obedient imitators of Christ are the first to be given the name “Christian.” This daughter church would become the new center for global missions. In response to Agabus’ predicted famine, they show unbiased care for those in Judea and send relief to the mother church at Jerusalem!

## CH.12 PERSECUTION INCREASES

It almost seems that persecution is what caused Christianity to stay pure and powerful enough to fulfill Jesus’ command to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth! In spite of the worldwide famine Agabus’ predicted, Herod’s murder of one of the Twelve apostles, Peter’s imprisonment, and the increase of persecutions, the Gospel is unstoppable! The three rulers in Judea with the title “Herod” throughout Jesus’ life had hated the Messiah and sought to kill those who preached his name. There are three named James in the New Testament, and it is James, an apostle and the brother of John, who become the third of Herod’s victim.

### 1 – 19 Intercession for Imprisoned

The Acts of the Apostles now details some acts against the apostles. Herod has James the brother of John killed by the sword. Desiring to further please the Jews, he also imprisons Peter. But as the suffering Church prayed, Peter was freed by an angel. Upon his escape, Peter returns to his Church, who was still praying for his release even though it was midnight. They could not believe Peter was alive and thought Rhoda had seen his ghost at the door. Herod cannot imprison the Gospel, so he instead executes Peter’s guards. Jesus’ Spirit and angelic powers are manifested, specifically in the context of unjust sufferings!

## 20 – 25 Intercession for Imprisoned

Satan has been behind Herod's murderous ways. Herod resisted God's grace, rejected the Gospel, and gave a speech to set himself up to be a god before the people. An angel of the Lord brings divine judgment causing Herod to be struck down and eaten by worms! Christ is the righteous Judge and only wise King over all the earth and he will not share his glory with another. But all those who suffer with Christ will one day reign with him and share in his glory. Paradoxically, the Church marches into the Gentile world both in spite of and because of suffering. As the word continues to spread, a worldwide mission is ready to launch (Acts 12:24).

There have been several **strategic keys** serving as both the foundation and guide for Christian missions:

1. These disciples were rooted in God's Word, led by the Spirit and unified in their fellowship. God was at work in them through his Spirit.
2. The door of opportunity for the Church to spread the Gospel often swung on the hinges of opposition, yet advanced the scope of salvation in Christ to all.
3. The rapid, wide expansion of the church was mainly due to individuals who were not ashamed of the Gospel of grace and instinctively gossiped its joys wherever they went.
4. The Church was essentially a living organism with the Holy Spirit indwelling believers. However, it still needed to be organized with leaders and structures in order to accomplish its mission.
5. Believers asked for boldness to be witnesses rather than pray for deliverance from persecution, counting it a privilege to suffer for Christ.
6. The love of money, possessions, and positional power caused internal problems and hindered their strong witness to their Lord, whose kingdom is not of this world.

# III. PAUL'S THREE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS (13:1 - 21:16)

## From Church Missions to Global Movements

Acts reveals God's predetermined purpose for his Servant, Jesus, and his people, both Israel (OT) and the Church (NT) – Acts 2:23,31; 3:18; 4:28; 13:16-41, 17:3; 26:23. The story of Jesus is one of God's saving power for all peoples of the earth. Acts records for us the progress of the Gospel and the establishment and expansion of the Church from Jerusalem (ch.1-7), into Judea/Samaria (ch.8-12), to the ends of the earth (ch.13-28).

Saul of Tarsus, now Paul the Apostle, becomes the chief character. Most certainly in this section Luke defends not just the Gospel but Paul's mission as well. Since Theophilus is a member of Caesar's court, this portion of Acts serves as a legal-theological device to acquit Paul from arrest. It is Paul's résumé demonstrating his reasonable faith in Jesus, thus serving as an evangelistic tract, especially to unbelieving Jews. It outlines how he picks up the Gospel baton from the apostles, taking it to the Gentiles and to the center and end of the then known world – Rome.

Importantly, the theme of suffering in Paul's life, more than that of the other apostles, does four things:

1. Clarifies sufferings as a major motif in Acts: its call, basis, a requirement for Christianity.
2. Legitimizes call to 'apostolic' missions with this key characteristic "badge" of discipleship.
3. Highlights the missionary's weakness ironically revealing the Gospel's grace and power.
4. Demonstrates how sufferers spread the Gospel, serve people, and fuel church growth!

## FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY (13:1 – 14:28)

### CH.13 BARNABAS AND PAUL GO INTO ASIA MINOR

It almost seems that persecution was what caused Christianity to stay pure and powerful enough to fulfill Jesus' command to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth! In spite of the worldwide famine Agabus' predicted, Herod's murder of one of the Twelve apostles, Peter's imprisonment, and the increase of persecutions, the Gospel is unstoppable! The three rulers in Judea with the title "Herod" throughout Jesus' life had hated the Messiah and sought to kill those who preached his name. There are three named James in the New Testament, and it is James, an apostle and the brother of John, who became the third of Herod's victim.

#### 1 – 12 The Commissioning Church

Within the context of listening to God's word, worshiping, and serving, the Church strategically deploys two capable leaders: Barnabas and Saul. Those two whom the Spirit had already called, the obedient church sends out. Leadership is key and teamwork

necessary to do Jesus' Commission. They visit Cyprus, where proconsul Sergius Paulus expresses interest in the Word of God. But they are opposed by Bar-Jesus (Elymas) the false prophet. Wherever the church advances the gates of hell are raised. Saul (now called Paul), filled with the Holy Spirit, smites Elymas blind for repudiating the Gospel of the true light of life.

### 13 – 43 Evangelism Explosion at Cyprus

For whatever reason, John Mark quits to go home to Jerusalem and the team is now led not by “Barnabas and Saul” but “Paul and his companions”. They travel to Antioch in Pisidia (not Syria, the sending church). Employing many Old Testament quotes and Jewish history, Paul makes an argument for faith in Jesus' death and resurrection as the only means of salvation for all. Notice his practice of going to the Jewish synagogues first to win them over. The next Sabbath, the whole city gather to hear Paul. While some Jews follow him, many threaten and verbally abused him out of jealousy. He warns them of bringing judgment on themselves, quoting Isaiah 49:6, where God's people are called lights to the Gentiles. He then declares, “We are now turning to the Gentiles!”

### 44 – 52

When the Gentiles heard that they too are destined to eternal life upon their belief in Christ, they glorify God's word, which spreads throughout the whole region. The disciples are filled with the Spirit's joy because of this. But Jews stir up persecution and expel Paul and Barnabas who, unmoved by hostility, move on to a new frontier in Iconium!

## CH.14 FROM ICONIUM TO DERBE

### 1 – 20

Paul and Barnabas stay a while at Iconium, preaching and healing. Many are saved, but others try to stone them. Paul and Barnabas escape just in time to Lystra. Here, after healing a cripple, they are worshipped and treated like gods, which was worse than being ill-treated for the Gospel. Again, many are saved, yet Paul's adversaries from Antioch and Iconium catch up to them and this time actually succeed in stoning him. His enemies leave him for dead, but Paul miraculously gets up and leaves for Derbe.

### 21 – 28

Instead of fleeing persecution, the missionaries go back to follow up with and strengthen the churches they had planted. Paul's missionary strategy involved three initiatives: 1) evangelize key unreached cities; 2) establish local churches; 3) entrust reliable leaders to do the same. Rather than creating an impoverishing dependency, he sets up an **ATM** system to **A**ppoint, **T**rain, and **M**entor local leaders (Acts 14:23-24). While the form of persecution in Derbe is not mentioned, Paul's missional exhortation and summary statement of faith holds: “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God!” (Acts 14:22)

## CH.15 JERUSALEM COUNCIL AND “SIMPLE CHURCH”: REAL, RELIABLE, AND REPRODUCIBLE

### 1 – 29

The Church faces its first international crisis when orthodox Jews from Judea turn up at Antioch in Syria to enforce the old, legalist system on new believers. There is confusion over whether the Gentiles have to become Jews or not before becoming Christians. Paul and Barnabas from Jerusalem share their experiences, Peter clarifies the matter, and James states the Church's position once and for all: God's offer of forgiveness to Gentiles and Jews alike is by faith in Christ alone! This is the only grounds for salvation—nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Without putting a burden on the Gentiles, the council circulates a letter instructing them to refrain

from deliberately offending the Jews' dietary laws (not eating blood or strangled animals which would have blood still present), food offered to idols, or sexual immorality

### 30 – 41

This letter, sent to churches by Silas and Judas, was joyfully received by the Gentiles, whose faith was strengthened as a result. Sadly, such legalism continued and Paul later deals with it in his letters to the Galatians, Corinthians, Philippians, and Colossians. The growing Church has an internal incident—"a sharp contention"—to deal with when Paul and Barnabas are divided over whether John Mark, who abandoned them on their first trip, should join them on the next (Acts 15:39). Unfortunately, they go their separate ways without a resolution; Barnabas takes Mark to Cyprus, and Paul chooses Silas and Timothy, whom he circumcises to avoid further in-fighting and controversies (Acts 16:1-4). Paul eventually accepts Mark (2 Tim.4:11) yet through all this division and disputes, Luke records that the Gentile churches are "strengthened in faith and grew daily in numbers" (Acts 16:5).

## SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY (16:1 – 18:22)

### CH.16 THE ADVENTURE BEGINS: ESTABLISHING THE GLOBAL CHURCH IN EUROPE

#### 1 – 5

In this next lap, Paul goes into the strongholds of the Roman world maintaining his strategy of evangelizing cities, establishing churches, and equipping nationals do the same. Mark drops out, but Timothy, Paul's spiritual son with a local church reputation, comes on! The Church advances in spite of the splits, but it must suffer to pioneer into new frontiers.

#### 6 – 24

While waiting for God's direction, Paul is given a vision in which he sees and hears a Macedonian calling, "Come over . . . help us." Paul obeys at once and Luke's narrative continues with Paul and the others into Philippi. They eventually come to a riverside synagogue where Lydia, a rich businesswoman, who is saved and baptized ministers to the apostles. Satan is not pleased with this, causing a girl with an evil spirit to test Paul's patience until he casts it out. This gets missionaries beaten and imprisoned. Instead of exercising his rights, Paul sings hymns to God during his night in jail, counting it a privilege to suffer for Christ (Phil.1:29).

#### 25 – 40

God responds supernaturally by sending an earthquake to open the prison doors and free the missionaries. But the greater miracle is the jailor's response to God's Word, causing both him and his household to be saved and baptized! The magistrates realize they are in trouble for ill-treating these Romans citizens. Paul and his friends are released, proving once again that the saving Gospel cannot be bound and pain can be gain!

### CH.17 FROM MACEDONIA INTO ALL ACHAIA!

#### 1 – 9 To Thessalonica

It is here Paul will explain to those in the synagogue how Christ's suffering on their behalf was necessary for salvation. The Jews' reaction is severe, and this information turns their world upside-down. Here we find Luke's missionary pattern: Paul's custom was to start at the city in the synagogue on Sabbath. His apologetic had a 2-fold proof showing the man Jesus from Galilee is Christ the Messiah (1) OT Scriptures fulfilled (2) eyewitness evidences of suffering death and resurrection. This was "the Gospel" that often had a 3-fold response some 1) accepted like Jason 2) others rejected or 3) neglected its power to save lives.

## 10 – 15 Berean Believers

The people at Berea were more noble and fair-minded. They willingly received Paul's message, daily examined it against God's revealed Word, then determined for themselves whether or not it was the truth worth trusting. In contrast, legalistic Jews resented the Gospel, chased Paul away, and followed him around to cause trouble and stir up mobs against him.

## 16 – 34 At Athens

In Athens, some listened to Paul's message, but others mocked. As this city was known for its religious philosophers, Paul's methodology for sharing the Gospel in this pagan, polytheistic region was different. Notice how he ministered to them on three fronts: 1) the synagogue with God-fearing Jews, 2) marketplace with a pagan populace, and 3) Areopagus where curious academics gathered to hear more about new religious ideologies.

Paul begins with creation, explain truths about God using sources outside Jewish Scriptures (natural theology). He appreciates their religiosity, moving on to addresses their anxiety over an "unknown god" and the inability to please it. Using their awareness of this incapacity, he reveals their need for a new life (resurrection) and works his way to the message of the cross! All nations are in darkness and the Gospel is light. Some political leaders and women join the believers. But others listen only until the point of having to make a decision. Some, like the Stoics, are intrigued by it, while others, such as the Epicureans, openly mock the resurrection.

# CH.18 TENT-MAKING TO TELL THE TRUTH

## 1 – 11 Coming to Corinth

Paul the missionary was bi-vocational, using his trade to support himself financially rather than burdening the churches he started. He meets Priscilla and Aquila, Jewish-Christian coworkers deported from Rome. When his helpers Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia with financial support, Paul frees himself for full-time ministry. Facing constant opposition with the Gospel and God's grace reviled, Paul washes his hands of the Jews and again "turns to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:51; 28:28). Notice how the gathering of believers is slowly moving from the synagogue to the Greco-Roman household. In spite of opposition, Jesus appears to Paul and God is calling-out from the Gentiles a people for his name! (Acts 18:9-10; 15:14-17)

## 12 – 22 The Gospel is not Anti-Political

Seeking to condemn Paul for teaching Christ, the Jews attack him and bring him before the proconsul of Achaia, Gallio. Knowing Gallio's office term in office (AD.51-52) helps date events in Paul's life. Luke shows that some Roman magistrates, ever since Pilate's trial of Jesus, find nothing in Christianity's claims worth condemning. The Jews are frustrated by this verdict and beat up their own leader, Sosthenes. His mission in Corinth complete, Paul ends a Jewish vow by cutting his hair (the image of a living sacrifice) and heads back to Antioch to

# THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY (18:23 – 21:16)

## CH.18 FROM ASIA MINOR TO JERUSALEM

### 23 – 28 Coming to Corinth

Apollos an eloquent preacher from Alexandria arrives at Ephesus. Upon hearing him preach correctly on everything but baptism, Priscilla and Aquila give him further instruction in “the Way” and commend him onward to Corinth. The result of this encounter was the equipping of a great teacher who then went on to become an even greater witness on Christ’s behalf.

## CH.19 EPHESUS: REVIVAL, SURVIVAL, UPHEAVAL!

### 1 – 7

Acts is about God’s kingdom present as the body of Christ (Church) advancing into all the world by his empowering Holy Spirit. At Ephesus, Paul discovers that some of John the Baptist’s disciples had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul shares the Gospel with them, they believe in Jesus and are baptized in his name. When Paul lays hands on them, like at Jerusalem and Samaria (Acts 8:14-17), these Ephesian Gentiles receive the Spirit, speak in tongues, and prophesy!

### 8 – 22

At Ephesus, Paul explains the heavenly—not nationalistic—nature of God’s kingdom. But the Jews stubbornly rejects the Way, so he moves the disciples to the hall of Tyrannus. For two years, Jews and Gentiles all over Asia heard the Gospel daily from this new hub. God’s word was accompanied by extraordinary miracles – signs that Jesus’ Spirit was at work mightily through Paul. Any piece of cloth that so much as touched Paul’s skin was used to heal the sick and cast out demons! Miracles of power authenticated the message of the Gospel.

Seven sons-of-Sceva, a high priest, try to magically invoke Jesus’ name to exorcize a demonized man. The demon attacked, striped them naked, chased them into the streets. As a result, not only did many revere Jesus’ name, but they also brought out their occult books and publically burned them. Satan cannot stop or supplement the Gospel! After having sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, Paul now leads a movement from Ephesus.

**Progress Report (PR#3):** “In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power”—the result of many troubles, trials, and encounters with God’s power! (Acts 19:20)

### 23 – 41

Christianity’s influence spread throughout all Asia in ways that affected idol-makers who earned a living making silver shrines to Artemis or Diana. With business threatened by Paul’s claims against their false, money-making gods, they instigated a chaotic riot in a theatre and arrested Paul’s companions, Gaius and Aristarchus. Paul was advised not to interfere while Alexander tried to demonstrate that Demetrius’ charges were baseless, but this started a two hour chant! Eventually, a Roman town clerk dismissed this senseless riot.

## CH.20 EPHESUS: BY LAND AND SEA

### 1 – 16 Push-back to Troas

After escaping the mob, Paul is eager to return to strengthen the churches he started in Macedonia. Like Jesus, he mentors Gentiles believers so they are able to do things he cannot (Acts 20:4). He stays in Greece for three months, but upon hearing of a plot to have him killed, Paul returns to Troas for a week's intensive teaching. Believers now gather to worship on Sunday, the first day of the week. During a late evening service, Eutychus, a young attendee, falls asleep, falling out of a window to his death. Paul, like Jesus and Peter, is able to raise him from the dead. He comforts the people looking on and proceeds to finish his message. He travels over land before sailing with Luke to Miletus, where he sends for the Ephesian elders.

### 17 – 38 Push-back to Troas

These pastors or bishops are charged to care for, oversee, and preside over the flock. Luke records Paul's typical farewell message. Having summoned the elders, Paul reminds them of his faithful, exemplary life and mission. Next, he alludes to his death and warns them of coming dangers from apostates and false teachers. Finally, with tears, he blesses and prays for them, commending them to God's grace.

## CH.21 JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

### 1 – 16

Paul stops at several port cities where Christian communities help and encourage him in practical ways. They housed him, warned him of danger, and upheld him to God's throne of grace. At Caesarea, he stays with the evangelist Philip who had five prophesying daughters. Agabus, a prophet from Judea (Acts 11:28), came and vividly portrayed what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem by actually binding up his hands and feet. Paul is determined to go to Jerusalem even to die.

# IV. MISSION POSSIBLE: PORTRAIT OF A PERSECUTED PIONEER. 21:17 - 28:32

## From Missionary to Movement-mobilizer

*“In this way the Word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.” (Acts 19:20)*

Three Trends:

1. Spirit Comes at Pentecost
2. Saul Converts to Go
3. Mission focus Changes to the Gentiles

Cross-cultural missions starts by reaching out to those who are near you and like you, then to those near you, but not like you, and eventually to those not near you and not like you! This is seen in the method Paul chose in moving outward to cross boundaries, a reflection of Jesus' Commission in Acts 1:8. He began with the Jews, moving on to dispersed Jews and then to the Gentiles. Even among the Gentiles, there is still an outward progression in his focus as Paul first reaches proselytes, then God-fearing Gentiles, and finally pagans.

Boundary Signposts:

1. Geographic (9:15)
2. Socio-cultural (13:1)
3. Ethno-linguistic

## CH.22-23 ARRESTED: JEWISH RITES, ROMAN RIOTS AND THE UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL

### 22:1 – 21

The Jews of Jerusalem formed a mob against Paul upon finding him in the temple. Paul's first defense speech appealing his innocence involved the retelling of his conversion and commissioning. He explains to them why he is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy (Gal. 1:23). He is a Jew loyal to the Old Testament, innocent of the accusations against him claiming that he was instigating people against Moses' law, the temple, and the emperor.

### 23:1 – 11

Ananias, the Sanhedrin's high priest, has Paul slapped and Paul calls him a "white-washed wall" and quickly resumes speaking against this legitimate Jewish authority (Acts 23:2). His message concerning Jesus' resurrection with angels and the Holy Spirit upset the Sadducees, who did not believe in such doctrines. Paul claimed to be a Pharisee who was on trial for "the hope and the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6). The dispute and uproar were such Paul would have been killed had the commander not removed him from the scene. Jesus himself appeared that night to reassure Paul for his upcoming witness in Rome.

### 23:12 – 35

Paul is transferred to Caesarea because forty Jewish fanatics had taken an oath not to eat or drink until they had Paul killed. His sister's son overheard the plot and shares it with Paul, who mentions it to a centurion, who relays it to the commander. This Roman tribune, unwilling to have a prisoner in his custody murdered, has Paul sent to Rome with an escort that came at no small expense to the government. God's providence was at work protecting Paul.

## CH.24-27 PAUL BEFORE KINGS

### 24

Paul's trials before Felix and other Roman officials mirror that of Jesus'. Ananias hires the lawyer Tertullus to condemn Paul and impress the governor with standard charges. In defense, Paul admits to worshiping according to the Scriptures, the Way, and the promise of a resurrection. While the Jews stressed judgment after death, Paul preached a resurrection of the dead with the promise of life in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, he justified his presence in the temple on account of bringing financial assistance to his fellow Jews in Jerusalem.

Upon his release into a relatively loose custody, Paul is summoned to speak with Felix. The governor is at once ashamed after hearing Paul's message which held that faith in Christ, involving a righteousness of life, convicted him of having taken his Jewish wife Drusilla from her husband. Though Felix expected Paul to pay him off with a bribe, Paul refused to give one as part of the cost of following Jesus and fighting injustice.

### 25

More than two years later, Paul is finally brought before Felix's successor Festus, ultimately taking his appeal to the highest authority, Caesar, allowing him a free trip to Rome. The Jews want Paul's trial to occur in Jerusalem so that they can have the opportunity to kill him on the way there, but the new governor insists on Paul's remaining in Caesarea. King Agrippa and his wife Bernice are invited to join the proceedings in Caesarea, before Paul is sent to Rome. There are four rulers in the Herod family and none finds any fault with Paul's claims about Christ!

### 26

The defense Paul makes before King Agrippa, an expert on Jewish customs, will serve as an ultimatum for the Jews who absolutely refused to receive the Gospel that presents Jesus as the Messiah. This hearing points to Jesus as the Savior from Old Testament Scriptures and establishes his death and resurrection as the means by which God extends salvation to Jews as well as Gentiles. The analogy of turning "from darkness to light", understood by both groups, is the verdict from Paul, who is himself declared innocent by Agrippa (Acts 26:32).

Festus refuses to listen to reason and shouts out, “Paul . . . your great learning driving you insane!” (Acts 26:24) So Paul appeals directly to King Agrippa because he understands Jewish prophesy, and the king finds Paul’s Gospel compelling, almost to the point of persuading him to convert to Christianity. Unfortunately, does not entirely commit to it, as Paul desired. Both officials would have freed Paul, were it not for his appeal to present his case before Caesar in Rome.

## 27

Paul is sent to Rome in the custody of Julius, a Roman captain. Luke and Aristarchus, a Macedonian Christian, sail with them as well. Against Paul’s advice to remain at Crete, they risk the dangerous sea keeping close to the coastline. Unable to deal with the devastating storm and experiencing disastrous loss, the hopeless soldiers decide to kill both the prisoners and themselves! In the life-threatening darkness, Paul stands up and encourages them with the declaration that the God he serves had promised he would stand before Caesar in Rome. Therefore, as long as they were aboard the ship with him, their lives were safe. The men on board were refusing to eat and some tried to abandon ship, but Julius trusted Paul because of his impressive faith and listened to his directions. At last they were shipwrecked on the island of Malta—all 276 were saved.

Lessons from Paul: Suffering as Witness and Fulfilling the Mission

1. Avoided personal troubles, but defended himself before the authorities
2. Did not take persecution lightly; developed confidence and quickly learned how to handle it
3. Loss of personal well-being opened many doors, gaining many ministry opportunities
4. Experiences of trials, imprisonment, and injustice only moved him toward the final target
5. Knew he may die, but learned to accept, embrace, and use suffering to benefit the Gospel
6. Goal of suffering was to get the Gospel out to the point of need and global advancement
7. Did not glory in his own suffering or take it lightly (Phil. 3:10)

## 28 Rome at last

Paul’s courage and faith in God was attractive to the natives of Malta, so much so that it caused them to be hospitable to his group. Although he was older and recovering from the beating they had all suffered at sea, Paul takes it upon himself to gather sticks and build a fire. But while he sits warming himself, he is bitten by a snake. God once again protects his servant, however, and Paul is able to shake the snake off into the fire! The islanders presume he is a god, but the Lord uses his servant to miraculously heal many of the natives, including the chief’s father.

After three months in Malta, they board a ship and arrive at Rome where believers who had been longing to see them welcomed them joyfully (Rom.1:10-13). Paul, guarded by a soldier, was able to invite guests over, so he calls the Jewish elders of Rome together and tells them why he is appealing to Caesar. He spends time persuading them from Scripture how God’s kingdom had come and how Jesus was building his witness through the Church in these last days. While some are convinced, others simply refuse to believe. Finally, Paul categorically states “God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen” (Acts 28:28). For two years Paul preaches Christ as Lord and Savior from his rented house in Rome unhindered by any authorities.

Acts continues today as Jesus' followers keep going out in obedience to the Great Commission, being led by his Holy Spirit. His will is accomplished through those of us who are willing to pay the price to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. His kingdom will come as his will is done. We are living out Acts chapter 29!