

Notes on

The Actions of the Envoys

Authorship and Date Issues:

While there are those who theorize that portions of a journal were inserted into the middle of an account written by a later Christian, the majority view is that the various "we" passages (much of parts three through five) indicate that the author was one of Paulus' companions. If we follow this train of thought, a comparison with Paulus' letters (e.g., Col 4:14; Phm 24; 2 Tim 4:10f.) reveals that there is one person mentioned as a member of Paulus' party who is not mentioned in the Actions: Lukas the "beloved physician." Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that Lukas was the author both of this work and of the account of Jesus' life which preceded it (1:1).

If we acknowledge Lukas as the author of the two historical accounts, we must still ask a question as to the date of composition. Some theorize that Lukas wrote this work quite late, c. 85 CE. However, since both books (Lukas and the Actions) refer to the destruction of the temple and siege of Jerusalem in such a way that it is evident that the First Revolt had not yet begun, it seems more likely then that the books were written prior to the beginning of the war in 66 CE.

Furthermore, the book leaves us no account of the final hearing of Paulus, appearing to leave us at a point where his vindication may be imminent. Also, there is no mention of persecution by the Romans, which began under Nero after the Great Fire of Rome. With the absence of the Great Fire -- for which the author was likely an eyewitness -- it is more tenable then that the Actions were written just as the events detailed within them terminate, with the author awaiting Paulus' appearance before Nero c. 63-64 CE.

PART ONE

Indeed I made the first message, O Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day when he was taken up, after giving the precept through the holy breath to the envoys whom he had chosen.

To them also he had presented himself alive after his suffering in many clear proofs for forty days of being seen by them and saying the things about God's kingdom.

The author begins by reminding the reader of his earlier work, and specifically about the final scene in that earlier account (Lk 24). It is that last scene which will be the springboard for the beginning of this second work.

Like the account of Jesus' life bearing Lukas' name, this work is addressed to a certain "Theophilus." Since the word means "lover of God," it is possible that the author is making use of an alias. Others have suggested that the use of "Theophilus" is a literary device -- the book

belongs to all people. Given the timely nature of some of the information, though, it is just as possible that the author was addressing a person who called himself Theophilus.

And he gathered them together and charged them "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise, which you heard from me, that 'John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized in holy breath' after not many of these days."

Now, Luke reprises the final scene in his account of Jesus' life, providing further details. The Twelve (as a unit) were charged not to leave Jerusalem until they received "the Father's promise." Luke explicitly mentions that this promise is the holy breath ... God would empower them with what have come to be known as the "spiritual gifts." The Twelve need to wait until this happens. Jesus' quote about being baptized in holy breath had been spoken earlier, but here, when the author reprises it, he adds that the so-called baptism would take place in "not many...days." This quotation regarding the baptism is important; it foreshadows what will happen in chapter 2. The expression is only connected with **two** events, which are parallel -- the event in Acts 2 and the event that occurred in Acts 10 at the home of Cornelius.

So, after they came together, they indeed asked him, saying, "Lord, will you restore the kingdom to Israel at that time?"

The Twelve recognized that the Anointed One ("Messiah") was supposed to restore the kingdom to Israel. There are several OT passages that had come to be interpreted as predicting this restoration. Since Jesus had just mentioned an event that the Twelve were to wait for, Lukas presents this as a logical follow-up question. Will this be the time when the kingdom is restored? Will this be the time when the Messianic prophecy is fulfilled?

Now, he said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has placed in his own authority. However, you will receive power when the holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and as far as the farthest part of the land."

Most commentators focus on the first sentence. But the "however" which follows should be taken together with that first sentence. Jesus scolded the Twelve for asking about God's timing of events, but then he answered their question. The answer to their question, as we will see later, is "YES". Yes, the kingdom is about to be returned to Israel, but as the Twelve would find out, this would not happen *physically*, as most Jews were expecting.

Further informing them about what is to come, he tells the Twelve that the holy Spirit --God acting in revelation to humanity-- will come upon them, and they will receive power (called "holy breath" and always connected with revelation). Then what?

Then they will be Jesus' witnesses. The Twelve, who had been with Jesus since the beginning, would testify in a legal (Jewish) setting to all the things that they had personally seen and heard regarding Jesus. They would provide legal proof that Jesus was the Anointed One. These men would be witnesses not only to Jerusalemites, but to people who lived in every place where Judaism had a foothold.

As Lk 24 indicates, the Twelve would be heralding the covenant in the name of the Jewish Messiah. Because this scene is the first new one in the book, some commentators allege that this is the author's theme -- the spread of the message throughout the land. However, as the written work unfolds, occasionally we reach locations where the message had been established previously (19:1f.), and there are certain important locations (e.g., Rome) where the spread of the message to that city has been ignored by Lukas completely. This is not the theme for the book but the device of foreshadowing. Lukas is in the process of preparing the reader for the event that begins chapter two. The use of Jerusalem...Judea...Samaria...everywhere in the land selects all of the centers of Judaism (both mainstream and unorthodox), following the list by a catch all. Wherever there are Jews, there the message will soon be (after not many days).

And, after saying these things, he was lifted up as they were looking, and a cloud withdrew him from their eyes. And as they looked attentively into the heavens (as he was going away), look! Two men were standing near them in white clothes. And these men said, "Men, Galilaeans, why are you standing and looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, this one will come back in the same manner that you saw him going into heaven."

This is an interesting comment, one which has sparked considerable controversy. Luke appears to be saying that Jesus was standing there, talking with the Twelve, when suddenly a cloud overwhelmed him and he disappeared-- was exalted into heaven. Jesus' departure (cloud and all) was visible to the Eleven, and they were able to briefly look into heaven -- this is paralleled and confirmed by Stephen's vision later on (Acts 7) of Jesus in heaven with God.

But two messengers, "men in white," appeared to redirect their focus on the things to come. Jesus would return "in the same manner" in which he left. I interpret this to mean, "suddenly," an interpretation which fits with everything else Jesus said about his return. All authors who wrote of Jesus' impending and imminent return indicated that it would seem sudden, just as his departure into heaven was surprising and sudden.

Although no parallel is drawn between the disappearance of Jesus and the fates of Enoch and Elijah, these certainly come to mind. While Elijah's disappearance was spectacular, Enoch simply "was not found" (Gen 5:24), "for God took him." This explains the fact that Jesus' body was never discovered by anyone after his departure.

The controversy arises over the ambiguity of "in the same manner" and the fact that the word translated "heaven" can mean the atmosphere, space, or the place where God is. If we reinterpret "heaven" here to be the sky, then would Jesus return flying? Is that the "same manner"? Or covered in a mist? Some people (wrongly) connect the mist in Acts 1 with the expression "coming in the clouds," which refers to a majestic appearance for the purpose of judgment, and so there has been confusion.

Dutifully, the Eleven sought to do exactly as Jesus charged them to do.

1:12 *Then they returned into Jerusalem from that mountain called the Mount of Olive Trees, a sabbath's journey distant. And after they went in, they went up into the upper room where Peter, and Johannes, and Jacob and Andreas, Filippus and Thomas, Bar-Tolmai and Matthias, Jacob*

the son of Alphaius, and Simon the Jealous, and Judah son of Jacob were staying. All of these were constantly involved in prayer with the women and Miriam the mother of Jesus and his brothers with one accord. And in these days, Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers--and it was a crowd of people: in it were about one hundred and twenty. He said, "Men, brothers, it was necessary that the writing be fulfilled which the holy Spirit foretold through the mouth of David about Judah, the one who became a guide to those who seized Jesus. This is necessary because he had been counted among us and had obtained the assignment of this service."

The Eleven had just witnessed Jesus' being taken into heaven. Furthermore, they had just heard his explanation that in a few days they would be baptized with holy breath and fire. In a few days, the restoration of the kingdom to Israel would come. Lukas was careful to make note as to exactly who was there. The only member of the Twelve not mentioned here is Judah (Iscariot), with Judah being dead. The author wants his reader to know that the Eleven remained together, waiting for what was about to happen. He also provides us with an explicit reminder of who constituted the Eleven--and therefore, who would be considered members of the revived Twelve. Lukas also points out that the faithful women were present also.

Sometime during those ten days, Peter reminded the others that it would be necessary to replace Judah as one of the Twelve. The author's description of Judah is considerably light. He "became a guide" to the Jewish Leadership. We might expect the judgment on Judah to be a harsh one, but perhaps Judah's own remorse (see below) caused many of the envoys to pity him, or perhaps he had been forgiven by this time, with his betrayal of Jesus viewed as a necessary part of God's plan. The fault for Jesus' arrest and death ultimately falls on those leaders.

(So indeed, this one bought a field from the wages of wrong, and after falling head-downward, he burst in the middle, and each of his internal organs was poured out. And it became known to all those who dwelt in Jerusalem, so that that field came to be called in his own dialect Hachel-damach, that is, Field of Blood.)

Lukas briefly sketches out Judah's fate, which had not been mentioned in his account of Jesus' life. *Clarke's Commentary* rightly indicates that there is described a certain dysentery which causes choking (as Matthew indicates) and finally the sort of gut-busting that Lukas describes here. Apparently, Judah was so overtaken by his remorse over having betrayed Jesus that he contracted dysentery and died. The origin of the name of the field appears to be unknown. Was it called "Field of Blood" because it was bought by the priests (in Judah's name, for his burial) with the "blood money"--the 30 silver pieces that Judah had sold Jesus for? Or was it called "Field of Blood" because he was buried there? Apparently both stories circulated at the time of Lukas' writing, approximately 34 years later. For the inerrantist, it is theoretically possible that both stories were true.

"For it was written in a scroll of psalms, "Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one dwell in it,"

and,

""His oversight let another take."

These are the citations provided by Peter in support of replacing Judah with another envoy, to make the number of Twelve complete again. This act of reinstating the number **12** is important to Lukas for the activity that is about to follow, and so, it is the only apostolic action that he includes (between the time of Jesus' departure and the Feast of Weeks).

The first citation is from Psa 69:25. In context, the author of the Psalm writes of his enemies. The curse upon his enemies actually begins in v. 22, and the entire passage is in the plural: **"Let their dwelling places be desolate, and let no one dwell in them. For they persecute the one whom you smote, and they afflict still more the one whom you wounded."** Peter saw the language in the psalm as relating equally to Jesus as to the original author. His application of the psalm is that Judah's fate was the same as that wished by David on his enemies.

The other quote is Psa 109:8. This is part of the author's curse on his enemy. **"When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his petition be counted as sin! May his days be few; let another take what he oversees! May his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow!"** This probably represents as much Peter's feelings toward Judah as anything else. Peter identifies Judah with the enemies of David = Jesus. Whatever the psalmist wishes on his enemy, Peter sees as applying also to Judah. Peter calls upon his fellow envoys to fulfill this writing--to have another take Judah's place, restoring the number "twelve."

"Therefore, it is necessary that those men who have associated with us during all the time in which the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, starting from John's baptism until the day on which he was taken from us--one of these is to become a witness of his resurrection with us."

It was necessary for an envoy ("apostle") to have been sent by Jesus as a herald. But to be a member of the Twelve more was required:

- The person had to have associated with Jesus ever since his baptism.
- The person had to have been a witness of (and sent out by) the resurrected Jesus.

Again, the replacement of Judah was inevitable--even necessary.

And they set apart two: Yosef (the one called Bar-Sabbas) whose surname was Just, and Matthiah. And they prayed, saying, "You, O Lord, knower of all hearts, show which one out of these two you have selected to take the place of this service and sending from which Judah stepped aside, to go into his own place."

And they gave them lots, and the lot fell on Matthiah, and he was counted together with the eleven envoys.

There were only two people who qualified: Yosef the Just, and Matthiah. The Eleven cast lots, praying that God would show them which one of the two was God's own choice to take Judah's place. Matthiah got the tap and became one of the Twelve. And so, the number of the Twelve was restored. This is the sole purpose for Matthiah being mentioned, and so, Lukas never mentions him again. This is his only appearance in the New Testament, although a portion of the apocryphal Acts of Andrew revolves around him.

Now, the stage is set for an important event.

2:1 *And on the full day of Pentecost, they were all one at the same place. And suddenly a sound from the sky happened, like that of a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And they observed with them forked tongues, like fire, that sat on each one of them. And they were all filled with holy breath, and they began to speak in other tongues, saying what the Spirit gave them to say.*

The full day of Pentecost was the 50th day after Passover. Strictly speaking, the Jews were gathered for the Feast of (Seven) Weeks, which began 49 days -- 7 weeks -- after the earlier feast. The first full day, the 50th -- remember: the "day" starts at sunset -- was called "pentecost" by the Greek-speaking Jews. Lukas clearly identifies the day as a Jewish feast day.

Next, he indicates that the envoys were still all together "in one place"-- possibly the same building as in ch. 1, although we are not told this. A visible sign was provided over each of them. It wasn't fire, but it LOOKED LIKE fire. This, in essence, was their anointing--coupled with a sign to them that the things he had told them about ten days earlier (Acts 1) were happening. "Wait until you receive power (Lk 24)." Notice also that the author doesn't say there was wind ... he said it SOUNDED like there was a rushing wind. The miracle was virtually indescribable.

At this point, the Twelve -- whose number had just been restored -- were filled with holy breath. This expression signifies that they received miraculous powers of some sort. The reader will soon see of what nature these powers were. More specifically, though, they were empowered with prophetic utterance. The "holy Spirit" is God in revelation to humanity. God was about to speak through the Twelve.

Now, there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, pious men from every nation under heaven. Now when this sound happened, the crowd came together and were confused because each one heard their speech in his own language. Now they were astonished, and they wondered, saying, "Look, aren't all of these ones who are speaking Galilaeans? And how is each one of us hearing in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes, and Elamites, and those who dwell in Mesopotamia, Judea, and also Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Frugia and also Pamphulia, Egypt, and the parts of Lybia near Kurene, and the Roman strangers--Jews and also proselytes, Cretans and Arabians. We hear them speaking in our own languages the great things of God."

Jesus had earlier told the Twelve to wait in Jerusalem until empowered and to speak in the name of the Messiah to all nations. Lukas sets up the reader so that he realizes that this event fulfills the renewed commission (Lk 24:45-7; Mt 28:19; Mt 10:1f.) to the Twelve. First, the reader is taken somewhere else, possibly just outside the building. Everyone was able to hear what **sounded like** a rushing wind, and they headed toward this sound to see what it was. If Josephus' estimates for the year 65 are even close to the numbers for this year, there might have been as many as one MILLION people gathered for the feast!

Lukas points out that these are pious men. These are not the unfaithful. These are the Jews who have been honestly seeking God, to the point at least where they made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on foot (and possibly by boat) to participate in the feasts. These men had devoted their lives to

God. Since this event fulfills the commission to the Twelve, Lukas is also careful enough to point out where the men are from, naming various nations--which comprise the Palestine area plus all areas of the zodiac (i.e., people from all directions). He specifically writes that these men were "from every nation under heaven." The Twelve were supposed to take the message to Jews of all nations, then their number was restored, then the sign happened that they had been awaiting, and now they would fulfill that commission.

Next, Lukas indicated one of the miracles--a miracle of hearing. Whatever the Twelve were saying and however they were saying it, these devout men HEARD those things as though the men were speaking in their native languages! One first century Jewish source wrote about the "prophetic utterances." Such a miracle would not have been out of their understanding. Normally, the prophet would be carried away "in ecstasy," speaking praises to God -- but the faithful could understand. Here, the faithful Jews of all nations DO hear, and they DO understand. But they don't know what it means. The author is pointing out in detail that the message in its original form is being carried to Jews everywhere.

*Now they were all astonished and confused, saying (one to another), "What will this be?"
Now others were scoffing and said that "they have been filled with sweet wine."*

These pious Jews were confused by the miracle, and some present could not understand what the Twelve were saying. Instead of hearing the Twelve clearly praising God in their own language, some people supposed that the men were babbling drunk -- filled with sweet wine. This controversy that arose about the MIRACLES of speaking and hearing prompted action.

Someone had to speak up and explain what was going on. Although Lukas doesn't say so, the explanation was probably in Aramaic or Greek, since only those languages would be known to most people present. Lukas never says that the explanation was spoken via miraculous power.

14 *Now Peter, standing up with the Eleven, raised his voice and spoke clearly to them:
"Men, Judeans and all those who are staying in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and heed my declarations.
"For these are not drunk as you are assuming, for it is the third hour of the day! On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel,"*

It was Peter, the one to whom the "keys to the kingdom" had been given, who would speak first among the Twelve, attempting to explain WHY the Twelve appeared to be babbling. After all, it was 9AM -- too early to begin drinking. Having full understanding of the Messianic passages and possibly thinking about Jesus' answer (Acts 1) to their questions ten days earlier, Peter applies a passage in Joel to the event. Joel had said that these things would happen after the coming of the Messiah! What things?

""And it will be in the last days," says God, "I will pour out from my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young will see visions, and your elderly will dream dreams.

""And indeed on my male slaves and on my female slaves I will pour out from my spirit in those days," and they will prophesy.

""And I will give wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and majestic day of Yahweh comes. And it shall be that each one who may call on the name of Yahweh will be saved."

God would pour out miracles for people everywhere. Both men and women would prophesy, and there would be signs. Peter does not continue the citation, but all the Jews present would have been familiar with the passage -- and what came next:

"For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered among the nations, and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and have sold a girl for wine, and have drunk it....Proclaim this among the nations: prepare war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears." (Joel 3:1-3; 9-10)

The passage (lasting the rest of the book) is long. It is a prophecy about the "restoration of the kingdom." This restoration was supposed to be accomplished by the Messiah. Traditionally, a period of dominance would follow, with Israel ruling the other nations, and the Messiah as their leader. Peter says, "THIS IS HAPPENING NOW." The signs you are seeing show that this is happening. This is the restoration of the kingdom--and a time would follow where the Jewish people would dominate. There was now be a new, free, covenant, but only Jews could enter...until Acts 10.

Peter and Joel also indicate that the signs would be present "until the great and majestic day of Yahweh." The destruction of Jerusalem and end of Priestly Judaism was coming, and the period mentioned in the prophecy would soon pass, but the signs would be here for the time being.

"Men, Israelites, listen to these words. Jesus the Nazarene was a man who was pointed out to you as being from God through powerful deeds, and wonders, and signs, which God did through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know."

Peter appeals first to public knowledge. Folks, the Joel prophecy is coming to pass now because the Messiah was just here. He did all these signs, which you heard about. He WAS the Messiah. Peter would now set out to prove this point.

"After this one was given up according to the fixed plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed and killed him through the hands of lawless ones. God raised him up, after loosing the pains of death, just as he could not be held under it. For David says for him,"

Yes, it's true that Jesus died, but this was all part of God's plan. So, when you people (speaking of Peter's whole race collectively) killed him, it was part of God's plan, and so was his resurrection. Peter has proof of this, too.

""I always saw Yahweh in my presence. Because he is at my right hand, I may not be shaken. On account of this, my heart was gladdened, and my tongue rejoiced; and furthermore, my flesh will also relax in hope--because you will not abandon my soul into Hades, nor will you allow your godly one to see decay.

""You made the ways of life known to me. You will fill me with joy with your face."

Peter quotes another passage that everyone knew was about the Messiah. David, speaking as Messiah, indicates that God will NOT allow him (the Messiah) to decay. Jewish tradition held that a body decayed after 4 days in the grave. Thus, Lazarus (Jn 11) had begun to decay at day 4, but Jesus rose BEFORE his body "saw decay" in the Jewish sense.

"Men, brothers, it is lawful to speak freely to you about our ancestor David: that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is among us until this day.

But just in case someone might have said, "David was talking about himself," Peter pointed out that David died. Not only did his body decay, it's still in the tomb right now...decaying! So David clearly WAS talking about the Messiah and not about himself.

"So, since he was a prophet, and since he knew that God had sworn an oath to him that God would cause someone from the fruit of his loins to sit on his throne, he spoke with foresight about the resurrection of the Anointed One, that he was not abandoned into Hades, nor did his flesh see decay. This Jesus God raised up; of this we are all witnesses."

David promised that someone -- his descendant, the Messiah -- would not be in the grave 4 days to see decay. He "spoke with foresight about the resurrection of the Anointed One." Then Peter and the Twelve stood up together and provided testimony that JESUS -- the one they'd already heard about -- had fulfilled this strongest of Messianic prophecies. God had raised him from the dead.

*"Then when he was exalted to the right hand of God and received the promise of the holy Spirit from the Father, he poured out this, which you see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself said, '**Yahweh said to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies as a footstool for your feet.'**'" Therefore, let all of the house of Israel know for sure that God made him both Lord and Anointed One--this Jesus whom you have crucified."*

Now, Peter's explanation rolls to a close. He has been explaining the PROMISE made through Joel -- the promised holy breath from God. After Jesus resurrected, the time was right for the PROMISE to be "poured out" -- just as Joel predicted. Therefore, states Peter, "what you see and hear" is additional proof -- additional to the testimony of 12 witnesses -- that Jesus was the Lord of whom David spoke (the kingly figure) and the Anointed One. He was the one they'd been waiting for, and they (Israel) had killed him!

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and they said to Peter and to the remaining envoys, "What will we do, men? Brothers?"

After having it proven to them that Jesus was the Anointed One that they and their ancestors had been awaiting for hundreds of years, these pious and honest men broke down. Calling the Twelve "brothers" (i.e., fellow-Jews), they asked for advice.

Now Peter to them: "Change your minds", he said,

They asked for advice, and Peter gave it. "Change your minds." These men, as devout as they were, need to change. What? They needed to accept that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. These were good men who had gone out of their ways in service to God, but they lacked one thing: they had failed to recognize their Messiah when he came. And so, they were standing not with those who followed Jesus but with the rest.

"and each of you be baptized on the name of Anointed Jesus into forgiveness of sins,"

The use of "on the name of Anointed Jesus" appears here only. The use of "on the name" appears to have denoted the mention of the name of Jesus as Messiah. Peter advised these men to identify themselves with Jesus by undergoing the ritual cleansing known as baptism.

They were to be baptized ... into forgiveness of sins. Anytime the expression "βαπτίζω + εις" (baptize into) is used in the NT, it refers to a covenant. For example, John the Baptizer was also baptizing into forgiveness of sins, and he was baptizing "into repentance" as well (Mt 3:11). By following the cloud and walking across the bottom of the Red Sea, the Israelites "baptized themselves into Moses" (1C 10:2) -- they had entered a covenant involving Moses. Here, these Jews were to identify themselves publically with Jesus and therefore enter a covenant of forgiveness of sins.

Just as "baptized into repentance" does not signify that the covenant provides repentance, neither does "baptized into forgiveness" signify that the covenant provides forgiveness. Instead, accepting Jesus as Messiah and following his teachings would allow them to be forgiven (and of course their religion would not end when the temple was destroyed).

The covenant would provide the assurance that they had made the right choice by accepting the teachings of Jesus over the traditions of their ancestors.

and you will receive the gift of the holy breath, for to you is the promise--and to your children, and to all those who are far away--as many as Yahweh our god may call."

The PROMISE -- Joel's promise -- would apply to all who entered Jesus' covenant; well, to all those Jews who were listening, and their descendants ... all the way up until the "great and notable day" mentioned by Joel. The miracles would be available to as many as God would call during that time.

And with many other words he testified and advised them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

"This perverse generation" was the generation which would have their temple and way of worship destroyed. The listeners should no longer identify themselves with "this generation." The expression had been used by Jesus frequently (and is especially prominent in Matthiah's account). There is little doubt that Peter was borrowing the language of his teacher.

So indeed, those who received his message were baptized and were added on that day--about three thousand souls. Now they were attending to the teachings of the envoys and to the sharing, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. And fear happened to every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the envoys, and all of those who trusted were at the same place, and had all things in common, and they were selling their possessions and goods and dividing them to all, just as any one had need. And daily they were attending in the temple courts with one accord. And they were breaking bread at home and partaking of food in happiness and in singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with the whole populus. Now the Lord as adding those who were being saved daily onto the same group.

Approximately 3000 people came to publically acknowledge Jesus as Messiah on that day. These people all became part of the Christian community, although the term "Christian" had not yet arisen. They would be recognized as the Nazarene sect of Judaism. These newcomers wanted to learn about Jesus, so they eagerly listened to the Twelve spiritually gifted eyewitnesses explain exactly what things he had done and taught in their presence.

They all participated in "the sharing" -- a communal lifestyle, in which everyone gave to whomever needed something. This was certainly necessary to a group who was far away from home for the time being. In addition, they ate together (literally, "broke bread") and prayed.

These activities are then detailed further. Being Jews, they went to the temple courts each day. They ate together in homes, and they shared everything. Presumably, those who were visiting stayed with those who were residents. Meanwhile, the Twelve were working miracles, and the group became quite popular. With Jesus still fresh in everyone's mind, people were accepting him as Messiah on a daily basis.

3:1 *Now Peter and Johannes were going up into the temple court at the hour of prayer (the ninth), and a certain man who was lame from the womb was being carried. By day, they would place him facing the door of the temple called Beautiful to ask for donations from those who entered into the temple court. When he saw Peter and Johannes about to go into the temple court, he asked to receive donations. Now Peter stared at him with Johannes, and he said, "Look at us."*

The author has illustrated a first account of the content of the message-- Jesus' Messiahship. This next passage depicts the powerful signs that accompanied the message and shows the genesis of the opposition that would arise against the message. Here, Peter and Johannes are depicted as pious Jews. As they might be expected to, they went to the temple court to pray at the proper time. At the Beautiful Gate, they encountered a man who had been born lame. Being unable to walk, he asked people for financial assistance as they entered the temple court. Peter and Johannes looked at the man long and hard, and Peter asked that he look up at them in return.

Now he heeded them, expecting to receive something from him. But Peter said, "Silver and gold are not possessed by me, but what I do have, this I am giving you: In the name of Anointed Jesus the Nazarene, [rise and] walk."

The section is self-explanatory: Peter called upon the power God had given him, and the man was healed. It was important to mention the fact that he and Johannes did not belong to one of the other Jewish sects but that they were followers of Jesus, who was the Anointed One.

And when Peter took him by the right hand, he lifted him up. And his legs and ankles were strengthened immediately, and he leaped up, and stood, and walked with them into the temple court, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all of the people saw him walking and praising God. Now they recognized him, that he was the one who was sitting at the Beautiful Door of the temple with donations as his purpose. And they were filled with wonder and excitement at what happened to him.

The man immediately gained the power to walk, stand, and even leap. Naturally, he began to praise God--drawing a crowd in so doing. This man was familiar to the crowd, who knew that he'd been lame all of his life. They were stunned!

And while he held Peter and Johannes close to him, all of the people ran together, awe-struck, to them onto that porch which is called Solomon's. Now Peter noticed this and answered to the people, "Men, Israelites, why are you wondering about this? And why are you staring at US, as though we had made him walk out of our own power and piety?"

As they began to realize what happened, the locals looked toward Peter and Johannes, through whom the miracle had been worked. But Peter drew the attention away from himself. In reality it was GOD who had made him walk--Peter and his friend were just ordinary people. Peter seems to express surprise that he and Johannes should be the focus of attention. After all, these people were Jews--they knew about God's power.

""The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaak, and the God of Jacob""--the God of our ancestors glorified his servant-boy Jesus, whom you indeed delivered up and denied to Pilatus' face, when he had judged to release him. But the holy and just one you denied, and asked that a murderer be granted to you. "Now, you killed the Prince of the Life, whom God raised from the dead. Of this we are witnesses. And his name has strengthened this man--whom you regard and know--sound, through trust in his name. And that trust, through Jesus, gave him this soundness, in the presence of all of you."

Peter immediately assigned the miracle to God -- their god -- Israel's one and only God. Then he takes the opportunity to mention the reason for their anointing: the Messiah, God's servant, Jesus. This was the very same Jesus that the crowd (pressured by the leaders) ordered crucified. Some of these people, local residents, may have been part of that crowd. They were responsible for his death--and all Israel, by extension. Peter testifies that this Jesus, the promised Messiah, was resurrected by God--just as God was able to heal the man who stood and leaped in their presence. Peter provided powerful evidence that Jesus was the Anointed One. After all, had Peter and

Johannes not been followers of Jesus, "this soundness" which the man had received would not have come to him.

"And now, brothers, I know that you did it according to your ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But what God announced before through the mouths of all of his prophets--that the Anointed One would suffer--he fulfilled in this way. Therefore, change your minds, and turn to God, so that your sins will be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing would come from the Lord's face, and that he may send the one who was previously marked out for you, Anointed Jesus, whom indeed it is necessary for heaven to embrace until times of restoration of all things, which he spoke about from the age through the mouth of his holy prophets."

But wasn't the crowd ignorant of the fact that the Messianic king would be a suffering servant as well? Yes, says Peter. He urges them to change their minds about who Jesus was -- just as he spoke to the crowd in chapter 2. Recognizing Jesus as Messiah is the first step in Peter's mind as turning to God.

If they turned to God, God would provide seasons of refreshing -- freedom from the guilt that accompanies sin -- even freedom for their having crucified their Messiah. And God will send their Messiah to them.

All things would soon be restored (CE 70), and they would now be on the side that experiences the restoration. For when the Jewish state is destroyed, Judaism in its Biblical form would be wiped out along with it. Therefore, when the Messiah comes in judgment, he will come for his followers, placing them in a "new Jerusalem". The crowd, if they accept Jesus, will be saved from the destruction of their religion and will look forward to his arrival in judgment.

*"Indeed, Moses said that, **"Yahweh your god will raise up for you a prophet like me out of your brothers. Hear him in each of the things which he says to you. And it will be that every soul which does not hear that prophet will be wiped out from among the people."***

When the First Revolt happens, Judaism (in its form acceptable to God) will cease to exist. Therefore, the crowd must accept the "prophet like Moses" -- Jesus.

*"Now also all the prophets from Samuel (and those who followed), as many as spoke, also announced these days. You are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God set up with your ancestors, saying to Abraham, **"and in your seed all the families of the land shall be blessed."** For you first, when God raised up his servant-boy, he sent him blessing you by turning away each one of you from your evil deeds."*

If the crowd accepts Jesus as Messiah (and follows his teachings), they will be blessed instead of destroyed. Turning away from their "evil deeds" -- away from rejecting their Messiah -- is the way that they would receive the promises made to Abraham.

4:1 *Now while they were speaking to the people, the high priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Zadokites came upon them, grieved that they were teaching the people and announcing in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in*

holding until the next day, for it was now evening. But many of those who had heard the message trusted, and the number of the men became about five thousand.

Since Jesus (and now Peter) had been proclaiming a resurrected Messiah and the destruction of the temple, it is natural that the ones who first step forward to oppose Peter are the priestly group. These leaders of the people refused to accept a resurrection, even though other miracles had been worked in the presence of the people. They apprehended Peter and Johannes, but the message about the healed man -- and the reason for his healing -- continued to spread. By this time, there were at least 5,000 men in Jerusalem who accepted Jesus as the Anointed One.

4:5 *Now on the next day it happened that their rulers and older people and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem--including Hannas the High Priest, and Kaiaphas, and Johannes, and Alexandros, and as many as were out of a family of high priesthood. And when they placed them in the midst of them, they inquired, "In what power or in what name did you do this?"*

One day after the healing of the man who had been born lame, all of the high priests, and scribes, and older people were involving themselves in attacking Peter and Johannes for having healed the man. Peter and Johannes were already in custody. In the manner of council meetings, Peter and Johannes were made to stand in the middle of their circle of accusers.

They were asked "In what power or in what name did you do this?" The expression "in what name..." signifies "who sent you to do this"? Although no teachings of the rabbis had been broken, the high priests (who did not believe in any physical resurrection) questioned the healing itself -- that it should even have taken place. After all, these "defenders of the faith" had not authorized a healing.

*Then Peter, who was filled with holy breath, said to them, "Rulers of the people, and older ones: If we today are being examined about working a good deed on a sick person--in which he has been saved, let it be known to all of you and to all of the people of Israel that in the name of Anointed Jesus the Nazarene--whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--in him this person has stood sound in your presence. This Jesus is the stone, the one **"rejected by"** you, **"the builders, which has become a cornerstone."** And there is no salvation in any other one, for there is no other name under heaven which has been given among humans in which it is necessary for us to be saved.*

Peter, speaking by inspiration, addressed the crowd of accusers. It is he who remarks that the leaders are actually questioning a good deed! This deed was done in the name of Anointed Jesus the Nazarene. That is, he and his friend are representatives of Jesus, the Messiah.

Adding to this, Peter pointed out that the Jewish leadership, including two people present in the room, had participated in Jesus' crucifixion. Because Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the once lame man was healed.

Citing Psa 118:22, Peter refers to Jesus as the stone that the builders rejected. They had been entrusted with "building up" God's nation, Israel. But they rejected a building stone, their

Messiah. Unfortunately for them, God made the Messiah the cornerstone -- the most important stone for the construction of any structure. Jesus is the cornerstone for the building up of Israel.

"There is salvation in no other" means simply, "And no other Messiah is coming. Jesus was IT." The term salvation here extends to the First Revolt and destruction of the temple. No other Messiah is coming to save you from the terrible things that the Romans will do. You must accept Jesus as the Anointed One, or your whole religion will cease to exist. This prophecy turned out to be true, for after Fani (Phinneas) in 68-70, the priestly lineage -- from which these people stemmed -- came to an abrupt end as Priestly Judaism itself was removed.

Now, when they observed the freedom with which Peter and Johannes spoke, and since they had perceived that they were illiterate idiots, they wondered. And they recognized them--that they had been with Jesus--and when they saw the person who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say against them.

The leaders observed a couple of things:

- Peter and Johannes (both speaking at this time) were exercising freedom of speech. They weren't speaking the words of another or a prepared defense but were honestly speaking their own opinions.
This caused wonder in the leaders because it had been their opinion that Peter and Johannes were "illiterate idiots." An idiot, in those days, was someone who was mentally incapable of performing two tasks simultaneously. The use of this term was an insult. The term "illiterate" probably refers to illiteracy in Biblical Hebrew. At any rate, the accusers began to realize that they had misjudged the two fishermen.
- They recognized that Peter and Johannes were two of Jesus' students. After all, they'd seen at least Johannes before. Jn 18:15f. indicates that they had both been at the door and visible to the high priest when Jesus was being tried and that Johannes was known, at least to some degree, indicating that his family had high standing.

So the leaders realized who Peter and Johannes were. The two men could, therefore, make a legitimate claim that Jesus had authorized them to speak and heal. Since the argument was over a healing, and since the healing was indisputable -- the man was standing with them -- the accusations ceased.

Now when they gave word for them to go outside of the Sanhedrin, they consulted together with one another, saying, "What will we do to these people--for indeed a known sign has been done through them. It is obvious to all those who are staying in Jerusalem, and we weren't able to deny it. "But so that it might not spread any more among the people, let's threaten them to speak no longer upon this name to anyone."

The council sent Peter, Johannes, and the once lame man outside to begin their deliberations. The sign was obvious and undeniable. The solution was to threaten the two, so that no more of Jesus' teachings would spread.

And when they called them, they charged them to neither say anything at all nor to teach on Jesus' name. But Peter and Johannes responded by saying to them, "You judge if it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God. For we are unable to not say what we noticed and heard."

But Peter and Johannes refused to keep silent. They would continue both to speak and to act as Jesus' representatives. They placed the burden on the leaders to "judge if it is right in GOD's sight to listen to you rather than to God." In the envoys' minds, God had been acting through Jesus, and therefore it was necessary for them to testify about what they'd personally witnessed. Their accusers were silent, unable to deny that God had healed the lame man.

Now those who again threatened let them go away, finding nothing to do to punish them, on account of the people--because everyone was glorifying God over what happened. For the person on whom this sign of healing had been worked was more than forty years old.

As a conclusion, Lukas points out that God (who had done the healing) was being glorified, and nothing could be done to punish Peter and Johannes. And as further proof of the genuine nature of the healing, Lukas points out that the man was over 40 years old. Obviously he wasn't faking bad legs for FORTY YEARS! Thus, Peter and Johannes successfully defended the message, and the readers have been let in on that message's content.

4:23 *Now when they were let go, they went to their own friends and related what the high priests and older people had said to them. Now when they heard, they raised a voice with one accord to God and said, "O Sovereign, "you who made the sky and the land and the sea and all which is in them", our Father, who said through the holy breath of your servant-boy David's mouth: "Why did the nations rage and the peoples devise vain things? The kings of the land stood up and the rulers gathered together with the same cause--against Yahweh and against his Anointed One.""*

The next scene begins as the aftermath of Peter's and Johannes' arrest. The two envoys, having been set free, returned to their friends, who listened to their account of the confrontation with the priests. Together the group prayed, and what we are shown is the gist of what various people said in that prayer. The first quotation is a traditional doxology to God. Similar language appears throughout the First Testament (see, e.g., Psa 146:6).

The second quote is from Psa 2:1. This is the same coronation psalm which contains the expression, "You are my son; today I have fathered you." The crowd realizes that the people have set themselves against the Messiah, just as David foretold.

"For in truth, in this city, on your holy servant-boy Jesus whom you anointed, were gathered Herod and also Pontius Pilatus, with gentiles and people of Israel to do the things that your hand and your plan marked out earlier to be done. And now, O Lord, look on their threats and grant to your slaves to speak your message with all freedom of speech, to stretch out your hand for healing, and to do signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant-boy Jesus."

The rest of the prayer serves as both a reminder to the reader of what happened to Jesus and a call to continue to empower the inspired messengers to speak freely--without fear of reprisal--and to work the marvelous signs that God gave them to work. All of this will be done as representatives of Jesus, the Anointed One.

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with holy breath and spoke God's message with freedom of speech. Now the heart and soul of the multitude of those who had trusted was one, and not even one said that any of his possessions was his own. On the contrary, all things were common to them. And with great power the envoys gave the testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great favor was upon them all. For not even one was poor among them, since those who were landowners or homeowners were selling them and bringing the proceeds of the things that were sold, and they were placing them at the envoys' feet. And it was divided to each one, just as anyone might have a need.

Lukas records that the Twelve did just that, because God acted to grant all of those present with miraculous gifts. Thus, they spoke God's message -- the message about the coming of the Messiah and his internalization of the Torah -- so that even more people might come to understand.

The passage strongly indicates that what Lukas called "the sharing" (in ch. 2) was not a fad. It was a way of life. The Twelve continued to provide the growing crowd with testimony as to what Jesus had said and done, and the crowd "walked the walk." They shared everything with one another, even selling their land so that the poor among them would not be poor. Anyone who had a need saw that need met, because of the loving generosity of the people.

36 *Now Yosef--the one who was surnamed Bar-Nabas by the envoys [which is, translated, son of advice], a Levite, a Kuprian by birth--who had a field of his own, sold it and brought the money and placed it at the envoys' feet. But a certain man named Hananiah with his wife Sapphira sold a possession and held back some of the price. His wife was also aware of this. And he brought a certain part and placed it at the envoys' feet.*

This passage serves as both a bridge and an introduction. Although everyone was bringing their goods and selling them--to support the poor-- we are introduced to Yosef Bar-Nabas, a man who would later become a partner to Saul/Paulus. Bar-Nabas, we are told, actively participated in the Sharing.

But a certain man called Hananiah -- whose name ironically means, "protected by Yahweh" -- and his wife Sapphira conspired to claim that they would sell some land and give all of the proceeds to the poor. Instead, they lied about how much money was raised by the sale, and kept part of the proceeds for themselves. The problem was not that they did not give all of the money but that they said that they would give it all and did not.

5:3 *Now Peter said, "Hananiah, why has the Enemy filled your heart for you to deceive the holy Spirit and to hold back some of the price of the land? While it remained, didn't it remain yours?"*

And when it was sold, wasn't it in your authority? Why is it that you have placed this practice in your heart? You haven't lied to humans, but to God."

But God spoke to Peter, telling him of Hananiah's deceit. Peter's points are good ones:

- The land belonged to Hananiah. He could have said, "I'll give half the money to the poor." Or he could have kept the land for himself. But he had promised before God to give ALL the proceeds to the poor.
- Even after he sold the land, he could have told God (and his envoys) that he needed to keep some of the proceeds. But he lied about it.

Now when Hananiah heard these words, he fell down and his spirit left. And great fear happened upon all those who had heard these things. Now the younger ones arose and wrapped him up, and when they had carried him out, they buried him.

With the charge that he had lied to God, Hananiah dropped dead. The story began to spread, and others began to fear God even more. Within the first few hours after his death, Hananiah received a burial. Lukas mentions that it was the younger people who buried Hananiah; perhaps the older people would have nothing to do with him, even in death.

Now, it happened about three hours later that his wife (who didn't know what had happened) also came in. Now Peter answered her, "Tell me if you sold the land for this much." Now she said, "Yes, that much." Now Peter said to her, "Why is it that it has been agreed on by you to test the Lord's spirit? Notice that the feet of those who buried your husband are at the door. They will carry you out too." And she fell immediately toward his feet and expired. And when the young ones came in, they found her dead, and when they carried her out, they buried her with her husband.

The passage does NOT say that Sapphira was "called in." Instead, it looks as though she merely approached Peter--perhaps to confirm that her husband had given (a portion of) the money, or perhaps to claim glory for having helped to buy food to feed the poor. Peter asked her also how much the land had sold for, and her answer was the same as her husband's. She too had lied, and God would take her as well. This death is connected with Peter's pronouncement that the young people would carry her out as well; Sapphira dropped dead at Peter's feet.

And great fear happened upon the whole of the assembly, and upon those who heard these things. Now through the hands of the envoys many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord at Solomon's Porch.

The fear of God created by the incident (which had been a challenge to God) caused even more deep reverence for God. The envoys worked "many signs", and the people became even more united.

But none of the others dared to join them. But the people magnified them. Now more who trusted were added to the Lord: crowds of men and also of women, so that they would also bring out the sick into the open areas and would place them on beds and couches, so that the mere shadow of

Peter coming by might overshadow some of them. Now also the crowd came together from the surrounding cities into Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those troubled by unclean spirits--all of whom were healed.

Yet this event caused resistance from those who were not Christians. Perhaps they were afraid of suffering the same fate as Hananiah and his wife. Even so, the populus spoke highly of the Christian group, and the end result was that more pious people did come to recognize Jesus as the promised Anointed One.

Superstitions developed regarding the envoys (something that would be reflected later in Paulus), but even so, the Twelve healed everyone who came to them for assistance.

17 *Now when the High Priest and all those who were with him went up (those who were of the school of thought of the Zadokites), they were filled with jealousy. And they laid hands on the envoys and put them in public prison.*

Now, with the truth of Jesus' Messiahship spreading, the High Priest and all the priestly school decided to grab all Twelve of the envoys and imprison them. The High Priest had been granted such authority by the Romans, although they could not have executed the envoys for religious reasons.

The term usually rendered "Sadducees" is thought to connect the school of thought with the great priest, Zadok, who served during the time of Solomon and who (together with Nathan) anointed Solomon as king. They claimed to follow priestly (as opposed to rabbinical) traditions. Since they did not accept the resurrection from the dead, they were often at odds with Jesus, and naturally with his followers, who proclaimed a resurrected Messiah.

Now a messenger of the Lord opened the doors of the jail by night, brought them out, and said, "Go and speak to the people all the declarations of this life as you stand in the temple court."

This paragraph is short and sweet. One of God's messengers was sent to the Twelve with a message: that they should go to the temple courts and tell the people about the resurrection and teachings of Jesus -- all the things that the priestly class hated them for. The messenger also freed them, so that they could accomplish this.

Now when they heard, they entered into the temple court at dawn and taught. Now when the High Priest and those who were with him came, they called together the Sanhedrin and all of the Senate of the sons of Israel and sent someone into the prison to have the envoys brought. But when the officers went, they didn't find them in the jail, and when they returned, they reported, saying that, "We found the prison closed with complete security, and the guards were standing in front of the doors. But when we opened them, we found no one inside."

It would not have made sense for them to go to the temple court at night, when no one would likely be present. But at dawn, the Twelve did exactly as the messenger instructed them. The High Priest had been so enraged that he convened a council (composed of the Sanhedrin and the Senate) to try the Twelve for their activities, but the Twelve were not in prison when they were

sought. The Senate was the council of all the older people in Israel, probably identified with the Great Sanhedrin -- an indication that the Twelve were in great trouble.

The mention of security is deliberate on the author's part. He lets the reader know for certain that the Twelve did not escape of their own power but were miraculously freed by God's messenger.

Now when they heard these words--both the captain of the temple guard and the high priests--they were confused about them as to what this thing might be. But when a certain one came, he told them that, "Look, the men whom you put in jail are in the temple court, standing and teaching the people." Then when the captain of the temple guard went there with the high priests, they brought them (not with violence for they feared the people), so that they might be stoned.

Suddenly, while everyone was wondering how they might have escaped, a guard or messenger approached with the news: the Twelve weren't in hiding somewhere. They were standing out in the temple court, teaching! For their escape from custody, compounded with the charges against them-- teaching what they had been warned not to teach-- the Twelve could be legally stoned. It has been suggested that the leaders would have had the Twelve stoned, even had they not escaped.

Now, after they brought them, the envoys stood before the Sanhedrin. And the High Priest asked them, saying, "We charged you with a charge not to teach in this name, and, look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you wish to bring upon us this person's blood."

Now we see one of the matters which upset the leadership so much. In teaching about the crucifixion (and resurrection) of Jesus, the Twelve were blaming the crucifixion on the leaders. Of course, when reading Lukas' account of Jesus' life, the leaders WERE responsible. But they did not want their popularity to be jeopardized by the word of their involvement getting out.

Now Peter and the envoys answered, saying, "It is necessary to be persuaded by a divine being rather than human beings. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, on whom you violently laid your hands and hanged on a cross. God has lifted him up (as a prince and a savior) to his right side, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. And we are witnesses to these declarations, as is the holy Spirit, which God gave for those who are persuaded by him."

The first sentence is usually translated "God rather than men." However, "theos" appears without an article here, indicating that a contrast is being drawn between the sort of beings mentioned: "a god" (literally) and "human beings." Naturally, Yahweh God is intended. God wanted the Twelve to teach what they were teaching (and had just been sent by God's messenger to do that very thing!). But human priests wanted them to stop.

They answer with an undeniable charge that the high priest and his associates DID participate in Jesus' death. God brought Jesus, and YOU crucified him. God resurrected him, and you deny it. But we twelve are witnesses that it is true. God's role is contrasted several times here with what the leadership did. Jesus is now at God's right side -- i.e., the most important place in God's spiritual realm -- Jesus is the most important person there was! He is both a prince and a savior --

the healer of the city and nation. It is through Jesus that "national repentance" and forgiveness have come. This stands in contrast to the traditions of the priests and rabbis.

Finally, Peter and the others testified that God was in personal communication with each of them -- remember: the holy Spirit is God in communication to humanity. God himself, in communication with the Twelve, testifies (i.e., as a legal witness) that the Twelve are doing exactly what he wants them to do. They are persuaded by God, just as they MUST be. After all, who SHOULD they listen to?

Now when they heard, they were cut, and they wanted to kill them. But a certain Perush in the Sanhedrin, named Gamaliel, a law-teacher, honored by all the people, stood up and gave word for them to put the people outside for a short time.

Gamaliel was one of the most respected teachers in Israel at the time. The fact that it was he who stood up to protect the Twelve from stoning is noteworthy. He was known for his tolerance, and so his words here match his personality as described elsewhere.

And he said to them, "Men, Israelites, take heed to yourselves about what you are going to do to these people. For before these days, Theudas stood up claiming to be somebody, to whom a number of men--about four hundred adhered. He was put to death, and as many as listened to him were dispersed and became nothing."

Josephus misreports this as happening during the (later) procuratorship of Cuspius Fadus. However, since the event is recorded in Josephus without any connection eventwise to a specific procurator, it is likely that Josephus has confused his dates. Josephus merely misremembered Theudas as having been active in Fadus' time.

The passage (Antiquities, book 20, chapter 5, section 1) reads:

Now it came to pass, while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; and many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them; who, falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them, and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem. This was what befell the Jews in the time of Cuspius Fadus's government.

From Josephus, we see exactly what Theudas had been doing. He claimed to be a great man, empowered by God. And, says Gamaliel, even though he persuaded a few people to follow him, in the end he was put to death. Eventually, Theudas' followers amounted to nothing.

"After this, in the days of the census, Judah the Galilaian stood up and drew away people after him. And he was destroyed, and all those who listened to him were scattered."

We have no record of this outside of this passage. Apparently, this took place during the second census, which is recorded as having taken place in 6 CE. However, it is just as possible that the uprising took place during the time of the first census, c. 6-5 BCE. At any rate, Gamaliel points out that here was another "would be Messiah" whose school of thought amounted to nothing as time passed.

"And I'm telling you now: withdraw from these people and leave them alone, because if this plan or this work is from human beings, it will be wiped out. But if it is from God, you are not able to wipe them out. And do not be found to be fighters against God."

Gamaliel concludes his speech by advising his fellow rabbis and the priests that if they kill the Twelve while they are popular, this could prove to be an unwise decision. After all, if it turns out that they're just making this up, their philosophy will eventually be "wiped out." People will stop believing them. But if God really IS behind them, the leaders would be fighting God to oppose the Twelve.

Now they were persuaded by him, and when they called the envoys after beating them, they charged them not to speak on the name of Jesus, and they released them. Therefore indeed they went away from the presence of the Sanhedrin rejoicing, because they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the name. And every day, in the temple courts and at home, they did not cease teaching and announcing the good message of Jesus the Anointed One.

Although they had been ready and eager to stone the Twelve, they listened to the wise words of Gamaliel and merely had the Twelve beaten. Again and more strongly, they told the Twelve to quit teaching about Jesus. But the passage alludes that the leaders knew that their behavior would not stop. The Twelve left feeling great because they had been beaten on behalf of their Messiah, and so they continued to announce that Jesus was the Anointed -- and all the things that went with that.

6:1 *Now in those days when the number of students was increasing, a gripe of the Hellenists happened against the Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily service.*

As part of the concept of "sharing" to which the early Christians were devoted, they made sure that all of the "brothers and sisters" were being fed. This was mentioned previously in both chapters 2 and 4, but here, some time later, a problem arises. The Palestinian Jews, whose first language was Aramaic, and the Hellenistic Jews (who probably spoke only Greek) were at odds with one another. For reasons unknown to us -- perhaps more of the Hellenists had traveled into Jerusalem and consequently were not as affluent -- there were either more Hellenists who were poor, or there was blatant racism on the part of the Hebrews. While it is true that Hellenists were regarded by Hebrews as being on a somewhat lower plane (to the point where the writings of the Hellenists would eventually be excluded from the Jewish canon), we would expect the Christians (Jews) to have less of a problem with this racial issue.

Perhaps that is one of the reasons why there is mention that the numbers were increasing at the time: new Hebrews and Hellenists were coming into the Christian group, who had not become adjusted to the Christian way of thinking. Another reason for mentioning the influx at this time

was surely the fact that with more people to take care of, it may have become more difficult to make sure everyone was being fed.

Now when the Twelve called the multitude of students to them, they said, "It isn't appropriate for us to leave God's message to serve at tables. Therefore brothers, find seven well-attested men among you, full of spirit and wisdom, for us to appoint over this need. But we will attend to prayer and to the service of the message."

Noticing the problem, the Twelve called together the ENTIRE group. Apparently, some people had wanted the envoys to ensure that the poor were being fed, but they indicated that this simply wasn't why they were called: "to serve at tables". This was not said to demean the people's serving one another, since of course the Twelve would have been involved with that on a personal level, but the envoys quickly realized that they would not be able to do what they'd been sent to do if they kept track of who was being fed and who was not. And naturally, the envoys held no position of authority -- being placed in sole responsibility for everyone's health would have given them too much PERCEIVED status.

In fact, the Twelve did not even select the ones who would perform the feeding. Instead, they urged the people themselves to "find seven" who would do the feeding. When the people found seven guys who would make sure all 5000+ were being fed, the envoys would bless the choice. The Twelve would continue to herald the message and to pray.

And the statement was pleasing in the presence of all the multitude, and they chose Stefanos (a man full of trust and holy breath), and Filippus, and Prochorus, and Nikanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nikolas (a proselyte from Antioch). These they placed in the presence of the envoys; and, after praying they laid hands on them. And God's message grew, and the number of the students in Jerusalem was greatly multiplied, and a great crowd of the priests paid attention to the faith.

The crowd chose to accept the advice that the Twelve had given them, signifying that both factions had decided that the solution was a reasonable one. They picked seven trustworthy and blameless people, and the Twelve prayed and laid hands on them. The placement of hands signified their personal acceptance or blessing. Stefanos is mentioned first (and specifically mentioned as having been gifted by God) because he -- a man trusted by Hebrews and Hellenists -- would have a part in taking the message of the coming of the Messiah to a certain "fringe" element of Judaism.

The conclusion of the matter is that the poor were fed, causing the word about their Christian lifestyle to attract others to hear the message that the envoys were proclaiming. And the group grew still larger. Notice that as the group grew even larger, there were no longer any problems assisting the poor in obtaining food. The implication is that the people had chosen wisely.

Now Stefanos, full of favor and power, worked wonders and great signs among the people. Now some of those from that synagogue called the synagogue of the Free (whose people were Kurenians, and Alexandrians, and of those from Kilikia and Asia), stood up and were disputing with Stefanos. And they did not succeed in resisting the wisdom and the spirit with which he

spoke. Then they underhandedly hired men to say that, "We have heard him speaking reviling declarations against Moses and God."

While Stefanos was accepted by all the Christians, Hebrew and Hellenist alike, he was certainly not in favor with all his countrymen. While working miracles (in Jesus' name) among certain non-Palestinian Jews, they challenged him. But he spoke with such an attitude and with such wisdom that he essentially outwitted his opponents. Perhaps they were attempting to show that Jesus was not the Anointed One. At any rate, they conspired to spread the rumor that he was speaking against both Moses and God. This parallels the treatment Jesus received from Palestinian Jews, who hired false witnesses in order to try him.

NOTE: the use of the term "free" may have identified them as former slaves. There is an inscription which may identify members of this group.

And they stirred up the people and the elderly and the scribes. And when they came upon him, they seized him and led him into the Sanhedrin. And false witnesses stood up, saying, "This person doesn't stop speaking declarations against the holy place and the Torah. For we have heard him saying that this Jesus the Nazarene will wipe out this place, and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us."

Some time passes, and the leadership are brought into the matter. False testimony is brought against him, and these are serious charges. Speaking against the temple did not carry the death penalty, but rejecting the Torah was a reason for expulsion from the synagogue at the least.

Like the testimony brought against Jesus, there was an element of truth to the lies told against Stefanos. Jesus had indeed prophesied an end to the temple (although this end would not come for another 30+ years). Also, Jesus had spoken of the completion of the Torah, which would be reduced to internal principles. More than that, Jesus denied that many of the customs practiced by Jews at the time were actually those of Moses. They clearly viewed Jesus (and therefore Stefanos) as a threat to their entire way of life.

And when they gazed at him, all those who were seated in the Sanhedrin noticed that his face was like a messenger's face. Now the High Priest said, "Are these things so?"

As at Jesus' trial, when he said nothing, the defendant was entitled to speak to his own defense, and the High Priest called upon him to do so. Stefanos' face was "like a messenger's." Either he appeared innocent to the members of the council or he seemed to glow; the author does not say what this resemblance was, but it is interesting that the High Priest carries on the proceedings even though the council noticed this about Stefanos.

7:2 *Now he said, "Men, brothers and fathers, hear this:*

Stefanos addresses the Jewish leaders using traditional terms of respect. He intends them no disrespect as human beings, but he opposes their participation in the death of a great prophet/king/Messiah.

*"The God of glory appeared to our ancestor Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he was staying in Charran, and he said to him, **"Go out from your land and from your relatives, and come into whatever land I will show you."** Then he went out from the Chaldean land, and he stayed in Charran. And after his father's death, God removed him from there into this land, in which you are now staying. And he did not give him an inheritance in it, not even a parcel the length of a foot. And he promised **"to give it to him as a possession and to his progeny after him,"** though he had no children. Now God said it this way: that **"his progeny will be strangers in a foreign land, and they will enslave and oppress them for for hundred years. And I will judge the nation to which they will be enslaved,"** said God, **"and after these things, they will come out"**, and **'they will worship me in this place'**.*

Once again, Stefanos refers to God in a traditional way. Here, he also appeals to the patriarch Abraham as a testimony to his own mission and to his charges against the Jewish leadership.

In fact, Stefanos is citing a point of Jewish tradition. The account of Abram's conversation with God in the OT (Genesis 12) mentions only a call from Charran. But Stefanos cites a call given by God to Abram while he was living in Ur, before he reached Charran. Philo refers to this tradition as well.

Also, Stefanos appears to have been reading a Samaritan copy of the Torah, or at least an earlier Hebrew version than our Masoretic Text. The MT indicates (Gen 11:32) that Terah lived for 60 years AFTER Abram left for "this land," showing his life as lasting for 205 years. The Samaritan variant lists Terah's life at only 145 years.

Stefanos made two points regarding Abraham, which are important to his case:

- Abraham himself was not given an inheritance (share) in the promised land; it was offered to his (as yet unborn) descendants.
- His descendants would have to suffer in slavery first (i.e., before Moses arrived to free them).

"And God gave him a covenant of circumcision, and in this way he fathered Isaak and circumcised him on the eighth day, as Isaak did Jacob, and Jacob did to the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, since they envied Yosef, sold him into Egypt. And God was with him and delivered him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh (king of Egypt) and placed him as ruler over Egypt, along with his household."

When Stefanos mentions the covenant, it is only as part of the continuous history of his people. Isaak and Jacob are only necessary in this account to provide a transition to Yosef, who was sold into slavery by his own brothers, whom Stefanos calls "the patriarchs." Here, Stefanos first alludes to the rejection of God's chosen leaders by the so-called leaders of the people. He has in mind the present leadership's rejection of Jesus. So, although Yosef's brothers reject him, GOD delivers him, and GOD makes him "ruler over Egypt."

"Now a famine and great affliction came on the whole land of Egypt and Canaan, and our ancestors did not find provisions. Now when Jacob heard that there was food made from grain in Egypt, he sent out our ancestors the first time.

This happened in Genesis 42. During this encounter between Yosef and his brothers, he recognized them, but they did not realize who he was. The ten brothers had left young Benjamin behind, and Yosef refused to sell them grain unless he saw Benjamin. Filling their bags with grain, he sent the brothers back to Jacob their father, keeping Simeon with him.

*"And during the second time, Yosef was made known to his brothers, and Yosef's family became shown to the Pharaoh. Now Yosef sent and called for his father Jacob and all his relatives (75 souls in all), and Jacob went down into Egypt and passed away, as did our ancestors also. And they were carried into Shechem and were placed in the tomb which Abraham bought (with silver) from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. But when the time drew near to fulfill the promise that God had agreed to with Abraham, the people were growing in number and were being multiplied in Egypt until **"another king stood up, who did not know Yosef."** When this one completely tricked our race, he treated our ancestors badly, making them expose their babies so that they might not be preserved.*

When the brothers returned to purchase food, Yosef revealed to his brothers who he was (Gn 45:1). The number of 75 that Stefanos arrived at includes the 9 wives of Jacob's sons.

The account in Josh 24:32 says only that Yosef was "carried to" (buried at) Shechem; Stefanos quotes a tradition that indicates his brothers were buried there too. Now Stefanos is ready to bring up Moses. His account of the rejection of Moses will be stronger than his allusion to their rejection of Yosef.

"Another king stood up, who did not know Yosef." (Ex 1:8) Various speculations have arisen as to the identity of this particular Pharaoh. Most people identify him as one of the early Ramessides (Rameses I -- c. 1325 BCE; Rameses II -- c. 1285-1225 BCE), but the Biblical account would make these pharaohs much too late. It would seem more plausible that Moses was born near the end of the XIV dynasty and the beginning of the rule of the Hyksos, who went on to dominate Egypt for most of Moses' time there. These rulers, who rightly belonged to a different culture, had certainly never heard of Yosef.

"In this season, Moses was born, and he was beautiful to God, and he was nursed for three months in his father's house. Now when his father exposed him, Pharaoh's daughter took him and nursed him herself as a son. And Moses was trained in all Egyptian wisdom. Now he was powerful in words and in his deeds."

Moses was trained by Egyptians rather than by his countrymen. At this time, Stefanos' comment is merely a point of history, but he will contrast this to Moses' treatment by his own people.

"Now when forty years of his lifetime were completed, it came up in his heart to visit his brothers, the sons of Israel. And when he noticed a certain one being mistreated, he defended him and in striking the Egyptian he did justice for the one who was being oppressed."

It was another Jewish tradition that indicated Moses' precise age when he began to serve Israel. Before this time, he essentially served Egypt, but from this time on, Moses would exhibit a strong sense of national identity. Contrast Moses' readiness to serve his people with Stefanos' audience. Moses "did justice."

"Now he thought that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation through his hands, but they didn't understand. Now on the next day, he appeared to those who were arguing, and he urged them to be peaceful, saying, 'Men, brothers, why are you mistreating one another?'"

*"But the one who was mistreating his neighbor pushed him away, saying, **'Who set you down to be a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me the same way you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'**" But Moses fled at this saying and became a stranger in the land of Midian, where he fathered two sons.*

When Moses did step out publically to bring peace to his people, they rejected him, questioning his judgement and leadership. The people refused to see what Moses was trying to do for them, pointing to his nationalistic act of justice as something terrible. Moses fled them for 40 years.

And after forty years were completed, a messenger appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai in a flame of a burning bush. Now when Moses noticed it, he admired what he saw, and when he went near to observe it, a voice of the Lord happened:

By this time, the rule of the Hyksos (c. 1640 - 1560 BCE), had ended. Pharaoh Seqen-en-Ra was ruler in Egypt. Egypt had changed greatly, and Moses would have to deal with this new Pharaoh. God's messenger (later revealed as God himself) appeared to Moses, and Moses paid attention to what God was telling him. Stefanos cites this as proof that Moses was sent by God; he is making a parallel between Moses and Jesus.

"I am the god of your ancestors: the god of Abraham and of Isaak and of Jacob."** And since Moses was terrified, he did not dare to look. Now the Lord said to him, **"Loosen the sandals on your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. When I looked, I noticed the bad things happening to my people in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. And come now, I will send you forth into Egypt."

God sent Moses to rescue his people (i.e., just as God sent Jesus the Anointed One to rescue his people). Here, Moses' call was made clear. Also, Stefanos establishes that he has nothing bad to say about Moses -- one of the charges against him.

"This is the Moses that they denied, saying, "Who set you down to be a ruler and a judge?" This one God also sent to be a ruler and a redeemer with the hand of a messenger that appeared to him in the bush. This one led them out, doing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and for forty years in the desert.

Again, Stefanos reminds the Sanhedrin that although the people had rejected Moses, GOD had chosen him -- to occupy the roles of ruler and redeemer. Moses had worked "wonders and signs" which proved him to have been sent from God (i.e., just as Jesus had also done).

*"This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, **'God will raise up for you a prophet like me out of your brothers.'**" This is the one who was in the assembly in the desert with that messenger speaking to him in Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors. He embraced living oracles to give to us."*

This same Moses predicted that someone like him would come, a prophet, and obviously Stefanos is inferring that Jesus was that prophet.

*"To him our ancestors did not wish to become subject. On the contrary, they thrust him away and turned back into Egypt in their hearts, saying to Aaron, **'Make gods for us who will go before us, for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'**"*

But although God had sent Moses the great lawgiver, the people continued to reject him—even though he had proven his identity. They told Aaron, ancestor of all the priests, to make other gods for them to worship, refusing to wait for Moses to come down from Sinai. This is parallel to the current situation in Jewish society; the leaders have rejected God's Messiah and his rulership for their own "gods".

*"And in those days they made a calf and offered a sacrifice to the image, and they rejoiced in the deeds of their hands. But God turned and gave them up to serve heaven's host, as it was written in a scroll of the Prophets, **'You didn't offer animal bodies and sacrifices to me for forty years in the desert, O House of Israel. And you took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Raifan, of the type that you made'** to worship. **'And I will carry you away beyond'** Babylon."*

As a result of their rejecting Moses and God, God rejected them in return, making them wander in the desert for 40 years. There, they worshipped everything but God. Stefanos cites Amos 5:25-7 from the Septuagint, where God promises an even farther exile than Babylon. Stefanos is implying that the predicted fall of the Jewish state and destruction of the temple is a similar punishment for having rejected their Messiah. "Babylon" was responsible for their earlier exile, and so, Stefanos substitutes it for "Damascus," which appears in Amos.

"The tent of testimony belonged to our ancestors in the desert, just as the one who spoke to Moses arranged it, according to the type which he had seen. This also our ancestors with Joshua received and brought in from the possession of the gentiles, whom God put out from the presence of our ancestors until the days of David. He found favor before God and asked to find a tent for the House of Jacob, and Solomon constructed a house for him."

God had arranged a tent of meeting while they were in the desert, but when they settled down, David wanted to build God a house. The OT intimates (see Psa 132, for example) that this was David's idea and not God's. Solomon (1 Kings 6) continued his father's pledge to build a house for God.

*"However, the Highest One does not dwell in handmade places, as the prophet says, **'Heaven is my throne, and the land is my footstool. What house will you construct for me?'**, says Yahweh. **'Or what is my place of rest? Hasn't my hand made all of these things?'**"*

But God never wanted nor needed an earthly house. In fact, he "does not dwell in handmade places." I.e., what the Jews knew as the temple in Stefanos' day was not, in fact, God's house.

Stefanos cites Isa 66:1f. as God's clear statement on the subject. God could not possibly dwell in something that was merely his physical creation. The passage in Isaiah goes on to indicate that "it is the man to whom I will look, the one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at my declaration." This hearkens to Jesus' sayings about the true nature of worship being personal and from within (John 4).

"You stiffnecked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You always resist the holy Spirit. You are doing as your ancestors did also. Which of the prophets DIDN'T your ancestors persecute? And they killed the ones who were announcing in advance about the coming of the Just One, of whom you have now become betrayers and murderers, you who received the Torah under the direction of messengers and did not keep it."

This is Stefanos' final charge. God's people, specifically the leadership and these leaders, have always resisted everything God has revealed to his people. This Sanhedrin and these priests are merely following in the footsteps of their ancestors, who persecuted the prophets.

All of these prophets taught of the coming of Jesus, so it is no surprise that they murdered Jesus also. Rather than it being Stefanos who opposed the Torah, he charges that the leaders were the ones who "received the Torah...and did not keep it." Thus, as evidenced by their treatment of Jesus, the leaders are the ones who are guilty of what they accused Stefanos of. And as for the temple, God never wanted it, and God does not live there; Jesus' prediction of its destruction should come as no surprise.

Now when they heard these things, they were cut to their hearts, and they gnashed their teeth at him. But since he was full of holy breath, he stared into heaven and noticed God's glory and Jesus standing at God's right side, and he said, "Look! I am watching the heavens being opened and the Son of Man standing at God's right side!" Now they cried out with a loud voice and shut their ears, and they charged at him with one accord. And after throwing him out of the city, they stoned him. And the witnesses put down their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul. And they stoned Stefanos, who cried out, saying, "O Lord Jesus, embrace my spirit." Now he dropped to his knees and shouted with a loud voice, "O Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And when he said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was consenting to his murder.

Their being cut to the hearts (see Acts 2) is an expression indicating that great emotion was stirred within them, and possibly that they realized that what Stefanos was saying was true.

Jesus had experienced a transfiguration. Here, Stefanos undergoes a similar transfiguration as he looks into heaven and sees Jesus. The false witnesses (who were supposed to execute judgment) stoned Stefanos to death (which was technically illegal, but there was no Governor to immediately replace Pilatus). Stefanos was still looking at Jesus in heaven. His asking Jesus to receive him is a public affirmation that Jesus was with God.

And as a bridge to what follows, there is a mention of a certain man named Saul, who agreed with the verdict against Stefanos.

8:1 *Now on that day, a great persecution happened to the assembly at Jerusalem. Now everyone was scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the envoys. Now devout men took Stefanos and made a great lamentation over him. But Saul was tearing apart the assembly, entering each of their homes and dragging both men and women and putting them in jail.*

The stoning of Stefanos represented "the straw that broke the camel's back," as far as the Sanhedrin and the priests were concerned. In their minds, the Nazarene group (Christians) was spreading so many damaging and heretical teachings that they had to be eliminated. Stefanos' body was buried and lamented over, but the whole Christian assembly was being persecuted, sending people from Jerusalem all throughout the land.

Having completed their mission (back in chapter 2), the Twelve remained in Jerusalem to withstand the persecution. And again we have mention of this man Saul actively participating in the arrest and imprisonment of Nazarene men and women. Holding a woman for having unorthodox opinions was certainly rare.

Therefore indeed, the ones who had been scattered were announcing the message as they passed through. Now when Filippus went down into the city of Samaria, he heralded the Anointed One to them. Now the crowds held on to the things being said by Filippus with one accord, as they heard and saw the signs that he was doing. For many of those who had unclean spirits came out, crying with a loud voice. And many who were paralyzed and lame were healed, and much joy happened in that city.

Filippus was one of the seven men of good reputation who had been selected to feed the poor. When happenstance scattered the group out of Jerusalem into the surrounding countryside, Filippus went to Samaria. Although this activity would have been unlikely for a "Hebrew" -- a Palestinian, Aramaic-speaking Jew -- because of their traditions regarding Samaria, either Filippus was a Hellenist or he did not care about such things. Following in the footsteps of the Samaritan woman (John 4), Filippus immediately began telling these "fringe Jews" that the Anointed One had come. The message had already been carried to representatives of mainstream Judaism everywhere, and now the coming of the Messiah was being announced even to Samaritans.

Filippus was gifted by the holy breath, and so he began working the various signs which accompanied the message. Many people were healed, and people all throughout the city began to listen to what Filippus had to say about the Messiah. Although the Samaritan view of the Anointed One was different than the "Hebrew" view (since they did not acknowledge the later Biblical writings with the same authority as the Torah), they still awaited the coming of the Anointed One eagerly. And now he had come!

Now a certain man, Simon by name, had been in the city before, working magic and astonishing the nation of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. Everyone paid attention to him, from

small to great, saying, "This one is God's power, called the Great One." Now they were paying attention to him on account of the long time that he had been astonishing them with his feats of magic.

There had been a man called Simon, most likely a Samaritan himself, who had become known throughout the region for his feats of magic. Lukas' account never indicates that his magic was false, but from the context of this passage it appears that what he could accomplish was relatively weak. Still, he was known as "the Great One" and enjoyed being revered and idolized by the crowd. He is the very image of someone who used his miraculous ability to gain a position of leadership. Rather than attract people to a message God had given him (i.e., like Filippus), Simon was drawing followers for himself. (In the language of Matthew 23, he loved to be called "Rabbi.")

But when they trusted Filippus, who was announcing about God's kingdom and the name of Anointed Jesus, they were baptized, both men and women. Now Simon also himself trusted, and after being baptized, he attached himself to Filippus. And he was amazed as he observed the signs and great wonders that were happening.

When Filippus told the people about their Messiah and about the coming destruction of the Jewish state, many of them were baptized, identifying themselves publically as being followers of Jesus. Simon himself was so impressed by what he saw God do through Filippus that he too believed, and he began to follow Filippus around. Obviously the signs which Filippus had been able to work were greater than anything Simon had ever seen.

Now when the envoys in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had embraced God's message, they sent Peter and Johannes to them, who prayed for them as they were going down, so that they might receive holy breath. For it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Filippus had not been one of the Twelve. Since Samaritans were Jews, essentially, it certainly made sense that the coming of the Messiah should spread through Samaria. This section is included centrally to show that the Twelve approved of what Filippus had done. Although Filippus had not been SENT to Samaria, God had empowered him to work signs in that region, and people had come to realize who Jesus was.

But none of them had received the promised holy breath (Acts 2:38). They "had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus." Although they had publically acknowledged Jesus, separating themselves from other Jews, they had not received the breath. Therefore, as Peter and Johannes were traveling to Samaria, they offered prayers to God that the Samaritans too would be able to display the signs proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

Then they laid their hands on them, and they received holy breath. Now when Simon noticed that the breath was given through the laying on of the envoys' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this authority, so that the one on whom I lay my hands may receive holy breath."

When Peter and Johannes arrived in the city, they "laid their hands on them," which was a public show of acceptance. Peter and Johannes, along with the others who had sent them, publically accepted Samaritans as belonging to the new covenant. This is placed here for the reader's benefit for two reasons: first, because Samaritans were still Jews -- but as a fringe element the reader needed to know that both God and the "regular" Jews accepted them; and second, because the reader is being prepared for God's acceptance of all people into the covenant (which begins now and culminates in chapters 10 and 11).

So the Samaritans, too, received the gift of the holy breath. Ordinarily, the expectation was that all Jews would receive the gift when they converted, but in this case, prayer and the acceptance of the Twelve were required. Also, the Twelve had been expressly forbidden from taking the message to Samaritans (Mt 10:1f.); this sign showed that Jesus' intent in saying that was temporary; the restriction not to talk to Samaritans had now expired. This served as a sign to the "Hebrew" Christians that everyone accepted the Samaritans. However, Simon took this to be a power that he had never seen -- the power to give others magical abilities. He asked -- and tried to bribe -- Peter and Johannes to please give him that ability. (For imagine what a reputation he would have if he could do that!)

But Peter said to him, "May your silver be with you until you are destroyed, because you assumed that you could buy God's gift with money! There is for you no part or lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore, change your mind away from this bad thing of yours, and beg the Lord that the thought on your heart will possibly be forgiven you. For I see you as being in gall of bitterness and in a bond of wrong."

But Peter took the focus OFF of himself and put it, rightly, onto God. Whatever Peter could do was merely God's gift. How could someone buy God's gift with money?! Peter could clearly see that Simon's attitude was wrong (see, e.g., Mt 18:1f.). Unless he changed his attitude, he could never be a part of them and would never be gifted. Peter advised Simon to turn to God and beg him for forgiveness. The expressions Peter uses to describe Simon's state are figures of speech. The "gall of bitterness" signifies his specific attitude -- it is something horribly unpalatable. The "bond of wrong" is an enslavement to whatever causes people to reject God and the Torah. It was imperative that Simon escape his attitude.

Now Simon answered, saying, "You beg the Lord on my behalf, so that none of the things that you said will come upon me." Therefore indeed, when they had solemnly testified and had spoken the message about the Lord, they returned into Jerusalem, and many villages of the Samaritans heard the good message.

Good for Simon, he realized that his self-seeking attitude was horrible, and he feared what God might do to him if he stayed the way he was. So he asked Peter to beg God not to allow those things to happen. He wanted to be part of the community, and certainly he did not want his religion to be wiped out thirty years later (remember, Filippus had told them about the future destruction of Judaism). Although the end of the "temple" concept of worship meant little to Samaritans (who worshipped in Mount Gerizim), the siege of Israel by Rome signified much more than that. Simon wanted to be on the right side!

And Peter and Johannes continued to testify to what they had seen and heard Jesus do and teach, and before returning to Jerusalem, people from the entire region had begun embracing their Messiah.

8:26 *Now a messenger of Yahweh spoke to Filippus, saying, "Get up and go south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza--this is the desert road." And he got up and went. And, look, there was a man: an Ethiopian eunuch, a treasurer of Kandake the Queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all of her treasure, who had come worshiping in Jerusalem. Now he was returning home and was seated in his chariot and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Now the Spirit said to Filippus, "Approach this chariot and accompany it."*

Another fringe element of Judaism was the eunuch. Eunuchs were often used in positions of trust because it was believed that their lack of sexual interest would make them more dependable. However, the Torah was clear regarding eunuchs: they could not even enter the place of meeting.

However, like the Samaritans, eunuchs (representative of the remaining fringe elements of Judaism) were about to be expressly admitted to the new covenant.

Kandake was the title of all queens of Ethiopia at the time, and this particular eunuch was her chief treasurer. Lukas makes the case that he was devout, for he had gone to Jerusalem to pray and worship in the temple, and probably to participate in one of the feasts (the usual reason for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem).

As he rode home in his chariot, Filippus received a divine revelation to go to the road where the eunuch was traveling and to ask for a ride. God did not tell Filippus what to do next, or what to say, but that would be obvious.

Now when Filippus ran up to it, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and he said, "So, do you know what you are reading about?" Now the eunuch said, "Well, how can I be able to if no one guides me?" And he begged Filippus as he came up to sit with him.

Filippus noticed that the treasurer was reading out loud (in Greek), and he must have tingled when he recognized the passage as one of the Messianic prophecies. Clearly, Filippus had been sent to explain Jesus' Messiahship to this man. The question baited the treasurer, who answered that he could not understand (to whom the passage referred). Filippus got into the chariot and began discussing the passage with him.

*Now, the portion of the writing that he was reading was this: "**Like a sheep to the slaughter he was led, and as a lamb is mute before the one who shears it, so he does not open his mouth. In humiliation, his judgment was taken away. Who will tell of his generation, because his life was taken from the land?**"*

This is a loose citation from the Septuagint. The portion reading, "because his life was taken from the land," is not found in the Masoretic Text. The treasurer was reading the section, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, one of the "songs of the suffering servant" -- a passage which speaks of the Messiah as a sufferer (see also Luke 24:45f.).

Now the eunuch answered Filippus, saying, "I ask you: Who is the prophet saying this about? Is it about himself, or about a certain other person?" Now Filippus opened his mouth, and announced Jesus to him, beginning from that writing. And as they were going along the road, they came upon a certain spring. And the eunuch said, "Look, a spring. What prevents my being baptized?" And he had the chariot stop, and they both went down into the water, Filippus and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

The eunuch was already a proselyte to Judaism. He understood that the passage predicted that SOMEONE would suffer. But was Isaiah prophesying about himself? Or if it's about someone else, who could this person be? This was the ideal question for Filippus, who began explaining all of the things regarding Jesus' own trials. Filippus started by answering the treasurer's question precisely: Isaiah had spoken about Jesus. By the end of the conversation, Filippus had proven to the treasurer that Jesus was the promised Messiah, not only a king but also a sufferer. We do not know what things the treasurer may have already known about Jesus or his followers.

Baptism was the way of publically separating from the other Jews and identifying with Jesus. At the end of the conversation, the treasurer was fully willing to identify himself with Jesus: he had found his Messiah! Seeing his willing attitude, Filippus baptized the eunuch, and with God's own approval -- for God had sent Filippus -- all sections of Judaism were now part of the new and lasting covenant.

Now when they came up out of the spring, the Lord's Spirit snatched Filippus, and the eunuch did not notice him any longer, for he was going on his way rejoicing. Now Filippus was found to be in Azotus, and as he passed through he announced to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

The treasurer returned to his own country, alone and unaided, now secure in the knowledge that his questions about the coming suffering servant had been answered. But Filippus was led elsewhere by God. Eventually, he showed up in Azotus, and then Caesarea, as he traveled along the Mediterranean coast.

9:1 *Now Saul, still breathing out threatening and slaughter against the Lord's students, went to the High Priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damaskus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, men or also women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now in the journey, it happened that he neared Damaskus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And as he fell to the ground, he heard a voice telling him, "Oh Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*

So begins the historical account of Saul's famous journey on the "road to Damaskus." Although he has been mentioned only briefly thusfar, the readers are already aware of Saul's identity. Saul was a Perush ("pharisee," literally "a stickler for details") who eagerly sought out members of the Nazarene group -- here called "the Way" -- with intent to harm. The year is 34 CE, seventeen years prior to the events in chapter 15 and just four years after the crucifixion of Jesus.

The Christians, who before the time of Stefanos were centered in Jerusalem, gave themselves several nicknames. Most common of those nicknames appears to have been simply "students." This is the term that Lukas and Jesus use most frequently, and when Lukas says "students"

(without an additional qualifier), he always means Christians. Here we find another label, "the Way." Today there is a cultic group called "the Way," who take their name from the label used here. The use of the term signifies following a path. Jesus was the path to salvation for all Jews at the time, for anyone who remained in the old religion would soon have that religion removed.

Here, in the historical account, Saul sees a light. From this passage (and others similar to it), "seeing the light" became synonymous with finding the truth. Saul also heard an unmistakable voice asking, "Why are you persecuting me," and calling him by name.

Now he said, "Who are you, sir?" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Instead of persecuting, get up and enter the city, and you will be told what it is necessary for you to do."

Saul replied by asking a bold but natural question, "Who are you?" The voice was the voice of Saul's Messiah. Here, Jesus uses "persecuting me" to signify Saul's actions against Jesus' people. This reminds us of Jesus' own statement, "Indeed I assure you, as often as you did them for one of these of the least of my brothers, you did them for me," which applied to both good and bad things.

Here, Jesus acknowledges Saul's honesty. Knowing that Saul will do as he is asked to do, he merely says, "enter the city, and you will be told what it is necessary for you to do." Saul was a man of integrity who honestly believed that what the Christians were saying was evil. But here, he could not deny that Jesus had been sent by God.

Now the men who were travelling with him were standing speechless, hearing indeed the voice but observing no one. Now Saul was lifted up from the ground, and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. But they brought him into Damaskus, leading him by the hand. And he was sightless for three days, and neither ate nor drank.

At this point, none of his companions could see Jesus, although they could see a light and hear a voice. They were witnesses to a degree that something miraculous was occurring on the road to Damaskus. Saul got up and became blind. Like Zachariah, father of John the Baptizer, Saul could not see until he did what God wanted him to do. Saul needed to follow Jesus' instructions. Being pious, Saul fasted, hoping to find a certain person who would help him find his Messiah.

Now there was a certain student in Damaskus named Hananiah. And the Lord said to him in a vision, "Hananiah?" And he said, "Look, it is I, Lord." Now the Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight and seek a person from Tarsus, Saul by name, in the house of Judah. For look, he is praying, and he noticed a man named Hananiah coming in and placing his hands on him, so that he might see again."

This contact, a pious student called Hananiah, also received a vision to seek out Saul. Here, we find out that Saul's latest vision had included Hananiah praying and placing his hands on him -- thereby showing acceptance for Saul.

Now Hananiah answered, "O Lord, I have heard from many people about this man, how many bad things he has done to your holy ones in Jerusalem. And he has authority here from the high priests to bind all of the ones who call on your name."

Ah, but Hananiah knew all too well who this "Saul" was. He was the one who was persecuting Jesus' people everywhere, taking them to the high high priests to be tried. Hananiah was reluctant to have anything to do with the man.

But the Lord said to him, "You go, because this one is a vessel of my choosing to carry my name before nations, and kings, and the sons of Israel. For I will show him how much it is necessary for him to suffer on behalf of my name." Now Hananiah went a way and entered into the house, and after placing his hands on him, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me--Jesus, the one who appeared to you on the road by which you came here--so that you might see again and might be filled with holy breath."

Yet Saul had been chosen by Jesus personally to take the message about Jesus to both Jew and Gentile. Thus, the first witness to the fact that gentiles were to enter the new covenant was a pious Jew, and he received that information directly from Jesus in a vision. Thus, we have solid testimony from a reliable witness that Saul was to be an instrument of God, to carry the message about Jesus to other nations.

With that, Hananiah went to Saul, placed his hands on him -- showing full acceptance -- and verbally acknowledged that Jesus had sent him to Saul and had told him of Saul's situation. Also, Saul was about to receive an anointing from God -- to be filled with holy breath.

And immediately something like scales fell away from his eyes, and he could see again. And he got up and was baptized and was strengthened after eating food. Now it happened that he was with the students in Damascus for a considerable number of days. And immediately he was in the gatherings heralding Jesus--that he is God's son. Now all the ones who heard were amazed, and they said, "Isn't this the one who had been wiping out the ones in Jerusalem who called upon this name? And didn't he come for this reason: so that he could bring them bound to the high priests?"

Suddenly, as Jesus had indicated, Saul could see again. He got up and took action to publically identify himself as a believer. He was baptized. From that point on, people would learn that he had accepted Jesus as the one and only Messiah. He stopped his fasting and stayed with the other Damaskan students -- no doubt learning about Jesus.

Anxious to tell his story, he entered the Jewish gatherings and acted as Jesus' herald -- his official representative. In other words, Saul began to do just what Jesus had instructed him to do. He started telling people that Jesus was indeed God's son -- the Messiah. But for about twelve years now there had been Jews entering the new covenant, and for what appears to have been several years, Saul had resisted the Jesus movement. The people there knew who he was, and so they were confused. Isn't he the one who was persecuting God's people? We remember what they said about Moses, "Didn't you kill the Egyptian?" His own people began to question him -- something that Saul (in his position) had probably experienced very little of prior to this time,

but something that would be common to him from this point on. And here, their attitude was one of great confusion -- for the leaders were PLEASED with him when he was persecuting Christians, but now here he was promoting their so-called Messiah!

But Saul was filled with more power, and he confused the Jews who lived in Damaskus, proving that this Jesus is the Anointed One. Now when a considerable number of days had been completed, the Jews conferred together to kill him. But their plot was known to Saul. Now, they were also monitoring the gates by day and also by night, so that they might destroy him. But the students took him by night and lowered him in a basket through a hole in the wall.

Saul's knowledge of the Torah and Prophets was considerable. In the Jewish gatherings, Saul would stand up to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, and this aggravated certain people to the point where they sought to kill him -- just as they always persecuted the prophets (all the way up to Stefanos). "The Jews," here, refers to the leadership -- the same people who plotted against Stefanos and Jesus before Saul. Saul hid out in Damaskus, but the leadership sent people around the city in search of him. They watched the gates, so that they could grab him if he tried to leave. They had trusted Saul, but now, he was a traitor. Their considerable anger and feelings of betrayal are not surprising. But his new friends and fellow students smuggled Saul out of town through a hole in the city wall. Bypassing the gates this way, he escaped and fled.

Notice that Saul was to carry the message of Jesus to gentiles, but he did not yet do this. In fact, he would not be the first to do so -- a fact so important to the author that these events are most carefully recorded. After more preparation, the stage would be set for a universal covenant -- a covenant that all could enter. And Lukas will show his reader that even with this dramatic difference in scope, the message itself would not change.

9:26 *Now when he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join up with the students, and everyone was afraid of him, not believing that he was a student. But Bar- Nabas grabbed onto him and led him to the envoys, and he related to them how he noticed the Lord in the road, and that he had spoken to him, and how in Damaskus he spoke freely in Jesus' name. And Saul was with them going into and out of Jerusalem, speaking freely in the name of the Lord. He both spoke with and debated the Hellenists, and they tried to kill him. But when the brothers recognized this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. Therefore indeed all the assembly throughout Judea and Galilaiah and Samaria had peace; and it was being constructed and was walking in the fear of the Lord, and was being multiplied in the advice of the holy Spirit.*

Here we see the beginning of Saul's relationship with Bar-Nabas. The author introduced us to Bar-Nabas some time ago, and so when Saul encounters him, the reader is already aware that Bar-Nabas was a well-regarded Christian who was accepted by the group at large. Bar-Nabas took Saul to the envoys, who listened to Saul's story and believed it. Although not everyone was quick (or ready) to accept Saul as a Christian, the Twelve received him, and for a time both they and Saul went around Jerusalem telling others about Jesus.

Saul spent some time debating the Hellenists. The passage merely states, "they tried to kill him." It is possible that the reason for their violence was Saul's message about Jesus, but it is equally possible that (like the Jewish people in Damaskus) they regarded Saul as a traitor to his people.

Although I side with the latter view, Lukas does not provide a reason, and perhaps he did not know it.

When Saul was taken away safely to Tarsus, "all the assembly" in the region had peace. Clearly, they had not been ready to accept Saul as a Christian, but clearly also, the people were pleased that a persecutor was no longer pursuing them throughout the land. It is possible that Saul's removal represents the time period (given by Paulus in Galatians as three years) that Saul spent learning about Jesus from the master himself. Lukas never points this out to the reader explicitly. Some believe it happened prior to this time, while some place it later -- perhaps after chapter 11. At any rate, Saul never consulted with the Twelve as to what he "should believe." Instead, like the Twelve, he was taught directly by Jesus.

At this point, Lukas has us primed for the introduction of the gentiles to the new covenant. A few things are necessary first, however.

The text has likely seen a displacement at this point, with a segment about Peter being moved to the beginning of chapter twelve. It is possible but improbable that author intended the chronological displacement.

[12:1 Now during that season Herod the King put forth his hands to harm some of those from the assembly. Now he killed Jacob the brother of Johannes with a sword. And when he noticed that it was pleasing to the Jews, he proceeded to capture Peter also.]

"During that season" is a broader expression than "in those days," but they have roughly the same meaning. If Jacob the Greater wrote the letter of Jacob, he could hardly have survived longer than shortly after its writing, and he is not mentioned anywhere in Actions, except for here.

Concerning the date within this section, Herod Agrippa I (called "the King" because he became king of Judea and Samaria in 41 CE) died in 44 CE. The events in 12:1-24, as we will soon see, clearly occur during the year of 44 CE. For this reason, some people date everything in chapter twelve to approximately 44. However, that poses problems later on with the timing of the famine predicted by Agabos, and also probably contradicts Paulus' chronology given in his letter to the Galatians, so that Biblical historians are prompted to fabricate a famine during the mid 40's. It seems more logical that the section on Peter (which mentions Paul and gentiles nowhere) has been displaced.

Thus, it seems that this section fills part of the void between 9:31 and 9:32. This section parallels the sections in chapters 4 and 5 that deal with Peter's and Johannes' earlier arrest by the Jewish leaders. It further parallels Paulus' (later) arrest and miraculous rescue (ch. 16). That follows Paulus' pairing with Silas (aka Silvanus) at the end of chapter 15.

The author off-handedly mentions the slaughter of Jacob "the Greater," who was brother to Johannes. It is necessary to mention Jacob's death for two reasons: 1. Another Jacob, Jesus' half-brother, will be mentioned later and throughout the rest of the Actions. 2. Jacob's having been

hunted down and executed explains why Peter was being imprisoned. Herod Agrippa I favored his wealthier Jewish subjects and began listening to their pleas to persecute Christians.

Now these were the days of the Unleavened Bread. And when they caught him, they put him into a jail and delivered him over to four groups of four soldiers each to guard him, intending to lead him out to the people after the Passover.

Since we have no concept of exact year, Lukas explains that this took place during Passover week. "The Passover" here refers to the entire week of Passover, i.e., it is another term for the "days of the Unleavened Bread." Lukas uses the terms interchangeably elsewhere as well (Lk 22:1). The section indicates that Peter's cell was securely guarded. Peter's fate was to be decided by the people immediately AFTER the feast. This was the norm, whereas Jesus' having been tried DURING the feast was an abnormality.

So indeed Peter was watched over by the guard, but an earnest prayer was being directed to God by the assembly on his behalf. Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers. He was bound with two chains, and the guards were in front of the door watching the jail. And look! A messenger of Yahweh was standing by, and a light shone in the building. Now he nudged Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off of his hands.

Interestingly, Peter himself was not (necessarily) praying for his own release. Perhaps the author is trying to point out that the prayers of any faithful person are heard...the envoys themselves need not be involved. At any rate, Peter woke up to see Yahweh's messenger -- in the OT, this is often God himself in theophany -- standing beside him. The messenger simply told Peter to get up, and Peter's chains dropped. The rescue was a very simple one for the power of God to accomplish.

And the messenger said to him, "Wrap yourself and tie your sandals." Now he did this. And he said to him, "Throw your cloak around you, and follow me. And he went out and followed, and he didn't know that what was happening through the messenger was real; instead, he thought he was seeing a vision.

Peter thought he was dreaming or seeing a (waking) vision of himself escaping. Why? Because there was no resistance, the guards were not alert, and Peter's escape was as simple as following God's messenger. Peter followed dutifully, not questioning the messenger and not asking where they might be heading.

Now after passing through the first and second guard, they came upon the iron gate which leads into the city, which moved by itself and opened for them. And after going out, he went forward one block, and immediately the messenger left him.

All of a sudden, the main gate opened, and Peter was free. The guards had completely ignored him, clearly unable either to notice anyone at all or to recognize who was passing by them. Once Peter was free, the messenger departed.

And when Peter came to his senses, he said, "Now I truly know that Yahweh sent out his messenger and delivered me out of Herod's hand, and out of all the expectations of the Jewish people."

As if he had been in a fog, Peter suddenly realized that what was happening to him was real. He was not asleep, but he'd been rescued by God! A parallel might be drawn to various OT accounts (e.g., Daniel and the lions, Moses and the Egyptians), but perhaps that was not intended.

And as he was reflecting, he came upon the house of Miriam the mother of that Yohanan who is surnamed Markus, where there was a considerable number of people assembled and praying. Now after he knocked on the door of the gateway, a household servant named Rhoda came to listen, and when she recognized Peter's voice she didn't open the door due to her joy. But she ran and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.

Here we are introduced to Yohanan Markus, who would later become a traveling companion to Paulus and Bar-Nabas. It was this man's mother's house to which Peter directed himself after escaping the jail. Christians gathered here (apparently often), and when Peter knocked, the servant clearly recognized his voice. She confidently announced that he had escaped.

But they said to her, "You're crazy!" But she forcefully asserted that it was so. Now they said, "It's his messenger." But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened the door they noticed him and were amazed. But he waved his hand to them to be silent, and he related to them how the Lord led him out of the jail. Now he said, "Announce these things to Jacob and to the brothers." And after going out, he went someplace else.

Thinking she was crazy, or that Peter had sent a messenger, they refused to believe Rhoda. But she insisted, and he kept knocking, so finally they opened the door to believe. The language Lukas uses to describe Rhoda appears reminiscent of his description of Miriam, sister of Martha, who wanted only to learn from Jesus but whom her sister rejected. Here (as there) the author subtly upholds the stature of women, and in this case he elevates a servant as well.

Peter explained everything to them, relating the details of his escape, and asked for word to be sent to Jacob (i.e., Jesus' half-brother) and to "the brothers" -- probably the remaining Ten, in this instance.

12:18 *Now when morning happened, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had happened to Peter. Now when Herod hunted him and did not find him, he questioned the guards and gave word for them to be led off from there to be executed. And he went down from Judea into Caesarea and remained there. Now he was aggravated with the Turians and the Sidonians, but they were present with him with one accord, since they had persuaded that Blastus who was in charge of the king's bed chamber that they wanted peace, on account of the fact that their country was being fed by the king's.*

Shortly following Peter's miraculous jailbreak, Herod Agrippa rounded up the guards who allowed Peter to escape and had them executed. In the event of an escape, all soldiers were liable to the sentence that would have been carried out on their prisoners.

We also see a bit of political intrigue. Herod had been at odds with two other regions, those of Ture and Sidon. However, at this particular time, they had been able to negotiate a treaty, with the assistance of Blastus. Being "in charge of the bed chamber" was the equivalent of the office of Chamberlain, and so Blastus had had the authority to arrange the treaty, apparently by putting pressure on Ture and Sidon, on account of Herod's sending food to the two cities.

Now on an arranged day, when Herod had put on his kingly robes and had seated himself on the throne, he made a speech to them. Now the populus shouted, "It is a god's voice, and not a human's!" And immediately a messenger of Yahweh struck him because he did not give glory to God, and he was eaten by maggots and expired. But God's message grew and was multiplied.

The "arranged day" apparently refers to the day when Herod was to sign the agreement with Ture and Sidon, although Lukas does not say this. It is also certain, supported by Josephus, that the "day" refers to the second day of those games which were held in honor of Caesar:

"Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Caesarea, which was formerly called Strato's Tower; and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar, upon his being informed that there was a certain festival celebrated to make vows for his safety."
(Antiquities XIX, 8, 2)

Josephus confirms Lukas' account that they referred to Herod Agrippa as a god, and that he did not contradict them:

"On the second day of these shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theater early in the morning. At this time the silver of his garment was illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, and shone out after a surprising manner and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and immediately his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good,) that he was a god; and they added, 'Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered you only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own you as superior to mortal nature.' Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery." (ibid)

Then, Herod Agrippa saw an owl, a bad omen. He began to get severe stomach aches and realized that he would soon die. After suffering for five days, he died.

"And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life...." (ibid)

From Lukas, we get the additional information that this happened because he did not glorify God, but allowed them to revere him as a deity. A similar connotation is placed on the event by Josephus.]

9:32 *Now it happened that Peter was passing throughout the region to come down to the holy ones who lived in Ludda. Now he found a certain person there named Aineus, who had been*

lying on a bed for eight years, since he was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aineus, Anointed Jesus heals you. Get up and take your mat."

We do not know when this takes place. The gap between 9:31 and 9:32 is likely several years and may be as long as 13 years. This portion takes place some time between Saul's conversion and the events in chapters 10-11. It seems probable, given 9:36f., that these events take place after the death of Herod Agrippa in 44 CE and prior to 47 CE (when chapter 10 begins).

With Saul off studying (or teaching), author Lukas continues to focus on Peter, who was traveling. Peter again acts in Jesus' name, this time healing a paralytic named Aineus. The event is similar to when Jesus said, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk," to a man who was similarly afflicted (Lk 5:17ff.). This will be paralleled in chapter 14.

And immediately he got up. All the ones who lived in Ludda and Sharon noticed him and turned to the Lord.

The reaction of the crowd is universally positive, wanting to hear more about this Jesus, in whose name Peter is able to heal. Everyone in the area came to accept Jesus as Messiah as a result.

XV

9:36 *Now in Yoppa was a certain student named Tabitha (who is called Gazelle in translation). Her life was full of good deeds and of doing charitable works. Now it happened in those days that she became sick and died, and after bathing her, they put her in an upper room. Now since Ludda was near Yoppa, when the students heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him asking him, "Don't delay to come to us." Now Peter got up and went with them, and when they arrived, they led Peter into the upper room. And all the widows were standing around, crying and showing him the tunics and garments that she (Gazelle) had made while she was with them.*

Peter's travels took him to Yoppa, the same city where Yonah had fled, and the site of modern day Tel-Aviv. Being sent here, he found a dead girl named Tabitha who was an excellent example of good behavior.

The author provides a translation of the word "Tabitha" from Aramaic into Greek, so that the reader will recognize the meaning of her name. The name signified both grace and beauty. Lukas has built a strong case for her eventual healing. When Peter arrives in Yoppa, he is led straight to the girl, who by this time has been ritually bathed. Tabitha had been a seamstress by trade, and Peter was greeted by a barrage of crying widows, who testified to Gazelle's industriousness and charity by showing him the things she had made (and presumably had given to the widows).

Now Peter put them all outside and dropped to his knees and prayed. And, turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, get up." Now she opened her eyes, and she noticed Peter and sat up. And he held out his hand for her and lifted her up. Now after calling the holy ones and the widows, he presented her alive. Now it became known in all of Yoppa, and many trusted in the Lord.

Lukas' wording here is careful. Peter sent the people out and prayed on his knees to God. Then he turned to "the body" (i.e., not to "the girl") -- the wording indicates clearly that she was dead - and said, simply, "Tabitha, get up." The girl got up, as though she had merely been asleep. He lifted her up by hand and called all of the faithful people in town. This event soon spread, and many people in Yoppa came to realize that Jesus was the Anointed One.

Now it happened that he remained in Yoppa for a considerable number of days with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Thus, the event serves not only to spread the message of the Anointed One further throughout the land but also to explain Peter's whereabouts at the time when he would receive certain very important visions (chapter 10). As was his "apostles' privilege" (Mt 10), Peter was staying with fellow Christians during his travels. Simon the tanner would serve in part as a witness to what was about to happen.

PART TWO

10:1 *Now there was a certain man in Caesarea named Kornelius, who was a centurion of that manipule called the Italian Manipule. He was pious and feared God, as did all of his household. He did many charitable works for the people, and always prayed to God.*

Although this section is preparatory to what is about to happen, there is a sense in which the entire book up until this point has been preparatory. From here on, portions of the Actions will begin to parallel one another, and indeed they already have. Just as it was necessary in Acts 1 to induct a new member of the Twelve, chapter 9 involves the addition of a new envoy. And when the new envoy came along, there followed a special day (Pentecost), during which the gift of the holy breath was given to the Twelve. The author is setting us up for another instance of the "spirit baptism" -- the latter of just two instances of "the baptism."

The year is probably 47 CE, as indicated by the chapters that follow directly from this one. This means that 13 years have elapsed between Saul's conversion in chapter nine and these events. This chapter begins with a clean break, and no attempt is made here to place the events within a timeline, or to connect directly to previous events. Peter is with Simon the Tanner in chapter 10, but for all we know he continued to stay with Simon off and on for an extended period, whenever he was in Yoppa. It is also possible that the entire 13 years elapsed between 9:31 and 9:32.

This section begins with the story of a pious gentile called Kornelius. He "feared God," performed "many charitable deeds," and "always prayed to God." Kornelius is the very parallel of the "Jews, pious men from every nation under heaven" in chapter two. However, the term normally indicates that the man was uncircumcised.

In a vision, he noticed clearly at about the ninth hour of the day a messenger of God coming to him and saying to him, "Kornelius!" Now he looked directly at him, became afraid and said, "What is it, sir?" Now he said to him, "All of your prayers and your charitable works have gone

as a memorial before God. And now, send some men into Yoppa to find a certain Simon, who is surnamed Peter. He is rooming with a certain Simon, a tanner, who owns a house by the sea."

But if Kornelius is to be accepted into a Jewish covenant by Jewish people, he will need to do much more than to simply show up at a feast (like the men at Pentecost). Consequently, God's messenger spoke to him, telling him that because of his devotion, God will direct a man called Simon Peter to him. The messenger indicates the present location of this man Peter. By the wording, Kornelius had never heard of Peter. The time is clearly stated; it is important.

Now when the messenger who had spoken to him went away, he called two of his household servants and a pious soldier who attended him and related all things to them. And he sent them into Yoppa.

Having received a divine vision, Kornelius acted in the appropriate pious manner. Without question, he sent two of his servants (and a guard) to locate Peter in the coastal city of Yoppa, with the hope that Peter would return to speak to him.

Now on the next day, as they went along the road, and as they were nearing the city, Peter went up to the roof to pray. It was about the sixth hour. Now he became very hungry and wanted to eat. Now while they were preparing his lunch, a trance came upon him, and he observed the sky opening up, and a certain vessel like a great sheet was coming down. It was being lowered by its four corners to the ground. In it were all the four-footed creatures of the earth and the wild animals and the creeping things and the birds of the sky.

Meanwhile, as the men were travelling toward Yoppa, Peter was praying on the roof of Simon's house. Lukas specifies the time for the sake of accuracy; the event is important, for it is at this time that Peter received his first vision about animals. In fact, ALL of the (edible) animals were in the vision.

And a voice happened, which was directed at him: "Get up, Peter, and make a sacrifice, and eat." Now Peter said, "No way, Lord! Because I have never eaten any common or unclean thing."

But a voice (God's ?) came to Peter indicating that the sheet was in essence a tablecloth. "Make a sacrifice, and eat." As a devout Jew, Peter knew that it was only appropriate to sacrifice animals which God had declared clean. Animals such as pigs, deer, and shrimp could not be sacrificed (and thus made holy), and could not be eaten without defiling the person who ate. Peter refuses to eat, knowing the teachings of the Torah.

And a voice said to him again a second time, "Do not make common what God has cleansed." Now this happened three times, and the vessel was taken up into the sky.

Yet for a second and then a third time, the vision came to Peter. But this time, there was the added saying, "Do not make common what God has cleansed." Items that were not "unclean" by nature were generally "common". That is, they were good for ordinary use, but not for holy use. Items that had been ritually cleansed were "holy". The voice explicitly instructed Peter that all

foods were now holy, having been cleansed by God himself. But since Jesus had declared that the principle of cleanliness comes from within -- food cannot defile someone, this clearly had a greater meaning other than about food.

Now as Peter was considering to himself what the vision that he saw might mean, look again! The men who had been sent from Kornelius asking for the house of Simon were standing at the gate. And they made a sound and asked if Simon surnamed Peter was rooming there.

But Peter had not been provided with any meaning to the vision. Since God (or Jesus?) had not explained the vision to him, Peter meditated on its possible meanings. The vision had come three times, so there was no mistaking that it was a genuine divine statement and not an ordinary dream.

While Peter was considering the vision's meaning, Kornelius' servants and guard approached, asking for Peter.

Now as Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are seeking you. But you get up, go down, and go with them. Doubt nothing, because I have sent them."

Suddenly, God revealed to Peter that the three men who were approaching were people with whom Peter must travel. His instructions left no room for error. He must trust them, because God sent them to him. Obviously compelled, Peter came down from the roof to meet his guides.

Now after going down, Peter said to the men, "Look, I am the one you are seeking. What is the reason for which you are here?" Now they said, "Kornelius, a centurion, a just man who fears God and about whom the whole nation of the Jewish people testifies, was divinely admonished by a holy messenger to send after you to his house and to hear declarations from you."

Having been instructed by God, Peter engaged the gentile strangers in conversation. Who are they, and what do they want? The servants immediately revealed Kornelius' vision from God. This serves to confirm for Peter his own triple vision. He was to travel to see Kornelius and to speak with him. But about what? After all, gentiles were not part of either the first or second covenant...yet.

Then he rested after calling them in. Now on the next day, after getting up, he went out with them, and certain of the brothers from Yoppa went with him.

Peter gathered with him several witnesses. Peter realized that his visit to a gentile's home, apparently to teach him something from God, would spark controversy. Consequently, Peter would require witnesses to vindicate his actions. We find out later (11:12) that Peter took six witnesses with him, TWICE the number of witnesses necessary to verify or refute something. Peter was about to tread lightly here, knowing the rift that existed between his own people and the other nations. Had Peter been comparing Isaiah 2 and Joel 2-3 that day, he might have foreseen what was about to happen. And certainly he had an idea of what it was that he must tell Kornelius. But the full scope of what was about to pass would not be known until they happened...just like the first time.

24 *And on the next day they entered into Caesarea. Now Kornelius called his relatives and close friends together because he was expecting them. Now when it happened that Peter was to enter, Kornelius met him. He bowed down to him, falling to Peter's feet. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Get up. I myself am a human being also." And he started a conversation with him and went in and found many people gathered together.*

The trip from Yoppa took approximately one day, making this the fourth day since Kornelius had received his divine instruction. Realizing that the time for the stranger's arrival must be near, Kornelius gathered all of his close associates to hear whatever it was that Peter would be telling him.

When Peter did approach, Kornelius dropped to his knees. Because of Peter's reply, many have taken this as a sign that Kornelius believed Peter was a deity. However, bowing was normally only a recognition of superiority. Even so, it may have been the case that Peter believed that this gentile stranger was going to worship him. Uncomfortable with Korny's bowing posture, Peter declares himself Kornelius' equal. So, Peter started a conversation with this stranger. As they walked inside, Peter noticed the crowd; this was a social gathering.

And he said to them, "You are familiar that it is unlawful for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner. God has also shown me not to say that anyone is common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I also came without hesitation. Therefore, I ask: for what matter have you sent for me?"

In the presence of six Jewish (Christian) witnesses, Peter made a public statement to cover his actions. Although Peter clearly recognizes the social issues that exist between Jews and gentiles - in particular, he would never associate with a foreigner -- God expressly showed him that he should not regard anyone as common or unclean. At least by this time, in the midst of a social dilemma, Peter has realized the significance of his three visions. However, Peter has not yet proven to his witnesses that he must speak about Jesus to these gentiles. Consequently, he asks for personal testimony.

And Kornelius said, "Four days ago at about this hour, I was fasting, and on the ninth hour I was praying in my house. And look, a man was standing before me in glowing clothing. And he said, 'Kornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your charitable works have been remembered before God. Therefore send into Yoppa and call for Simon who is surnamed Peter. He is rooming by the sea in the house of Simon, a tanner.'

"Therefore, I sent to you at once, and you have done well in coming. Therefore, we are all now present before God to hear all the things that were arranged with you from the Lord."

From his own mouth, Kornelius explains to Peter the circumstances of his sending for Peter. Although Peter was already aware, his witnesses now have full testimony (from Peter's end and from Kornelius') as to the necessity of Peter's visit. It is now clear to everyone present -- Jew and gentile -- that God has sent Peter to speak to Kornelius.

Now Peter opened his mouth and said, "I perceive in truth that God is not a respecter of persons. But in every nation whoever fears him and works what is right is acceptable to him."

At Pentecost, Peter did not speak until he was compelled to do so. This time, he has been sent by God. This first statement, Peter's bold perception of equality, is a turning point in Lukas' writing, for it is with this proclamation that Peter opens the covenant to the first gentiles. How simply Peter said, "Whoever fears God and does right is acceptable." Now, Peter no longer was posturing himself socially. Now, he was "off the fence." His witnesses were about to hear Peter at his best!

"The message that he sent to the sons of Israel announced the good message of peace through Anointed Jesus. This is the Lord of all things. You know that declaration that happened throughout all Judea, beginning at Galilaiah, after the baptism that John was heralding: how God anointed that Jesus from Nazareth with holy breath and power, who went about doing good deeds and healing all those who were oppressed by the Accuser, because God was with him."

Until this time, God's message, "the good message of peace," had been sent only to "the sons of Israel." But the Messiah is everyone's Lord -- Peter now knew this.

Peter reminded the listeners in generalities about Jesus. These are things that it is likely they already know. Peter uses their existing knowledge about John the Baptizer and Jesus as springboard for the things he must tell them. Therefore, he has added comments like "God anointed Jesus." This was rumor, but Peter is now testifying that the rumor is fact. "God was with him" -- this too is Peter's testimony. Lukas is careful to point out the content of Peter's talk because it is our author's theme that the message has not changed. What Peter told Kornelius is precisely what he has been telling his Jewish countrymen.

"And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the countryside of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also killed him, hanging him on a cross. God raised this one up on the third day and allowed him to show himself, not to all the people, but to those witnesses who had been previously hand picked by God: to us, ate and drank with him after he was raised from the dead."

Peter now goes into detail about all that "we" (the envoys) had seen, in both the country and in the city. "They" -- the Jewish leaders -- killed Jesus. When speaking to Jews, Peter normally nationalized this to "you killed him," a statement that was not appropriate in this talk. Still, the content was the same. God caused Jesus to be resurrected -- this is just what Peter told the pious Jews at Pentecost. The envoys witnessed the resurrected Lord-- again, this is just what Peter told his countrymen. Now, the gentiles gathered with him know also that God made Jesus both Lord and Anointed One -- this Jesus whom the Jewish leaders crucified.

"And he charged us to herald to the people and to testify fully that he is the one who was marked out by God to be a judge of the living and the dead. All of the prophets testify about him: that every one who trusts in him is to receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

Now, Peter completes his message about Jesus -- that this same resurrected Messiah sent Twelve people, including Peter himself, to testify to Jews about Jesus and his teachings. This Jesus was the subject of various prophetic writings, and "everyone who trusts in him is to receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

Peter does not here claim that gentiles can only be forgiven if they learn about Jesus. However, there is a covenant of forgiveness of sins that is now offered to everyone. Although Peter does not mention the spiritual gifts that were given in Acts 2, this is the next logical statement, for Peter has practically quoted Joel 2 -- that "everyone who calls on Yahweh's name will be saved".

While Peter was speaking these declarations, the holy Spirit fell on all those who were hearing the message. And those believers of the circumcision group, as many as came with Peter, were surprised because the gift of the holy breath was being poured out even on the gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and magnifying God.

Suddenly, the miraculous "gift of the holy Spirit" came down on everyone there, and Lukas points out bluntly that not only did the gentiles receive the breath, but also that Peter's six witnesses were surprised at this. Although Peter himself was boldly standing up for what he knew God wanted, the six Jewish witnesses were confounded -- you mean God would actually anoint these gentiles?

God granted the gentiles one of the more obvious gifts, that of praising God "in tongues", so that the witnesses would realize who had anointed them. Although the promise in Acts 2:38 did not extend to gentiles, these gentiles had already received the gift. What remained for them? Circumcision?

Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid the water, that these people who have received the holy Spirit just as we have should not be baptized?" And he arranged for them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

Paralleling Peter's statement at 2:38, these gentiles did not need to change their minds about having rejected Jesus. They had already received the gift of holy breath. Instead of requiring circumcision, Peter was consistent in telling them that they needed to publically identify themselves as followers of Jesus by being baptized. Consequently, to the detail, Peter's message was the same as he had always told it.

Peter's question was directed toward the witnesses. After seeing that they had been gifted -- just like the Jewish followers of Jesus, and in particular just like the Twelve -- would they prevent Peter from baptizing these gentiles? No. So Peter arranged the first gentile baptism, and as he stayed for a while, they were attending to his teaching -- just as the Jews in Acts 2 were listening to what the Twelve told them about Jesus. Of course, word of what Peter was doing would carry well beyond Kornelius' household, and Peter was about to be "called on the carpet" for his actions.

11:1 *Now the envoys and those brothers who were in Judea heard that the gentiles had also embraced God's message. And when Peter went up into Jerusalem, those of the circumcision argued with him, saying that, "You went in to men who are uncircumcised, and you ate with them."*

Tying into the events of the following chapters, the year is probably 48 CE, although it might possibly be late 47 as these events unfold. When Peter returned to his fellow envoys, they (along

with everyone else there) had heard that he had spoken the message to gentiles. The author infers (but does not state) that the envoys themselves were not upset by this turn of events.

There were different schools of thought in Judaism regarding how gentile converts were to be treated. Some believed that they must be circumcized. By this time, there were others who believed differently -- that circumcision had been given only to the descendants of Abraham. Eventually, a form of proselyte baptism would be practiced, although there is no evidence from this early period that proselytes to Judaism were baptized. Still, the two factions (circumcision for gentiles, or not) were each promoting their views.

When Christianity was a purely Jewish phenomenon, the question of how to handle gentile converts had never arisen. However, when hearing of Peter's actions toward Kornelius and his guests, the members of the "circumcision" group were upset. Socially, one ought not even to eat with uncircumcised gentiles. What was Peter even doing there to begin with?!

Now Peter started, laying it all out in order for them, saying:

"I was in the city of Yoppa praying, and while in a trance I noticed a vision of a certain vessel coming down like a great sheet, being lowered from the sky by its four corners. And it came down as far as me. As I looked into it, I saw clearly and not iced the four footed animals of the land and the wild animals, and the reptiles, and the birds of the sky.

"Now I heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter. Sacrifice and eat.' But I said, 'No way, Lord, because nothing common or unclean has ever entered into my mouth.' But a voice answered me a second time out of the sky: 'Do not make common what God has cleansed.' Now this happened three times, and everything was drawn up again into the sky.

"And, look, immediately three men were standing in the house where I was, having been sent from Caesarea to me. Now the Spirit said to me, 'Go with them. Doubt nothing.'

"Now these six brothers went with me also, and we entered into the man's house. And he relayed to us how he noticed the messenger standing in his house and saying, 'Send someone into Yoppa, and send after Simon that is surnamed Peter who will speak declarations to you by which you and all your household may be saved.'"

Lukas repeats the entire story in some detail, proving to the reader that Peter told those who questioned him exactly what had happened -- i.e., exactly what Lukas has already related to the reader. When the listeners wind up accepting gentiles into the covenant, it is important that they had become aware of the exact circumstances surrounding the gentile pentecost. This section roughly corresponds to Peter's and Johannes' having been questioned by the Jewish leadership for promoting Jesus. Now, the exact same thing was happening again, but Peter's audience had been a different (gentile) one.

"Now as I began to speak, the holy Spirit fell on them, just as on us also in the beginning. And I remembered the declarations of the Lord, how he said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized in holy breath.' Therefore, since God gave them, who trusted in the Lord Anointed Jesus, the same gift as he gave also to us, now who was I to be able to restrain God?"

Peter relates what happened to the gentiles to the gift of the holy breath that had come upon the envoys that one Pentecost, a dozen or so years earlier. The phrase "just as on us also" is an

intentional parallel. Peter's recall of the statement of Jesus -- which is applied ONLY to the two events in Acts 2 and Acts 10 -- is another intentional parallel. Peter had done according to what Jesus had prophesied. But even then, he was only following God's own actions, in empowering the gentiles with holy breath. Peter argues rhetorically, "Who was I to be able to restrain God?"

Thus, Peter puts his argument against Jewish tradition in the hands of the listeners. Jesus did speak of such events, and it was God who had gifted them. Knowing that, what SHOULD Peter have done? The answer was clear, and no one disputed the point.

Now when they heard these things, they were quiet, and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also given to the gentiles the change of mind that leads into life!"

At first, the circumcision group was stunned, but then they grew to accept what God had done. This is in contrast to the leaders in chapters 3-4 who became even more adamantly opposed to the Christians despite the occurrence of a miracle. These most strict of Jewish Christians accepted that gentiles could be part of the new movement, the "mental change that leads into life." Culturally, this was a difficult statement to make, for certain Jews acknowledged participation in an afterlife only through the covenant of circumcision. Clearly these critics belonged to that tradition.

Now, Lukas has established that when the message spread to gentiles, it remained the same and was acknowledged as having remained unchanged by the most staunch of critics -- those who rejected gentiles altogether unless they were circumcised.

Just as the Pentecost event corresponds to what was predicted in Joel 3 -- the restoration of the kingdom, so also this passage can be seen to correspond to the parallel and opposite language in Isaiah 2, which describes a time of reconciliation and peace between Israel and the other nations. (This is paralleled in Mic 4:1-5 also.)

As important as this event was (in allowing Christianity to spread among gentiles as well as Jews), it did not solve the problem of whether gentiles should need to be circumcised and embrace the Torah before becoming Christians. That question would serve to divide Jews and Christians from this point onward until the final split between what would now be two different ways of thinking.

11:19 *Then indeed those who had been scattered due to the affliction that happened around Stefanos went through to Phoenix and Kupros and Antiochus, not speaking the message except to Jews alone. Now some of the men were Kuprians and Kurenians, who spoke to the Hellenists after coming into Antiochus, announcing the good message of the Lord Jesus. And Yahweh's hand was with them, and a large number trusted and turned to the Lord. And the matter about them was reported to the ears of that assembly in Jerusalem, and they sent out Bar-Nabas into Antiochus. When he happened by and noticed God's generosity, he rejoiced and advised all to continue in the Lord with purpose of heart. For he was a good man, and was full of holy breath and trust. And a considerably large crowd was added to the Lord.*

This is the aftermath of the earlier part of the chapter, expressed the way that Lukas usually does. People who had been scattered began spreading the message, and there were a great many people who acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah.

Although the message had begun to spread to gentiles, it was apparently spreading there due only to the efforts of certain of the envoys -- most notably Paul. The people themselves who went out sharing their lives with those whom they met were generally still associating only with Palestinian Jews, although certain people were accepting of the Hellenists (who spoke Greek). This section of the Actions brings the message to the city of Antiochus, which was named for the father of the Seleucus I, who founded the city. (Most of the Seleucid rulers, who administered the region until the Romans took over, were named either Seleucus or Antiochus.)

The expression, "Yahweh's hand was with them," signifies that they were able to perform the signs which distinguished the Nazarene (Christian) message. This was certainly a factor in the spread of the message to the region. The passage does not mention any gentile converts, and so it is possible that Bar-Nabas was sent merely to check out the conversion of Hellenists -- just as had been done in the case of the Samaritans. Noticing that there had indeed been considerable genuine conversion, Bar-Nabas was pleased. The reader should then remark that the further spread of the message after the inclusion of gentiles was the same as had happened beforehand, and what happened still obtained approval from those who were in Jerusalem. It is implied that this pious man, Bar-Nabas, continued to work signs among the people (being "filled with holy breath"), causing even more additions to the new group at Antiochus.

Now he went out into Tarsus to seek Saul, and when he found him, he brought him into Antiochus. And it happened that for a whole year they met together in the assembly and taught a crowd of considerable size. And the students were first known as "Anointed" in Antiochus.

Bar-Nabas left to find Saul, and so began a great friendship. This section relates to the reader how that friendship began, for Bar-Nabas was a pious Jewish Christian. But it was at this time that he came to realize how valid Saul's mission was. Suddenly it clicked for him, and he went off to meet this converted persecutor.

Given the later timeline and the passage of a year, at the beginning of this section (11:19), it is approximately 48 or 49 CE. We are also told here of a new nickname for the Nazarene sect of Judaism. The students (i.e., of Jesus) became known as "Anointed" in the Greek-speaking city of Antiochus. Some speculate that the label was a derogatory one, but more likely it arose because Greek-speaking converts began to use the term "Anointed One" for Jesus, and it was natural to apply the term "Anointed" to describe themselves. The term is rare in the NT, but Peter eventually uses it, and even Johannes had come close to using the term. In his first letter, he wrote of the Anointed One, and of his anointing, and of the anointing (of holy breath) which followers of Jesus received. Thus, Jesus had been anointed, and so had they.

11:27 *Now in those days prophets came down from Jerusalem into Antiochus. Now one of them who had arisen, named Agabos, indicated through the breath that, "A great famine is about to go over the whole empire," as it also happened under Claudius. Now each of the students*

determined to send a service (so much as was possible) to those brothers dwelling in Judea. And they did this, sending it to the older men through the hands of Bar-Nabas and Saul.

"In those days" is a somewhat precise expression. It links the events earlier in the chapter to those found here. This is the first clear indication of the passage of time that the author gives his reader. There was a minor, isolated famine during 41-42, but there were no famines on record from 42 to 50 CE. The aforementioned minor famines were by no means great enough to have warranted a prophecy that a famine would cover the empire. A major famine occurred under Emperor Claudius, in 51 CE, beginning in Greece and spreading throughout the Empire, even to Rome. Josephus mentions a famine that was isolated to Jerusalem, but does not mention a widespread famine at any time. Some conjecture that the famine in Jerusalem (*Antiquities* XX) is the one here in the Actions, but the chronology of events places that famine near the end of Tiberius' reign, and it certainly would not have qualified as extending over the whole habitation (empire).

Here, the Christian prophet Agabos predicts the famine, which hit the whole region hard. It was politically important that Saul be one of those who collected food for the Judeans, for he had not found universal acceptance there among Christians. He and Bar-Nabas, who was a man of good reputation, were the ones chosen to deliver the aid. Paulus mentions his mission of mercy in several places.

Both Suetonius and Tacitus support the Biblical account in stating that there was a famine, caused by a corn shortage, during the part of Claudius' reign. Both accounts appear to place the famine during the year 51, which means that the prophecy in Acts must have happened in 49 or 50.

"Several prodigies occurred in that year [51 CE]. Birds of evil omen perched on the Capitol; houses were thrown down by frequent shocks of earthquake, and as the panic spread, all the weak were trodden down in the hurry and confusion of the crowd. Scanty crops too, and consequent famine were regarded as a token of calamity." (Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*, XII:43)

"When there was a scarcity of grain because of long-continued droughts, he was once stopped in the middle of the Forum by a mob and so pelted with abuse and at the same time with pieces of bread, that he was barely able to make his escape to the Palace by a back door; and after this experience he resorted to every possible means to bring grain to Rome, even in the winter season." (Suetonius, *Claudius*, from ch. 18.

The text that was displaced to become 12:1-24 is found at the end of chapter nine.

12:25 *Now Bar-Nabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem after fulfilling the service, bringing along Yohanan surnamed Markus with them. Now there were prophets and teachers at the assembly that was in Antiochus: Bar-Nabas; and Simon who is called Black; and Lukius the Kurenian; and Manaen (Herod the Tetrarch's adopted brother); and Saul. Now while they were performing religious service for the Lord and fasting, the holy Spirit said, "Indeed, separate out*

for me Bar-Nabas and Saul for the work for which I have called them." Then after fasting, and praying, and laying hands on them, they let them go out.

Yohanan Markus would become a point of contention between Saul and Bar-Nabas, but at this point, he was striving side by side with the two friends. The author points this out now because of what would happen later.

In Antiochus, at this particular time, there were five reputable men who stood as witnesses to what happened there -- namely, to God's calling Saul and Bar-Nabas for what would become "Paul's First Missionary Journey." Having these witnesses attest to Saul's genuine calling was important, and so Lukas lists them all by name.

After considerable fasting and seeking God's desire for them, God replied, telling everyone that Saul and Bar-Nabas had been chosen to travel with God's message. After more prayer and fasting -- indicating that the approval had not come hastily -- the trustworthy and reputable men "laid hands" on the two as a public sign of approval, and the two men departed.

13:4 *Therefore, after these indeed were sent out by the holy Spirit, they went down into Seleukia, and sailed from there into Kupros. And when they happened into Salamis, they announced God's message in the gatherings of the Jews. Now they also had Yohanan as an assistant.*

Led by God personally -- a point that is important to the author's case that the message not only has remained the same, but that its expansion to include gentiles has God's approval -- the two (accompanied by Yohanan Markus) traveled to the island of Kupros to the city of Salamis, which is on the eastern coast of the island.

Saul and his partners announced the message only to the Jews at first. This would become Paul's custom, taking the message first to the Jews, and then to the Greeks. He will explain the reason for his custom later.

Now after going through the whole island as far as Pafos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, who was named Bar-Yeshua. He was with the Proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This one called Bar-Nabas and Saul to him, strongly seeking to hear God's message. But Elumas, the Magician [for his name is translated this way], stood against them, seeking to turn the Proconsul away from the faith.

This situation parallels that of Simon Magus (8:14ff.), and we are expected to notice that Saul and Bar-Nabas deal with Bar-Yeshua in as strong a manner as Peter and Johannes treated Simon.

We are told a small tidbit of Bar-Yeshua's background. First, he was associated with Sergius Paulus, who was the Roman governor of Kupros at the time. Pafos was the capital city of Kupros, and so it was not surprising that they should meet someone there who was a consultant to the Governor. Also, we are told off-hand that Bar-Yeshua's given name was Elumas. (Bar-Yeshua merely signified "son of Joshua".) Elumas comes from an Arabic word meaning "wise man," and Lukas translates it into Greek as "Magician."

The Proconsul wanted to see Bar-Nabas and Saul, but Elumas opposed any influence by the two on his employer. Apparently, Elumas was concerned that Sergius Paulus might no longer require his services.

But Saul (who is also Paulus), filled with holy breath, stared at him and said, "O man full of all craftiness and of all trickery! You son of an accuser! You enemy of all that is right! Won't you stop perverting the straight ways of the Lord?! And now look! The Lord's hand is upon you, and you will be blind, not seeing the sun for a season." And a fog and a darkness immediately fell on him, and he went about seeking guides. Then when the Proconsul noticed what had happened, he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord, and he trusted.

The Roman name, "Paulus," roughly signifies "Little One." Having had a humbling experience (ch. 9), Saul took the name Paulus as his Latin name. It appears to have been mentioned here for the first time because Sergius Paulus shared a similar name. There is also a second and greater significance. Until now, Saul has delivered the message to Jews, but at this moment, he turns to a gentile. From here on, the author will employ the Roman name in describing Saul. The use of the term is therefore indicative of his having been sent to gentiles.

As Elumas was trying to talk the Proconsul out of listening to Paulus and Bar-Nabas, Paulus became aware of the negative intervention and, with God's insight, realized exactly what were this man's motivations. As a magician, he is an "enemy of all that is right." Rather than perform miracles from God, Elumas merely "perverts the straight ways of the Lord (Yahweh)." And so, Paulus declared that Yahweh will deal with the man by his (God's) own hand, and God struck him with temporary blindness.

The author indicates almost as an aside that Sergius Paulus responded to the sign by trusting in God. Therefore, the Proconsul became the first national leader to embrace Christianity. For the man was not only astonished at the miracle, but at what Paul and Bar-Nabas subsequently taught him.

13:13 *Now after setting sail from Pafos, those around Paulus went into Perge, a city of Pamphulia. Now Yohanan left them and returned into Jerusalem. Now after they had passed through Perge, they went into Pisidian Antiochus, and after entering into the gathering on the sabbath day, they sat down.*

Paulus and his companions continued travelling -- from Pafos to Perge, which was in Pamphulia on the coast of Asia Minor. At this point, Yohanan Markus left for home. Most agree that he merely felt homesick and wanted to return to his family, although there are other reasons proposed for Yohanan's departure. This became the core of the disagreement between Paulus and Bar-Nabas.

The rest of the group left the coast and headed northward (inland) into Pisidia, to the city called "Pisidian Antiochus," which distinguished it from Syrian Antiochus. As usual, when they arrived they went to meet with their fellow Jews.

Now after the reading of the Torah and the Prophets, the rulers of the gathering sent to them, saying, "Men, brothers, if there is a message of advice for the people among you, speak."

There was (and is) a traditional time during the gatherings when anyone who wished to speak might provide Torah-based advice or exhortation for the people. Paulus used this time to promote Jesus as Messiah.

Then Paulus stood up, waved his hand, and said, "Men, Israelites and those who fear God, hear this: The god of the people of Israel, this one chose your ancestors and lifted up the people during the stay in the land of Egypt, and He brought them out from there with an uplifted arm."

Part of Paulus' address resembles the speech of Stefanos before the Jewish leaders who had him stoned. Paulus had been there, witnessing the stoning, and now he was speaking in the same style -- a brief review of Jewish history. Paulus began his historical review with God's rescue of his people from Egypt. In a moment, he will compare the good message to the Torah.

"And for about forty years time, he bore with them in the desert, and after casting out seven nations in the land of Canaan, he distributed their land by lot. All of this took about four hundred and fifty years. And after these things he gave judges, until the time of Samuel the prophet."

For a number of years, God ruled his people, having only certain spokespeople, the judges. This took place in the promised land of Israel, which Paulus says God gave to the Israelites. Paul gave glory to God, rather than to the people who took the land, remembering no doubt the miraculous intervention that was necessary at points (e.g., Jericho) to fulfill the promise that God had made to Abraham.

*"And then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Ben-Yamin, for forty years. And after removing him, he raised up David to be King for them. He also said to him, testifying, **"I have found that David, son of Yeshai, a man according to my heart, who will do all of what I want."**"*

Paulus mentions the coming of the human rulers in a subtle way, merely saying, "then they asked for a king." Paulus was aware that God did not intend for them to be ruled by any other human beings, but his chief point is elsewhere, and so he mentions the "asking" as an aside. God brought Saul, and then removed him. Saul may be mentioned only to bridge the gap to David, but since Paulus himself was a Saul from the same tribe, he may also have been reminding his listeners of his national standing.

Unlike Stefanos, Paulus mentioned nothing about the Temple. Instead, his goal is not to chastise but to prove.

"From this one's progeny, according to a promise, God brought forth a savior for Israel: Jesus. John had announced to all the people of Israel a baptism of mental change before Jesus showed his face. Now as John was finishing the race, he said, 'Who are you assuming me to be? I am not the one. But look, someone is coming after me whose foot-sandals I am not worthy to loosen.'"

Therefore, Paulus jumps immediately to the promised Davidic king. Clearly, he made his point "God brought forth a savior for Israel: Jesus." Now, Paulus' speech more closely resembles that of Peter in chapter 2, and the resemblance will become even closer.

Yet here, although Paulus had not received any of his teachings from the Twelve, he cites sayings of John the Baptizer about himself and about Jesus. This section shows that Paulus had received (through his visions) the same teachings about Jesus that the Twelve had received -- and they had been witnesses of those things.

"Men, brothers, sons of the race of Abraham, and those among you who fear God: this message of salvation is sent to you. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, knowing neither him nor the voices of those prophets which are read on every sabbath day, have fulfilled them by judging him. And though no one found a reason for him to die, they asked Pilatus to kill him. Now when they had finished doing all the things that had been written about him, they took him down from the cross and placed him in a tomb."

Instead of saying, "you crucified Jesus," since he was not in Jerusalem Paulus rightly pointed to the residents of Jerusalem who were responsible for Jesus' crucifixion. Again, this parallels Peter. These people, said Paulus, did not understand the prophetic writings that they read every week. Consequently, they asked Pilatus to kill him. The onus is clearly on those who rejected their Messiah, and not on the Roman government, who only acted out what the leaders wanted.

Paulus' mention of "the things that were written about him" most likely refers to Psalm 22, which describes the crucifixion, and Isaiah 52:13-53:12, which describes God's suffering servant. Lukas presents this so that his reader will know that Paulus presents the same view of Jesus as held by those who followed him around the countryside for three to four years.

*"But God raised him up from among the dead. This one appeared over a period of many days to those who had gone up with him from Galilaiah into Jerusalem--who are [now] his witnesses to the people. And we are announcing a good message to you, that promise that was made to the ancestors, which God has fulfilled for our children by raising up this Jesus, as it is also written in the psalms, **"You are my son. Today I have fathered you."***

Continuing from there, Paulus described Jesus' resurrection, which God accomplished. The listeners would have to realize that only God could have done such a thing. Rather than appeal to his own testimony, he mentions the Twelve, who "are [now] his witnesses." This comes just as Peter said "we are witnesses of these things."

In providing further support for his case, Paulus quotes the second psalm, which was spoken to Jesus (in part) at his baptism. Jesus had been resurrected because he was the Messiah, God's son, and God said so himself. Again, Paulus was not there when God said this to Jesus, but members of the Twelve were present. Once more, Paulus presented a version of events that coincided with what the Twelve were saying. Again, Lukas illustrates that the message has not changed.

*"Now because he raised him up from among the dead, to return no longer to decay, he said this: **"I will give you the godly and trustworthy things of David."***

Paulus set up his point early (about Jesus not seeing decay), quoting first a portion of Isaiah (55:3). The citation is a brief allusion to the fact that the Messiah was to bring a new and permanent covenant. The passage reads, in further expansion:

"Everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters! The one who has no money, come -- buy and eat! Come and buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why are you spending your money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which does not satisfy?"

"Listen to me carefully, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in fatness.

"Lean your ear, and come to me. Hear, so that your soul will live, and I will make an everlasting covenant -- the trustworthy and godly things of David. Look, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

"Look, you will call nations that you do not know, and nations that did not know you will run to you, because of Yahweh your God, and of Israel's holy one -- for God has glorified you."

The section in Isaiah hearkens back to God's promise to David (2 Sam 7:12f.) that the Messiah would come and bring an everlasting kingdom. Therefore, the quote connects what Paulus said before with what he was about to say.

*"Therefore also, he said in another place, **"You will not allow your godly one to see decay."** For David indeed fell asleep, after serving his own generation as God planned it, and he was laid with his ancestors and saw decay. But the one that God DID raise up did not see decay."*

This citation (Psa 16) is the same one that Peter made in chapter 2. Thus again, down to the detail, Peter's theology and Paulus' were the same. David died -- for the quote was not for him but for the Messiah. And Jesus DID raise from the dead before the fourth day -- when tradition held that decay set in. (Thus, Jesus rose on the third day, but Lazarus -- Jn 11 -- was raised after his body had begun to decay.)

*"Let it be known therefore, men, brothers, that through this one forgiveness of sins is being announced to you. And everyone who trusts in him is justified from all the things from which you are unable to be justified by Moses' Torah. See then that what was spoken by the prophets does not come upon you, **"You scoffers: look, and wonder, and disappear. Because I am working a work in your days--a work which you would by no means believe, even if someone told you."**"*

Just as the point about Jesus' resurrection became the concluding point of Peter's speech, so here it is the concluding point of Paulus' historical review as well. It is through Jesus, the only true Messiah, that forgiveness is being announced. Paul wrote that the Torah was weak because it could not remove the guilt associated with sin (much of Romans). Here, he says as much -- that there were things that the Torah could not remove. Strictly speaking, following the Torah could remove all sin. But even the most pious person, if he were bound in legalism, could never experience that forgiveness -- because the guilt would be with him.

Having concluded his proof, Paulus exhorted the crowd to listen to him about Jesus, and to accept Jesus as Messiah, otherwise the passage in Habakkuk (Hab 1:5) that referred to God's use of the Chaldeans to bring justice upon Israel would also apply to them. Paulus has already alluded to the coming of the Roman armies and subsequent deliverance of the faithful by

beginning his speech with the exodus from Egypt. His conclusion drives his introduction home. Paulus too is aware that the Romans are coming to destroy the state of Israel, and Priestly Judaism with it. Unless his listeners embrace Jesus as Messiah, their religion and way of life would be destroyed in such an amazing fashion that they would never believe God was doing it. (See also Hab 1:6f.)

Now as they were going out, they besought that these declarations might be spoken to them on the next sabbath. Now after the gathering had broken up, many of the Jews and worshipping proselytes followed Paulus and Bar-Nabas, who by speaking to them convinced them to continue in God's favor. And on the next sabbath, almost all of the city came together to hear the message about the Lord.

Since they did not want their way of life to be destroyed, and since Paulus had made a good case that Jesus might have been the Messiah, the people asked Paulus to remain and speak again on the following week, during the regular gathering. And people, Jews and gentile proselytes alike, were anxious to hear about this Messiah whom God had sent -- anxious to the point of following Paulus and Bar-Nabas around. The crowds following them grew, so that by the next week, nearly everyone in the area was at the gathering, hoping to hear about Jesus.

*Now when the Jews noticed the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and spoke against the things that were being said by Paulus and said evil things. Now Paulus and Bar-Nabas spoke freely, saying, "It was a necessity for God's message to be spoken to you first. Since you have thrust him away and are judging yourselves unworthy of the eternal life, look! We are turning to the gentiles. For the Lord has given us this precept: **"I have set you to be a light of nations, that you are to be for salvation to the last part of the land."***

The "Jews" -- the local leadership -- were angry that people were coming to listen to Paulus and Bar-Nabas tell them about this so-called Messiah. They began speaking openly against Paulus, trying to disprove him -- something that was normally permitted in the discussions. However, they also "said evil things" -- they lied about Jesus or Paulus. Maybe they criticized Paulus' conversion.

At any rate, seeing that they were no longer wanted, Paulus and Bar-Nabas reluctantly withdrew from their people and turned to the gentiles. Notice, that as the two of them indicate, it is not the Christians who consider these people to be "unworthy," but in rejecting Jesus as Messiah, the leaders themselves (and all who follow them) have proven themselves unworthy. They have chosen death over life! And so, Paulus and Bar-Nabas must fulfill the prophecy to become a light to the nations -- they would go to the gentiles.

This might seem odd -- that it would take such a stunning turn of events to make Paulus leave the traditional synagogue. After all, he had been TOLD to teach gentiles. However, this behavior shows that Paulus was by no means a "rogue rabbi." He was very traditional, schooled by trusted Jewish leaders, and having a deep love for his own people. In this respect, he was just like the Twelve, who had been sent to Jews.

Now when the gentiles heard this, they rejoiced, and they glorified the Lord's message, and as many people trusted as had been arranged for eternal life. Now the message about the Lord was carried throughout the whole country. But the Jews were stirring up the devout women of high standing and the city chiefs, and they raised up a persecution against Paulus and Bar-Nabas, and they cast them out from their borders. Now they shook the dust off of their feet in protest against them, and they went into Ikonium.

The gentiles were open to the message about Jesus, moreso than the Jewish leaders. And so, many of them came to embrace the message, to the point where word was spreading about Jesus throughout the region. However, just as the Jewish leaders rejected Peter and Johannes (chs. 3-4) and had stirred up the people against Jesus, they turned to the wealthy noblewomen and city leaders, getting them to agree to persecute Paulus and Bar-Nabas. The two Christians were thrown out of town -- the usual treatment of protesters or those who disturbed the peace. Just as the Twelve had been told (see Mt 10), and had done, Paulus and Bar-Nabas simply left the place and went (eastward) to another town.

14:1 *Now it happened in Ikonium that they went at the same time into the synagogue of the Jews, and they spoke in such a way that a great multitude of Jews and also Greeks trusted. But the Jews who did not trust stirred up the gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. Then for a considerable time they remained, speaking freely about the Lord; they testified to the message of God's generosity by giving out signs and wonders which happened through the their hands. Now the multitude of the city was divided: some indeed were with the Jews; but some were with the envoys.*

In Ikonium also, Paulus and Bar-Nabas were experiencing resistance -- generally from the same faction of Jewish people who refused to acknowledge Jesus and refused to allow gentiles to be treated equally. These Jewish people deliberately went around to the Ikonian gentiles, prejudicing them against Paulus and Bar-Nabas, so that none of them would convert. But the two of them stayed on, speaking God's message and working the accompanying signs. The city "was divided."

Now as an assault by the gentiles and also Jews occurred, to insult and to stone them, when they noticed this together, they fled into the cities of Lukaonia, Lustra, and Derbe, and to the surrounding countryside. And there they were announcing the good message.

Certain of the "poisoned" gentiles and their Jewish instigators first insulted and then threw rocks at Paulus and Bar-Nabas, causing them to flee elsewhere. The author would shortly tell us of the happenings in those nearby areas.

8 *And a certain man in Lustra was sitting--his feet were powerless--who was lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked around. This one heard Paulus speaking. When Paulus gazed at him and noticed that he had the trust to be saved, he said with a loud voice, "Stand erect on your feet!" And he leaped up and walked around. Now when the crowds noticed what Paulus had done, they raised their voices and said in Lukaonian, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"*

This passage is parallel to the healing of the lame man who sat by the temple (chapter 3). There as here, the man had been lame from birth. Back in chapter 3, Peter and Johannes had met the man's gaze; the same happens here. There, Peter spoke as a representative of Jesus, calling on God's power to heal the lame man. Here, Paulus was told via divine inspiration that the man's heart belonged to God. Based on that trust, he simply told the man to stand. "The trust to be saved," here, refers not only to his relationship with God, but also to his belief that Paulus and his associates had been sent with the power to heal him. The man was saved from his condition.

The reaction of the local populus is similar but not identical to that of the crowds in Jerusalem. Then, they were all amazed. Here, the crowds became amazed, but being Greco-Roman gentiles, they immediately believed that Paulus and Bar-Nabas must be gods!

And they indeed called Bar-Nabas "Zeus"; and Paulus "Hermes", because he was leading the presentation of the message. Now the priest of that Zeus image that was in front of the city brought bulls and wreaths to the gates and with the crowds wanted to make a sacrifice.

Their welcome of Paulus and Bar-Nabas was extreme. Bar-Nabas may have been the older of the two -- at least, he is mentioned quite early in the Actions (ch. 4). This may have contributed to their association of Bar-Nabas with the elder statesman and patriarch of the gods: Zeus. Also, the personality of Bar-Nabas may have lent itself to the association. Because of his outspoken nature, Paulus was associated with Hermes. Besides being known for his speed, Hermes' role was as messenger to the gods. There was so little doubt in the people's mind that Paulus and Bar-Nabas were divine beings that even the priest of the shrine to Zeus (which was just outside the city) was inclined to support bringing sacrifices to honor the "gods" who had appeared to them.

*But the envoys, Bar-Nabas and Paulus, hearing this, tore their cloaks and rushed out into the crowd, calling out, saying, "Men, why are you doing these things?! We are also human beings, with the same emotions as you have. We are announcing a good message to you to turn you away from these worthless things to the living God, "**who made the sky and the land and the sea--and all the things in them**"--who in generations past allowed all the nations to travel their own paths. Although indeed he didn't do this without leaving testimony about himself--doing good, giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with gladness."*

Here, Bar-Nabas is referred to as an envoy. He had been personally sent by God to speak the message. Like Paulus, he was not one of the Twelve. The tearing of cloaks was an indicator of emotional distress. The two were so distraught that the crowd was glorifying them rather than God that they immediately took action to put a stop to it.

Their reaction was much the same as that of Peter and Johannes (Acts 3). Then, the two envoys (P & J) had been surprised that everyone was "staring at them," as though they had made the man well by their own power. Likewise, Paulus and Bar-Nabas were also quick to point out that they were merely human beings -- no greater than anyone in the crowd.

Their speech began with an appeal to the Torah (Ex 20:11, also recorded in Psa 146:6) that the true God -- the one who made everything -- had sent them with a message to turn away from

false gods such as Zeus and Hermes. This same God (Yahweh) had been leaving the gentiles information about himself all along, including granting them blessings. This points out that the Jews' god was also the god of the gentiles.

And so, Paulus and Bar-Nabas have intimated that the gentiles have lived in and acted out of ignorance (compare 3:17), but now the truth will become known.

And by saying these things, with difficulty they prevented the crowds from making a sacrifice to them. But Jews came from Antiochus and Ikonium, and after persuading the crowds, they stoned Paulus and dragged him out of the city, assuming him to be dead.

Just as the Jewish leaders had arrested Peter and Johannes (ch. 4), so also they took action to stop Paulus and Bar-Nabas -- although their actions against these two were more severe. In a short time, the crowds went from wanting to worship the two envoys to seeking their deaths, all at the instigation of certain of their countrymen. The crowd's attack was so severe that they left Paulus for dead.

But when the students surrounded him, he got up and entered into the city. And on the next day he went with Bar-Nabas into Derbe. And after announcing the good message in that city and after instructing many students, they returned into Lustra and Ikonium and Antiochus, strengthening the souls of the students and advising them to remain trusting and advising that it is necessary for us to enter into God's kingdom through many afflictions.

After being helped by fellow Christians, Paulus and his compatriots not only took the message to nearby Derbe, but also they were brave enough to return to the cities where they had been attacked and provide thoughts of encouraging advice for those who had converted. Instead of showing anger toward his fellow Jews, Paulus advised the new Christians that in his day and age -- with such hostilities existing -- the treatment he was suffering was typical. They themselves would no doubt experience a form of the hostility that he was suffering (although not necessarily to such a degree).

Now after picking older men with a show of hands for them by assembly and after praying and fasting with them, they committed them to the Lord, in whom they trusted.

The "sharing" -- the communal way of life -- was still important. Just as chapter 4 concludes with the feeding of the poor, so also this section concludes with the Christian groups selecting (by a show of hands) older men to oversee the feeding of their poor. It was necessary for the author to include this section so that his readers would know that Paulus had not omitted anything that was important to the early Jewish Christians (Acts 2:42; 4:34). After praying and fasting with them -- to strengthen the group -- Paulus and Bar-Nabas were ready to return home to Antiochus, the city from which they began their journey.

24 *And after passing through Pisidia, they came into Pamphulia. And after speaking the message in Perge, they went down into Attaleia. And from there they sailed to Antiochus, where they were they had been committed to God's generosity for the work which they fulfilled. Now after arriving and after calling the assembly together, they related the things that God had done with*

them and that he had opened a door of trust for the nations. Now they remained for no short time with the students.

This completes Paulus' first journey. He and his compatriots returned to Antiochus, where they had begun their adventure. As usual in the Actions, Lukas is somewhat vague about time, but by now it is probably close to 51 CE -- the time of the famine that Agabos predicted. It is during this time period, while Paulus was at Antiochus, that Paulus met and confronted Peter -- an action recorded in Gal 2. This is summarized at the beginning of the next chapter, although Peter himself is not mentioned as being part of the more difficult discussion.

15:1 *And some who had come down from Judea were teaching the brothers that, "If you are not circumcised with the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*

This is the core of the dispute that had arisen between certain Jewish Christians and everyone else. Some were claiming, "Since this is Messianic Judaism, gentiles must become Jewish before they can accept the Messiah." To an extent this is reasonable, since gentiles who had nothing to do with the Torah, for instance, would have trouble understanding who Jesus was -- in his proper context. However, the ones who would be nicknamed "Judaizers" began to insist that all the (adult) male converts be circumcised before becoming "Anointed."

Therefore, since there was a dispute and since Paulus and Bar-Nabas had no small debate with them, they arranged to send Paulus and Bar-Nabas and some of their other people up into Jerusalem to the envoys and the older people, about this question. Therefore indeed, they were sent up by the assembly, and they went through Foinike and Samaria, telling about the converting of the gentiles, and they made great joy for all the brothers.

This dispute in Antiochus caused such a stir that Paulus and Bar-Nabas took an entourage into Jerusalem to discuss the point with the envoys. The older people of the group were well-respected by the Jewish members (as was and is the custom among Jews), and it was a good political mood to include them in the discussion -- even though only the envoys would wind up contributing directly to the process.

Some authors claim that this is the meeting that is mentioned in the second chapter of Paulus' letter to the Galatians. I take the position that he was referring not to this meeting but to the later meeting which took place in ch. 21 and which would have included Titus.

Before taking us to the discussion, the author points out how well accepted the conversion of gentiles was becoming (among other Christians). This will be Lukas' first "formal" defense of the message.

Now when they came into Jerusalem, they were received by the assembly, and the envoys, and the elderly, and they related the things that God had done with them. Now some of those from the school of thought of the Perushim who trusted stood up, saying that, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to charge them to keep Moses' Torah."

The arrival of Paulus and Bar-Nabas was greeted with the same enthusiasm in Jerusalem as it had been elsewhere. The reader should realize that the acceptance of gentiles was not a problem among Jewish Christians. However, there was a point of contention, repeated here, that gentiles should be first circumcised and then bound to the Torah before they could accept the Messiah. Here, we gain the additional information that the ones who promoted this notion were largely those who had been Perushim -- that school who were sticklers for points of interpretive/rabbinical detail.

Now the envoys and the elderly got together to look into this matter. Now since there was much debate, Peter got up and said to them, "Men, brothers: you are familiar that from days past God chose from among you, that through my mouth the gentiles would hear the account of the good message and would trust. And God, who knows hearts, testified to them, giving them the holy Spirit just as he gave to us. And he judged no differently between us and them also, having cleansed their hearts through trust."

Again the author points out that the elderly, who were respected by all the Jews present, were included in the process of examining the situation. It is also noteworthy that neither Paulus nor Bar-Nabas is recorded as having spoken up. They were controversial figures, and so they took a passive role. Yet whatever points they may have made were not important to the solution of the problem. It was Peter who spoke first. Peter pointed out the revelation that he had received from God to take the message to gentiles. This (Acts 10) was the first anyone had ever heard of a "gentile mission," and so it made sense for the person who had received that revelation to be the first to make an address on the topic.

Peter justly points out two things:

God granted revelation (and the accompanying miraculous signs) to gentiles, "just as he gave to us." In ch. 11, "us" had referred to the envoys, who had received the gift of holy breath back in ch. 2. Here, "us" refers to Jews. Peter is equating the Jewish and gentile experiences.

God "judged no differently between us and them." This restates Peter's point (at 10:34-5) that God shows no partiality. The gentiles' hearts are clean, just as God purifies Jewish hearts.

"Therefore, why are you now testing God by placing a yoke on the students' necks that neither our ancestors nor we succeeded in bearing? On the contrary, we trust to be saved through the generosity of the Lord Jesus, as do they in the same manner."

This is the same sort of question that Peter asked when about to baptize Kornelius. Would anyone take action that opposes what God himself has done? Yet here, the question is directed to the Judaizers: "why are you testing God?"

He refers to legalistic Torah-keeping as "a yoke .. that neither our ancestors nor we succeeded in bearing." Legalism is a burden, not a means to salvation, and so Peter added that the generosity brought by Jesus is the only way for us (Jews) to be saved -- and it is the same for gentiles. The salvation of all human beings comes from trust, not from deeds.

Now all the multitude was silent, and they heard Bar-Nabas and Paulus telling about what signs and wonders God did through them among the gentiles. Now after they were silent, Jacob

*answered, saying, "Men, brothers: hear me. Simeon told how God first visited to take from the nations a people for his name. And the words of the prophets harmonize with this, as it is written, **"After these things, I will return and will construct again David's tent which has fallen down. And I will construct its ruins again, and I will set it up, so that the rest of humanity may seek out Yahweh--even all the nations on whom my name has been called,' says Yahweh, who is doing these things,"** which were known from the age."*

Then Paulus and Bar-Nabas spoke, although the respected Bar-Nabas is listed first. Conspicuously absent are any comments they may have had on the matter at hand. Instead, the pair told only of GOD's activities among the gentiles. It is likely that they kept silent about what would surely have become controversial.

It was Jacob, perhaps the most respected Christian in Jerusalem, Jesus' own (half) brother, who addressed the group next. His testimony, while hearsay, would have been accepted by those who respected Jacob. He confirmed Peter's story, referring to him by his Jewish name of "Simeon." Jacob's confirmation comes not only from his own opinion that Peter had been truthful but also from an application of the Prophets. Amos 9:11-12 was referring to the restoration of the kingdom -- which was fulfilled in Acts 2. Since he was living in the time of fulfillment of the "restoration" passages, the application of Amos was not surprising; instead, everyone present would have accepted it. Jacob cites the portion where "the rest of humanity" and "all the nations where my name is called" would be brought together to seek out God. Jacob cites the Septuagint version. One line ("the rest of humanity") is different in the later Masoretic Text. Since Jacob used Simon Peter's Aramaic name and addressing Palestinian Jews, we may presume that he was quoting a Hebrew source that predates the Masoretic Text. This passage (Amos) brings together the images in Joel (of the restored Judiasm) and in Isaiah and Micah (of peace/equality among the nations). It is clear that the envoys viewed the gentile mission as a logical extension of the restoration of the kingdom.

"So I judge not to cause trouble for those from the nations who turn to God, but to write to them to abstain from the pollutions of the idols, [and the prostitution], and the strangled animals, and the blood. For from ancient generations, Moses has had in every city those who herald him; he is read in the gatherings on every sabbath."

With Peter and Bar-Nabas having spoken, Jacob lends his statement of agreement with what Peter has said (and done) and with what Paulus and Bar-Nabas have done. He judges "not to cause trouble" for gentile converts -- by making them be circumcised and follow the Torah like a rulebook. Instead of binding them to the Torah, Jacob only wishes to see them remove the elements of idol- worship from their lives: cultic prostitution; strangled animals; blood (drinking). Jacob affirms that the first covenant accepted those who accepted Moses and his teachings, and so he intimates that the new covenant must accept those who accept Jesus and his teachings.

With full agreement among the most Jewish of envoys, all of whom were widely respected, and with the inclusion of all those people whom the Judaizers would respect, the envoys consider the matter solved.

15:22 *Then it seemed good to the envoys and the elderly after choosing with the whole assembly men among themselves, and, after writing a letter by their hands, to send them into Antiochus with Paulus and Bar-Nabas. These were Judah surnamed Bar-Sabbas and Silas, men who were leading among the brothers.*

Although the envoys had been the ones who discussed the situation, the entire group selected Judah and Silas to carry the letter to Antiochus with Paulus and Bar-Nabas. This illustrates the approval of the entire group. The mention of the elderly continues to show the Judaizers that the most respected Christians in Jerusalem (the elderly and, of course, the envoys) favored the things written in the letter. Thus, the elderly would also be mentioned on the letter as having taken part in the proceedings.

"The envoys and the elderly brothers-- To those brothers in Antiochus and Syria and Kilikia, those who are of the gentiles:

"Hello.

"Since we have heard that some who went out from us stirred you up with words and unsettled your souls, to whom we had issued no statement, it seemed good to us (who were of one accord) to choose out men to send to you with our beloved Bar-Nabas and Paulus, people who have given up their lives on behalf of the name of our Lord, Anointed Jesus."

This is the statement of the problem: Judaizers have been "stirring you up." Therefore, the Jerusalemites are sending this letter. In this introduction to the issue, the Christians in Jerusalem indicate that they are all in agreement and that they fully support Bar-Nabas and Paulus.

"Therefore, we have sent out Judah and Silas--and through their message the same things will be announced. For it seemed good to the holy Spirit and to us to lay no more of a burden on you than these things that are necessities:"

Paulus and Bar-Nabas were regarded as located in Antiochus. The envoys have indicated that they never before sent out any indication of what they were teaching, but now they are sending out Judah and Silas, so that everyone elsewhere would know that they are telling people the same things that Paulus and Bar-Nabas have been telling people.

"To abstain from what is offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled animals, and from prostitution. You will do well if you are keeping yourselves from these.

"Goodbye."

The envoys listed the only things that had come up in discussion. While it is not necessary for gentiles to be circumcised, or bound to the Torah, they must leave those practices that are associated with the worship of idols. The letter is friendly, offering no retribution against the Judaizers, nor against those who are struggling with idolatry.

Then indeed, when they were dismissed, they went into Antiochus, and after gathering a crowd together, they delivered the letter. Now when they read it, they rejoiced over the advice. And Judah and Silas, who were themselves also prophets, advised and confirmed the brothers through a long statement. Now after spending some time there, they were dismissed with peace

from the brothers to those who had sent them. Now Paulus and Bar-Nabas remained in Antiochus, teaching and announcing the good message--the message about the Lord--with also many others.

The letter was delivered, and the gentile converts were pleased that they did not have to be circumcised or bound to the Torah. Now there were four recognized prophets in Antiochus: Paulus, Bar-Nabas, Judah, and Silas. The four of them created peace and continued to announce the message. Thus, the message that Paulus and Bar-Nabas had brought them was the same message as the one brought by Judah and Silas -- which, of course, agreed with that of the envoys in Jerusalem. Even in the face of social pressures, the message has not changed.

36 *Now after some days, Paulus said to Bar-Nabas, "Let's go back, and indeed we can visit the brothers in every city in which we have announced the message about the Lord, and we can see how they are."*

It was Paulus' idea to make a second trip, returning to the same areas visited on the first journey.

Now Bar-Nabas considered taking that Yohanan who is called Markus along with them. But Paulus thought it proper not to take this one along--the one who had left them from Pamphulia, and who did not go with them to the work.

Bar-Nabas suggested the company of their ally, Yohanan Markus. However, since Markus had left the group to return home on the earlier journey, Paulus was adamant against taking him along. He would rather have had the company of someone who would remain with them on their work.

Therefore a sharp division happened, so that they were separated from one another. And Bar-Nabas, taking along Markus, sailed to Kupros. But Paulus, choosing Silas, left, after being committed by the brothers to God's generosity. Now he passed through Syria and Kilikia, confirming the assemblies.

Paulus was stubborn, absolutely refusing to travel with Markus. This stubbornness caused a division between two friends: Paulus and Bar-Nabas. Barnabas went to Kupros, taking Markus along with him--whom he regarded as helpful. Paulus would later admit Markus' usefulness, but at this time he chose Silas (aka Silvanus) as his traveling companion, and the two of them traveled by land.

XXX

16:1 *Now he came to Derbe and Lustra, and look, a certain student was there, Timotheos by name, son of a Jewish woman who trusted; but his father was a Greek. Those brothers in Lustra and Ikonium testified to him. Paulus wanted for this one to go out with him, and so he took and circumcised him, on account of those Jews who were in those places, for they all knew his father--that he was Greek.*

As Paulus and Silas traveled by land, they eventually reached the Galatian region of Asia Minor, where Derbe and Lustra were located. There they met a "student" -- i.e., a fellow Christian -- who had been converted before Paulus' arrival. Although the people attested to this young man, Timotheos, whose name signifies "honoring God," the youth had a gentile father who had not had him circumcised. Although his mother and grandmother were Jewish, a son was normally under the tutelage of his father, as Timotheos was, and so he had not embraced the Judaism of his mother. However, as an adult he had encountered Christianity, and since there had been no need for him to be circumcised, he had not been.

Timotheos wished to travel with Paulus, and Paulus was pleased with the idea, but he knew that an uncircumcised traveling companion would prove too controversial for the acceptance of the message by many Jews. Therefore he asked Timotheos to be circumcised -- no small favor -- and Timotheos allowed it. He would be Paulus' friend for the rest of Paulus' life.

Now as they went through the cities, they delivered those decrees that had been handed down by the envoys and those older ones in Jerusalem for them to keep. Then indeed, the assemblies were strengthened in trust, and they were increased in number every day.

As Paulus and his companions traveled, they passed on the envoys' statements and showed the contents of the letter to both Jews and gentiles. The author's mention of this demonstrates Paulus' full cooperation with the remaining members of the Twelve. Even without Bar-Nabas, Paulus was continuing to respect his Jewish roots and to teach the message exactly as those envoys in Jerusalem were teaching it. Thus, it is considered a sign of Paulus' being right that the assemblies were becoming stronger spiritually on account of his visit.

PART THREE

6 Now they were going through the Frugian and Galatian countryside, since they were forbidden by the holy Spirit from speaking the message in Asia. Passing by Musia, they tried to go into Bithunia, and the spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this. Now after passing by Musia, they came down into Troas.

God had expressly said not to go into Asia, but Paulus traveled into familiar areas in Asia Minor without announcing the message. He wanted to go north and west into the region of Bithunia, but Jesus appeared in a vision, telling them not to go there. Instead, they headed due west and wound up in Troas, on the coast of the Aegean Sea.

And at night a vision was seen by Paulus: a certain man of Makedon was standing and begging him, saying, "Pass over into Makedonia and help us." Now when he saw the vision, we immediately sought to go out into Makedonia, inferring from the vision that God had called us to announce the good message to them.

The passage does not say that Paulus was asleep when he received the vision, although it was at night. Nevertheless, a man appeared to Paulus alone, dressed like a Makedonian. He entreated Paulus to travel by boat across the sea to Makedon and "help us." Paulus deduced that God

wanted Paulus and his group to tell them about Jesus the Anointed One, and so they made plans to sail.

Now after we sailed from Troas, we headed directly to Samothrakia, and to New City on the following day. And from there, we went to Filippi, which is a leading city of the region of the colony of Makedonia. Now we were remaining in this city for several days.

North-northwest from Troas was Samothrakia, an island in the Aegean about halfway between the closest part of Makedonia and where Paulus and his party were. From there, Paulus, Lukas, and the others headed northwest to New City (Neapolis). It is probable that they picked up supplies while in Samothrakia and to rest, since the sea around the island is normally stormy and rough. The Samothrace web site mentions it as a "natural port of call."

Neapolis had been founded on the site of a former city (thus being "New City"), one which had supposedly been founded by a descendant of Herakles. The city was a member of the Free Laconian League.

And on the sabbath day, we went out of the gate by a river, where there was a place allowed for prayer, and after sitting down we spoke to the women who had come together. And a certain woman, Ludia by name, who was a seller of purple cloth from the city of Thuatira, and who was a worshiper of God, heard. The Lord opened her heart to hold on to those things that Paulus was saying. Now when she was baptized, along with her household, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be trusting to the Lord, enter my house and stay there." And she made us go.

Paulus and his party took time to rest and pray on the Sabbath, as was traditional. A group of women arrived and began talking with the travelers. One of these was a businesswoman named Ludia who was a traveler herself. She hailed from Thuatira, a city near Sardis in Asia Minor. Ludia was in town on business, selling purple cloth. Dyeing was a popular industry in Thuatira, and so Ludia was probably a prominent woman there. She was a gentile who worshipped God, indicating that she had been exposed to and had embraced Judaism. So when Paulus began telling her about the Messiah, God "opened her heart" to hear the teaching. She publically acknowledged Jesus as Messiah (by being baptized), and her entire household came to accept Jesus as well. Ludia owned a home in New City, and in humility she asked Paulus and the others to be her guests while they were in town.

Now it happened, as we were going to a place of prayer, a certain female servant who was possessed by a spirit of Puthonos ((Apollo)) came to meet us. She brought her lords much financial gain through divination. She was following Paulus and us closely, and she called out, saying, "These people are slaves of the highest god, who are announcing a way of salvation to us!" Now she did this for many days.

While in New City, Paulus and the others were seeking another place of prayer -- and it may be the case that this was the same day. Suddenly they met a servant woman who was an oracle of Apollo. (Apollo was nicknamed "Puthonos" -- Pythian -- because he had slain the serpent-god Python shortly after the Great Flood.) Apollo, who had made the woman's owners very wealthy through her divination, had told this woman that Paulus and the others were followers of the

highest god, that is, Yahweh. Thus even the spirits that others called gods recognized who the true God was, and she began announcing this, following Paulus around wherever he went.

But Paulus was grieved, and he turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Anointed Jesus to come out from her." And it came out at that hour. Now when her lords noticed that their hope for financial gain had gone out, they grabbed onto Paulus and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the rulers, and they led them to the captains of the militia and said, "These people are disrupting our city! They are Jews, and they are announcing certain customs which it is illegal for us to accept or do, since we are Romans."

This annoyed Paulus, eventually disturbing him to the point of ordering the spirit from Apollo to leave the woman. Naturally, the spirit had been cast out in the name of Jesus, just as Jesus had told his other envoys to do. However, her masters were understandably displeased with this, since their meal-ticket was now gone. While Lukas and the others were apparently not speaking publically (and were therefore safe), Paulus and Silas were regarded as the instigators of their misfortune. The townspeople dragged Paulus and Silas to the local militia, trumping up charges against them so that the two might be imprisoned or (more likely) expelled from the city.

22 And the crowd rose up together against them, and the captains tore off their cloaks and gave word for them to be beaten with rods. And after many had thumped them, they threw them in jail, charging the jailor to keep them securely. And when he received such a charge, he cast them into the inner jail, and their feet were bound into stocks.

The militia leaders ordered the two to be beaten (for punishment) and jailed overnight. They would be ordered to leave after that. The angry people had allied them with the Jews, whose code of conduct might appear threatening to someone of Greco-Roman descent. A guard was placed on their cell to prevent escape or an attack by Paulus' confederates.

Now at midnight, Paulus and Silas were praying and singing a song to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Now suddenly a great earthquake occurred which shook the foundations of the prison. And immediately all of the doors were opened, and all of the bonds were broken.

But it was not Lukas and the others who broke Paulus out of jail. Paulus and Silas were not disturbed by what was going on. They assumed (correctly) that God would act in some way to see to it that justice was done. The two prayed and sang into the night, and suddenly an earthquake happened, setting them free. But this is where it became strange!

Now when it happened that the jailor came out of his sleep and noticed that the doors of the jail had been opened, he drew a sword and was about to kill himself, assuming that the prisoners had fled. But Paulus called out with a loud voice, saying, "Don't do anything bad to yourself, for we are all here!" Now he asked for lights and rushed in, and becoming terrified he fell down before Paulus and Silas.

The guard who had been entrusted with keeping Paulus and Silas in jail woke up during the quake. Realizing that the whole jail was now open, he knew that he had failed in his duty. He was about to preserve his honor by committing suicide, when Paulus called out to him to stop.

Although the prison was wide open, he and Silas had made no attempt to escape. The jailor realized that whoever these men were, they were by no means ordinary criminals. He dropped to their feet, afraid.

And after leading them out, he said, "Sirs, what is it necessary for me to do so that I might be saved?" Now they said, "Trust in the Lord, Anointed Jesus, and you will be saved, as will your household." And they spoke the message about the Lord to him, with all those in his household. And after taking them in that hour of the night, he washed their wounds. And he and all those who were his were baptized. And he led them up into his house and prepared a table, and he and all his household rejoiced, trusting in God.

Having heard that Paulus and Silas had come "announcing a message of salvation," the jailor realized that this must indeed be true. He asked about this salvation, and the message reported to him was simple: Trust in Jesus. The jailor invited the two men to speak to his household about this Jesus. Who was he? Why would trust in Jesus save them, and what would it save them from? They responded to the invitation, explaining about their God and about Jesus, God's Anointed One. All of them marvelled at this, and the jailor gave word for Paulus and Silas to be fed, and for their wounds to be cleaned. The whole household came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and that night they all publically identified with Jesus by being baptized. Paulus had set out to visit his former converts, but the trip had already taken him to a new area, where prominent citizens and public officials were coming to know who Jesus was.

Now when it became day, the captains sent the rod-bearers, saying, "Release those people." Now the jailor passed these words on to Paulus, that, "The captains have sent for you to be released. Therefore, go out now, and go in peace." But Paulus said to them, "After flogging us publicly--uncondemned, since we are people of Rome--and throwing us in jail, now they are casting us out privately? Indeed, no! On the contrary, let them come themselves and lead us out."

That morning, the jailor's immediate supervisors received his report about what had transpired during the night. Rather than send them out publically in disgrace (as an example to others), the captains of the guard realized that to cast Paulus out publically would only draw attention to him and to what had happened to him and Silas. Therefore they simply ordered for the two men to be freed. Paulus realized this as well. As a Roman citizen (and not a wandering Jew), Paulus appealed to his rights as a citizen, which had been violated. He had had no trial and yet had received sentence, although he was due a trial. Knowing that he was in the legal right, he decided to remain.

Now the rod-bearers passed the message of these declarations on to the captains, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. And they went and begged them. And they led them out and asked them to leave the city. Now after going out of the jail, they went in to Ludia, and when they noticed the brothers, they advised them, and they went out.

No one had mentioned previously to the captains of the guard that the men were Roman citizens. On appeal, the men who had ordered Paulus and Silas to be beaten might be relieved of their duties or even executed. This frightened them enough to approach the two Christians and ask them nicely to leave town. They led Paulus and Silas out of the jail publically, after which the

Christians visited their friend Ludia and the other converts. After taking time to advise the new converts on the matters of life, Paulus and his band left town, not in disgrace but in triumph.

17:1 *Now when they passed through Amfipolis and Apollonia, they came into Thessalonike, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Now according to Paulus' custom, they went in to them, and for three sabbaths they held discussions with them from the writings, proposing and proving that it was necessary for the Anointed One to have suffered and to have been raised from among the dead, and that "This Jesus, whom I am announcing to you, is the Anointed One." And some of them were persuaded, and they adhered to Paulus and Silas--including a great number of pious Greeks and not a few of the chief women.*

As Paulus and his party traveled along the coast, they passed through Amfipolis, a city noted for its devotion to Cleo, Apollo, Artemis, and other gods (placed strategically near the Pangaion gold mines), and through Apollonia (or, strictly, the eastern Apollonia) on their way to Thessalonike.

Thessalonike had been founded in 315 BCE by King Kassandros (named for his wife, who was Alexander the Great's sister). In 168 BCE it became the capital of the Makedonian province; Thessalonike has been an important port city ever since. Thessalonike had a large population of Hellenistic Jews, and so Paulus immediately entered their gathering and began to discuss the Messiah with them. Once again, subtly, the author shows the reverence that Paulus held for the people of his own race.

Paulus' message was simple:

1. that the promised Anointed One was supposed to suffer.
2. that the Anointed One would raise from the dead.
3. that Jesus did those things and therefore was the Anointed One.

Paulus' proof was so strong that not only did many of the Jews begin to believe in Jesus, but the Greek converts as well saw the divine wisdom in what the envoy was telling them. Even a few of the prominent women in town were attracted to Christianity, being persuaded by the message. This went on for three weeks.

But the Jews became jealous, and they gathered up some evil men who hung around the marketplace, and formed a crowd, and disrupted the city, assailing the house of Jason, seeking to lead them out to the mob. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers to the rulers of the city, calling out that, "These ones who have overturned the Empire are also present here. Jason has received them, and all of these are opposed to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king: Jesus." Now they stirred up the crowd and the rulers of the city (when they heard these things). And they took the bail money from Jason and the rest, and they released them.

Since their proselytes to Judaism were becoming Christian converts, certain of the Jews -- probably the leaders -- decided that Paulus and his friends had to go. They went to the place where Paulus was staying, grabbed their host, and took him to the "rulers of the city" -- the

Makedonian officials. They accused Paulus and his compatriots of disrupting the Roman Empire -- a charge serious enough to warrant civil attention. Like the Jews who tried Jesus, they accused the Christians of claiming that Jesus was a king who vied for Caesar's throne. Of course the charges were false, since Jesus was no longer present, and while he was alive he had supported the Roman government whenever asked about it.

The bail money given by Jason was "security" money -- a fine. They had been found guilty of a civil offense (equivalent to our "disturbing the peace"). A next offense might include a trial and jail time. It was time for Paulus and Silas to leave Thessalonike and go elsewhere.

17:10 *Now the brothers immediately and by night sent both Paulus and Silas away into Beroia, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonike, for they embraced the message with all eagerness, examining the writings every day to see if these things were so. Therefore indeed, many of them trusted, including prominent Greek women, and not a few men.*

With Jason having been roused by the authorities, Paulus and Silas were by no means safe. When night fell, they passed safely to Beroia, a town further to the west and inland. As was their custom, they went to speak at the synagogue, and the author contrasts the behavior of the Jews at Beroia with that of the Thessalonikans. At Beroia, they were more "noble-minded." Lukas uses this word to signify "open," and some translations record it as such. When the Beroians heard of the possibility that the Messiah had come, instead of rejecting the message outright, they investigated to see whether what Paulus told them was true, comparing his interpretation with the Torah and Prophets. The author indicates that it was a natural consequence that "many of them trusted." After all, the message spoken by Paulus and Silas was the truth. Again, many prominent citizens were part of the converted community.

It is very interesting that Protestants attempt to use this passage to prove Luther's principle of "sola scriptura" -- that the Bible alone is the source of teaching from God. They claim that since the Beroians searched the writings for verification of everything that Paulus and Silas told them, they were applying the principle of "solo scriptura." The Catholic Church, however, teaches that since the Beroians DID accept something outside of "scripture" (i.e., the information Paulus had), this passage refutes the "sola scriptura" principle.

It appears to this author, though, that the Beroians were merely applying the ancient concept of canon. Whatever agreed with the Torah could be used. Since Paulus' application appeared (by all inspection) to agree with the existing prophetic writings, it was useful.

But when those Jews from Thessalonike learned that God's message was also being announced in Beroia by Paulus, they went there also, stirring up the crowds. Now then, Paulus immediately sent out the brothers to go as if to the sea, but both Silas and Timotheos remained there. Now those who were conducting Paulus led him to Athens, and they departed after receiving a precept for Silas and Timotheos, that they should come to him as soon as possible.

Naturally, there were those who did not approve of what Paulus was doing. The ones who had been responsible for his flight from Thessalonike made the journey to Beroia -- for the sole

purpose of running Paulus off. This time, he would not leave. He sent a group down river to the sea, making it appear that Paulus was with them; however, he and his two closest associates remained behind. Paulus went by land to Athens -- led there by other unnamed Christians. In Athens, he awaited the arrival of his two friends. There too, Paulus would find interesting conversation.

17:16 *Now while Paulus was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was stirred up within him when he observed that the city was full of idols. So indeed, he started discussions with the Jews in the synagogue, and with the pious people, and in the market every day with those he happened to meet. Now some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him, and certain ones said, "Indeed, what is this seed picker intending to say?" And they said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign spirits," because he was announcing the good message of Jesus and the resurrection.*

In Athens, a metropolis occupied by the Romans since 146 BCE and noted for its many shrines, Paulus was overwhelmed by the number of images made to the Greco-Roman gods. He began discussing Jesus with those who might be most open -- his fellow Jews and the knowledgeable pious people, but with the number of idols being so overwhelming, Paulus soon was speaking in the agora -- the open market -- each day as well, breaking his usual pattern of addressing Jews in the synagogue and turning to gentiles only after the Jews had rejected him.

The market, situated at the foot of the Acropolis, was the cultural and religious center of the city. The citizens of Athens gathered here daily to hear news, to exchange viewpoints, and of course to buy and sell goods. Paulus chanced to meet some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers there. A cornerstone of Stoic belief is that a person is most virtuous when he wishes only what happens and lives according to reason. In order to retain a tranquil spirit, the Stoic renounces everything that appeals to the emotions. The Epicurean, on the other hand, seeks moderate "pleasure," with friendship being the highest goal. Peace comes not from seeking nothing but by pursuing certain high ideals. Neither Stoics nor Epicureans believed in an afterlife. Stoics rejected gods altogether, while Epicurus taught that the gods simply do not involve themselves in human affairs. The two groups were in constant debate.

Aside: Because Antiochus IV (who desecrated the temple) favored opening Epicurean-like schools, the Jews were at odds with the Epicureans from the second century BCE until as late as the twelfth century CE. It is in this context that Paulus entered the conversation.

They referred to Paulus as a "seed picker". This term is literal. Used here, it signifies someone who has no real philosophy, but instead picks up bits and pieces of what he hears and amalgamizes them together. Today, we might say Paulus was accused of being "New Age." This accusation was natural, since Stoicism and then Epicureanism were the two most notable philosophies. Their insult/accusation that he was "proclaiming foreign spirits" is understood also, since he was announcing the existence of an afterlife, which both groups rejected.

And they took hold of him and led him to the Areopagos, saying, "Can we know what this new teaching is that you are talking about? For you are bringing certain foreign things to our ears. So, we want to know what these things are supposed to mean."

Still, the Athenians were eager to try to understand what Paulus meant -- even if perhaps they only wished to know how to dispute him. They led him to the Areopagos, the nearby "Hill of Ares," on which important discussions were often held, so that they might have a more private discussion.

Now all the Athenians and all those strangers who were staying there enjoy nothing more than to tell and to hear something new. Now Paulus stood up in the midst of the Areopagos and said, "Men, Athenians: I observe that in all things you are devoted in your spirit worship. For as I passed through and observed the things you worship, I also found an altar which was inscribed, 'To an unknown god.'"

Lukas relates that the Athenians enjoyed hearing new philosophies, and so when Paulus spoke, he had quite a few listeners. In Paulus' understanding, the Athenians worshipped not gods but spirit beings -- daemons -- and he indicated as such. Having earlier marvelled at the quantity of idols, he noted that there was even an idol to a god who was unknown. His impression is that the Athenians, however devout they might be, may have been seriously searching for something but not understanding what that something -- or Someone was.

"Therefore, since you don't know whom you are worshiping, I announce this to you: The god who made the creation and everything in it, the one who is Lord of Heaven and Earth, does not dwell in handmade temples, nor is he served by human hands (as though he lacked something). He gave to all creatures life and breath and all things, and he made from one every nation of people to dwell on the face of the land, fixing the seasons and the limits of their habitation, for them to seek God, if indeed they might feel after him and find him.

This speech parallels that of Stefanos (ch. 7), who told the same things to his Jewish audience. Thus, Lukas has shown again that the message has not changed, even though this time the crowd is exclusively gentile.

And what did he tell them? The true God -- the one who is Lord of the Universe -- "does not dwell in handmade temples." Stefanos had been indicating the temple in Jerusalem, but Paulus meant the same thing by referring to the Greco-Roman shrines, for the true God does not live in any manmade structure. Paulus also added, "nor is he served by human hands." God desires nothing physical that we could give him. As possessor of "the cattle on a thousand hills," God would rather have mercy than sacrifices, and here, the sacrifices are entirely meaningless to such an almighty god. This Highest God made everything and everyone, and yet this god is so personal that he wants everyone to "feel after him and find him." In short, this Yahweh is both more vast and more personal than anything that the Athenians knew.

"And indeed he is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and are moved and exist, just as also some of those poets with you have said, 'For we are also his offspring.' Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we are bound not to imagine that gold or silver or stone--a sculpture of art and of human skill--is like the Divine One."

And this Yahweh is so close that everyone can perceive him. Paulus went on to cite Aratus (from the Phaenomena, 5) as proof that people everywhere can understand God. In fact, he had been

right in saying, "We are his offspring." Affirming this observation to be true, Paulus logically concluded that if human beings are the children of God, then manmade items cannot be what God is truly like. Therefore, the idols are useless. A brilliant, Jesus-like piece of logic.

"Therefore indeed, overlooking the times of ignorance, God now announces to all people in all places to change their minds, because he has established a day in which he is about to judge the Empire in what is right, by a man whom he selected, having provided proof to all by raising him from the dead."

Looking now to the present and future, Paulus focused his message on the Athenians in particular. A day of judgment would come soon to the Empire, and people would fall under the judgement of Jesus, not Caesar. Therefore, people must leave their ignorance behind -- they must change their minds and come to know Yahweh God.

Now when they heard about a resurrection from the dead, they mocked him. Yet they said, "We will listen to you again about this." And so Paulus went out from their midst. Now some men associated with him and trusted, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Knowing with whom he was discussing, Paulus had deftly mentioned the resurrection last. The other elements of his argument were indisputable. Therefore, his inference that Jesus had been raised from the dead had some support. The philosophers mocked Paulus, but they were open enough to what was undeniable that they asked Paulus to continue to speak with them. Some of the followers of the (now dead) philosophers decided to associate themselves with Paulus, and the author mentions two who might be known to the reader.

18:1 *Now after these things, Paulus departed from Athens and went into Korinth. And he found a certain Jew named Akila, a Pontian who had recently come from Italia (because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to depart from Rome), and Priscilla his wife. He went to them, and he stayed with them and worked with them, because they were in the same business. For they were tent makers by trade. Now he held a discussion each sabbath day in the synagogue, and he persuaded Jews and Greeks.*

Emperor Claudius had issued an edict, possibly as early as 49 CE, expelling the Jews from Rome. The edict was in effect for less than a year; it is mentioned by Suetonius. Paulus' travels from Athens had taken him west to Korinth, where he met up with two pious Jews -- a husband and wife named Akila and Prisca. (Note: Prisca is usually referred to by the diminutive "Priscilla".) Like Paulus, the two were tentmakers, and so the three of them worked their trade together. While he was in Korinth, he held discussions among the Jews (this time following his usual custom of always taking the message to his people first). Both Jews and "God fearing" gentiles came to acknowledge Jesus as a result of Paulus' discussions.

Now when both Silas and Timotheos came down from Makedonia, Paulus was held to the message, testifying earnestly to the Jews about Jesus the Anointed One. But when they resisted him and spoke bad of him, he shook off his clothes and said to them, "Let your blood be on your head. From now on, I will go to the gentiles." And after leaving from there, he went into the

house of a certain one named Titius Justus, who worshiped God and whose house adjoined the synagogue.

Finally, Paulus was rejoined by his traveling companions, Silas and Timotheos. Paulus continued to speak the message to his fellow Jews until they no longer wished to hear from him. After they rejected him, he turned to the gentiles. One "God fearing" gentile who welcomed Paulus was named Titius Justus. Since his house was next to the synagogue, Paulus was already aware of him and sought to stay with Titius. Titius agreed.

Now Krispus, the ruler of the gathering, trusted in the Lord, along with his whole household, and many of the Corinthians who heard trusted and were baptized.

While he stayed at the home of Titius Justus, he discussed Jesus with anyone who would hear him, and as a result the synagogue ruler (whose task it was to decide the format of the meetings and maintain order) became a Christian. His entire household converted as well, and so did many Jewish and gentile Christians. Like earlier converts, these were not ashamed to identify themselves publically with Jesus by being baptized.

Now the Lord said to Paulus through a vision at night, "Do not be afraid. On the contrary, speak and do not be silent, because I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, because there are many of my people in this city." And he remained there for a year and six months, teaching God's message among them.

God spoke to Paulus in a vision one night, not long after the events described above. He told Paulus that this city contained many God fearing gentiles and pious Jews who were open to the message that the Messiah had come. And so Paulus spent considerable time in the city, continuing to work his tentmaking trade for support and teaching "God's message" -- the message about Jesus -- to anyone who would hear.

It is during this period that Paulus began writing letters. Before this time, he had always been on the road. No doubt he wanted to visit his friends and children in the faith, but God had told him to remain. So Paulus wrote two letters from Korinth to his friends in Thessalonike. He would eventually write several others, both to groups he had visited and to his traveling companions (plus one to Filemon). These first letters are among the earliest writings in the New Testament.

12 *Now when Gallio was Proconsul of Achaia, the Jews charged at Paulus with one accord, and they led him to the tribunal, saying that, "This one is persuading people to worship God apart from the Torah." But when Paulus was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "So, if indeed there was any injustice or the commission of evil acts, O Jews, I would bear with you according to reason. But if it is a question about a message, and about names, and about that Torah of yours, you will see to it yourselves. I choose not to be a judge of these things." And he drove them out of the tribunal.*

This is an event that took place during Paulus' stay in Korinth. An inscription was rather recently discovered at Delphi. Called the Delphi Inscription, it states, "As Lusius Junius Gallio, my

friend, and the proconsul of Achaia..." Lukas mentions Gallio because he was only Proconsul for one year, c. 52 CE. Thus, our author dates this section of the Actions somewhat precisely.

Lukas' historical account has only one charge brought against Paulus: that he was supposedly encouraging people to leave the Torah. To some extent this was true, since Jesus had completed the Torah. Gallio realized that this was not a civil issue but a philosophical debate; he refused to have any part of it. Showing that he had some knowledge of Paulus' teachings, Gallio correctly indicated that the dispute was about "a message, and about names, and about that Torah of yours". The message, of course, was that Jesus was Messiah. His use of "names" signifies the identity of the Messiah. Was he Jesus, or some other person yet to come. Lukas' Gallio correctly identifies the Torah with the Jews only as their religious book.

Now they all took hold of Sosthenes, the ruler of the gathering, and they beat him before the tribunal; and Gallio cared nothing about these things. Now after Paulus remained for a considerable number of days, he said goodbye to the brothers and sailed out into Syria. And Priscilla and Akila were with him. He had shaved his head in Kenchrea, for he had taken a vow.

Sosthenes was the Jew who oversaw the gathering (the synagogue). This man was probably the co-author of Paulus' first letter to the Korinthians -- a name that the readers would recognize. The beating of Sosthenes by the Jews who were part of his own gathering shows the degree to which the animosity between Christians and other Jews was heating up. Proconsul Gallio simply ignored the beating, illustrating how little Roman officials cared for Jewish disputes (see also the response of Pilatus to Jesus). Other than this incident, Paulus' stay in Korinth was a pleasant one, and after the year and one half were completed, Paulus, Priscilla, Akila, and others sailed from Korinth to Syria.

Apparently they crossed by land to Kenchrea first, where Paulus shaved his head. The nature of the vow has been in dispute. Some say that the act of shaving his head was the beginning of the vow, while others believe that he cut his hair after growing it, and that growing his hair was part of the vow that he had taken. The passage does not indicate which was the case, although we know he cut his hair short at this time. In this section, Priscilla's name is mentioned ahead of her husband's. This is the usual order in the NT, but the mention of a wife before her husband was abnormal. In the NT, this appears to indicate Priscilla's more active role as a Christian. Harnack even suggested that she was the author of the treatise to the Hebrews.

Now they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. But he entered into the gathering and discussed with the Jews. Now they were asking for more time, but he did not consent. Instead, he said goodbye, saying, "I will return to you again if God is willing." He sailed from Ephesus, and after going down into Caesarea, he went up and greeted the assembly, and he went down to Antiochus. And after spending some time there, he went out, passing through the Galatian country and Frugia, in order, strengthening all of the students.

Paulus and the others sailed from the port city of Kenchrea to Ephesus, where Paulus left them. He discussed Jesus with the Jews only once here, then sailing immediately to Pisidian Antiochus, after stopping off at Caesarea to greet his fellow Christians. As had been his original plan for the trip, Paulus stayed in the area around Antiochus (the Galatian country and Frugia) assisting his

fellow Christians in their spiritual growth. Lukas is imprecise as to how much time Paulus spent in the area.

24 *Now a certain Jew, Apollos by name, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man who was powerful in his knowledge of the writings, came into Ephesus. Since he had been instructed in the Lord's way and was on fire in the spirit, this one spoke and taught accurately the things about Jesus, being familiar only with John's baptism. And this one began to speak freely in the gathering. Now when Priscilla and Akila heard of him, they took him and explained more accurately God's way to him.*

The passage serves as an introduction of an Alexandrian Jew to the author's narrative, possibly paralleling the sections of Acts 8 which display the conversion of "fringe" Jews to Jesus. Apollos came from Alexandria, not only a center of Judaism for a considerable time but also a city noted for great learning. Constructed (c. 332 BCE) by the order of Alexander the Great (on the foundation of an earlier city), Alexandria came to house the Great Library, a legendary wealth of written works of unprecedented scope which was still standing during the First Century. The formation of the library coincided with the preparation of a standard Old Testament Greek Bible (called the Septuagint). If Apollos had access to the library, it is not surprising then that he had gained great knowledge, as Lukas points out.

Apollos had been told about Jesus, understanding the passages clearly which taught Jesus to be the promised Messiah. Lukas does not say that Apollos had been baptized by John, although it is possible that John or one of his followers had a role in Apollos' conversion to Messianic Judaism. It happened that this man Apollos was in Ephesus -- for reasons that are not disclosed -- and was speaking about Jesus in the Jewish gathering. This impressed Paulus' friends, Priscilla and Akila, who had remained there. Hearing that Apollos was teaching about John's baptism, Priscilla and her husband taught Apollos "more accurately" about Second Covenant baptism. With Priscilla's (and Akila's) assistance, Apollos now understood the passages about the New Covenant more fully. It is quite possible that they went over passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel with the studious Apollos, pointing out their meaning.

Now when he wanted to pass through into Achaia, the brothers advised the students to receive him. When he arrived, he helped greatly those who trusted by means of generosity. For he was strongly discussing with the Jews in public, proving Jesus to be the Anointed One through the writings.

As Apollos traveled, he was accepted by the Jews in Achaia. The author points out how helpful he was to others and that his knowledge was great enough that he was able to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. The author appears to regard it important that not only Paulus but his associates also were teaching others things that they too passed on accurately. Now that the message had begun to spread around Asia Minor, still it had not changed from those things Jesus himself had said.

19:1 *Now it happened while Apollos was in Korinth that Paulus was passing through the upper parts and came into Ephesus. And when he found some students, he said to them, "Did you receive holy breath after trusting?"*

The author uses "students" without qualification to mean "Christians" exclusively. If they had been converts of Apollos, they were most likely Jews as well. Paulus went to Ephesus and found some Christians there. His question is an important one, for it illustrates that the signs of the covenant were important in the confirmation of the message. Most non-Charismatics tend to downplay their importance, but there was Paulus, asking people whether the group in Ephesus was gifted. How else would they be distinguished (by God) from the non-Messianic Jews?

Now they said to him, "We haven't heard if there is holy breath." And he said, "Into what were you baptized?" Now they said, "Into John's baptism."

Now comes the second important question: "into what were you baptized?" The Greek verb βαπτίζω occurring with εἰς (into) always indicates a covenant in the NT. Paulus was asking whether they had indeed entered the New Covenant through baptism into Jesus. They had not, although they HAD identified themselves with the reformation movement that prepared them for the coming of the Messiah. Paulus would have to explain the difference:

Now Paulus said, "John baptized with a baptism of mental change, telling the people that they should trust in the one who was coming after him...that is, in Jesus." Now after hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paulus placed his hands on them, the holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Now the entire number of the men was about twelve.

Paulus' explanation took the form of a redirection. If they knew about John, then the group must know that he was a forerunner of Jesus -- whom they already knew was the Messiah. Paulus explained that they needed to be baptized into Jesus, allying themselves with the Messianic movement and not merely the reformation associated with the Baptizer's followers. When they realized this, they were baptized into Jesus' name. In the traditional show of public acceptance, Paulus placed his hands on them. God showed his acceptance, too, immediately -- for he came upon them, granting them holy breath. Paulus (and the readers) could know that this was the case because they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

It is quite possible that the attempt of the author has been to show in more detail exactly what Apollos had lacked, for he had been in Ephesus prior to leaving for Korinth (18:24). Since Apollos' perspective was somewhat different, this created not a division but the POSSIBILITY of division -- if people were to take Apollos' differences to extremes. Paulus wound up teaching in the gatherings in Ephesus for three months (19:8), and it is possibly during that time that he wrote his first letter to the Korinthians, although he spent two years there among the gentiles (19:10) as well.

8 *Now after entering into the synagogue, he spoke freely for three months, discussing and persuading [the things] about God's kingdom. Now when some were hardened and distrusted, saying bad things about the Way in the presence of the multitude, he departed from them and separated out the students, holding discussions every day in the School of Turannus. Now this happened for two years, so that all those who were staying in Asia heard the message about the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And God did uncommon deeds of power through Paulus' hands, so*

that even handkerchiefs and aprons that were brought from his skin to those who were sick set them free from their diseases, and the evil spirits were cast out.

As seemed to happen often, Paulus faced acceptance from his countrymen at first, until the leaders became jealous of how many people were acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. In this case, many refused to believe and began spreading publicly false rumors about the Christian Jews. Following his usual pattern, Paulus left the Jewish gathering and began to reason with the gentiles. Lukas records that he did this every day for two years, which is quite amazing when you think about it. Naturally, Paulus continued to work "the signs of a genuine envoy" among the people, healing their sick and casting out evil spirits.

XL

13 Now certain of those Jews who went around binding spirits by oath took it upon themselves to name the name of Jesus on those who had evil spirits, saying, "I bind you with an oath by Jesus, whom Paulus heralds." Now there were seven sons of a certain Skeua, a Jewish high priest, who were doing this. Now the evil spirit said, "Jesus I know, and Paulus I am familiar with, but who are you?" And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and after mastering them, it prevailed against them, so that they fled that house naked and wounded. Now this became known to all those who were staying in Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, and fear fell on all of them, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many of those who trusted came, acknowledging and declaring their deeds.

At some time during this two years, there were other Jews who were also binding the evil spirits. The author does not say that this was done to rival Paulus, but given what he has just mentioned, this is certainly possible and appears to be inferred. The binding of a spirit literally means "to oath out." Rather than simply expelling the spirits, they were bound not to return. Whether they were rivaling Paulus or not, they knew enough to use the name of the Messiah in order to get rid of the spirits. The account indicates that Skeua, who was a high priest, had seven sons who were engaged in this benevolence. But just the NAME of Jesus wasn't where the power lied, but also in the trust of the person binding the spirit. So on one occasion, the spirit ignored their order (because of their unbelief), and the person influenced by the spirit physically subdued ALL SEVEN of them, stripping them to their underwear ("naked") and causing them harm! The moral of this event was "Don't mess with something you don't understand." Or at least, "If you don't have faith, your lack of faith will be revealed." The story circulated throughout the city, and even those who did not acknowledge Jesus as Messiah knew that he was some manner of powerful prophet, and they began saying good things about him. Rallying around this show of public support, Christians began to testify to others about who they knew Jesus to be, and about the deeds God had worked through them.

Now considerable number of those who practiced magic brought together their scrolls and burned them in the presence of everyone, and they added together their values, and found it to be 50,000 silver pieces. In this way, the message of the Lord grew powerfully and succeeded.

All of this public favor made Christian Judaism so popular that people of various superstitions began to turn to God, to the extent that they burned their scrolls. Ephesus was a noted center of

magical arts, to the point where one nickname for scrolls of magic was "Ephesian Scrolls." It is no surprise that the residents owned them. Scrolls were expensive to make, and so burning a scroll was no easy matter for someone of simple means. It was a show of faith, and in this case, an enormous sum of scrolls was destroyed out of trust in God. The message about Jesus spread even more as a result of these displays of trust.

The amount -- 50,000 silver pieces -- was an incredible sum, representing many years wages for the average worker.

21 *Now when these things were fulfilled, after passing through Makedonia and Achaia, Paulus disposed in the spirit to go into Jerusalem, saying: "After I have been there, it is necessary for me to see Rome too."*

Paulus longed to see Rome, the capital of the Empire, but it would not yet be the time for him to go there. He left Epheus, however, and began to make his way around the countryside. Yet he realized that it was time for him to return to Jerusalem.

Now after sending two of those who were serving him into Makedonia, Timotheos and Erastus, he remained for a time in Asia. Now during this season no small commotion occurred concerning the way. For a certain silversmith, Demetrius by name, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no small financial gain to the workmen. He brought them together, and those who were workmen in the same business, saying, "Men: you are familiar with the fact that our wealth comes from this work, and you observe and hear that this Paulus has persuaded and misled a considerable crowd, not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia, by saying that those things that are made with hands are not gods."

Artemis (or Diana) was the goddess of the hunt, an image of great female beauty, and the patron deity of Ephesus. Ephesus was the cultural center of the region, and the Artemision (temple of Artemis) at Ephesus was for Ephesus what the Parthenon was for Athens. There had been an temple in Ephesus to Artemis for many years. It had been destroyed or partially destroyed several times, but because of its central importance, her temple was rebuilt every time until 401 CE when (Christian "church father") John Chrysostom had it torn down. Constructed of marble according to Greek mathematical designs, the Temple of Artemis was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Antipater wrote:

"But when I saw the sacred house of Artemis that towers to the clouds, the [other Wonders] were placed in the shade, for the Sun himself has never looked upon its equal outside Olympus."

This event took place while Paulus was staying in Ephesus and travelling around locally. The popularity to this new sect of Judaism called Christianity was so great that the silversmiths who made shrines to Artemis felt threatened. Lukas has already established (see ch. 17) that Paulus was indeed telling people that handmade idols and shrines were not gods.

"Now, not only is our craft in danger of getting a bad reputation, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be spoken of as nothing, and its magnificence (which all of Asia and the Empire worships) will be wiped out as well."

As I mentioned, they had quite a number of years before the temple to Artemis would be destroyed, but this appeal to the temple was a rallying cry to the great tradition of the city.

Now when they heard, they also became filled with emotion, and they cried out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" And the city was filled with confusion, and after grabbing on to Gaius and Aristarchos, Makedonians, Paulus' fellowtravellers, they charged into the theatre with one accord. Now Paulus was wanting to enter into the mob; the students did not allow him. Now even some of the rulers of Asia who were his friends sent to him, begging him not to venture into the theatre.

The call of "Great is Artemis" was less a vindication of Artemis than it was an appeal to everything that the city had been built on. The Jews had their own traditions and temple, and so Ephesus was not unlike Jerusalem, whose citizens murdered Jesus for (among other things) predicting he would destroy the temple. [At least that's what they THOUGHT he was going to do.]

Even though Paulus' compatriots were gentiles born nearby, the citizens of Ephesus had no qualms about apprehending them. Paulus tried to speak, knowing that his god-given speaking ability might help smoothe things over, but his fellow Christians feared for his life. Lukas mentions almost nonchalantly that some of his converts were the leading people in the province.

So others indeed called out another thing, for the assembly was confused, and the majority did not know why they had come together. Now they pushed Alexandros together out of the crowd, with the Jews throwing him forward. Now Alexandros, waving his hand, wanted to make his defense before the mob. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, one voice came down from all for two hours, calling out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Some people in the crowd were chanting something else -- not the Artemis chant, and Lukas points out that the people didn't really know why they were assembled or why everyone was upset. By this time, they were gathering into an unruly mob with no sense of direction. Alexandros, pushed ahead to defend God by some of the other Jews, tried to speak, but the crowd -- led by the silversmiths -- shouted him down. They kept the chant going for two hours!! Perhaps the great tradition of singing the Florida Seminole war chant for three hours at every football game started in Ephesus! And the use of "...of the Ephesians" in the chant is probably indicative of their possession of the temple (and goddess). They saw this Jewish God as an invasion now, whereas Artemis was THEIR goddess.

Now after the scribe calmed the crowd down, he said, "Men, Ephesians: For what person is there who doesn't know that the city of the Ephesians is the keeper of the shrine which belongs to the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be declared against, it is necessary that you shut up and do nothing rashly. For you brought these men, who are neither temple robbers nor those who speak evil of your goddess. Therefore, if indeed Demetrius and those craftsmen with him have a legal matter against any one of them, court proceedings are held, and there are proconsuls. Let them accuse one another."

The scribe, or "town crier," had as one of his functions the organization of the public assembly. It was his job to quiet them, and the people eventually acknowledged him. His public appeal was to matters that he deemed to be unrefutable. "We all know that Zeus gave us this temple of Artemis." And they all knew that Ephesus had been granted the honor of keeping the temple of Artemis. Therefore, he urged the crowd to calm down, because no mere words could contradict what they ALL KNEW to be fact. The scribe framed this as a legal matter between the silversmiths and Paulus and company. Therefore, he reasoned, the crowd should disperse.

"But if you are chasing after further things, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly. For we are also danger of being accused of today's riot, since there is no reason that we can give for this gathering." And after saying these things, he let the assembly go.

Allowing for the fact that some members of the crowd might want to do violence to Paulus and his friends, the town crier reminded the people that they were not lawfully assembled. In the proper assembly of the people, they could bring up such matters if they so desired. At that, he urged the improper assembly to disband, pointing out that they themselves might be violating the law if the people continued to act as they had been. The people listened to reason and went home.

20:1 *Now after the riot was restrained, Paulus called the students to him, and he embraced them, and he went out to go into Makedonia. Now after passing through those parts and after advising them with a great message, he went into Greece. And after staying there for three months, a conspiracy by the Jews happened to him as he was about to sail into Syria. A resolution was done that he return through Makedonia. Now Sopater of Purros, a Beroian, went with him. But the Thessalonikans Aristarchos and Sekundus; and Gaius of Derbe; and Timotheos; and the Asians Tuchikos and Trofimius--these came to us in Troas and awaited us.*

Paulus decided to leave Ephesus, which had been his base of operations for two years. After travelling around Makedonia and giving advice to the Christians, he found his way into Greece. During the time he spent here, Paulus wrote his first letter to Timotheos, advising him about certain matters in Ephesus. While preparing to sail toward home, he met with a conspiracy. Since he was already planning to leave, he followed his plan, taking several people with him and planning to meet others at Troas.

XLIII

6 *Now we sailed out from Filippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and we came to Troas to them in five days, where we remained for seven days. Now during the first day of the week, while we were gathered together to break bread, Paulus held a discussion with them, since he was about to depart on the next day. And he continued the talk until midnight. (Now there was a considerable number of lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.)*

Meeting up with Lukas, Timotheos, and others in Troas must have been quite a reunion. Paulus and/or his compatriots were still celebrating Passover (and the Feast of Unleavened Bread) with his fellow Jews, so he had delayed his arrival in Troas until after the feast. The group arrived in Troas just after the sabbath and remained there a full week. Since some of his fellow-Jews

wished not to sail on the sabbath, they remained until after the sabbath to leave. Therefore, on the Saturday night immediately preceding his departure, he got together with the Christians there and held a discussion with them. Most likely, he detailed his travels and exploits for them. Since the room had light sources, they continued to talk well into the night.

Now a certain young man named Eutuchus was sitting on the windowsill and was carried off into a deep sleep, since Paulus was prolonging the discussion. Overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.

During the discussion, Eutuchus fell out of the window asleep. The height was a great one, and he hit the ground and died.

Now Paulus went down, fell on him, threw his arms around him, and said, "Don't be troubled, for his soul is in him." Now after going up and breaking and enjoying bread, and after conversing for a considerable time until dawn, he so departed. Now they brought the boy up alive and were comforted in no small way.

Paulus' admonition to the people was a comfort. Although the author points out that the boy was clinically dead, Paulus comforted the crowd by telling them that he was still alive ("soul" and "life" were the same in traditional Jewish usage, such as in the LXX). Of course, Paulus knew what God was doing. The boy was now merely asleep in the conventional sense, and the passage appears to indicate that they left him in the street until dawn. More likely, though, he was taken to a room in one of the lower floors of the home. They "brought him up alive" after the discussion was finished, as the boy awoke, around dawn. It is quite possible that the name, Eutuchus, was given to the boy afterward, for it signifies good fortune.

XLIV

13 *But we had gone ahead to the ship, and we sailed to Assos, intending to take Paulus on board again. For it had been arranged this way, since he was intending to go on foot. Now when he threw together with us at Assos, after we received him again we came into Mitylene. And after sailing from there on the following day, we went across from Chios. Now on another day, we crossed over to Samos.*

Lukas and the others mentioned earlier had decided to sail on to Assos -- probably during the week -- as Paulus wanted to walk. He joined up with them again, and they hopped around from place to place along the coast (in the Ionian region).

15 *Now on the following day, we came into Miletos. For Paulus had judged it good to sail by Ephesus, so that it would not happen that he would spend time in Asia. For he was hurrying, in case it was possible for him to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.*

Miletos was still an important port city at the time of Paulus, filled with statues. It had been the home of several philosophers and historians. Miletos was also one of the first cities in the world to begin minting coins. In fact, Arktinos of Miletos wrote five books that comprise part of the Epic Cycle -- the classic stories that defined the Greco-Roman myth. Arktinos focused on

Achilles, who first killed the daughter of Ares, then slays Memnon, and finally is shot by Paris in the heel -- his only weak point.

The Feast of Weeks and Pentecost follow Passover by seven weeks. Allowing himself time to sail and time to make stops along the way, Paulus was somewhat in a hurry if he wanted to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost. Therefore his stop in Miletos was brief, giving his party more time to stock up on supplies in Ephesus.

Now he sent into Ephesus from Miletos, calling for the older people of the assembly. Now when they happened by him, he said to them,

Paulus had words of advice for the people of Miletos. This advice was probably similar to what he gave others, but the author includes this particular (last) discussion as a means of concluding Paulus' journey. He called the respected older people of Miletos to him in Ephesus to speak with them.

"You realize how I happened to be with you for the whole time, since the first day when I came into Asia, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and tears, and those trials that were done to me as part of the Jews' conspiracies. And you realize how I kept back nothing that was profitable, not failing to declare to you and to instruct you publicly and in homes, as I earnestly testified both to Jews and to Greeks of a mental change in God and that trust in our Lord, Anointed Jesus."

Paulus reminds them of his history with them, having several things in mind:

1. He genuinely cared about them.
2. His troubles had been due to his own countrymen -- not as a result of his own actions.
3. He told them the truth, holding back nothing, speaking the message equally to Jews and gentiles.

"And now, look! I have been bound spiritually to go into Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will be happening to me there, except that the holy Spirit is solemnly testifying to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me."

Paulus notified this group of people in particular that God wanted him to go to Jerusalem, but that he would be jailed. God was telling him this on a regular basis.

"But I make my life totally valueless to me, so as to finish my race and the service that I received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify the good message of God's generosity."

Paulus expressed that his mission -- which he had been sent by God to accomplish -- was more important than even his life. By comparison, his life was worthless.

"And now, look! I know that you all (among whom I have gone around heralding the kingdom) will no longer observe my face. Therefore, I am testifying to you on this day, that I am clean from the blood of all people, for I did not restrain from declaring God's entire plan to you."

Having reminded them of his own history and integrity, Paulus focuses on two things in particular -- since if he will ever see them again, it will not be soon. First -- Paulus' conscience is clear because he has done nothing wrong. Second -- This is because he was fully truthful to them in all things. The people he told this to already knew him well enough that they were certain of this anyway, but he was preparing to give them warnings for the future.

"Pay attention to yourselves and to the flock in which the holy Spirit placed you, as overseers to feed God's assembly, which he bought with the blood of his own."

His admonition -- his imperative -- to them is to watch out. Watch out not only for yourselves but for everyone there. As the older, more respected, more spiritually advanced, people, Paulus charged them to watch over the new converts because something bad was about to happen.

"I know that ravenous wolves will enter among you after my departure, who will not spare the flock. And from among you men will arise speaking distortions, to draw away students after them. Therefore, watch out, remembering that for three years (night and day) I didn't stop admonishing every one with tears."

This was not a prophecy, but an observation based on Paulus' previous experience. Everywhere he had gone, Jewish opposition had risen up -- sometimes including members of the Christian group. (Paulus has already mentioned his Jewish opponents.) They would "speak distortions" -- teaching things out of the Torah that were false applications of it. His use of the words "distortions" and "draw away" indicates that these were people whose purpose was not an honest discussion of the teachings of the Bible. On the contrary, their purpose was to gain followers. Over and over again, he had seen people (Jew and gentile) become jealous that people were turning to God and Jesus. They had been driven each time by their jealousy and not by any genuine search for truth. Paulus said, "Look out for these kinds of people." He also reminded them again of his own sincerity -- how much genuine emotion and concern he showed them during his time in the area. He was no faker!

"And now I commit you all to God and to the message of his generosity, to what is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all those who have been made holy."

He reminded his friends that God's message -- the message that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus and had internalized the Torah -- that message is what would ultimately build them up. The implication is that rejecting Jesus now would lead to their destruction.

"I have strongly desired no one's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands supplied my needs and the needs of those who were with me. All these things I have pointed out to you because it is necessary to work like this to grant to those who are weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Had Paulus been greedy while among them? No, and he could prove it. How? By the very example that he had given them. He worked hard to support his own needs. He did not seek to burden the people by mooching off of them. Paulus reminded them that "it is necessary" that everyone follow this example of hard work and help those who cannot work. In saying so, he

mentioned a saying of Jesus which is not recorded anywhere else: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

And after saying these things, he put down his knees, and he prayed with them all. Now there was a considerable amount of crying among them all, and they fell on Paulus' neck and strongly kissed him. They were sorrowful most of all over the saying that he said, that they were about to observe his face no longer. Now they accompanied him to the ship.

After praying with them, seeking God's approval, Paulus began to cry, and so did his trusted friends. They held and kissed one another with great affection, and his friends were most upset at the fact that he would never see them again. As friends do, they walked him to his ship and saw him off.

At around this time (early ch. 21), Paulus wrote his letter to the Romans and his second letter to the Corinthians. He would soon write most of his other letters as well.

PART FOUR

21:1 *Now it happened that when we separated from them and sailed, that we travelled directly and came to Kos, and next to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And after finding a ship which was going over to Foinike, we boarded it and set sail.*

Lukas and his compatriots, travelling together, headed in the general direction of home. Paulus had not seen Jerusalem in approximately three years.

Now when Kupros came into view, we passed it by on the left, sailed into Syria, and we were brought to Ture, for the ship was unloading its cargo there. And after finding the students, we remained there for seven days. These ones told Paulus through the breath not to go up into Jerusalem.

Lukas continued to document their journey: passing the island of Kupros, they arrived at Ture, where the ship on which they were passengers was to unload its cargo. They found the group of Christians who met in Ture and stayed with them, but at this time they urged him -- by inspiration -- not to finish the trip to Jerusalem. However, as the author has already recorded, Paulus had been told to go there. This event was a warning to Paulus of what lay ahead.

XLVII

5 *Now when it happened that we concluded the days there, we left and went on our way. All of them were accompanying us, with women and children, until we were outside of the city. And we put our knees on the beach and prayed. And after embracing one another, we entered into the ship, and they returned to their own homes.*

After the ship was done unloading and loading, the travelers returned to it, preparing to head down the coast toward Jerusalem. Paulus' experienced great affection from the Christians, here as everywhere.

Now when we had gone through the trip, we went down from Ture into Ptolemais, and we embraced the brothers and remained with them for one day.

Ptolemais was just west of the Sea of Galilaiah; Paulus was nearly home. They stayed the night here before continuing. Time was passing, though, and Paulus still wanted to be in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks.

8 *After going out the following day, we came into Caesarea, and we entered the house of Filippus the good messenger, who was one of the seven, and we stayed with him. Now this one had four virgin daughters who could prophesy.*

The approval for Paulus came not only from the Twelve, but also from Filippus, who had taken the message about the Messiah to the Ethiopian treasurer, who was a eunuch. This approval was evidenced by Paulus being invited to stay at his house.

By this time Filippus had four daughters, all of whom were gifted to prophesy, and none of whom were married. Just as Joel had predicted, both men and women were being gifted with holy breath from God.

Now as we stayed on for many days, a certain prophet named Agabos came down, and when he came to us, he also grabbed Paulus' belt, and after binding his feet and hands, he said, "The holy Spirit says this, 'The Jews in Jerusalem will bind this way the man who owns this belt, and they will deliver him into the hands of gentiles.'"

We still know little about Agabos other than the fact that he was a prophet (see also 11:27f.), although tradition indicates that he was one of the 70. Tradition also says that this was the same Agabos who had forecast the famine. Like the OT prophets, he performed an act symbolic of the prophecy. He bound Paulus, just as the Jews in Jerusalem would bind him. Agabos also spoke in the form of a traditional prophet: "God says this."

Now when we heard these things, both we and those in the place begged him not to go up into Jerusalem. Then Paulus answered, "What are you doing, crying and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem on behalf of the name of the Lord Jesus." Now when he was not persuaded, we were quiet, saying, "Let the Lord's wishes occur."

Filippus, Lukas, and the others were distressed by this prophecy, but now the earlier prophecies to Paulus and the others made sense. It was Paulus' decision what to do, but God wanted him to go to Jerusalem -- even though he would be captured and imprisoned. Paulus' belief in the message was so strong that by this time he was ready to die on its behalf, and on behalf of his Messiah. His friends realized that what God wanted needed to be done. They would leave for Jerusalem.

15 *Now after these days, we packed our bags and went up into Jerusalem. Now some of the students from Caesarea went with us also, leading us to someone with whom we might stay, a certain Mnason, a Kuprian, an early student. Now when we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers gladly received us.*

Finally, Paulus, Lukas, and the rest of the entourage arrived back at Jerusalem. Since none of them were residents of the city, another student housed them. The author subtly points out that Mnason was an "early" student, because the early converts were Palestinian Jews who had not anticipated Paulus or his mission. Thus, the author points out the acceptance that Paulus received from early Christians other than the envoys.

Now on the next day, Paulus went in with us to Jacob, and all of the elderly happened to be around. And after greeting them, he laid out for them one by one the things that God had done among the gentiles through his service. Now when they heard, they glorified God and said to him, "Brother, you observe how many tens of thousands among the Jews there are who trust and who are all Zealots of the Torah. Now they have been notified about you, that you are teaching all of the Jews among the gentiles to depart from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to follow the customs."

Since the author, writing later, is aware of what was about to happen, he now not-so-subtly points out the acceptance Paulus was enjoying among his fellow Jewish Christians -- even those in Jerusalem itself! They heard the things that Paulus was doing and were pleased with him. But they warned him of MANY non-Christian Jews who were displeased. These "tens of thousands" of "zealots of the Torah" were aware of the things that Paulus was teaching, but they understood those teachings in a distorted way. Paulus was INDEED teaching that circumcision was not NECESSARY, nor were the customs and rituals created by the Jewish leaders over the years. But (as the author has already laid out for his reader) he was NOT teaching them that this constituted "departure from Moses." In this matter, they either misunderstood or deliberately did not want to understand.

"What is it then? They will surely hear that you have come! Therefore, do as we say."

Knowing that this large group of Jerusalemites would soon be after Paulus, they had a point of advice for him which would allow him to "make amends" or "save face" somewhat with his angry countrymen.

"There are four of our men who hold themselves to a vow. Take these ones and be purified with them, and pay their expenses, so that they can shave their heads. And all will know that the things that they have been notified about concerning you are nothing. On the contrary, you are walking in an orderly way and are keeping the Torah."

Paulus himself had taken a vow earlier. Thus, his travelling with the four men who were still under a nazirite vow (Num 6:1-21) and his making their burnt offering for them (Num 6:13f.) was an illustration that Paulus was still keeping the customs handed down by Moses. [Here, I am assuming that the vow taken by Paulus earlier in Acts was a similar one.]

"Now we have sent word about the gentiles who trust, judging that they are keeping themselves away from the idol sacrifices, and from the blood, and from strangled animals and prostitution."

These are the precise stipulations mentioned by the Jerusalemite Christians in Acts 15. According to those who knew of his exploits, Paulus had been doing exactly what he had agreed to do -- which was exactly as he was supposed to do.

26 Then Paulus took away the men. On the following day, he was purified with them and entered into the temple courts, announcing when the conclusion of the days of purification would be, when they would offer the offering on behalf of each of them . But when the seven days were about to be finished, the Jews from Asia observed him in the temple. They stirred up all the crowd and took hold of him with their hands, calling out, "Men, Israelites: help! This is the person who is teaching all people everywhere against the people and the Torah and this place. And furthermore, he also led Greeks into the temple and has made this holy place common." (For they had seen Trofimius the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they assumed that Paulus had led into the temple.)

Paulus was doing precisely what the Torah prescribed for him to do. However, his time of purification was interrupted by certain angry Jews from Asia. Rather than make a up a story about what they might have seen going on in Asia, these Jews spoke only about the situation in JERUSALEM. In this case, the author leads us to believe that this was a misunderstanding on the part of these Jews, who had seen him travelling around with a gentile from Ephesus and believed he had taken the gentile into the inner temple courts with him.

And the whole city was agitated, and a stampede of the people occurred, and they laid hold of Paulus, and they dragged him out of the temple court, and the gates were closed immediately. Now when they were seeking to kill him, a report went up to the commander of the manipule that the whole of Jerusalem was in confusion. He immediately took soldiers and centurions and charged down at them.

Paulus was literally thrown out of the city, and the gates were closed behind him. At the same time, the military heard of this riot and called out the guard.

Now when they noticed the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paulus. Then the commander came near, laid hold of him, and gave word for him to be bound with two chains, and he asked who indeed this was and what it is that he had done.

The guard observed these Jews beating Paulus to death just outside the city. The beating stopped, and Paulus was held for questioning. After all, he had not been legally convicted or even tried for any crime.

Now others were shouting another thing in the crowd. Now since he was unable to know the facts because of the riot, he gave word for him to be brought into the fortress. But when it happened that he was on the steps, he had to be carried by the soldiers on account of the crowd's violence. For the multitude of the people were following, calling out, "Take him away!"

Due to the uproar caused by the crowd, it was impossible to properly question anyone. Paulus was led through the riotous mob to the fortress (a defended home) of the commander of the

manipule. At one point, they even had to boost Paulus up on their shoulders in order to prevent the crowd from mauling him.

21:37 *And when Paulus was about to be led into the fortress, he said to the commander, "Is it permitted for me to say something to you?"*

Knowing that he was speaking to a gentile official, Paulus addressed the commander in Greek, humbly asking permission to speak.

Now he said, "You know Greek? Aren't you that Egyptian who before these days created rebellion and led four thousand men of rebels out into the desert?"

The commander was surprised to hear Paulus speaking in Greek. He had heard a rumor that Paulus was a certain rebellious Egyptian. Apparently that Egyptian was known to Josephus, who wrote:

"But there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; these he led round about from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place; and if he could but once conquer the Roman garrison and the people, he intended to domineer over them by the assistance of those guards of his that were to break into the city with him. But Felix prevented his attempt, and met him with his Roman soldiers, while all the people assisted him in his attack upon them, insomuch that when it came to a battle, the Egyptian ran away, with a few others, while the greatest part of those that were with him were either destroyed or taken alive; but the rest of the multitude were dispersed every one to their own homes, and there concealed themselves."

(Wars of the Jews, Book II, Chapter xiii, section 5)

Notice that Josephus assigns the Egyptian a larger army (30,000 men), but the accounts are similar enough that they probably refer to the same man. Paulus had been accused of being a known rebel.

Now Paulus said, "Indeed, I am a Jewish person of Tarsus of Kilikia, a citizen of no inconsiderable city. Now I beg you: allow me to to speak to the people."

Still speaking in Greek, Paulus told the commander the truth about him -- that he was a Jew, just like those who wanted to kill him. Again recognizing the commander's authority, he asked permission to address the Jerusalemites.

Now when he permitted him, Paulus sat down on the steps and waved his hand to the people. Now a great silence occurred, and he addressed them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,

22:1 *"Men, brothers and fathers, hear now my defense before you."*

(Now when they heard that he was speaking to them in the Hebrew dialect, they kept quiet some more.)

This is the first of two of Paulus' defenses. On the face of it, he appears to be defending himself. However, the details show that his true defense is of the message itself. His own fate is not so important to him, but he wants the people present to know exactly what he has been teaching -- rather than relying upon rumors. Paul addressed the crowd in Aramaic (the "Hebrew dialect"), just as he had spoken to the commander in Greek. His use of Aramaic bought him enough time to begin his defense. It would not be the only way that Paulus would connect himself to the Jewish people.

And he spoke this, "I am indeed a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Kilikia. Now, I was brought up in this city, being accurately schooled in the ancestral Torah at the feet of Gamaliel, being a person possessing jealousy for God--just as all of you do today . So I persecuted this Way to the point of death, binding both men and women and delivering them into jails, just as also the High Priest testifies to me; all of the group of older people does also. Also, I received from them letters to the brothers and went to Damaskus to lead those who had been bound there into Jerusalem, so that they might be punished."

First, Paulus mentioned his birthplace and the fact that he was a fellow Jew.

Second, he pointed out that he was raised and schooled in Jerusalem (which was, of course, the very center of Judaism).

Third, he invoked the name of his teacher, Gamaliel 1, who was well-known to all Palestinian Jews. Clearly then, Paulus had received accurate knowledge of the Torah.

Fourth, he allied himself with the crowd's jealousy to see God honored, indicating that at one time he had been a persecutor of Christians. The mention of his earlier reputation would no doubt have sparked the memories of some people in the crowd.

Fifth, he pointed out that he was acting under the direction of the High Priest when he travelled around imprisoning Christians. This shows his obedience to JEWISH authorities. He has mentioned a great Rabbi (Gamaliel) and now he makes reference to the greatest PRIESTLY authority in Judaism. Finally, he mentions deliberately the assent of the respected older people of Jerusalem in his persecutions.

Paul has established a case that he was the perfect obedient Jew -- even more so than the people who were angry enough to kill him. Now he would go on to relate the conversion that changed him from a persecutor into a prophet.

"Now it happened as I was travelling and nearing Damaskus at about midday that a great light out of heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell onto the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' Now I answered, 'Who are you, sir?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.'"

In beginning the story, he mentions the time -- midday. There could be no doubt, then, that he mistook the person who appeared to him. It was not twilight or dark, nor was it early enough for Paulus to have been sleepy. Paulus' reaction to the voice was understandable (from a Jewish standpoint), for this could have been the very voice of God in theophany, or one of his messengers. Paulus discovered, though, that the voice was that of Jesus, the Jew from Nazareth who had been put to death.

"Now those who were with me observed indeed the light, but they did not hear the voice that was speaking to me. Now I said, 'What should I do, sir?' Now the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go into Damascus. It will be told to you there about everything that it has been arranged for you to do.'"

Seventh, in this account, Paulus made mention of the witnesses who saw the same light that Paulus saw -- even if they could not hear the voice. Paulus demystified the account, placing more emphasis on what was said and what he did than on the miraculous appearance: he asked what to do and was told to go into Damascus. Actually, Lukas pointed out earlier (ch. 9) that the men could actually hear SOMETHING -- but apparently they did not fully understand it.

Now since I could not see, due to the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and I came into Damascus. Now a certain Hananiah, a pious man according to the Torah who was testified to by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and stood nearby, and said to me, 'Brother Saul: see.' And in that hour I saw him."

Paulus had been blinded. Consequently, as he related it, he had to be led (again by pious Jews) to the house of a certain other pious Jew named Hananiah. As an eighth point of contact between Paulus and his fellow Jews, Emphasis is placed in this account on the role of Hananiah, who (Lukas records) followed the Torah and had the testimony of ALL the Jews in Damascus! Even the miraculous recovery of his sight is attributed to Hananiah.

Ninth, in this account, Paulus is greeted as 'brother'. Clearly, then, this godly Jew recognized Saul as a countryman.

Tenth, Paulus refers to himself (correctly, historically) by his Jewish name.

"Now he said, 'The God of our ancestors destined for you to know what he wants and to notice the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth. Because you will be his witness for all people of what you have seen and heard. And now, why are you delaying? Get up, be baptized, and wash yourself from your sins, calling on his name.'"

Eleventh: Hananiah refers to Yahweh as "the God of our ancestors." This is traditional Jewish form, but of course, Paulus mentioned this because Hananiah had used "our" -- inclusive of Paulus.

Twelfth: Jesus was referred to as "the Just One." Not only was this a euphemism for "Messiah" but also it points out Jesus' blamelessness before the Torah.

Thirteenth: Hananiah had told Paulus that he would testify to "all people" about Jesus. At this point in the conversation, Paulus does not mention "gentiles" expressly.

Fourteenth: As an atonement for having rejected his Messiah, Paulus was directed by the pious Jew to perform a ritual cleansing. This is something that the Jews would have understood as natural.

"Now it happened after I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple court, that I went into a prophetic trance. And I noticed him saying to me, 'Hurry, and go out quickly from Jerusalem, because they will not receive your testimony about me.'"

Fifteenth: after atoning for what he had done, Paulus "went into a prophetic trance." This was the usual description (see also Philo) during the first century for saying that God revealed something. It was Jesus, "him", who appeared to Paulus in the vision, and Paulus mentions it now because indeed people did NOT "receive his testimony." His implication now is that this is just as the Messiah had predicted.

"And I said, 'O Lord, they are familiar with the fact that I was jailing those who trusted in you and was beating them in the synagogues. And when the blood of Stefanos your witness was poured out, I was also standing there and consenting, and I was keeping the cloaks of those who were killing him.'"

Sixteenth: Paulus mentions almost off-handedly that he had even participated in a murder, thinking that he had been doing God's will. Now, however, Paulus realized that he had been guilty of an innocent man's blood -- a serious matter under the Torah, and the same thing that Paulus' CURRENT persecutors would be guilty of if they killed him!

"And he said to me, 'You go, because I will send you to far away nations.'"

This is the important point. Paulus' defense has been tailored to his fellow Jews in the express hope that they would hear this point -- that the message that was spoken by those Christians whom he had persecuted was now a message that he himself was speaking -- and God had extended that message to include gentiles -- mentioned again euphemistically, this time as "far away nations."

Now they listened to him until this statement, and they raised their voices, saying, "Take such a person from the land, for it is not fit for him to live!" Now as they were calling out, and throwing off their cloaks, and throwing dust into the air, the commander gave the word to lead him into the fortress, telling them to examine him by torture, so that he might recognize the reason why they were shouting about Paulus.

But it was that very point that they refused to hear. The crowd did not object to Paulus' defense of himself, but they were outraged at the opening of a covenant to gentiles. Although they had been listening quietly, at this point they flew into a rage and condemned Paulus, even preparing to take hold of him and murder him -- as "throwing off their cloaks" illustrates. At this time, though, the commander to whom he had been so polite ordered him to be held for questioning (by torture) to see if he was telling the truth. The Roman commander would get to the bottom of the matter of the crowd's rage.

Now as they stretched him out for the leather whip, Paulus said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to whip someone who is an uncondemned Roman?" Now when the centurion heard, he went to the commander and reported, saying, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman." Now the commander went to him and said, "Tell me: are you a Roman?"

As the Romans were preparing to whip him, though, Paulus abruptly changed his line of argument. Now speaking to a different group of people, he made an appeal to his Roman

citizenship. He hadn't been tried lawfully, and yet he had been sentenced to be tortured. Such treatment violated the rights of a Roman citizen. The torture stopped, and the commander came to Paulus questioning him about this.

Now he said, "Yes." And the commander answered, "I bought this citizenship with a great sum of money." Now Paulus said, "But I was born this way." Then those who were about to examine him went away from him immediately. And the commander was also afraid, recognizing that he was a Roman, and that he was having him bound.

The commander himself had bought his citizenship, but Paulus explained that he was legally a Roman by birth. Apparently Paulus provided further proof, for the commander realized that his statement had been true. Paulus was immediately released, for there might have been serious repercussions against the commander who had ordered a Roman citizen to be tortured for questioning without any legal trial.

30 *Now on the next day, and since he wanted to know for certain what he was being accused of by the Jews, he freed him and gave word for the high priests and all the Sanhedrin to come together, and he led Paulus down and stood him among them.*

Paulus had the legal right to be told of the charges against him. His captor agreed that the matter seemed "fishy." Why were the Jewish leaders so intent on killing this man? At the commander's orders, the priests and ruling council were sent for, and they agreed to confront Paulus face to face.

23:1 *Now Paulus looked attentively at the Sanhedrin and said, "Men, brothers: I have been a citizen for God in all good conscience until this day." Now Hananiah the High Priest arranged for those who were standing by him to strike him on the mouth.*

In the gathering of his accusers, Paulus began to defend his behavior as a Jew, but the High Priest himself had arranged for someone to interrupt his discourse by striking him. The man who was High Priest was Hananiah ben Nedebaeus, who took over from his predecessor Yosef in 47 and (if this is indeed 58 CE) who was about to be replaced by Ishmael ben Fiabi 2, who starved and robbed the priests -- according to Josephus.

Then Paulus said to him, "God is about to strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there judging me according to the Torah, and you are violating the Torah by giving word for me to be struck!"

Paulus, seeing the man who gave the order to strike him, lashed back at that man verbally, promising that God would be the one to repay him for what he had done.

*Now the ones who were standing by said, "Are you verbally abusing God's High Priest?" And Paulus said, "Brothers: I didn't know that he was the High Priest. For it was written, "**You will not say bad things about a ruler of your people.**"*

Paulus had been away for most of Hananiah's term as High Priest and apparently had never met him. When confronted with the man's identity, Paulus apologized, recognizing that the Torah expressly forbade him from speaking bad against a High Priest (Ex 22:28).

Now Paulus knew that one part of them were Zadokites and the other were Perushim. He called out in the Sanhedrin, "Men, brothers: I am a Perush, a son of Perushim. I am being judged about hope and the resurrection of the dead."

Paulus' defense began by allying himself with the Perushim, hoping that this would split his accusers into two groups. Being a "Perush, of Perushim" (literally) may mean "son of Perushim" -- the traditional translation, which the NET follows -- or it may signify that he regarded himself as the greatest stickler for details -- which is what the term signifies. Either way, Paulus further allied himself with the Perushim by mentioning support for the afterlife, in which the Zadokites did not believe.

Now when he said this, a dispute between the Perushim and the Zadokites occurred, and the multitude was divided. For indeed Zadokites say there is no resurrection, nor a messenger, nor a spirit. But Perushim acknowledge both.

In case the reader missed this point, Lukas mentioned it explicitly.

Now a great outcry occurred, and certain of those from the group of scribes who were Perushim contended, saying, "We find nothing bad in this person. Now what if a spirit or a messenger spoke to him?"

The Perushim acknowledged that Paulus COULD have been spoken to by a heavenly being, and therefore some of them did ally with him. Perhaps he was innocent after all.

Now when the dispute became a great one, the commander, fearing that Paulus would be rended by them, gave word that the troops should go down and snatch him out of their midst and lead him into the fortress.

The dispute between the two factions became so great that the Roman commander intervened, took Paulus, and led him away from their reach.

11 *Now on the next night, the Lord stood by Paulus and said, "Be courageous, for as you testified the things about me in Jerusalem, so it is necessary also for you to testify in Rome."*

At this time, c. 58 CE, Paulus has written nearly all of his letters. He received direct revelation that he was about to be sent to Rome on account of the Jewish leadership's hatred for him. But God was about to use what was going to happen to bring news of the Messiah to Rome.

Now as day happened, the Jews, making a conspiracy, bound themselves with a curse--saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they killed Paulus. Now there were more than forty of them who were making this conspiracy. When they came to the high priests and older ones, they said, "We have cursed ourselves, with a curse to taste nothing until we have killed Paulus."

Therefore now, you make the commander aware of this, along with the Sanhedrin, in order that he might lead him down to you, as if you were about to examine his matters more accurately. And before he nears you, we will have killed him."

The Jewish men of repute who hated Paulus took an oath against Paulus' life. Lukas reports that at least 40 people were involved in this conspiracy. Taking a vow of fasting, they reported to the high priests, putting pressure on them to strongarm the Roman commander into allowing them to murder Paulus.

But when the son of Paulus' sister (who was hiding), he went up to and entered the fortress, he related it to Paulus. Now Paulus called one of the centurions to him and said, "Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to relate to him ." Then indeed he took him around and led him to the commander, and he said, "The prisoner Paulus called me to him and asked that I lead to you this young man, who has something to say to you."

Paulus' nephew got wind of the conspiracy and told his uncle about it. Since Paulus was not on bad terms with his Roman captors, he asked one of the centurions to take the nephew to the Roman commander. The centurion agreed to the request.

Now when the commander took him by the hand and retired privately, he inquired, "What is it that you have to relate to me?" Now he said, "That the Jews have agreed together to ask you to lead Paulus down tomorrow into the Sanhedrin, as though you were about to investigate about him more accurately."

Paulus' nephew related exactly what he had heard, not embellishing the story. Therefore, the Roman commander heard about the conspiracy accurately.

"Therefore, you shouldn't be persuaded by them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him. They have bound themselves with a curse to neither eat nor drink until they have killed him, and now they are ready, expecting the promise from you."

Paulus' nephew also explained the purpose of the conspiracy accurately, asking the commander not to listen to these Jewish men. It is possible that these conspirators were wealthy, for they appear to have had quite a bit of influence on the priests and Sanhedrin.

Then indeed the commander released the young man, after charging him to "tell no one that you have reported these things to me." And he called a certain two of the centurions to him, and he said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready, and seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, to go as far as Caesarea after the third hour of the night. And have animals standing around, so that Paulus can mount them, that they might carry him safely to Felix the Governor."

Knowing that Paulus was the victim of a conspiracy, the commander concocted a plan to allow Paulus to escape being murdered. It would still be necessary for him to be questioned lawfully, though, and so he would be sent to Governor Felix, where he would remain for two years (24:27) and write the remainder of his letters.

Antoninus Felix was the brother of one of Claudius' favorite freedmen and had been appointed to govern Judea by Claudius in 53 CE. Nero did not disturb his procuratorship, and so Felix remained until c. 60, when he died. Josephus records that at one time he hired magicians to figure out how to enable him to seduce another man's wife. This he did, and she divorced her husband and married Felix. This was a violation of the Torah and may account for Felix's preoccupation with Paulus. (Note: she is mentioned in Acts at 24:24.)

25 *He wrote a letter which had about it this style:
"Claudius Ludias to the excellent Governor Felix:"*

This is a traditional greeting to someone regarded as at least an equal. The use of "excellent" is also a term of great respect. Lukas addressed the Actions to a man he described as such.

"Hello. After learning that he is a Roman, I rescued this man, who had been apprehended by the Jews and who was about to be killed by them. Now since I wanted to know the reason for which they were accusing him, I led him down into their 'Sanhedrin'. I found him being accused regarding questions of their 'Torah', but he had no accusations worthy of death or bondage."

Using the terms that the Jews themselves used for their council and their religious writings, the commander (now named) sketched out the history of himself and Paulus for Felix. He also stated his opinion that Paulus had done nothing wrong.

"But when it was disclosed to me that there was a conspiracy by the Jews against the man, I sent to you immediately and charged his accusers to say before you the things directed at him."

The conspiracy had prompted the Roman commander to pass Paulus and his accusers on to the higher authority for processing and judgment. The commander's opinion that Paulus was blameless was expected to carry some weight as a recommendation.

31 *So indeed, the soldiers took Paulus according to their direction and led him by night to Antipatris. Now on the next day, they returned to the fortress, leaving the horsemen to go with him. These ones went into Caesarea, and after delivering the letter to the Governor, they also presented Paulus to him.*

Paulus was led out, eventually being presented to Felix along with the letter.

Now after reading, and after asking him what province he was from, and after understanding that he was from Kilikia, he said, "I will hear you out when your accusers also arrive." And he gave word for him to be jailed in Herod's Praetorium.

The Praetorium was now being used as a headquarters for the procurators, although it was once Herod's palace. Paulus would be kept here until his accusers arrived. This gave the Jewish leaders time to prepare a case and hire a spokesman. Unbeknownst to either the leaders or Paulus, Felix actually had some preknowledge of Christians and their way (24:22), which probably favored Paulus in the case.

24:1 *Now after five days, the High Priest Hananiah went down with the older ones and a certain orator, Tertullus. These appeared before the Governor against Paulus.*

After taking time to prepare their case against Paulus, Hananiah and the older people appeared before the Governor. They had brought along with them an orator -- a person who was paid for public lecture. This is the only place that the word group for "lecture" occurs in the NT. It is interesting that when Christians, discussion and not lecture always took place. But this was a trial and not an assembly.

Now when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse, saying, "We were enjoying great peace on your account and right things were happening to this nation on account of your forethought, and we also accept everything everywhere with all thankfulness, O Excellent Felix. Now so that I should not detain you any longer, I beg you to hear us briefly, with your kindness."

It is proper to praise the civil authorities for the generosity of their rule, and this is how Tertullus began -- by praising Felix.

"For we have found this man to be a plague, and he is inciting revolutions among all those Jews in the Empire. And he is a chief person of the school of thought of the Nazarenes, who also attempted to defile the Temple. We also apprehended him. From him you will be able to recognize for yourself what we are accusing him of, after you have examined him." Now also the Jews jointly accused him, asserting that the things were so.

The speaker's charges against Paulus were three: First, Tertullus claimed that he was promoting violence. This charge was untrue, although unrest did accompany the areas where Paulus had gone. Tertullus cleverly expands this to "the Empire." This is the very same charge made earlier against both Paulus and Silas (17:6). The reader can see the pattern -- that the same treachery used to get Jesus crucified was being used against Paulus. The Jews would continue to claim that Paulus was a threat to the Empire, so that the Romans would take care of their business for them. Second, Tertullus associated Paulus with the Nazarenes -- the Christians. This charge was true, but the implication that the orator was making was that the rumors (spread by the Jewish leaders themselves) about how terrible was the "school of thought of the Nazarenes" were true. The use of the expression "school of thought" (which some translations render as "sect") indicates that the Jewish leaders still regarded Paulus and the other Christians as Jews. Third, Paulus was alleged to have attempted to defile the temple. We know the source of this charge (21:27f.). These very people had wrongly accused him of trying to take a gentile into the inner courts of the temple. This charge was mentioned third before Felix because it was a religious matter; Felix would be most interested in the charge of disrupting the Roman Empire. The testimony of Tertullus was backed up by his formal accusers.

LVII

10 *Now after the Governor nodded to him to speak, Paulus replied, "Recognizing that you have been a judge to this nation for many years, I am cheerfully defending the matters about me."*

Unlike in America, those accused of crimes in first century Judea made their own defense. It was the function of a legal advisor (Gk. *paraklHtos*) not to plead someone's case for them but to indicate to the party how best to plead their own case. Paulus appears to have had no advisor, or at least none is mentioned. Like the orator, Paulus politely addressed the Governor and acknowledged his position of superiority.

"You are also able to know that it has not been more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. And they neither found me discussing with someone in the temple court, nor making the crowd riot (neither in the synagogues nor in the city). Nor are they able to prove what they are now accusing me of."

Paulus' defense (this time of himself and not the message) indicated the facts. These facts were readily discoverable by Felix, for the matter of Paulus' arrest had been documented by the Roman commander, who had already testified to Paulus' innocence. There was simply no evidence that Paulus was "causing a riot". In fact, he wasn't even discussing the message when he was detained. (As Lukas indicated already at 21:27, Paulus was in the temple court, presumably praying.) Paulus is about to agree to the second point -- that he was a Christian -- but the other two points he flatly denied. He was praying in the temple, not defiling it, and of course he was causing no public disruption of any kind in Jerusalem.

"But I acknowledge this to you: that according to the Way, which they call a school of thought, so I serve the God of the ancestors, believing all those things according to the Torah and those which have been written by the prophets. I hold a hope in God, which they themselves are also expecting: a future resurrection of the just and also of the unjust."

Paulus converges on Tertullus' second point. The only reason why he was being charged falsely by the High Priest was because of his beliefs. Paulus detailed to a degree that he served the same god as his accusers, following the Torah and the writings of the prophets just as diligently as they did. Just as the prophets looked ahead to an afterlife, Paulus does also, having brought up this point knowing that the priestly school of thought did not believe in an afterlife.

"Now in this I am taking action, to have a clear consciousness always toward God and humans. But through many years I happened by, doing charitable works and giving offerings to my nation. They found me doing this in the Temple after being purified, not with a crowd, nor with a riot."

Rather than being a troublemaker or rabble-rouser, Paulus asserted himself as someone who performed charitable deeds often and who was not conscious of any wrong deed. Then his defense returned to the point that the Romans could verify: that when he was grabbed by the Jewish leaders he had been in the temple court. He had caused no disturbance whatsoever in Jerusalem.

"Now there are certain Jews from Asia who need to be present before you, and to accuse me if they have anything against me. Or let these people speak themselves of what wrong they found in me as I stood before the Sanhedrin. Or maybe it is about this sound that I called out while standing among them: that 'about the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you today.'"

Finally, Paulus summed up his case by mentioning that the Jewish leaders from Asia were the ones who had a grudge against him, and that they had been spreading that grudge to Jerusalem. Repeating his earlier defense, Paulus indicated that the only issue at hand was the afterlife. Through subterfuge, the Asian leaders had persuaded the leaders at Jerusalem to take action against him -- all because of a difference of scholarly opinion. Being a Roman citizen, Paulus was aware that Felix could not take action against him over a matter of religious dispute.

Now Felix cast them aside since he knew more accurately about that Way. He said, "When Lusias the Commander comes down, I will inquire into your matters." And he arranged for the centurion to keep him and to let him have liberty, and to not prohibit any of his own people from helping him.

Felix already knew about the Christians -- enough to know that the Jewish leaders were lying about the danger created by his school of thought. He had Paulus held for further questioning, providing a degree of liberty for him. In fact, Felix would come to enjoy listening to Paulus' teachings.

24 *Now after certain days, Felix happened by with Drusilla (his own wife, who was a Jew). He sent for Paulus and listened to him about the trust in Anointed Jesus. Now as he was discussing about justice, and self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became afraid and answered, "Go for the time being. Now when I find the time, I will call for you." He was also hoping at this time that money would be given to him by Paulus, and so he would send for him more frequently, and he talked with him.*

Being somewhat familiar with Christianity, Felix became intrigued with his captive. Paulus gained the opportunity to discuss Messianic Judaism with the Governor. The two men discussed weighty issues. The mention of "justice" (or "right" or even "justification") refers to salvation issues of right and wrong, as written in the Torah and explained by Jesus. The second issue, self-control, was probably directed at Felix himself. We have already learned the story of how he came to be married to his Jewish wife -- a story reminiscent of that of David and Bathsheba. Paulus' talks about the coming judgment of the Jewish state surely made Felix more understanding about why his own people were out to kill him.

Lukas records that Felix was hoping that Paulus might bribe him, in order to be set free. Instead, Paulus remained in custody, talking with Felix somewhat regularly.

LVIX

27 *But when two years were over, Felix received a successor, Porkius Festus. And since Felix was wishing to store up favors with the Jews, he left Paulus imprisoned. So when Festus entered office, he went up into Jerusalem from Caesarea after three days. Now the high priests and the foremost Jews appeared before him against Paulus, and they begged him--asking a favor against Paulus: that he would send into Jerusalem for him; they were making an ambush to kill him on the way.*

Marcus Antonius Felix had not been liked by his Jewish subjects, and Josephus records that when Felix was removed (to be replaced by Festus), some of the Jewish leaders went up to Rome to accuse him of various misdeeds against them:

"When Porcius Festus was sent by Nero as successor to Felix, the leaders of the Jewish community of Caesarea went up to Rome to accuse Felix."
(Antiquities, XX, 8:9-10)

This explains why Felix wanted to keep Paulus prisoner, although he could have commuted his sentence at this point. He was hoping to point out things that he had done which had helped the Jewish people.

By this time, it is 60 CE.

Under Festus, the area was plagued by bandits, a fact (mentioned in Josephus) which explains why Paulus was now being virtually ignored by the ones who hated him. But still they wanted him out of the way and so planned an ambush to kill him, if they could get Paulus sent to Jerusalem.

Then indeed Festus answered that Paulus should be kept in Caesarea. Now he was about to go out there himself in haste. "Therefore," he said, "let those among you who are able go down with me. If there is anything wrong with the man, let them accuse him."

But Festus denied their request, ruling that he would remain in Caesarea. Still, the Jewish leaders could travel with Festus to see Paulus if they so chose, and of course they would elect to do so.

LX

25:6 *Now after remaining among them for not more than eight or ten days, he went down into Caesarea. On the next day, he sat down on the judgment seat and gave word for Paulus to be led out to him. Now when he happened by, the ones who had come from Jerusalem were standing around, bringing many heavy accusations which they were not capable of showing. Paulus defended himself: "I have not sinned in anything: neither against the Torah of the Jews, nor against the Temple, nor against Caesar."*

After a few days, Festus made his trip to Caesarea from Jerusalem, with various Jewish leaders traveling with him for the purpose of trying to seek Paulus' execution. The author does not mention any of the charges brought against him on this occasion. We are left to assume that they contributed nothing new. Lukas reports only that the charges were groundless and could not be proven. Paulus' defense is summed up this time by one line of his full defense -- a statement that he had done nothing against the Torah, nor the Temple, or Caesar.

Wishing to store up a favor with the Jews, Festus answered Paulus, saying, "Are you willing to go up into Jerusalem, to be judged before me there concerning these things?"

Since Paulus' opponents were asking that he be sent to Jerusalem, and since Porcius Festus was new and had problems to deal with in the area, he chose to ask Paulus -- who was a Roman

citizen -- whether he would elect to be judged in the presence of the leaders. God may have told Paulus that they were planning to ambush him; Lukas does not say.

Now Paulus said, "I am standing at the judgment seat of Caesar, where it is necessary for me to be judged. I have done the Jews nothing unjust, as you also recognize fully. Therefore, if indeed I am in the wrong and if I have done anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die. But if there is nothing to what they are accusing me of, no one is able to give me to them as a favor. I call on Caesar."

As a slap in the face to the Jewish would-be authorities, Paulus appealed to ROMAN authority. As a Roman citizen, it would be necessary to judge him "at the judgment seat of Caesar," where no viable charges had ever been made against him. He was assured by this time that neither the Roman commander, nor Antonius Felix, nor Porkius Festus, had found any charge worth convicting Paulus of. Throwing himself upon the Roman legal system, he exercised his right as a citizen to a full Roman trial. Appealing to Caesar meant just that -- he would be sent to Rome to be tried before Nero.

PART FIVE

13 *Now after some days passed by, Agrippa the King and Bernike came down into Caesarea, paying respect to Festus. Now when they had remained there many days, Festus submitted the things against Paulus to the king, saying, "There is a certain man who was left behind as a prisoner by Felix. Concerning him: when I was in Jerusalem, the high priests and the older ones of the Jews informed me, asking for condemnation against him. To them I replied that it is not a custom for Romans to give any person as a favor before the accused has the accusers face to face and takes the opportunity to make a defense to the charge."*

This "Agrippa" was the second Herod Agrippa, properly Julius Marcus Agrippa but commonly called Agrippa II or "King Agrippa." He ruled over a portion of his father's kingdom, from c. 48 until c. 66 CE (and formally reigned until 100 CE, but with almost no power). Festus' letter to the king indicated truthfully what had happened thusfar -- that although certain Jewish leaders asked for Paulus' death, Festus realized that it was necessary for him to have a fair and legal trial first.

"So when they came here, I made no delay: on the next day I sat down on the judgment seat and gave word for the man to be brought. The accusers stood up; none brought a charge concerning him of such evil things as I assumed. But they held certain questionable matters with him about their own religion, and about a certain Jesus who was dead, whom Paulus insisted was alive."

The two points made by Festus support Paulus' contention:

1. That there were no laws which Paulus had violated; the matter was purely one of doctrinal dispute.
2. That the central issues revolved around whether Jesus had indeed resurrected from the dead.

The second point, if true, would have proven Jesus to be the Messiah and would have proven also that what the priests contended -- that there is no afterlife -- was inaccurate.

"Now since I was in doubt about this question, I asked if he would be willing to go into Jerusalem and to be judged there about these things. But Paulus called for himself to be kept for the decision of the Venerable One, and I gave word for him to be kept until I send him to Caesar."

Festus covered himself by making certain to mention that it was Paulus' desire (and legal right as a citizen) to be judged before Nero Caesar rather than be committed into the hands of the Jewish leaders.

25:22 *Now Agrippa said to Festus, "I too was wishing to hear the person for myself." Now he said, "Tomorrow you will hear him." Therefore when the next day came, Agrippa and Bernike came with a great display, and when they entered into the place of hearing with both the commanders and those leading men of the city, Festus gave word, and Paulus was brought.*

Before sending Paulus to Caesar, Agrippa considered it wise to hear Paulus' defense personally. If Agrippa were questioned about Paulus, he would have the necessary answers. On the following day, Festus, the Roman commanders, and the "leading men of the city" were present as Paulus was brought before Agrippa to state his case for the Christian message.

And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all those men who are present with us: observe this one, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, calling out that it is necessary for him to live no longer."

Festus formally set up the charges against Paulus, publically indicated that the Jewish leaders wanted Paulus to be put to death.

"Now when I detected that he had done nothing worthy of death, and also that this one had called upon the Venerable One, I resolved to send him. I have nothing certain to write to the Lord about him. Therefore, I led him out before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that when the examination has happened, I may have something to write. For it seems ridiculous to me to send a prisoner and to not specify any charges against him."

But Paulus was innocent -- so said Festus, as Felix had said before him. Normally, a prisoner sent to trial before Caesar would be sent with a letter recommending his case. Prudently and politically, both Festus and Agrippa will now have something to say to Nero about Paulus.

26:1 *Now Agrippa said to Paulus, "It is permitted for you to speak on your behalf." Then Paulus raised his hand and defended himself:*

This is Paulus' second defense of the message, containing the third account of his conversion. The first (Acts 9) gave the basic information as Lukas gathered it. The second account, in Paulus' defense before the Jews, was tailored specifically for his Jewish audience. This third account,

before gentiles who have some understanding of Judaism, is tailored expressly for them. Paulus emphasizes and omits points in order to support his case. Fitting Lukas' priority, the book is about to conclude. He has presented evidence that the message did not change when Hellenists and other "fringe" Jews were included, nor has it changed now that gentiles have entered the covenant. He has provided for us a defense of the message before Jews, and now a defense before gentiles.

"Concerning all things of which I am being accused by the Jews, King Agrippa, I regard myself blessed to be about to make a defense before you, especially since you are acquainted with all the customs and religious questions of the Jews. Therefore, I beg you to suffer long in hearing me."

Just as Paulus had addressed the Jewish leaders in an appropriate manner, here he employs language befitting someone who is appearing before a king. Agrippa is well prepared to hear Paulus out; nevertheless, Paulus asks him to "suffer long" in hearing the defense that he is "blessd to be about to make."

"So indeed, my way of life--that one from my youth, which was from the beginning among my nation and in Jerusalem--is known to all Jews. Since they have known me previously from the start, if they would be willing to testify, they would say, that I lived as a Perush according to the strictest school of thought of our religion. And now I have been standing to be judged for the hope of that promise which was made by God to our ancestors. Our twelve tribes hope to attain to this hope, serving intensely night and day. I am being accused by the Jews regarding this hope, O King."

Paulus presents his historical background, which, he claims, is known to his accusers. For he is and was a Jew and a Perush at that. He defines the term (Perush) for the king as a member of "the strictest school of thought of our religion," for all Perushim were sticklers for details. His wording allies himself in every way with the Judaism that had been passed from God to his ancestors.

Certainly the king was aware that one school of thought (the Perushim) believed in the resurrection of the dead and another (the Zadokites, who had brought charges against him) did not. Paulus frames the priests' accusations against him as a mere theological disagreement, because Paulus so fervently argues in favor of an afterlife (in claiming that Jesus still lives).

"What? Do you judge it an untrustworthy thing that God raises the dead? Therefore indeed, I thought to myself about the name of Jesus the Nazarene--that it was necessary to practice many things against it. This also I did in Jerusalem, and I shut up many of the holy ones in jails after receiving authority from the high priests. And when they were killed, I cast my vote against them. And I forced them to say bad things as I punished them often in all the gatherings. And since I was exceptionally furious with them, I pursued them even into foreign cities."

Although Paulus believed that God raised the dead, he had never before seen proof. Like the other non-Christian Jews, he was opposed to the teachings of Jesus and his followers. Paulus was addressing a king, and it was important for him to point out that he was obedient to all

authorities. Therefore, he mentions that the high priests themselves had given him the authority to persecute Christians, whom he tormented and participated in their murder. Paulus' "pursuit" sets him up to introduce the Damaskus incident.

"At this time, while I was going to Damaskus with authority and that commission of the high priests, in the middle of the day I saw in the road, O King, a light from heaven shining around me (and those who were going with me), exceeding the brightness of the sun."

Again, Paulus points out that he was obeying the proper authorities in traveling to Damaskus. He emphasizes the vision, for such omens would be important to someone of Agrippa's background.

"And as we all fell down on the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me in the Hebrew dialect: 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are you, sir?'"

Paulus needs to mention that the voice spoke to him in his native, Jewish, language of Aramaic. Here (but not in chapter 22), Paulus mentions Jesus' statement that although Paulus was obeying the JEWISH authorities, he was "kicking against the goads." He was operating against a HIGHER authority -- God. Thus, Paulus' conversion will be an obedience to a greater authority.

"Now he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet. Because for this reason I have appeared to you: to mold you into an attendant and a witness both of what you noticed and of those things in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and the gentiles, to whom I am sending you out--to open their eyes, to have them turned from darkness to light and from the authority of the Adversary to God, for them to receive forgiveness of sins and a lot among those who have been made holy by trusting in me.'"

In this account, Paulus downplays the role of Hananiah, not even mentioning him. The pious Jew would be of no interest to King Agrippa, but the words of the ominous vision would be important. Therefore, Paulus details what Jesus told him:

1. that God would make Paulus a witness
2. that Jesus would appear to Paulus and show him other things to teach
3. that Jesus was sending Paulus to "the people" and the gentiles (the wording was traditional, but emphasizes the role of the gentiles when said this way).
4. that his opposition (Jew and/or gentile) were in darkness, acting under the authority of the Adversary. Paulus would teach them all about Jesus, enabling them "to receive forgiveness of sins".
5. The holy ones [to God] are those who trust in Jesus.

Thus, the message is from God and contradicts what the Jewish opposition has been saying. Not only is Jesus still alive in the afterlife, proving the resurrection from the dead, but also this message for Jews and gentiles alike was critically important -- and Paulus was sent out as a herald of that message.

"From this, King Agrippa, I did not become unpersuaded by the heavenly vision. On the contrary, I declared for them to change their minds and to turn to God and do deeds worthy of the mental change, first to those in Damaskus, and in Jerusalem, and in all the country of Judea, and to the gentiles."

Again, Paulus points out that he obeyed all proper authorities, allowing the greater authority to persuade him to do what was right. Knowing that his former way had been wrong, he had been telling others to "change their minds" and "turn to God." He did the very same thing, speaking the same message, among both Jews and gentiles.

"On account of these things, the Jews took me in the temple courts and tried to kill me with their hands. Therefore, after obtaining help from God, I have stood until this day, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing beyond what both the prophets and Moses spoke about what was about to happen: that the Anointed One would suffer, that since he would be the first of the resurrected dead, he was about to announce a light to the people and to the gentiles."

Because Paulus spoke of an afterlife (via a resurrected Jesus), there were people trying to murder him. But God -- the higher authority and supernatural force -- assisted Paulus personally, so that he has survived "until this day." The content of his message, that the Anointed One (Jesus) was to suffer and go on to the afterlife, was the same as what Peter and the other Christians had been speaking (as Lukas' readers notice). Paulus indicated to Agrippa that he had said "nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses spoke" -- he had changed nothing. For Agrippa, this is important, for it clearly established the matter as an issue of religious debate; for Lukas, it shows that the messianic message remains strong and clear. And indeed, Jesus was about to admit gentiles (like the King) into the new covenant.

Now while he was defending himself with these things, Festus was saying with a loud voice, "You're insane, Paulus! Your much learning is turning you to insanity!" But he said, "I'm not insane, noble Festus, but am uttering declarations of truth and soundness of mind. For the King is familiar with these things, to whom I speak with freedom. For I am persuaded that none of these things have gone unnoticed by him, for this has not been done in a corner."

Festus did not understand the afterlife issue, or the teachings of the Torah and Prophets. But Paulus realized that Agrippa was familiar with these things to a degree and had personal knowledge of what the Christians in his jurisdiction were doing.

"King Agrippa: do you trust the prophets? I know that you trust." Now Agrippa said to Paulus, "In a short time, you are persuading to make me an 'Anointed'." Now Paulus said, "I pray to God that in a little or much time not only you but also all those who hear me today would become such as I also am--except for these chains."

Paulus' defense of the message was quite persuasive, and Paulus' final statement to the king caps his defense -- that he hopes that all Jews and gentiles who hear his voice would realize that the afterlife he hopes to attain is real, and that the new covenant is through Jesus. His subtle aside at the end is the ONLY appeal that Paulus has made to be released.

And the King and the Governor and Bernike and those who were seated with them got up, and when they retired, they spoke to one another, saying, "This person is doing nothing worthy of death or bondage." Now Agrippa said to Festus, "This person could have been released if he had not called on Caesar."

Although all of the Roman authorities present realized that Paulus was not guilty of any crime, he had appealed to Caesar and therefore must be sent to Rome. Unfortunately for Paulus, this would mean his execution. But fortunately, it would give him the opportunity to spread the message to the farthest extent of the west -- the very capital of the Empire.

27:1 *Now when it was decided that we would sail out to Italia, they delivered both Paulus and certain other prisoners to a centurion of a manipule of the Venerable One whose name was Julius. Now they boarded an Adramuttian ship which was about to sail to Asian places, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Makedonian of Thessalonike, was with us.*

As a member of the manipule attached to Caesar, Julius was returning home. Adrammutia (Edremit) is located in Turkey, just north of Pergamum and east-southeast of Troas. The city was from an area which reasonably did trade with much of the region. This man Aristarchus was also headed toward home. Notice that Lukas has joined Paulus on his trip to Rome to defend himself before Nero.

And on the next day, we were brought into Sidon, and Julius, treating Paulus humanely, allowed him to go to friends to obtain medical care.

One day's travel took them to Sidon. The nature of Paulus' ailments is not known, although many have speculated about them. It is possible that he contracted one of various diseases common to seafarers.

LXV

4 *And from there we put out to sea and sailed under Kupros, on account of the winds being against us. And after sailing through that sea by Kilikia and Pamphulia, we came down to Murra of Lukia. And there the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italia and put us into it.*

Rather than take the most direct route, the pilots of the ship found it necessary (due to the windy weather) to sail around the island of Kupros. At Murra, the passengers disembarked. It would be unnecessary for them to travel all the way North to Adrammutia if they could find a ship sailing west -- and indeed they did.

Now we sailed slowly for a considerable number of days, barely making it by Knidos since the wind was not permitting us to approach. We sailed under Krete by Salmone, and passing by it with difficulty, we came to a certain place which is called Fair Havens, near which was a city called Lasaia.

Knidos should be about a day's journey from Murra -- on a good day. But again the weather was ominously unfavorable. The ship turned south, passing Krete on the south shore. Passing Lasaia

(Lassea), the ship's pilot saw a need to stop at Fair Havens (today, Kali Limenes). The troubling weather would become even more of a problem.

9 *Now since a considerable amount of time had passed, and since the sailing was already dangerous, on account of the fact that the Fasting Day had already gone by, Paulus gave advice, saying to them, "Men: I observe that the voyage is about to be accompanied by much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."*

The "Fasting Day" was probably the Day of Atonement, which fell in late September or early October. Storms are common in the winter months, and Paulus realized this. He advised the crew that if they continued to sail toward Rome, the ship would likely be lost -- as well as the lives of some of the crew.

But the centurion was persuaded by the pilot and by the ship's owner, rather than by those things that were spoken by Paulus. Now since it was inconvenient to pass the winter in harbor, the majority expressed a plan to be led out from there also, if they might possibly be able to reach Phoenix to pass the winter. This is a harbor of Krete facing toward the south-west and the north-west.

But the ship's captain and owner persuaded the centurion that Paulus was wrong. The city of Phoenix was nearby, on the western shore of Krete, and would be a more convenient place to pass the winter if they needed to.

Now since the south wind was blowing gently, they were assuming that they had achieved their purpose, and they weighed anchor and passed by Krete. But not long after, a violent gale called a Northeaster beat against it. Now the ship was caught, and since we were unable to withstand the wind, we surrendered and were blown around.

But with such a gentle wind, what was the point of staying in Krete for the winter? The captain ordered the crew to weigh anchor, and they left Krete for parts west. During the long sail across the Mediterranean, they encountered a Noreaster -- a strong gale. The ship was blown around and had trouble sailing. Paulus' prediction had proven correct -- they encountered winter storms while at sea.

LXVII

16 *Now as we ran under a certain small island called Kauda, we were barely able to become controllers of the lifeboat, which after hoisting it up, they used assisting ropes to bind the ship together. And since they feared that they might run in to a sandbar, they lowered the mast and were blown around that way.*

Kauda, or Klauda, is just off the coast of Krete. The ship had barely made it out of port before encountering the storms. The ship was being so overwhelmed at this point that the crew tried to escape in a lifeboat. However, they couldn't succeed in controlling the lifeboat either, and began to try to steady the ship. Lowering the mast (and sails) would prevent the ship from being tossed about by the wind, but the storm would still carry them around at random.

Now since we were being greatly tossed about, on the next day they started tossing out cargo. And on the third day, they threw out the ship's furnishings with their own hands. Now since neither sun nor stars had appeared for many days and since no small storm was pressing on us, all hope of our being saved was taken away.

The ship was too heavy and was beginning to take on water. Therefore, it was necessary to lighten the ship's load by jettisoning cargo. But three days later (or during the third day of the storm), they began even tossing out the furnishings of the ship itself. The entire crew felt hopeless; without sunlight or starlight, they had no idea where they might be.

Now since there existed a great lack of food, Paulus stood in their midst and said, "Indeed it was necessary, men, for you to have been persuaded by me not to have set off from Krete, and to have avoided this damage and loss. And now I advise you to be cheerful, for there will be not one life lost from you, except for the ship."

Paulus had spoken to God, for he prophesied at this point that none of the crew would be killed by the storm -- although the ship would be lost. He also added insult to injury by pointing out that they should have listened to him in the first place.

"For this night a messenger of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood by me, saying, 'Don't be afraid, Paulus. It is necessary for you to be presented to Caesar. And look, God has been generous for you to all those who are sailing with you.'"

Here, Paulus related to them the exact content of what God's messenger had told him: that he would indeed go before Nero Caesar and be tried. Therefore, he would survive the trip. Also, ALL of those who were travelling with him would survive as well.

"Therefore, be cheerful, men. For I trust in God--that it will be this way, according to the manner in which it was said to me. But it is necessary for us to be wrecked on a certain island."

As they were swept westward by the storm, Paulus had been told that they would be shipwrecked, although he did not divulge the precise nature of his revelation to the crew. Still, he expressed his complete trust in God that everything would turn out exactly as God's messenger had told him.

27 *Now when the fourteenth night happened, when we were being driven along in the Adriatic, at about the middle of the night the sailors suspected that some country was drawing near. And they took a sounding and found the depth to be twenty fathoms. Now when a short time went by, they sounded again and found it to be fifteen fathoms.*

They had spent two weeks adrift, being swept along by the storm, but finally there was land nearby. The crew sounded out the water and discovered that it was getting more shallow. Although they could not see land, this was a sure sign that they were approaching a shore.

And they cast down four anchors from the stern and wished it to be day, since they were fearing that we might fall on rocky places. Now the sailors were seeking to flee out of the ship, and they

lowered the lifeboat into the sea, giving the excuse that they were about to lower anchors from the bow.

Approaching a rocky shore in a storm in the middle of the night would be a hazard only braved by the foolhardy. The crew dropped anchor, some of them content to wait until morning. As for the rest -- the majority -- knowing that they were near land made them want to leave the ship for the comfort of dry (immovable) ground. Under a pretense of lowering more anchors, they dropped a lifeboat and prepared to board it.

Paulus said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these ones remain in the ship, you are not able to be saved." Then the soldiers cut the ropes to the lifeboat and allowed it to fall.

Paulus noticed what was transpiring, and without explaining his reasons, he told the centurion that the crew's presence would be necessary for their survival. The centurion believed Paulus and ordered his underlings to cut the lifeboat loose. They would all be part of whatever happened next.

Now while it was about to become day, Paulus called on everyone to partake of food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been looking out, continuing without food and having taken nothing. Therefore, I beg you to partake of food, for this is for your preservation. For not one hair from any of your heads will be lost."

The crew had been rationing what little food they had aboard ship. Knowing that they were about to leave the ship, Paulus informed the crew that they should now eat. He also assured them that none of them would be killed (in the shipwreck which was to come).

Now when he said these things, and after taking bread, he thanked God in the presence of all. And he broke it and began to eat. Now they all became cheerful, and they also took food. Now the entire number of souls that were in the ship was seventy six.

Seeing Paulus eat, they believed him and joined him. The author points out the number of people in the ship because they all survived to be witnesses to the truth of Paulus' predictions. In a way, we are reminded of the trials of Yonah aboard ship. There, it had been his fault that the calamities were befalling the ship, for Yonah had been disobeying God. Here, since Paulus was following God properly, God would protect all those who remained aboard ship.

27:38 *Now when they were satisfied with food, they made the ship lighter, throwing out the wheat into the sea. Now when day happened, they did not recognize the land, but they perceived a bay which had a shore, into which they planned to force the ship if they were able.*

There is a bay in Malta named for Paulus; it is quite possible that this was indeed the site of the shipwreck.

And having cut off the anchors, they left them in the sea, loosening at the same time the ropes connecting the rudders to the ship. And hoisting the mainsail to the wind, they pressed on toward the shore.

The crew cut off their anchors -- normally a sign of desperation. This would not have been done unless they believed that they needed to act quickly.

Now since they wound up in a place with sea on both sides, they ran the vessel aground. And indeed, the bow stuck and remained immovable, but the stern was broken by the violence of the waves.

The ship struck a shoal and ran aground. This alone was bad, but then the crashing waves dashed the rear end of the ship into pieces. The ship would begin to sink!

LXX

42 *Now it happened to be the soldiers' plan that they should kill the prisoners, lest one might swim away and escape. But the centurion, who wished to save Paulus, released them from the purpose and gave word that those who were able to swim should jump away first to go out to the land, and the ones who remained some would go indeed on boards; some on things from the ship. And so it happened that all were brought safely onto the land.*

As was common, the guards had standing orders to kill all prisoners in the event of disaster, so that none would escape. But since the centurion wanted to spare Paulus' life, he ordered his men to swim to shore. Some of the shipwrecked crew swam, some paddled to shore on boards, and some floated in with the tide, but all of them survived -- just as Paulus had predicted.

28:1 *And after being brought safely, they then recognized that the island was called Melita. Now the natives rendered extraordinary kindness to us. For they lit up a fire and took all of us to it, on account of the rain that was there, and on account of the cold.*

Naturally Lukas survived (or he could not have written the actions), and once they were ashore, he discovered their location: Melita (Malta). The local residents were generous to the castaways, offering them shelter, warmth, and food.

Now as Paulus gathered together a bundle of sticks and placed them on the fire, a viper came out from the heat and attached onto his hand. Now when the natives noticed the wild animal hanging onto his hand, they said to one another, "This person is certainly a murderer who was saved from the sea. Justice has not permitted him to live."

As they were fueling a bonfire, Paulus was bitten by a venomous snake. The others were certain that the fates had decreed his death. Just as the great fish had spewed Yonah onto the land, the ship had deposited Paulus. But again, since Paulus was righteous, he was to be spared -- in a manner miraculous enough to attract everyone's attention.

Then indeed he shook the wild animal off into the fire and suffered nothing bad. But they were expecting him to be about to swell up or to fall down dead suddenly. Now for a long time they were expecting this, and when they observed nothing out of place happening to him, they changed their opinions and said he was a god.

Paulus merely tossed the wriggling snake into the fire. Not only wasn't he killed by the venom, but also his hand didn't have any reaction to the poison. Perhaps the snake from the woodpile had been unable to inject any venom, but we are given the impression that he was spared miraculously, and the others all began to believe that Paulus was a god -- or at least more properly, a demigod.

7 Now the farmlands of the foremost person of the island were near that place. He was Poplius by name. When he received us, he entertained us with a friendly attitude for three days.

Poplius was the most well-known leading citizen of the island. As it was he who put up Paulus, Lukas, and the others, their reputations were clearly at a high point perhaps in their careers.

Now it happened that the father of Poplius was being held by fevers and dysentery, and was lying down. Paulus went in to him, and prayed, and placed hands on him, and healed him. Therefore, when this happened, the others on the island who also had illnesses came to Paulus and were healed. And they rewarded us with many honors and after leading us out, they put the things we needed on the boat.

Their host's father was ill, stricken with digestive disorders. Naturally, God has the power to cure such ailments, and so Lukas reports it matter-of-factly. But the event caused all those on the island who were ill to approach Paulus for healing -- which he obliged. In contrast to their reception elsewhere, Paulus and his compatriots were treated as honored heroes.

LXXII

11 Now after three months, we sailed in an Alexandrian ship which had spent the winter on the island, which bore the emblem of the children of Zeus. And after being led down to Surakusa, we stayed on for three days. From there we weighed anchor and came into Rhegium, and since a south wind sprung up after one day, we came to Potioli on the second day.

But winter passed, and now it was time for Paulus to complete his trip to Rome in captivity. Castor and Pollux were the legendary children of Zeus who were revered if not worshipped by sailors. Thus it is no surprise that the ship bears their image as a figurehead. They reached Surakusa (Syracuse), on the eastern edge of Sicily, where they remained for three days. Continuing northward, the ship reached Rhegium (at the tip of Italy's boot) and quickly made it to Potioli.

Now called Puzzuoli, Puteoli is situated just west of Napoli (Naples, then called New City). Lake Aornos ("birdless lake", now called Avernus) was nearby -- a place rumored to be the entrance to Hades. A prophet of Apollo also lived nearby. It is in this area that Paulus would spend his first full week in Italia.

Here we found brothers and were invited by them to stay on for seven days. And this is how we went to Rome. And when the brothers there heard the things about us, they came out to us into a meeting, as far away as the Appii Forum and the Three Taverns. When Paulus noticed these, he gave thanks to God and he took courage.

The Appian way ran from nearby Capua northward to Rome, facilitating easy travel. Thus, it is not entirely surprising that nearby Christians might be able to make their way to see Paulus and his associates. Three Taverns was two-thirds of the way to Rome -- a considerable distance by foot -- and so Lukas expresses their desire to see Paulus in terms of the distances that people traveled. By his fellow Christians Paulus was certainly loved -- even though none of them had likely ever met him before.

LXXIII

16 *Now when we came to Rome, Paulus was permitted to stay by himself, with the soldiers guarding him.*

Probably near summer of 61, Paulus reaches Rome, here to await his potential appeal to Nero Caesar. He remained bound by a chain under a form of house arrest. This lenient treatment is probably due to his Roman citizenship.

Now it happened that after three days he called together to him all those who were the foremost of the Jews. Now when they came together, he said to them, "Men, brothers: though I have done nothing to the people, nor to those ancestral customs, I was delivered from Jerusalem as a prisoner into the hands of the Romans, who, after examining me, wanted to release me on account of the fact that there was no cause for death in me. But since the Jews spoke against me, I was forced to call on Caesar -- but not as though I had anything to accuse my nation of.

Paulus called together as many local Jews as his friends were able to find. Possibly they had been hearing rumors about Paulus, or possibly Paulus wanted to dispel any possible gossip that might develop. Therefore, he made a brief summary of those things that had happened to him: charges were brought against him falsely by Jewish leaders; the Roman officials realized that there was nothing wrong and had wanted to release him; and now he awaited an appeal before Nero. For the author, this also serves as a summary to his reader and is an indicator that at the time of the composition of "Actions," Paulus was still alive and awaiting judgment.

"Therefore, I called you on account of this cause: to see and to speak with you. For I am wearing this chain around me on account of the hope of Israel."

Israel's hope, naturally, was the Messiah. Jailed on behalf of the promised Anointed One, Paulus was content with his circumstances; after all, he had done rightly.

Now they said to him, "We got no letters about you from Judea, nor did any of the brothers who happened by relate or speak anything evil about you. But we think it is worth it to hear from you what you think. For indeed it is known to us about this school of thought that it is spoken against everywhere."

Then Lukas reveals that indeed there had been rumors circulating about those people who believed Jesus had been the Messiah, although apparently news of Paulus' conversion to Christianity had not spread as far as Rome, for no one was saying anything about him. These people were open-minded, desiring to hear what Paulus might tell them of what was going on.

Naturally, being away from Palestine, any news they might hear about the goings-on in the Holy Land would have been listened to with eagerness.

LXXIV

23 *Now after arranging a day for him, many came into his lodgings to him. To them he set things out, testifying fully about God's kingdom, and he was persuading them about Jesus from the Torah of Moses and the Prophets, from morning until evening. And some of these indeed were persuaded by the words that were being spoken, but some did not trust.*

And so, Paulus was able to tell them about his journeys, but more importantly about the teachings of this man (Jesus) who had changed Saul's life. Going full circle, Paulus began to persuade his countrymen that Jesus had fulfilled the Messianic prophecies. (For Lukas, this established that the message had not changed in all the years that had passed.) The message was partly successful, as some of Paulus' listeners came to realize that he was telling the truth.

Now since they were not agreeing with one another, they were let go, with Paulus saying one declaration, that: "The holy Spirit spoke well through Isaiah the prophet to your ancestors, saying, "Go to this people and say, 'Hearing, you will hear; and you will by no means understand. And seeing, you will see; and you will by no means notice.' For the hearts of this people are unfeeling, and they hear heavily with their ears, and they have closed their eyes: otherwise then they would notice with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and they would return, and I would heal them.""

But Paulus had hoped to bring the entire group into the knowledge that Jesus was Messiah. Their division on the issue disturbed him, and so he censured those who were closed-minded and closed-hearted. Citing Isaiah (6:9-10), Paulus indicated that the ones who did not believe him by now would never believe. What was he to do from this point on?

"Therefore, let it be known to you that God's salvation was sent to the gentiles, and they will hear."

As always, when the Jews of a city rejected the message, he turned to the gentiles. Knowing that Rome was to be Paulus' swan song, this statement of Lukas' takes on a certain finality. After the destruction of the temple, Judaism and Christianity would diverge -- becoming in essence separate religions. Not merely Paulus but indeed Christianity itself would be "sent to the gentiles" on account of the division that would later occur.

LXXV

30 *Now he stayed for two whole years in his own rented home, and he received all those who came into to him, heralding God's kingdom and teaching the things about the Lord Anointed Jesus unrestrained, with full freedom of speech.*

At the time of writing, it is mid to late 63 CE. Lukas' message is upbeat, and perhaps he expects Paulus' release to come soon. Paulus' situation in no way inhibited Paulus, for he spoke freely to

everyone that he could about the coming of the Anointed One. The date of Paulus' death most likely followed in 64. Clement (c. 96) mentions that Paulus died (in Rome), but gives no indication as to how or why. It is Tertullian, writing c. 211 in "Antidote to the Scorpion's Bite," who first raised an issue of Paulus' martyrdom. Proposing the idea that God does favor martyrs, in ch. 15 he matter-of-factly passes on the tradition that "Paul is beheaded". Tertullian appears to place Paulus' death under Nero after Peter's; it is most likely the case that both were put to death shortly after the Neronian persecution began (in 64).

Tacitus, writing c. 109, records this in the *Annals of Imperial Rome*:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

The fire of 64 (rumored to have been started by Nero himself) was blamed on the Christians. It is unlikely that Paulus lived much beyond this point, for as soon as Christians and their superstitions were viewed as the cause of the Great Fire, it is almost certain that those Christians who were already in custody were immediately executed. Whether or not Peter ever set foot in the city of Rome is a matter of great debate. It is quite possible that he was executed in Palestine.

Having updated his reader, Lukas can proceed no further. Lukas promises no followup, for none should be necessary; he has proven his case. He has succeeded in defending the message against any argument by oppositional Jews that it had been perverted by the inclusion of gentiles in the New Covenant or by the addition of the former persecutor, Paulus, to Christianity. After all, Paulus was in prison for his beliefs, awaiting judgment by Nero Caesar himself! His concern for his own countrymen has been spelled out clearly, alongside his greater love for his Messiah.