

THE EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH

SURVEY OF ACTS

Acts 1:8 “...But 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 to the end of the earth.**”

JERUSALEM...

The apostles followed Jesus' last instructions to remain in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit would empower them to engage the mission of advancing the gospel to the *ends of the earth*. While waiting the apostles selected another teammate to join them in an official role as a **witness** to fill the vacancy left by Judas Iscariot.



Witness (martyr) = witness; one who testifies (Eng. “martyr” = one who bears ‘witness’ by his death)

Power to become **witnesses** arrived on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit showed up in a powerful manifestation to fill and equip the believers to testify of Jesus – the gospel. As the early church is birthed, it takes place as Jesus portrayed to Nicodemus in John's Gospel (John 3:1-21). “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John



3:8). Thus, when the Spirit arrived on Pentecost the church was born. The Spirit wasn't just given to the apostles, but to all believers gathered together as Jesus instructed. Peter makes this clear while quote the prophet Joel in his sermon (Joel 2:28-32).

When the church was born of the Spirit (birthed, baptized, filled, indwelt, etc.), **what sign accompanied this new birth to validate that it was from God?** They (the church) began to speak in other tongues (languages) by the power and direction of the Spirit.

What's so impressive about this display of the Spirit? (v5-13)

As a smorgasbord from the known world was gathered in Jerusalem from Passover to Pentecost (v9-11), they not only gathered at the sound (apparent commotion) of what was taking place but they also heard the gospel of Jesus in their own language – “heart language.” One might not be too impressed initially, but when you realize that these “uneducated” Galileans were the ones waxing eloquent in foreign languages – it's time to take notice.

Note: Anytime the works of God are clearly on display there will be those who mock, reject, and explain them away (v13).

Peter capitalizes on the moment and clarifies what's taking place in their midst by quoting the prophet Joel. What's the main point of Peter's message? (v21) Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

As Peter continues preaching (v22-36), **who does he bear witness to?** Jesus of Nazareth

Who does Peter indict in the murder of Jesus? (v23, 36) The Jews, national Israel – God's chosen nation/people

As Peter bears witness to Jesus, describe the main points of his message from verses 23-24 and 36:

- Jesus' crucifixion was God's sovereign plan
- God raised Jesus from the dead/grave
- God has made Jesus the Lord and Messiah

What was the response of the audience? (v37)

- They were "cut to the heart" (convicted/weight of guilt)
- They asked, "What must we do?" (Now what? How should we respond? Is it too late?)

How did Peter direct them? What hope did he give them? (v38-41)

Peter told them to **repent** – from rejecting Jesus to embracing Jesus alone – and they would receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those who **received** his word (repentance/faith) were **baptized** (which follows as a natural result/consequence, but is not required for salvation as some would demand).

What was the result of the Spirit's work at Pentecost? (v41) Approximately 3,000 souls were added – to the Lord/to the church!

The Gospel's Impact and Practice of the Early Church (v42-47)

They devoted themselves to: [committed to]

- 1) the apostles' teaching (the Word)
- 2) fellowship
- 3) breaking of bread (eating together and the Lord's Table)
- 4) prayer
- 5) one another – (a) unity/oneness/together (b) physical needs/resources (c) worshiped together daily at the temple and in one another's homes (d) impacted their community (cf. John 13:34-35)

What was the result and impact of the gospel as the church lived out the mission of God? (v47)

The **Lord** added to their number daily those who were being saved! God did the saving, the adding!



ACTS 3

As Peter and John were going about their normal activities – like regular prayer at the temple – an opportunity arose for them to **witness** of Jesus. A man lame from birth was placed at the Beautiful Gate daily in order to beg alms of those going into the temple. As Peter and John approach, this man called out to receive some sort of financial gesture or token of kindness.

Instead, he was given the gift of miraculous healing – "...In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (v6). This man joins Peter and John into the temple walking, leaping, and praising God! Everyone recognized him – and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what they were seeing with their own eyes.

As the crowds gather completely astounded at what has taken place in their midst, Peter capitalizes on this opportunity to **witness** of Jesus Christ. He begins by deflecting all glory to God – "Don't think for one second that our personal power or piety accomplished this miracle." (v12). He goes on to unpack the gospel by boldly declaring that God glorified Jesus as the Messiah, but they delivered Him over to Pilate to be crucified, denied the Holy and Righteous One, and ultimately killed the Author of life – but God raised Him from the dead. **"To this we are witnesses"** (v15).

How does Peter call them to respond to the message of the gospel? (v16-26)

(a) by faith in Jesus (v16) (b) by repentance of sins (v19, 26) (c) sobering choice – rejection results in being destroyed (v23)

While Peter is addressing the crowd some of the religious leaders show up completely annoyed because someone other than themselves were teaching the people. Even worse, they were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. Peter and John were immediately arrested and thrown into jail overnight. But even though **witnesses** of Jesus may be bound, the word of God is not bound!



What impact did the gospel have on the crowd according to verse 4?

Many of those who had heard the word believed – approx. 5,000 men (not to mention women)

As Peter and John face trial for the miraculous healing of the lame man (v5-22), how does Peter respond to the inquisition? (v8-12)

(a) the **means** by which this lame man was healed is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (b) the **message** you need to hear is that this Jesus is the very one you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, and that there is salvation in no one else other than Him – for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

What was the verdict of this “kangaroo court”?

They couldn’t deny the miracle nor deflect the attention elsewhere, therefore, they charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus (v18) – threatening them and attempting to intimidate them.

Upon release the apostles returned to their friends (the church) and reported all that had taken place. What was their response? (v.23-31)

Corporate prayer – recognizing God’s sovereignty from creation to the crucifixion of Jesus, they asked God to **see** the threats and **grant** boldness to continue speaking the word (gospel) and that healings, signs, and wonders would continue to be performed through the name of Jesus. **God answered.**

And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:33



In Acts 5:1-11, God deals very uniquely and decisively with the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. These circumstances resulted in “great fear coming upon the whole church and all who heard of these things” (v11). All the while many signs and wonders were regularly done by the apostles validating the gospel message. And as they regularly gathered in Solomon’s Portico the church was held in high esteem by the people, but they were careful not to join them unless they became one of them.

What was the early church experiencing as they gathered regularly to celebrate the gospel? (v14-16) More than ever, believers were added to the Lord – multitudes of both men and women. People were being healed and released from demon possession.

The religious leaders were filled with jealousy and threw the apostles into prison for teaching the people the gospel. Although the prison was secured, an angel of the Lord released them and instructed them to “stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life” (v20). When morning came and the entire council was assembled, they called for the prisoners to be brought before them. But everyone seemed confused when they found the prison cell empty. As they scrambled for an explanation, it was reported that the prisoners were actually in the temple teaching the people.

The religious leaders were beside themselves! And when the apostles were finally brought before them, they laid into them – reminding them that they were strictly warned not to teach in the name Jesus. Yet, here they were filling Jerusalem with their teaching and intending to saddle the religious leaders with the blood of Jesus.

Peter and the apostles responded by boldly declaring that they were accountable to a higher court than the one they currently stood before, and preceded to share the gospel with the religious leaders declaring “we are **witnesses** to these thing, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him” (v32).

What was the initial response of the religious leaders in verse 33? They were enraged and wanted to kill them!

A Pharisee, Gamaliel, interceded and brought clarity to the situation (v34-39). The bottom line from Gamaliel’s vantage point was that if this religious following was of man it will no doubt be short lived. But if not, you don’t want to find yourself going toe-to-toe with the God of the universe. His advice was heeded. When the apostles were brought in, they were beaten and sternly warned not to continue speaking in the name of Jesus, then released.

What was their response to this suffering? (v41-42)

Rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus. They kept teaching and preaching daily in the temple and from house to house that the Christ is Jesus!

The more men tried to stop the gospel – the more it advances, disciples made, and the church grows. In Acts 6, the “disciples were increasing in number” (v1) and “the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (v7).



ACTS 6



ACTS 7

Stephen **witnesses** to Jesus beginning at Abraham and walking through the OT patriarchs all the way to Moses, highlighting that God would send a prophet like Moses to redeem and rule Israel. After mentioning David and Solomon and the temple, Stephen calls out the religious leaders for resisting and rejecting the very God they claim to worship (v51-53) and ultimately betraying and murdering their Messiah, the Righteous One. Enraged at Stephen’s **witness** of Jesus, they cast him out of the city and stoned him to death (v54-60)

Following the martyrdom of Stephen, intense persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem and the believers scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. While the apostles held fast in Jerusalem, Saul began his campaign against the church – ravaging the church from house to house, dragging off men and women to prison.



ACTS 8

What was the result of intense persecution? (v4) *Those who were scattered refused to keep the gospel to themselves, but rather preached the word wherever they went.*

SAMARIA...

Philip went down (from Jerusalem) to a city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ – Jesus as the Messiah. The crowds paid attention to what Philip said and the signs he performed – exorcism and healing – resulting in much **joy** in that city!

As Philip preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ—the Samaritans believed the gospel and were baptized (both men and women); even Simon, the magician, believed and was baptized. When the apostles heard that Samaria received the word of God, they sent Peter and John, who prayed and laid hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit.

*“Now when they had **testified** and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans” (v25).*

...JUDEA

Philip is guided by the Holy Spirit to venture south and connect with an Ethiopian on his return trip from worshipping in Jerusalem. As Philip approaches the chariot he finds the man reading from the scroll of Isaiah and asks him if he understands what he's reading. The Ethiopian official had no idea who the text was referring to, so Philip "...**opened his mouth**, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus" (v35). The man believes Jesus as the Messiah and is baptized. Philip is caught away miraculously by the Holy Spirit and preaches the gospel in all the towns from Azotus to Caesarea, while the Ethiopian official returns home "to the ends of the earth" with this glorious message of hope.



Persecution of the early church is picking up speed, and by Acts 9 Saul is leading the charge all the way to Damascus. While on route to accomplish his mission, Saul encounters Jesus and is transformed from a persecutor of the church to a disciple of Christ (v3-19). By the time he arrives in Damascus, rather than breathing threats and murder, he now gathers with the church as one of them and begins proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues as the Son of God.

Talk about 180° turn around! As Saul began defending the faith he once sought to eliminate, the religious leaders plotted to kill him.

...BACK IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, GALILEE, AND SAMARIA

Saul tries to join with the other disciples, but naturally they're skeptical that he's really a follower of Jesus. More likely, this is some kind of elaborate undercover operation to infiltrate the church. Barnabas takes Saul under his wing and defends him before the apostles as to the genuineness of his conversion.

"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied" (v31).

As the early church continues to live out the mission of making disciples, God continues to validate the gospel message by many miraculous works. As Peter is used to heal the paralyzed Aeneas, the residents of Lydda and Sharon "turn to the Lord" (v35). In Joppa, as Peter again is used to raise Dorcas/Tabitha from the dead, the news spreads like wildfire and "many believed in the Lord" (v42).

THE GOSPEL ADVANCES TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH...

Within the books of Acts we've begun to see the forward advance of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and in small ways trickling outward to the ends of the earth. At this point in the adventure the gospel will take an unexpected turn from being almost exclusively Jewish to including the Gentiles – the nations. As you can imagine, this was and continued to be a struggle for the early church to embrace and grow in unity.



Chapter 10 relays the process that it took to get Peter out of his "comfort zone" (culturally all he's ever known) to "open his mouth" (v34) and share the gospel with the Gentiles. Peter comes to realize that "God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable

to Him” (v34-35). He then goes on to share the “good news of peace through Jesus Christ” (v36), ultimately relaying that ***all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name*** (v43). “While Peter was still speaking these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (v44), and no objection could be made as to why they couldn’t be baptized (v47-48).



Word spread quickly that the “Gentiles also had received the word of God” (v1). Rather than being excited about the forward advance of the gospel, some chose to criticize Peter for violating their cultural expectations by associating with the Gentiles. Seriously?

So Peter relays the entire story to his accusers, concluding with the sobering reality that “God gave the same gift to them as He gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ – who am I to stand in God’s way?” (v17). The response? Silence. Then, once it sank in for a moment they glorified God that the Gentiles have also been granted repentance that leads to life (v18).

As a result of the persecution that arose over Stephen, the church was ***scattered*** throughout the known world “speaking the word to no one except Jews” (v19). However, that was all about to change in Antioch. Some of the believers began preaching Jesus to the Hellenists (Greek-speaking non-Jews). ***“And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord”*** (v21). As the report reaches the church in Jerusalem, Barnabas is sent to Antioch on a recon mission. Upon arriving he “saw the grace of God” (v23) on full display in and through these disciples. His response was not the typical Jewish response – he was glad and encouraged these new disciples in the faith. ***“And a great many people were added to the Lord”*** (v24). So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul and brought him back so they could equip the church together (v25-26).



King Herod joins the persecution by having James executed and Peter imprisoned. At this point the church launches an all-night prayer vigil fully expecting the same results as took place with James. Peter is miraculously released by an angel and attempts to join the church prayer meeting. Rhoda goes down in history as the “hallucinating girl” who leaves Peter standing on the porch knocking while she reports his arrival to the gathering. Herod soon dies an unnatural death, but amidst all of this ***“the word of God increased and multiplied”*** (v24).

At this point in the journey we find a group of prophets and teachers gathered within the church at Antioch. ***“While they were worship the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off”*** (v2-3). Verse 4 clearly indicates that they were sent out by the Holy Spirit, but this was not apart from the local church gathering.



What “work” was the Holy Spirit through the church commissioning Barnabas and Saul to accomplish? The mission of making disciples of all nations – gospel proclamation and church planting.

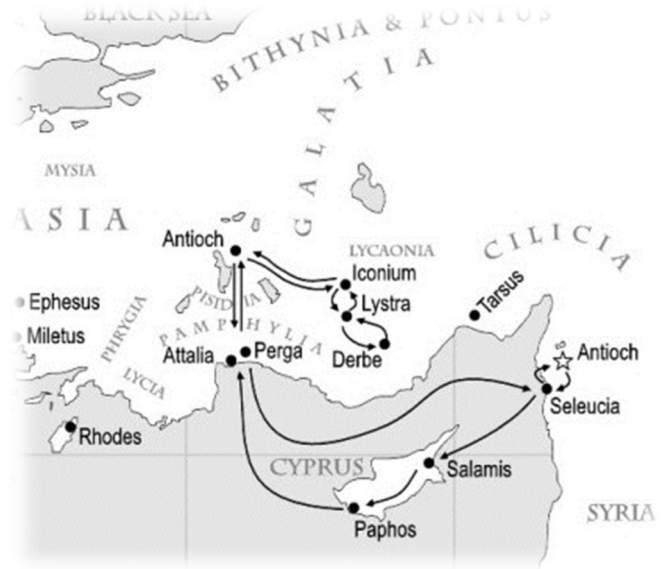
The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:16 that he is not ashamed of the gospel – for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the ***Jew*** first and also to the ***Greek***. And this is the pattern that we will see on display while on mission. Consider the maps in the back of your notes as we attempt to highlight the forward advance of the gospel as it continues to extend to the ***ends of the earth***.

ANTIOCH (13:1-4)

- Sent by the Holy Spirit through the local gathering.
- Set sail from Seleucia to Cyprus (v4)

CYPRUS (13:5-12)

- Landing in Salamis they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.
- They traversed the entire island all the way to Paphos where they encountered opposition from a Jewish false prophet, Bar-Jesus (Elymas), while sharing the gospel the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. Ultimately, the proconsul believed in Jesus.
- Then set sail from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia.



ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA (13:14-52)

Attending the local synagogue, Paul and Barnabas were invited to share a word of encouragement following the corporate reading of the Law. Paul gives a lengthy dissertation of the gospel in which he highlights the following points:

- Brief history lesson from the patriarchs to the nation's time in Egypt and wilderness wandering.
- While in the Promised Land, Paul notes the time of the judges ending with Samuel and the rise of the kings – highlighting David.
- He takes a massive leap all the way to John the baptizer – forerunner of the Messiah.
- **“...to us has been sent the message of this salvation”** (v26).
- BUT – we missed it! **“For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him”** (v27).
- They asked Pilate to have him executed; they carried out everything prophesied of Jesus; then laid Him in the tomb.
- God raised Jesus from the dead, and **we are now His witnesses to the people** (v31).
- **“Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses”** (v38-39).
- They warned them against unbelief (v40-41).
- Many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas (v43).
- By the next Sabbath, almost the entire city had turned out to hear the word of the Lord – this evoked jealousy from the Jewish religious leaders who began to oppose the gospel message.
- **“And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”**

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region” (v46-49).

- The Jews incited riots and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, thus driving them out of the district.
- Even so, **“...the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit”** (v52).

ICONIUM (14:1-6)

Having been forced out of Antioch in Pisidia, the team travels to Iconium. Again, they enter the synagogue and proclaimed the gospel of Jesus.



ACTS 14

- A great number of both Jews and Greeks believed (v1).
- Spoke boldly for the Lord amidst opposition.
- The Lord came through and bore witness to the word of His grace with signs and wonders.
- The city was divided and an attempt on Paul and Barnabas' lives caused them to flee to Lystra and Derbe.

LYSTRA (14:6-20)

"...and there they continued to preach the gospel" (v7) This mission of making Christ known to the nations and making disciples of Jesus continues to drive Paul and Barnabas throughout the regions of southern Galatia. While at Lystra, Paul calls to a man crippled from birth to rise and walk. The man is miraculously healed, and as you can imagine the place erupts! Fully convinced that the gods – Zeus and Hermes – had taken on human likeness, they prepared to worship these men.

Amidst the chaos, two things transpired: 1) Paul and Barnabas pleaded with them to turn from this empty worship of false deities and respond to the good news of the gospel, and 2) Jews from Antioch persuaded the fickle crowd to stone Paul and drag him out of the city. Don't we have a different concept of the "victorious Christian life"? As the disciples gather around Paul's 'corpse,' he gets up and enters the city. On the next Paul and Barnabas leave for Derbe.

DERBE (14:21)

"When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,..." (v21).

What were Paul and Barnabas intent on doing as they visited their church plants on their way home? (v22-23)

They strengthened the disciples – encouraging them to continue in the faith and preparing them to face suffering on account of Christ and the gospel. They also appointed elders in every church, committing them to the Lord with prayer and fasting.

PERGA (14:24-25)

As they round out their disciple making and church planting mission, they passed back through the regions of Pisidia and Pamphylia. They spoke the word in Perga, then set sail from Attalia back home to Antioch – ***"where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled"*** (v26).

ANTIOCH (14:26-28)

"And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (v27).



ACTS 15

While Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, men from Judea came and began teaching that 'unless you're circumcised according to the law, you cannot be saved.' Clearly, this was an ongoing issue within the early church – adding law to grace – and continues to wreak havoc on the church to this day. Paul and Barnabas adamantly opposed adding anything to the gospel and were willing to meet with the council of apostles and elders in Jerusalem to deal with this issue decisively.

As they traveled, they shared with the churches along the way how God was saving the Gentiles, which brought great joy to the believers – at least until they reached Jerusalem. Then, the proverbial '_____'

hit the fan' [insert euphemism in blank provided] when some had the gall to suggest that it was necessary for these new believers to also be circumcised in accordance with the Law of Moses. Can you imagine being part of that meeting?

The apostle Peter made it clear when he stood up and proclaimed, ***“Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”*** (v7-11).

The meeting continued, but this really was the trump card. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch to deliver the letter that was drafted by the council and report that faith in the person and work of Jesus and the grace of God was not only necessary, but enough for salvation! They remained in Antioch teaching and preaching the word of the Lord (v35).

Paul and Barnabas longed to see how the churches they had planted were holding up amidst the pressures of life and persecution of the Jews. Paul and Barnabas part ways over John Mark – who had previously deserted them in Pamphylia. So Barnabas to John Mark and sailed for Cyprus, while Paul took Silas with him through Syria and Cilicia. **Both teams went on mission strengthening the churches** (v41).

As the Paul and Silas revisited the churches previously planted, they delivered the council's report that had been determined in Jerusalem. ***“So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily”*** (v5).



As they desired to see the forward advance of the gospel extend to other regions, the Holy Spirit clearly closed access to Asia and Bithynia. It wasn't until they reached Troas that the next steps were revealed to them through a vision of a man from Macedonia. Paul's conclusion was that clearly ***“God had called us to preach the gospel to them”*** (v10).

Reaching **Philippi** they locate a common place of prayer and begin sharing the gospel with the ladies who were present. Among them was Lydia, a worshiper of God. ***“The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul”*** (v14) – and the gospel continues to advance.

While in Philippi they continued to proclaim the gospel, but things went sideways when a demon possessed slave girl kept crying out, ***“These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation”*** (v17). Not the kind of publicity Paul was willing to tolerate for long, and finally cast out the spirit. The financial impact suffered by her owners led to Paul and Silas being beaten and thrown into jail. Even in jail the gospel is not bound, for ***“about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ...”*** (v25).

When the earthquake hit miraculously opening the doors and releasing the bonds which held the prisoners, the jailer knew he was as good as dead for allowing the prisoners to escape. As he drew his sword to end his life, Paul called out for the jailer to stay his hand for everyone was still present. The jailer's response, ***“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house”*** (v30-32).



ACTS 17

Departing from Philippi they traversed to **Thessalonica** where they entered the synagogue and ***“reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ’”*** (v2-3).

The gospel had a polarizing effect on Thessalonica. Some of the Jews were persuaded and a great many of the Greeks, along with many of the leading women; however, many of the Jews were jealous and caused a riot. The accusation against Paul and Silas was that ***“these men have turned the world upside down”*** because of the message which they preach – the gospel.

Leaving Thessalonica they headed southeast to **Berea** where they ***“received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so”*** (v11). As the gospel continued to advance, many believed – both Jew and Greeks. But along with those who believed there were also who strongly opposed this message as well, “For not all have faith” (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Jews from Thessalonica made it miserable for Paul to remain in Berea, so he set sail for Athens.

In **Athens**, while Paul was waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him, his heart was grieved by the intense idolatry that plagued the city. Marketing themselves as full of knowledge and understanding, Paul knew their wisdom was folly, their worship was empty, and they were in desperate need of the gospel. Amidst the idolatry, Paul easily found a platform from which to **witness** of Jesus Christ. The result? Some mocked, others were curious to hear more, and ***“some men joined him and believed”*** (v34).

Paul left Athens and went to **Corinth** where he connected with Aquila and Priscilla, fellow Jewish tentmakers. Paul continued to reason in the synagogue every Sabbath, attempting to persuade them that Jesus truly is the Messiah. When Silas and Timothy finally catch up with Paul, they find him ***“occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus”*** (v5). When they reviled him, Paul finally had enough with their hearts of stone and shifted his focus primarily on the Gentiles (v6).



ACTS 18

Amidst the antagonistic opposition in Corinth, ***“many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized”*** (v8). The Lord also encouraged Paul through a vision to not fear, but keep preaching the gospel – “for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, ***for I have many in this city who are my people”*** (v10).

Leaving Corinth, Paul adds Aquila and Priscilla to his team. Arriving in **Ephesus**, Paul engages the Jews with the gospel. He declines their invitation to stay, but promises to return if God is willing.

From Ephesus Paul sails to **Caesarea** where he connects with the church briefly before making his way back home to **Antioch**. ***“After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples”*** (v23).



ACTS 19

God was willing, and Paul finally arrives in **Ephesus**. Among the many things that transpired while there, Paul spoke boldly in the synagogue for three months – reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God (v.8). But, the Jews proved to be stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the gospel. As a result, Paul began meeting in the hall of Tyrannus for two years, ***“so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks”*** (v10). And as God continued to validate the gospel message and the making of disciples and the planting of churches, ***“the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily”*** (v20).

After leaving Ephesus, Paul set sail for **Macedonia** to visit and strengthen the church previously established. From there he went on to **Greece** to encourage and strengthen those churches as well. On his return voyage he called for the elders of Ephesus to connect with him before departing for Jerusalem. Paul knew that they would not see him again, therefore, he wanted to encourage them to shepherd the flock well.



ACTS 20

*“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. **And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified**” (v28-32).*

This meeting ended with prayer and much weeping, as you can imagine how emotionally intense it would have been to know that they would never see Paul again.



ACTS 21-22

As Paul continued his journey toward Jerusalem, he connected with several churches along the way. At every turn, the believers were broken hearted that Paul was determined to go Jerusalem even though it meant certain imprisonment and most likely, death. But Paul was ready to both be imprisoned and die for the name of Jesus.

After meeting with James (21:17-26), Paul is ultimately arrested in the temple and assassination attempts were regularly made on his life. During this time of imprisonment, he was able to share his personal **testimony** as to what God had set him apart to do. As he’s relaying this to the primarily Jewish audience, he shares that his mission was to “**...be a witness for [Jesus] to everyone of what you have seen and heard**” (22:15).

Paul continues to stand trial on account of the gospel, which provides him a platform to share the message of life and grace with both religious and political leaders. After a couple years of imprisonment and no real hope for his circumstances to change, Paul finally appeals to Caesar. While relaying his defense before Festus and King Agrippa, Paul has yet another opportunity to make much of Jesus by sharing his personal **testimony** and emphasizing the mission entrusted to him –



ACTS 23-26

*“**...to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me**” (26:18).*



ACTS 27-28

These two chapters chronicle Paul’s journey from Jerusalem to Rome, which was anything but uneventful. While in Rome, Paul was able to share with the local Jewish leaders that he was imprisoned “**because of the hope of Israel**” (28:20). He was then given a platform to share his perspective on “this sect that was spoken against everywhere” (28:22). So, “from morning till evening he expounded to them, **testifying** to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets” (28:23). Yet again, the gospel divides into two camps – those who believed and others who disbelieved.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen throughout this adventure, the mission of God to make himself known to the nations was carried out by the church as they lived as witnesses of Jesus’ death and resurrection in their communities and “to the ends of the earth.”