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Acts Overview (Part 2)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In his overview of the book of Acts, Steve Gregg outlines the four main sections of the book and their corresponding themes. The first section focuses on the early church in Jerusalem, with Peter as the main character, while the second section shifts to the missionary activities and arrest of Paul. The third section covers Paul's three separate missionary journeys, and the fourth section ends with Paul in Rome waiting for trial. Throughout the book, the early church initially consisted of the twelve apostles and three thousand converts, and highlights key events such as Peter's vision regarding Gentiles and the Jerusalem Council to settle the controversy over Gentile converts being circumcised.

Transcript

Okay, for those who want to read through the book of Acts sometime in the near future, I thought I'd help out by taking an overview of it. It divides pretty much into four different kinds of material, four different segments, I would say. We could say that the first seven chapters talk about the birth of the church and the growing pains of the early church in Jerusalem.

The first seven chapters are entirely about the church in Jerusalem. And that church was the only church, as far as we know, for some years. How many years? We're not told.

Could have been three or four years. It could have been more. But eventually, persecution broke out because of Stephen the martyr being stoned to death.

And general persecution against the church in Jerusalem broke out from that. And Christians scattered to many other places, including Gentile lands. And that is what we read about in the next section.

Once the church's early growth pains in Jerusalem have been discussed, we see the expanding of the church and the harvest efforts of souls to the non-Jewish world, including Samaria and Turkey. What would now be Turkey was called Asia Minor back then and Greece and even apparently Rome. We don't read of the gospel reaching Rome, but we know that it did during this period because Paul writes a letter to

Christians in Rome, which is a place he had not yet been to, but somebody had.

And the church had gotten started there during this period of time. That would be chapters eight through twelve chapters, eight through twelve. Now, in these chapters, the main character is Peter.

Paul is introduced as early as this as Chapter seven as simply somebody standing by when Stephen is being stoned together. Was there watching it happen and approving it in chapter seven. Then he went out as a persecutor of the church and in chapter nine is converted and he makes a brief visit back to Jerusalem for a couple of weeks.

And then he has to flee from there for his life. And then we're talking about Peter again. So there's a brief introduction to Paul in that section, but Peter is the main.

Oaksman, the main character of the main focus of the stories in chapters one through twelve. However, the third section begins in chapter thirteen. And that runs through chapter twenty.

And this would be Paul's missionary activities, which are recorded as three separate missionary journeys. His first missionary journey was to Cyprus and southern Galatia, which is in Asia Minor, which is in Turkey. His second one took him to Macedonia and the Kaya, which are the northern and southern provinces of the Greek peninsula.

And then his third one took him to Greece again and Asia Minor again. So he revisited some of the territories and no doubt expanded the efforts of those places on the third missionary journey. This journey ended when he came back to Jerusalem and tried to.

Well, for one thing, he's bringing with him a gift to the Jerusalem Christians who had suffered great economic hardship. And in order to help patch things up between the Jewish church and the Gentile church, which always had a fair amount of friction between them. Paul had been taking for several years on his third missionary journey, an offering, a financial offering among the Gentile churches with the promise of taking it to the church in Jerusalem to help the brethren out who were suffering there.

And he did. And so in chapter twenty one, he returns to Jerusalem with this gift. But although he goes there on a, you know, a mission of mercy and and friendship, he gets into trouble there.

He gets arrested in the temple, not by the churches there, but by the Jewish leadership. And they try to kill him and the Romans have to intervene to save him. They take him away from the mob of Jews are trying to kill him and they take him into custody.

And he remains in Roman custody in Palestine for two years. Most of that time in the city of Caesarea, which is the Roman capital in Palestine. And then at a certain point, it is clear that his case is not progressing and he is in danger of the Jews being able to arrest

him out of the hands of the Romans, the protective hands of the Romans.

And so in order to avoid that, Paul appeals his case to Caesar. This is something that a Roman citizen could do. Most people in the Roman Empire were not Roman citizens.

Citizenship was a special privilege that was given to either war heroes who did some great accomplishments for Rome on the battlefield or frankly, wealthy people who could buy citizenship privileges for themselves and their family. Paul's father apparently had been wealthy and had bought citizenship for his family. So Paul was born with the privileges of Roman citizenship, something most Christians like Peter and the apostles did not have because of Roman citizenship.

Paul could claim privileges that the other apostles could not, including immunity from being beaten without a trial. Roman citizens and also he could appeal his case to the highest court just as we in America. Theoretically, if we're taking the court and things don't go our way, there's a series of courts we can go through and eventually can appeal to the Supreme Court.

I say theoretically, because there's about as much chance for a snowball in hell as for any of us ever have any of our concerns brought before the Supreme Court. But that's the way that's written up in the Constitution. We're supposed to be able to do that.

So in the Roman Empire, those who had citizenship could appeal their case if necessary to the highest court, which was Nero, the emperor himself. And so when Paul realized that the Jews were trying to persuade the local Roman governors to turn him over to be tried by them and Paul knew very well they would kill him without giving a trial. He said, No one can turn me over to them.

I appeal to Caesar, which meant that the Roman authorities had to transport him safely to Rome to stand before Caesar. And so the last part after Paul appeals to Caesar is found in chapters 21 through 28. The last chapter, and this is Paul's arrest is in here, but also his appeal to Caesar and his transport to Rome, his adventures there, suffering shipwreck and being bitten by a venomous snake and things like that.

And finally, coming to Rome and there we find it as the bookends. Paul is in Rome waiting for his trial before Caesar. And he's under house arrest, able to entertain guests.

And so he is visited by friends and curiosity seekers alike. He invites the Jewish leaders from town to come to visit him. He preaches the gospel to them.

Also, Christians probably came and visited him there. That's how the book of Acts ends. So the four sections are in chapters one through seven.

The birth and growth of the church in Jerusalem in chapters eight through twelve. The expansion of Christianity outside of Jerusalem and outside Jewish lands into Samaria and

Gentile lands. I said Peter's sort of a character in the first 12 chapters.

After that, Paul is very clearly the main character of chapters 13 through 28 and in chapter 13 through 20. It is it records all three missionary journeys and his return to Jerusalem in verse in chapter 21. And the rest of the book chapters 21 through 28 are the story of his frankly, his incarceration.

He never gets free in the book of Acts after that. He's arrested, taken into protective custody initially in chapter 21. He never gets out of custody.

He never gets out of prison until the end of the book. After that, most I think most conservative scholars would say probably there are evidences in the last three books that Paul wrote, which are later than the book of Acts. Those are the books of first and second Timothy and Titus.

After the close of the book of Acts and who knows how many years afterwards, Paul writes to his companion, Timothy and Titus, giving him instructions. Any next allusions there to places he had been and even to the fact that he had been delivered from the mouth of the lion on his first trial before Nero. So he obviously refers back to his first trial before Nero, which he was still awaiting when the act closes.

But apparently had a trial. He was released. He did travel further.

And in his later travels, he apparently left Timothy in Ephesus. He left Titus in Crete. And according to church tradition, he was arrested again at a later time in the Roman persecution of the Christians.

He was apparently released before Nero began to persecute the Christians. The persecution of the Christians by Nero started in 64 AD and ended in 68 AD when Nero committed suicide. It's apparently during that period of the between 64 and 68 that Paul was arrested a second time.

And now there is official persecution of Christians by Nero. And Paul ended up being beheaded and Peter arrested and crucified upside down in that same time period. But when Paul was when the book of Acts closes, Nero is not persecuting the church yet.

He was a perverted jerk to be sure, but he had not begun to officially persecute the church. He didn't do that until after he tried to burn Rome down and needed a scapegoat to blame that on because it was a very unpopular action in Rome to have your emperor try to burn your city down. Sort of like what our president's trying to do now.

And, you know, but it was very unpopular. So to find a scapegoat, he blamed the Magna crowd. No, I'm sorry.

He blamed the Christians. He blamed the Christians that they had burned down Rome.

And so that was in 64 AD.

And that's when the persecution of Christians began. But that was two years after the close of Acts. Very good reason to believe that before Nero began to persecute, Paul had his day in court.

Nero was still relatively objective about Christians, and he got released and he traveled more. And then during the persecution that broke out later against Christians, he was arrested again and killed. Those things are not recorded for us in the Bible, but they are recorded by the church fathers who were very near to the first century and certainly were preserving the stories of how each of the apostles died.

Now, this first segment, which is the birth and growing pains of the early church in chapters one through seven. Chapter one has a record of Jesus ascending to heaven only after telling the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He uses that term in Acts 1.5. He said, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized by the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

He says three verses later, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will receive power and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And then Jesus ascended into heaven and two angels said to the astonished apostles, why stand you gazing into heaven? The same Jesus who you saw going to heaven will return in like manner as you saw him go up and then the disciples went to an upper room, very possibly the same one where they had the last supper, which is very probably the upper room in the house of Mark's mother. Mark, who wrote the gospel of Mark, his mother is as famous as he is in the Bible.

We don't know her name, but she had a house in chapter 12 of Acts. There's a big prayer meeting going on in her house when Peter's in prison and many feel that the most likely place for the upper room was both the upper room where the last supper was taken and where the spirit came upon them in Pentecost was very probably in this woman's house. But they were up there waiting.

Jesus ascended 40 days after his resurrection and it was another 10 days before the spirit fell in that time. The disciples decided that the number 11 was not the right number for apostles. Jesus had chosen 12 apostles, obviously, to correspond with the 12 tribes of Israel.

He is forming a new Israel, but one of them had defected. One had died. Judas.

And so Peter, as they were waiting for the Holy Spirit to come, got everybody involved, which was 120 people in the upper room, including Jesus' mother and brothers and the 12 apostles and who knows who else. You know, we should choose another apostle to fill this vacancy among the 12 since Judas is gone and they elected a man named Matthias.

So instead of Judas being one of the 12 Jews now dead is replaced by a man named Matthias.

There are people who think they shouldn't have done that. There are people who think that Paul was supposed to be the replacement for Judas and they feel like Peter was jumping the gun that Peter, you know, the spirit had not yet come and he should have acted without the Holy Spirit and therefore Matthias was a mistake. Now, if this is true, Luke didn't know that.

And there is no greater fan of Paul's than Luke. Luke was obsessed with Paul's activity. He traveled with Paul.

He wanted to document Paul's activities. He stayed with Paul right down to the bitter end. He was a big fan of Paul.

And if he thought that Paul was supposed to be the replacement for Judas, he didn't give a hint of it. Instead, when Matthias was elected, Luke says from then on, he was numbered with the 12. And from then on, we read of Luke saying, and with great power, the apostles, which would include Matthias, gave witness to the resurrection of Christ.

And another place is and great signs and wonders. Why were done by the hands of the apostles, which would include Matthias. Luke, therefore, seems to accept that Matthias is the replacement for Judas.

But you see, the 12 had a different mission than Paul. Paul was certainly an apostle. And his team were apostolic, too.

But they had a mission to the Gentiles. And according to Galatians chapter 2, Peter, James and John met with Paul sometime after his conversion and agreed that he and his team were to be sent to the uncircumcised people, the Gentiles, whereas they were sent to the circumcised, that is, the Jews. Remember, Jesus said to the 12, you 12 shall sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

They saw their mission is primarily to the Jews. Paul's wasn't. Therefore, Matthias made a better replacement for Judas in the team that was sent to the Jews.

Then Paul would have made because he had a different mission. So although he was an apostle, every bit as prestigious and authoritative as the 12, he was not one of the 12. And so Luke does not seem to regard it as a mistake that Matthias was chosen and seems to accept that throughout the rest of the narrative.

Now, the second chapter of Acts, the spirit falls. There's a great commotion. There's the sound of a mighty wind.

There's the people speaking languages they don't know. There's flames of fire appearing

over their heads. There's a big commotion because it's it's Pentecost.

It's a piece of love. Jews from all over the world who made a pilgrimage to the feast like they're supposed to do. The streets of Jerusalem are clogged with Jewish natives and pilgrims have come from other countries.

They say, what's going on with all these foreign languages like from our home countries. How do these Galileans know this? This was assigned to the unbelievers, as Paul says tongues is in 1 Corinthians 14, says tongues is assigned to the unbeliever. Well, certainly was these unbelieving Jews didn't know why these galleys could speak their local dialects from foreign countries.

And so this gave it got their attention. And Peter got up and preached. It's clear he didn't preach in tongues.

They didn't need tongues to preach tongues was a sign. It was not languages in which the gospel was preached. What they heard in tongues was these men speaking about the wonderful works of God.

When I came to hear the gospel preach, Peter got me spoke one language. Everyone understood him. No doubt it was Greek because everybody in the empire spoke Greek.

You don't need to speak in tongues to evangelize people. They didn't need to, because everyone spoke Greek. They spoke their local dialects to which is what they heard on the Pentecost.

But they didn't need to be preached to in their local dialects. Since Greek was the lingua franca of the entire empire. Now, Peter preaches and 3000 are converted at the end of chapter two.

We get a brief summary of what the church was like. Initially, there were 3000 converts initially, 12 preachers, the apostles and 3000 people who were doing what? Well, they were continuing under the apostles teaching and breaking bread and fellowshiping and praying together. Apparently daily meeting from house to house and meeting in public places like the temple precincts.

Not in sanctuaries like our church, but the temple precincts were like courtroom or porticoes, porches of the temple where people could gather. These are the places where Jesus would sit and teach at the temple. He wasn't an official preacher at the temple.

He wasn't official rabbi, but he people could kind of informally gather in these porches and meet and have teachings. That's what the apostles did as well as in houses. And we're told that they also were concerned about each other's economic needs.

That those who had extra lands and houses sometimes would sell them and distribute

the money to those who needed things. As anyone had need, they did this. We're told chapter three records a remarkable miracle of a man who was lame for decades and was recognized by the inhabitants of Jerusalem because he begged at the temple gate daily.

And all the people who went to the temple in the eastern gate knew him as a beggar. Well, Peter and John were going into the temple once and the man started begging for money. And Peter said, I don't have any money, but I'll give you something better than that.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk. And the man was healed. And in the medical language of Luke, he says, and his ankles and his feet received strength.

And he stood up and he walked and leaped and praised God. And this caused a big crowd to gather and Peter preached his second famous sermon. And apparently over two thousand people were saved.

And so the church had grown to five thousand. I believe five thousand men is what we're told. So that might be not including the women and children.

The commotion, however, was very disturbing to the rulers of the Jews. The Sanhedrin remember these people only less than what three months earlier. It was actually less than two months earlier.

They had condemned Christ and had him crucified. This is the same here, the same court that condemned Jesus. Now the apostles are preaching.

Jesus is risen from the dead. He's healing these people. And these things are happening because of him.

And they don't like that. So they they round up the apostles or at least Peter and John. We're not sure if there's more of the apostles or just those two.

And they put them in jail. They brought them before the court said, don't preach anymore in this name. And Peter said, well, you're going to have to decide whether it's better for us to obey you or God.

But we don't have any trouble making up our mind about that. And and they and they were beaten and sent out with a warning that they should not preach anymore in the name of Jesus. Well, I'm sorry that that happened.

The next chapter, what happened in Chapter four was that they put him in prison and an angel spring out of prison. And they went on again and got arrested again the next day. And then they were beaten and warned not to preach anymore.

But Peter said, well, we have to obey God rather than men. So do what you want. Now, they probably would have been killed by the Sanhedrin, except one of the respected justices on the court, Gamaliel, who actually was the mentor to Paul prior to Paul's

conversion.

He was a protege of Gamaliel. Gamaliel is one of the characters in the New Testament that is known from non-Christian history. He is mentioned many times in the Talmud as a leading rabbi.

And Gamaliel actually made his appeal saying, you know, this this movement, these people following Jesus, if they're right, we don't want to oppose God if they're wrong. They're moving to fizzle out like others have before. Let's just let it go.

And so they gave the disciples a beating and sent them off. And in Chapter five, we read about the story of Ananias and Sapphira. A couple of people who are doing what other Christians were doing, those who are selling extra properties and bringing them to distribute the money to the poor, bring them to the apostles who are administrating this distribution.

And yet Ananias and Sapphira, this married couple, they pretended that they're bringing everything, but they were secretly holding some back. Now, they were not required to sell their house or bring any of it to the apostles, but they were certainly required if they did so not to lie about it. And Peter said, you have wickedly lied to the Holy Spirit.

Satan has filled your heart. And these the man is wife, both him first and his wife a little later the same day, drop dead. And of course, this brought the fear of God of the church in a big way.

And in Chapter six, this distribution of the money to the poor was being found not to be done as equity as some would wish. There were in the Jewish population what they called Hebrews who were local Judean Jews who spoke the Hebrew language actually Aramaic. When the New Testament mentions Hebrew usually means Aramaic, but Aramaic was the local language of Palestine.

But then there were Jews who had been raised maybe in other countries and they spoke Greek primarily and they were called Hellenists. And there were some synagogues in Jerusalem of the Hellenists, for example, the synagogue that Stephen preached in and got so stoned. Therefore, it was a Hellenistic synagogue called the synagogue of Friedman.

But the Hellenistic Jewish women widows were not receiving as much in the distribution as the Hebrew Jewish women. This was no doubt accidental. I mean, the twelve apostles were preaching and trying to manage the welfare system for over 5000 people.

They had their hands full and Peter just say, we got too much on our hands. Let's select seven men that everybody trust you. You bring up the candidates will recognize them and will separate ourselves.

The apostles to the preaching of the word of God and a prayer and these seven men will take care of the overseeing the distribution. So seven men were chosen, one of whom was Philip and one was Stephen. Stephen receives focus after this and then Philip does.

Stephen gets himself in trouble in chapter six by predicting, apparently, that Jesus was going to change the customs of the temple and bring in a new order, which is, of course, true. Well, he made people angry and they said he was blaspheming Moses in the temple and they stirred up the same he'd run to arrest him. And they gave him a chance to speak.

And all he did was lamb based them for their hypocrisy and for their hard heartedness. He gave a long sermon, one of the longest sermons in the book of Acts and chapter seven, in which he called them, you know, hard hearted hypocrites who always resisted the Holy Spirit. This made them so angry.

They charged him, threw him out of the court and stoned him to death until dead. Now, this was illegal for the Jews to do under Roman power. That's why they didn't kill Jesus that way.

They would have, but they the Romans didn't let the Jews execute people. So the same he'd same Sanhedrin had pilots permission to crucify Jesus. How they got away with stoning Stephen on this occasion, we're not told.

Perhaps it happens so suddenly as a mob action and then they dispersed so quickly that before the Romans could get there, you know, it was the deed was done and there was no one there, you know, or maybe it was one of those things that happened when the when the procurator was out of town and they took advantage of it. We know that much later in 64. That's what happened to James, the brother of Jesus.

This is told us by Josephus, the historian, that when the procurator died and before a new one arrived in Judea, the high priest of the advantage of stoning Jesus brother James to death because the Roman authority was out of town and that could have been the case of Stephen. So we don't know Stephen died and then a persecution against the Christians in Jerusalem expanded from there so that many, many Christians, in fact, seemingly most, it says, they were all scattered except for the apostles. Certainly there were others who stayed in Jerusalem besides the apostles, but it's not the hyperbole.

Many, many Christians fled from the persecution. Just like we would if we were Jews and Nazi Germany would flee and get out if we could and the Christians were in danger of their lives. So they fled and in their flight, they went to many different places, including Antioch, where the Church of Antioch was founded.

It's possible that the Church of Rome was founded by that. We don't know when the Church of Rome was founded, but it was founded not by Paul and not by anyone we

know. But when Paul was on his at the end of his third mission, a journey, he wrote a letter to the Christians in Rome, who obviously have been there for a while.

And he actually met some Christians from Rome in Corinth, named Priscilla Aquila. So someone had gotten to Rome without Paul getting there and made a church there. But whoever they were, it may be from this dispersion after the starting of Stephen, that some people went to Rome and evangelize.

We also went to Syria and some other places on the seacoast and so forth. And so some Gentiles were actually evangelized for the first time in Antioch, though they were not officially recognized necessarily yet by the apostles, because they were not circumcised and they were the first uncircumcised people, perhaps to receive the gospel. But in chapter eight, we then read of Philip, who is one of those who fled because the persecution he fled up to Samaria and he started a church up there.

He preached, people got saved, he baptized them. Eventually, the apostles had to come up and lay hands on them for them to receive the Holy Spirit. Now, why did that have to happen? Why didn't Philip lay hands on them? I don't know for sure, but the emblem of laying out of hand suggests partnership and association, formal association.

When a minister is ordained in modern times, someone appears in his church to lay hands on him. It means they are they're authorizing him. They're associating with his ministry.

They're putting their mark of approval on him. And that is no doubt the meaning. The first laying of hands we read of this kind was when Moses laid hands on Joshua, ordaining him to be his successor.

Well, probably what we're going to stand is that the movement that Philip had started in Samaria was the first instance of non Jewish people becoming believers in Christ. And this is a non Jewish church. But Philip had not been officially sent out as a missionary to do this kind of thing.

He just fled from persecution and did it spontaneously. And the apostles in Jerusalem heard about this brush fire movement sprang up spontaneously in Samaria. And they had to send some apostles up there to see if it was something they could approve.

And Philip apparently didn't feel like he was authorized to just automatically say his his new movement was part of the church in Jerusalem. For four years, the church in Jerusalem was the only church. Now there's some brush fire movement happening spontaneously from people fleeing and witnessing where they go.

And so the apostles have to look in on this. Do we approve of this? And when they did, they laid hands on them, which would show their partnership with their acceptance of the of this movement among the Samaritans as being part of their own movement in

Jerusalem. And the Holy Spirit came upon them at that time.

And then Philip went out into the desert. The Holy Spirit took him out there and he met an Ethiopian, also a Gentile. And that man was reading the book of Isaiah.

And he was curious about it. Philip ran up to his chariot and offered to teach him. And he led him to Christ and baptized him and sent him on his way.

Philip then was later found in a town called the Zodus, which is on the Mediterranean coast. And Philip settled in Caesarea. Again, that was the Roman capital of Palestine on the coast.

And Philip was living there many, many years later with his four daughters who are prophetesses. When Paul and his team visited there as they returned to Jerusalem for the last time he visited. So in Philip's called the evangelist.

Last we hear of him, he's been living in Caesarea with his four daughters. So that's the story of Stephen and Philip. And that brings us to the end of the section of Acts that talks about Jerusalem.

We now have chapters. Actually, eight through twelve. I mentioned eight because that was outside Jerusalem in Samaria.

In chapter nine, we then have Paul being converted. His story is very well known. He was a persecutor of the church.

He was a zealous Jew, a protégé of Gamaliel. Very angry at Christians. And he was authorized by the Sanhedrin to go to other countries where Christians had people have been converted, including Syria and Damascus.

And so he went up there to arrest them. But he met Jesus on the way in a vision. And so Saul arrived in Damascus as a believer.

A local believer named Ananias was sent by Jesus to lay hands on him because Paul was blinded by the vision. And by laying hands on him, his eyes were opened and he received the Holy Spirit. He was water baptized.

And then he began to preach in Damascus about Jesus. But the Jews there wanted to run him out and kill him. And so he escaped through a window in a wall.

An upper story window. He was let down in a basket and he fled to Arabia and to his own home country of Cilicia, where he'd grown up. And we don't hear about him again right away.

But we do hear about Peter. Peter's traveling around, still visiting these movements that are starting outside of Jerusalem. And he goes, for example, to Caesarea and he and to

Jaffa.

And in those places, a couple of important things happen when he's in. I think it's in Caesarea. I believe in Caesarea.

One of those two places, he heals a lame man named Aeneas. And in another place, I believe it's in Jaffa, he raises up a lady named Tabitha or Dorcas from the dead. And while he's in Jaffa, he has a vision of unclean animals being lowered on a sheet.

And Jesus says, kill these animals and eat them. And Peter says, I don't eat unclean animals. I'm a good Jew.

And Jesus says, what I've called clean, don't you call unclean. And this vision had to be repeated three times and left Peter curious. And Jesus spoke to him and said, well, let me tell you what this is about.

There's some Gentiles. A man named Cornelius has seen a vision of an angel who sent messengers to get you to come and preach the gospel to him in his house. Now, Cornelius was a Gentile, a full-on Gentile.

The Samaritans were at least half Jewish. This man was a Roman, an enemy of the Jews, total uncircumcised Gentile. And no Jewish Christian had ever gone into the house of the Gentiles because Jews had Jewish prejudices against Gentiles.

They didn't go into Gentile houses. And so Peter is being told by Christ to go into the house of this Gentile and preach the gospel. It turns out that we read of Cornelius, the story in chapter 10 of Acts, how he was praying.

He was a good, he was a good Gentile. He prayed to God. He was seeking God and an angel appeared to him and said, send some people to Joppa to get Peter.

Peter came up. He preached the gospel to him. The Holy Spirit fell on the whole household.

And the first Gentile converts who were uncircumcised apparently were converted. I was just after or before the Ethiopian unit. We are told things are sometimes told out of chronological order for the sake of following one man's ministry a certain distance before it goes back and talks about another man.

And so it's not clear whether the Ethiopian unit had been converted before this point or not. If he was, he might not have been uncircumcised. He was after all an Ethiopian who traveled to Jerusalem and read the Jewish scriptures.

He could very well have been a proselyte. A proselyte was a Jew who had been, I mean, a Gentile who had been circumcised and was regarded as a Jew now. So it's possible that the Ethiopian unit was a circumcised proselyte.

But Cornelius was not. When Peter got back to Jerusalem, the church in Jerusalem gave him trouble because he went into the house of a Gentile and baptized him. And Peter told the story how he'd been led by a vision to do that.

And that Cornelius had been led by an angel to speak for him. And so when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that. They said, oh, then I guess God has granted repentance to the Gentiles, too.

So that was a very major turning point. The latter part of Chapter 11 actually is one of the places that goes back earlier. It goes back to chapters eight when the church was persecuted.

It tells about people going very many places, including to Antioch. Now, it picks up that story because unknown Christians evangelize Antioch in Syria, including some Gentiles. And the apostles, as they needed to check out on these spontaneous movements, apparently were too busy to go up there.

So they sent a legate named Barnabas, a very trusted Jerusalem Christian from the early days since Pentecost. He was not an apostle, but he was very much respected by the apostles. And so he was sent up there as their legate to investigate the movement in Antioch.

He went up there. He liked what he saw. And he said, this is cool.

This is good. Good things are happening here. He decided this Antioch church could use some mature Christian leadership.

So Barnabas actually went to Tarsus where Paul was and he brought Paul back to Antioch. And the two of them ministered in the church for about a year there. And they were leaders in the church.

And after about a year, the Holy Spirit spoke to the leaders of the church that send Barnabas and Paul out on the missionary journey that I called them to. And so they did. They took Mark, who was Barnabas's cousin or nephew with them.

And they set out in. Now, what also happened in chapter 12 is that a brief persecution against the church broke out from her to grip of the first. Now, later in actually inherited a grip of the second her to grip of the second was somewhat sympathetic toward Paul.

And we see Paul holding a defense of himself before a group of the second. But a group of the first was no friend of Christians. And the Jews encouraged him to persecute the Christians and inherit a grip of arrested James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, one of the four fishermen and executed his beheaded.

And that was the first of the apostles to die. A martyred Stephen had died of martyr, but

was not an apostle. Judas had died, but he was not a martyr.

So the first apostle to die as a martyr was James, the brother of John. Then, Herod, seeing that the Jews were pleased by this arrested Peter, intending to do the same thing to him, put him in jail overnight. Apparently, Peter is going to be executed as James was the very next morning, but Peter slept soundly, chained to at least four guards in an inner prison with several locked gates between him and the outside world.

But an angel appeared to him, prison woke him up. His shackles fell free. The guards were asleep.

The gates opened and Peter walked out into the street. He thought he was dreaming. He didn't know it was real.

He hadn't shaken the sleep out of his face thoroughly until he was standing in the middle of the town. The way that this is real. He says, Now I know that the Lord sent his angel to deliver.

So he went to a prayer meeting that was taking place in Mark's mother's house. And he said to them, Listen, I got to get out of town. I'm a refugee, you know, a fugitive from justice here.

And so tell James and they left. I said, Tell James, James, he's referring to James, the brother of Jesus, who later in acts is seen to be the leader of the Church of Jerusalem. As Peter appeared to be in the earlier chapters, James now was.

It apparently was the case. I'm reading between the lines and I may be wrong, but apparently the case that when things were heating up and persecution was aimed at the apostles. And when James was killed, Peter may have mentioned to James, You know, I'm probably the next target.

So if anything happens to me, I want you to take over my leadership here in the church because you're less conspicuous. He wasn't one of the twelve apostles. He's a brother of Jesus.

He's actually very highly respected among the Jews. They call him James the just. And so I think, although we're not told, I think that arrangement had been prearranged by Peter with James.

Hey, if I have to get out of town, would you step up and leave the church for me? And that's why when Peter is about to run out, I said, Go tell James. And then he left and he's not seen in town anymore until later. The Jerusalem Council chapter 12.

In the meantime, we have Paul's and Barber's first missionary journey where they went to southern Galatia. They first went to Cyprus, which is where Barber's from Barber's was

Paul's companion and Barber's nephew Mark on this journey. The Holy Spirit sent them out.

This is in Chapter 13, Chapter 13 and 14. Record this first missionary journey beginning to end. They went to Cyprus.

There was a false prophet named Elmas there who is opposing their gospel while he was preaching to one of the government officials there named Sergius Paulus. And the man was being distracted from what Paul was saying by this false prophet. So Paul got angry and he rebuked the man and said, you'll be blind for a while.

And sure enough, the guy was struck blind and left the room looking for someone to guide him out the door. And Sergius Paulus, who saw this happen, was very impressed and apparently became a Christian. Now, one thing that's interesting at this point is until this happened in Cyprus, Barber's seems to have been the senior member of the team.

In Acts 13 at the beginning, the Holy Spirit said separate Barber's and Paul for the ministry of them apart for the apostles sent them out late has been sent out Barber's and Paul. And it mentions the apostles Barber's and Paul. But when it comes to this confrontation in Cyprus, it says, Paul, and it says, Luke says, who also was called Paul, which is the name used from forever after this point.

Rebuke this false prophet. Then the next we hear the team is Paul and Barber's Paul and Barber's Paul and Barber's and Paul and his companions. So Barber's was mentioned first as being prominent until Paul did this first miracle, which apparently increased everyone's respect for him.

And and at least from Luke's point of view, Paul was the leader of the team from then on, although Luke was not with them yet. They took ship up to the southern coast of what's now Turkey. They went to several towns there to sit in Antioch.

They went to Perga, Iconium, Lystra. In Lystra, a young man and his mother and grandmother seemed to have gotten saved named Timothy. He didn't come with Paul at this point, but later on in Paul's second missionary journey, went through Lystra and picked him up, took him with him as a team member.

But he went out and he established churches, the places he got into a lot of trouble in Lystra. He was mistaken for he and Barbara mistaken for some Greek gods because of miracles they did. And they had to tell you no, no, we're not gods.

Don't worship us. And the very next verse says, then the Jews came from elsewhere and turned the people of Lystra against him and stoned him to death, stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city. He may have been dead.

They at least believed he was dead when they dragged his mangled corpse out of the

city. But the disciples gathered around him and prayed. He stood up and walked not out of the city, but away back into the city.

Just to show that he is. You get off the horse. You're going to get back on the horse.

But once he did that, he left the next day and went back to revisit the same churches they found on the way back to Syria and which is their home. And they got back at the end of chapter fourteen to add you have to give a report of their activities now at that time. There began to be a controversy in the beginning of chapter fifteen between Judaizers who thought that Paul's Gentile converts ought to become circumcised.

Paul said, not on your life. We're not going to be circumcised. We're not Jews.

And this is a big contention. And this happened when these Judaizers came to Antioch, where Paul and Barabbas lived. So Paul and Barabbas went up to Jerusalem to hold the first council, the first council of the Christian church called the Jerusalem Council.

And there we see James is very clearly the leader of the church. James is superintending the meeting. James gives the final verdict and so forth.

So we see James has now replaced Peter as the main person of the church. And Peter's even there. Peter and Paul both are there giving testimony at the hearings.

But James makes the call and what they decide is that God himself, especially the House of Cornelius, had proven that God doesn't seem to care if people are circumcised or not. But whoever loves Christ and follows God is OK. They did ask that the Gentile Christians would avoid some of the more gross things that Christians might feel they have liberty to do, but would gross out the Jews in their regions, including eating blood and things strangled and meat sacrificed idols.

And they also threw fornication in there, which Christians wouldn't do. But Gentiles did a greatly offended Jews and avoided fornication, too. And they wrote a letter to that effect for Paul and Barnabas to take to the Gentile churches to let them know they don't have to be circumcised.

Well, that began the second missionary journey. Paul said to Barth, let's go. Let's go visit those churches again.

If our says, great, let's take Mark. But Mark had abandoned them on the first missionary journey. After he left Cyprus, he had gone back home.

We don't know why, but Paul felt he didn't have good reasons. And Paul didn't want to trust him as a companion. It's a dangerous mission.

You don't want someone you can't lean on. Barnabas was sympathetic toward Mark, maybe because he was his nephew. We don't know.

But Paul and Barnabas had a big argument about this. And Barnabas took Mark and went off on his own missionary journey, which is not recorded for us because Luke didn't ever travel with Barnabas. So, you know, Mark could have written those journeys, I suppose, because he went with Barnabas.

They went to Cyprus again. And who knows where from then on? Paul took a new companion, Silas, who is a prophet from the Jerusalem church. And so Silas and Paul made the second missionary journey, revisited some of the same regions.

But he moved. He didn't know he was going to go to. He moved into Greece.

And the first churches in Europe were founded on this missionary journey. This is the time when they weren't sure which way they should go. They were at Troas, which is on the edge of Asia, just across a brief waterway from Europe, Greece.

And they wanted to go to Bithynia and into Asia. But the Holy Spirit prevented them. It was a dream of a man from Macedonia, which is northern Greece, saying, come over to Macedonia and help us.

So they did. And that's when Luke joined them for the first time. I don't know why he was in Troas.

He didn't do it. He didn't go with them to Troas, but he left from Troas. Now, perhaps Troas was his home.

Maybe he got converted. Maybe Paul had some medical problems while in Troas and attended. You know, Luke attended to him and got converted through Paul and decided to travel with him because he needed medical attention.

Or some traditions say that Luke was a native of Antioch. And although he didn't travel to Troas with the apostles, he must have come later and joined them. We don't know if this is true or not.

Again, it might have been due to Paul's medical needs. We have no real idea. But Luke travels with them then across to Greece and still applies the first city where they found a church.

Paul casts the demon out of a fortune telling girl. He gets in trouble with her owner because she's a slave. He gets thrown into prison.

He is beaten without a trial, which only happens because he neglects to mention he's a Roman citizen. Roman citizens could not legally be beaten without a trial. Now, Paul was being tied to the whipping posts and the whips were being prepared.

And Paul had plenty of time to say, as he did on a later occasion, Hey, you can't do this to me. I'm a Roman citizen. And he would have escaped the beating.

Instead, he remains silent. And he and Barnabas took the beating. It's possible that this is because Barnabas wasn't a Roman citizen.

Paul didn't want Barnabas to be beaten without him. So he shared it with him. But we don't know.

But it got them bargaining power because the next day he mentioned, Hey, I'm a Roman citizen. You guys beat me last night. Oh, that terrified their inquisitors because they they broke a Roman law in beating him.

But what happened that night before all that while they're in prison, they were praising God. An earthquake came, shook the bonds off of them. The prison doors are open.

The jailer thought all the prisoners had left was going to kill himself because that would be his penalty for losing his charges. And Paul said, Hey, don't kill yourself. We're here.

And the man came in. What must I do to be safe? Also, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be safe. And your house, the man took him to his house, washed their wounds, was converted along with his family, were baptized.

And then brought him back to jail and locked him up again, which was he he could not do that without becoming a partner in crime. And so when the authorities came the next day, said, OK, you can leave now because they couldn't really place any charges on. Well, I'm sorry, it's not that easy.

He said, You arrested us and beat us on condemned in court and were Roman citizens. We're not going to leave quietly unless you escort us out publicly and vindicate us before everybody. Then we'll leave.

And so in great humiliation, the authorities had to do that. The reason Paul did that, of course, is because the gospel which he had come to represent had been publicly condemned or humiliated by him being arrested in his public scene. And therefore, if you just left quietly, it was like all those Christians there that illegal group that their leaders were put in jail.

But as the town leaders had to take them out and say, OK, these guys didn't do anything wrong. Paul could leave town knowing that his gospel wouldn't have detained in the town's memory of being promoted by criminals. And he apparently left Luke there because he went on down next to Thessalonica.

He was run out of Thessalonica by patriots who said he was preaching another King Jesus against Caesar. He had to leave town there, went down to Berea where the people were more noble than the people of Thessalonica. This is all in Chapter 17.

And I guess I forgot to mention he picked up Timothy along the way early on in this

journey. So the team was now Paul and Silas, Luke and Timothy. And so he went on down to Athens and apparently sent Timothy and Silas back up to see if they could check on how things were doing in the churches that he'd been run out of.

Paul was the one who was the lightning rod. He's the one that was the visible one. His partners were probably in the shadows most of the time, not really conspicuous.

So they could kind of visit town again and maybe not be recognized or not be a threat. Paul couldn't go back because he was seen as a troublemaker. So he had to go into Athens.

At that point, he had a gave a sermon on Mars Hill to a bunch of Greek philosophers. A few converts were made, but not many. They kind of mocked him when he brought up the resurrection of the dead.

And then we come to Chapter 18 and he gets he goes to Corinth in Corinth and meets Priscilla and Aquila. They are Jewish Christians from Rome who've been banished because the emperor Claudius had banished all Jews from Rome. We have mentioned this in the secular historians mentioned that Claudius had banished all the Jews from Rome because of Christ.

And they were apparently Christian Jews who were banished. They resettled in Corinth, which is in southern Greece. Paul meets them.

They happen to be tent makers, as he is. So he stays with them for 18 months. He's making tents and preaching on the side.

He gets run out of the synagogue. But even the synagogue leader gets converted and joins the church, Christos. And and so he ministers there in a facility called the School of Tyrannus.

We don't know who Tyrannus was, probably a Greek philosopher who held classes for his students in the daytime. And Paul probably rented the place at night or vice versa. Paul preached there for 18 months.

Then he left because he wanted to get to Jerusalem and he got to he stopped in at Ephesus, which is a minor on his way to Jerusalem. And he didn't stay there long. But Priscilla and Aquila left Corinth with him and he left them in Ephesus to kind of see the beginnings of Christianity.

And then he went on to Jerusalem. And after going to Jerusalem and keeping a feast there, he went back to Ephesus. This would be his third missionary journey.

And he arrived there in chapter 19. And he spent longer in Ephesus than in any other one place that we know of. And all three years in Ephesus, Ephesus was the capital of

Asia Minor.

And from there, he had outreach sent out all over Asia. The Bible says while he was in Ephesus, all Asia heard the gospel. This would include churches like the seven churches in Revelation.

Ephesus, Myrna, Thyatira, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colossae, and Hierapolis are among them. Troas also was in Asia. So there were at least 10 churches in Asia when Paul was done.

And he was apparently imprisoned some of the time there, but he was free most of the time. A man named Philemon got converted through him. He was from Colossae, but he apparently visited Ephesus and got saved through Paul.

Paul never went to Colossae, but Philemon went back to Colossae and there was a church in his home when Paul wrote to him. Also, Philemon's slave Onesimus escaped from Philemon and came to Paul either later in Rome or while Paul was in Ephesus. We don't know for sure and got converted and Paul sent him back home, converted.

Anyway, Paul eventually left Ephesus and wanted to get back to Jerusalem because he'd been traveling around gathering funds to help the Jerusalem church. And so he ended his third missionary journey by getting back to Jerusalem. On the way back, many people warned him that he was going to be arrested there and he shouldn't go.

But he went anyway. And when he got into Jerusalem, he met with James and James being the one who was pretty much in charge of things. Told Paul, you know, you're a controversial character among the Jewish church here.

They think things like you are true. They actually think you've been discouraging Jews from circumcising their children. Now, Paul had never done that.

Paul told Gentiles they shouldn't be circumcised. Jews were already circumcised and he didn't care and he didn't mind if they circumcised their children. But James said, well, we tell them that's not true.

You can prove it. Show that you're a good, you know, Torah observant man. And we have four people here who have to go to the temple to pay vows on a Nazarite vow.

So just take them and pay their vows for them and everyone will see that you observe the law. Well, he did and he did observe the law, but he got accused falsely. The Jews saw him there.

Some of the Asian Jews where he'd spent three years before. They didn't like him. They accused him of bringing one of his Gentile friends into the temple for Gentiles were not allowed to go beyond the court of the Gentiles.

He had apparently not done so because he was not there to cause trouble, but he was falsely accused. A riot broke out. The Jews tried to tear him to pieces.

The Romans who were in their fortress of Antonia nearby heard about it. Sent soldiers down, dragged Paul away from the crowd, took him up to the fortress for his protection. But they didn't know if he was innocent or not.

They just didn't want a mob to keep to kill him. So they actually tied Paul to a whipping post and they were going to interrogate him by whipping him. And on this occasion, Paul said, I'm sorry, you can't do that.

I'm a Roman citizen. Not the same situation as Tilapia. And the guard was terrified that he had almost whipped a Roman citizenship citizen.

And the man said, you really are. He says, I, the Romans said, I got my citizenship at a great cost. And Paul says, I was born a citizen.

So apparently Paul's father had gotten a citizenship for his family. Anyway, he was transported. Well, he's kept in custody briefly.

But a forty Jews made a covenant. They would not eat or drink until they killed Paul by divine providence. Paul's own nephew heard of the plot and Paul said to report it to the authorities.

And they did. And so they whisked Paul away in the middle of the night under Roman guard to Caesarea, which was, as I say, the Roman capital of Palestine. There were hearings between the Jews came there and Felix was the the procurator there as pilot had been procured during the days of Jesus.

Now Felix was and he he was not that interested, but he Paul would visit. He actually bring Paul out of prison to his chambers to have Paul preach to him. And Paul reasoned with him about justice and about the judgment to come.

And it says that Felix actually trembled when he heard this. And he said, go away, Paul. When I have a chance, I'll call you back.

But he didn't. Felix left his position. Another guy named Festus came in and took that over.

And that's just inherited the problem of Paul. But this is after Paul had been imprisoned there in Caesarea for two years. And they told him about Paul.

But he couldn't find anything wrong with Paul. He wasn't sure why he was in prison. He hadn't done any crimes, but he didn't want to let him go because the Jews didn't want him out.

And a grip of the second, who was a Roman who knew a lot about Judaism and cared a lot about the Jewish religion, came to visit Festus and Festus says, you're kind of an expert in these affairs. I have this person named Paul. Felix left him here.

The accusations against him, I can't understand what they are. The Jews say he's done some horrible things. I can't tell what it is.

Seems to be just a dispute among themselves. And would you hear him in a group? I'd like to hear him. And so a group are and his wife, Bernice and Festus gathered together to hear the accusations against Paul.

And Paul was able to give a defense in his defense. He almost converted a group of groups that you almost persuaded me to be a Christian. But he didn't.

And when Paul was taken back to his cell, a group of said to. Oh, and during that time, Festus said to Paul, will you allow yourself to be sent back to Jerusalem to be tried before the Jews? Now, the Jews already are people planning to kill him. He said, no, no one can do it.

He says, if I'm an offender or have done anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying. But since none of these things of which they charge me are true, no one can deliver me to their hands. I appeal to Caesar.

And Festus said, OK, just as you have appealed to Caesar, you will go. They had no right to deny him that decision. And so when Paul was back in his cell, a group of professors said, if this man had not appealed to Caesar, we could let him go because he's innocent.

But now we have to send him to Caesar. And so we have a few chapters of Paul's trip to Rome, especially chapter 27. And he was shipwrecked on the way the ship was torn apart by waves and the people survived it.

Paul, I should catch up charge. There are hundreds of prisoners on the ship and Roman authorities on them. But everyone was terrified for their lives.

And Paul was one who says, OK, here's what you got to do. An angel of my God stood by me last night, told me here's what to do. So forth.

And it's like Paul kind of took charge of the ship, though he is a prisoner. Anyway, the ship broke up into pieces. Everyone survived either by swimming or floating ashore on flotsam bits of the ship.

And they got onto this little island of Malta. And there, as they were gathering sticks for a fire to warm off as they're all wet. A viper, a deadly snake bit Paul on the hand and all the locals are.

Oh, this guy must be really bad. The Fates wanted to kill him in the sea, but he escaped

that. But they wouldn't let him live.

They sent a snake against him. But Paul just took off the snake and unharmed into the fire. The snake died.

Paul did not. It says the people watched him, expecting him to swell up and die. But when when he didn't, they changed their minds.

He was a god. Now, the leader of the island in those days, the leader was called the first man of the island. That's known for secular history.

That's what Luke calls him. The first man of the island had a father who was very sick. And Paul went to him and healed him, which got him obviously a lot of favor in the side of everybody.

And so he and his companions are kind of wintered there. And then they traveled largely by foot up the Greek or the Italian peninsula toward Rome. As the Christians in Rome heard he was coming, they went out to meet him and accompanied him to Rome.

He was held under house arrest there for two years. One of the first things he did in Chapter 28 is he called for the Jewish authorities and told them why he was there and what had happened and what he's preaching and so forth. And he preached to them.

Some of them believed, others didn't. And then we read that he spent two years there waiting for his trial under house arrest. But this has no one forbade him to have visitors.

And so he received everyone who came to him. And he spoke to them of the things of Jesus Christ and of the kingdom of God. And that's how the book ends.

Got to see the big picture. You know, you got to see the big picture and know how the details fit in, which is what I hope you'll do. As you now have been through the entire book of Acts in one night, now you can go through it slower at home.