



# THE ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

VOLUME FOUR  
ACTS 21-28

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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A small ember faintly glowed in Jerusalem. A carpenter, seeming to be a common man, collected a few faithful followers showing them what life was meant to look like. But as soon as these followers caught His brilliant vision, their joy and hope would seem crushed upon a Roman cross, because the powers and principalities would stop at nothing to snuff out His beauty and goodness. This is not how most stories begin . . .

But just when it seemed as if the shadows had grown to replace the light, a tomb is robbed of it's death and a risen Savior illuminates hope. Now these followers of Jesus are called to pick up and carry the vision and movement forward into the darkness of this world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they carry the spark of Jesus' vision outward, proclaiming this Good News of a King on a Cross to their city, their people, their enemies, and to the ends of the earth. And what began as a glowing ember in an upper room would gather into a blazing and consuming firestorm of witness across time and space, telling the tale of this carpenter, this risen Savior, the very Son of God.

These are the Acts of the Apostles.



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## SESSION ONE

READ

**Acts 21:1-14**

# ACTS 21:1-14

## INTRODUCTION

When we were last in Acts, Paul and his companions were tearfully parting from the Ephesian elders in Miletus. Paul had called them together for a farewell before setting his face toward Jerusalem, fully aware that imprisonment and suffering awaited him there. In his farewell, Paul urged these leaders to follow his example of faithfulness, warning them to guard their flocks from danger and reminding them of Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." They prayed and wept together, knowing this would likely be the last time they saw him. We now continue with Paul as he journeys toward Jerusalem.



# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Paul receives hospitality from disciples he may not have known. Can you think of other examples of Christian hospitality in the New Testament? (Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:2, Luke 14:12-14) What does it look like to offer this kind of hospitality today? Are there any challenges you've encountered?
2. Why do you think Luke draws our attention to Philip's four daughters? How could this help us better understand how the Holy Spirit equips the church body? (Acts 2:17, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 14:3)
3. The disciples take the physical posture of kneeling together in prayer at the beach. What role do postures like kneeling, bowing or lifting hands play in prayer alongside the posture of our heart? (Acts 20:36, Deuteronomy 9:25-26, Daniel 6:10, Luke 22:41-42)
4. What similarities and differences do you notice in the Spirit's messages in verses 4 and 11? How do these fit together?
5. We first meet Agabus in Acts 11. In this passage, he acts out a prophetic warning, much like the Old Testament prophets. (Isaiah 20, Jeremiah 19, Ezekiel 4) Why might God use physical symbols instead of words alone?

6. The disciples urge Paul not to go to Jerusalem. How should we weigh wise counsel from others against our personal conviction from the Lord? Where is the line between courageous obedience and reckless presumption?
7. Paul says he is "ready" to be bound and even die for Christ. God calls on His people to be ready in different ways throughout the Bible (see places like Exodus 12:11 and 1 Peter 3:15). What does readiness look like in your life? In your suffering? In your witness? In your relationships?
8. Describe similarities you see between Paul's willingness to suffer in Jerusalem and Jesus' determination to endure the cross? How does this parallel deepen our understanding of discipleship? (Acts 9:16, John 16:33)
9. The disciples finally surrender by saying, "The Lord's will be done." Compare this to Jesus' prayers in Luke 22:42 and in Matthew 6:10. What does it mean to pray and live this way for us?

# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL



As Paul journeyed toward Jerusalem, Luke tells us he stopped in city after city. He travels from Cos to Caesarea and each stop mattered. He prayed with believers, received hospitality and encouraged the church. Even so, Paul never lost sight of his destination, Jerusalem was always before him.

As Christians, our lives move much the same. Along the journey, we find ourselves in many "ports." Some are joyful, like marriage, meaningful work or loving friendships. Others are painful, like unemployment, illness or a loved one turning away from Jesus. Each port has purpose, yet none of them is our final destination. Time is carrying each of us forward toward eternity with Jesus.

When we keep our eyes fixed on our true destination, we can celebrate the blessings of each port and endure the trials without mistaking them for the end of the journey.

**So where are you today? How clearly are you keeping eternity in view? If you're not sure, invite a faithful friend or pastor into the conversation. And, if your destination is clear, what is one way you can share your hope in Jesus with others this week to help them set their sights on Him, too?**







## SESSION TWO

READ

**Acts 21:15-36**

# ACTS 21:15-36

## INTRODUCTION

Paul's relationship with Jerusalem continues to be marked by tension. We first meet him as Saul, persecutor of those following the Way, before he returns to Jerusalem after his life-changing encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. At that point, the apostles cautiously received him. Ten years later, in Acts 15, Paul returned to participate in the Council of Jerusalem as the church leaders debated whether Gentile believers must be circumcised. That gathering concluded with a letter affirming that salvation is found in Jesus Christ by faith, not in adherence to Mosaic Law. Now, we join Paul as he returns a third time to Jerusalem.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When Paul and his companions arrive, they go to see James and the other elders of the Jerusalem church. In what ways have things changed or remained the same in the structure of the early church since Acts 2? Which of these things do you recognize in the church today?
2. What is established at the Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15? Do Paul's teachings give any reason for these accusations? If not, why do you think they've continued to spread?
3. The church leaders in Jerusalem reaffirm the letter addressing Gentiles and the Law of Moses, yet rumors about Paul's teaching persist. Why might this kind of misunderstanding prevail in Jerusalem more than other places the Gospel has spread?
4. James requests that Paul participate in purification rituals and pay expenses for others. Why does Paul comply? What risks and opportunities could this choice create for the gospel? (1 Corinthians 9:19–23)

5. The crowd was stirred up. Review other instances of this mob mentality we've encountered in Acts. (Acts 7, 14, 17, 19) What parallels do you find with group behavior in our world today?
6. When Roman soldiers appear, the crowd suddenly stops beating Paul. What does this reveal about the relationship between Roman authority and those under it? Why do we often respond more quickly to human authority than to the authority of God?
7. Looking back at the warnings Paul received, how does this unfolding conflict align with prophetic words? (Acts 20:22–23; 21:10–11) How might this shape our trust in God's sovereignty when we face difficulty?
8. What cultural or religious beliefs kept so many Jewish believers from understanding Paul's message? Are there assumptions within our own culture that keep people from hearing the gospel clearly?



# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL



At another point in his story, Paul was not so different from those attacking him outside the temple. Years earlier, he had approved violence, collecting coats at the stoning of Stephen. Now he is the object of the same misdirected zeal that once defined him. As the blows fell, perhaps he prayed for his assailants as he remembered the grace and mercy he received from the Lord along the road to Damascus.

This passage reminds us that surrender to Jesus not only changes a life's direction, it also equips us to endure hardship with clarity and hope. Even Paul's act of purification in Jerusalem was more than a simple strategy to appease. It carried spiritual weight, drawing him nearer to God and preparing him for what lay ahead. His perseverance is more than grit. It is the fruit of a life rooted in seeking the Lord.

Praise the Lord, most of us won't face beatings or martyrdom for our faith, but we may face trials, opposition, misunderstandings and suffering. By anchoring ourselves in Christ through prayer, worship, Scripture and obedience, we are strengthened to endure with the same confidence Paul displayed.

**So, this week, you are invited to take two steps. First, rest in Jesus. Allow Him to strengthen you in the ordinary rhythms of devotion so that when challenges come, you are ready to persevere. Second, pray for the person you would be most surprised to see come to faith. Ask the Lord to soften their heart as He once softened yours. If He did it for Paul and He did it for you, He can absolutely do the same for them.**





## **SESSION THREE**

READ

**Acts 21:37 - 22:29**

# ACTS 21:37 - 22:29

## INTRODUCTION

The “third time's a charm” does not seem to be true for Paul. He has entered a hornet’s nest in Jerusalem, willingly. Confusion abounds. The tribune is confused, and there is confusion in the crowd, but Paul is not confused and stays on mission. He will be heard in whatever language, before whatever crowd, with whatever repercussions.



# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Summarize Paul's "defense." What do you think he is trying to get the crowd to understand? Who in the audience could validate his story? Do you think he got to the point he was hoping?
2. Recall the story of Gamaliel in Acts 5:33-39. Why might he be important to Paul's defense? How was his response different?
3. Recall the story of Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7. Why is this story important here? Why might Luke want us to bring it to mind?
4. Read Acts 9:3-18 and compare with Acts 22:6-21. Is there any new information? How close are the two accounts?

5. In Judaism, there was a way that Gentiles became Jewish. Read Exodus 12:47-49. Why did Paul's statement in Acts 22:21 anger the crowds? How does this relate to the concerns raised in Acts 21:20-21 and the original charges in Acts 21:28-29?
6. Read Ephesians 2:13-21. How does Paul understand the division between Jew and Gentile now that Jesus has died and risen? Why does this offend the Jewish people?
7. Has the tribune determined why the Jews were angry at Paul? What was likely a big obstacle? What was the tribune prepared to do? What stopped him?
8. Read Acts 22:25-29. Paul went through this once before in Acts 16:37-39. What's different between these two events?

# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL



Paul speaks to the Judean crowd in Hebrew, and he speaks to the tribune in Greek. Jewish and Roman. Two citizenships. He is well-trained and a known Pharisee so Paul addresses the crowd about his upbringing and experiences so they can be validated by other devout Jews. The crowd in the temple doesn't seem to complain when he speaks of the One who has spoken from heaven, Jesus the resurrected Nazarene. But when his mission is declared "to the Gentiles," their suspicions are confirmed. They want to destroy him. Ironically, a Gentile with Roman authority saves him. But he only does this in order to flog Paul into confessing. Which is not a great option for speaking the truth and quite ironic for the apostle to the Gentiles. No one gets it. Paul is a citizen of heaven and he is willing risk everything trusting in Jesus, the One who saved him and called Him.

**When is the last time you told your story to those who do not know Jesus? Did they listen? What can you do to increase the possibility of these conversations?**







## SESSION FOUR

READ

**Acts 22:30 - 23:11**

# ACTS 22:30 - 23:11

## INTRODUCTION

Surely the high council could clarify the charges to the tribune. The Sadducees and Pharisees made up the leadership of Israel's religious system, having seats in the Sanhedrin which was the ruling council for the people of Israel. Sadducees were typically more aligned with Rome, had more wealth and were the ruling priests in the temple, while the Pharisees were popular with the people, and were looked up to because of their way of life. The problem is that there were divisions in their beliefs. Paul understands and puts his finger on this pressure point and the tribune remains uncertain of why Paul is in such trouble.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Go back through the interactions with the tribune from last week and this week. What is the sequence of events that the tribune has tried to use to determine why Paul is in trouble with the chief priests and council?
2. Why is Paul struck? What do his Jewish hearers think he is saying by claiming “good conscience to this day”?
3. Read Exodus 22:28. Here Paul refers to a “ruler” who is a priest. Why has Paul backed down and apologized? Why might this be effective in this audience? Explain.
4. Paul is shrewd. He noticed his audience was split on certain issues. What does the text identify as the disagreement? What do you think of Paul using this tactic? What is most interesting about Paul’s stated reason about why he is being tried? Now read and discuss 1 Corinthians 15:13-19.

5. Read Luke 20:27-40. How does Jesus respond to the Sadducees in a similar confrontation?
6. When did Paul “[testify] to the facts about [Jesus] in Jerusalem”? What has been the basic content of the testimony?
7. In Acts 19:21, Paul makes a comment about Rome and here we see Jesus confirming that mission. Paul’s ideas and Jesus’ ideas have come together in Acts 23:11. How might you explain this type of participation in our faith?
8. In Acts 22:17-21, Paul in a trance sees the Lord and hears that he is being sent “far away to the Gentiles” while here in Acts 23:11, he is now being sent far away to “testify also in Rome.” Discuss the level of trust and obedience required to be used by God in this way.

# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL



The situation presents Paul as if he is standing in the middle of two parties between which he is likely to be destroyed. Isn't this how group dynamics still work? Your tribe becomes your focus. The rules of the tribe become unwritten law. It creates "us" and "them." But is this what Paul was doing? Was he creating division so he could slip out the side door? No. He presented the fact of the resurrection and risked his own destruction in doing so. Paul knows that Christ's resurrection is the culmination of his faith and hope. It is the culmination of the Hebrew scriptures and it is what brought life and hope to those inside and outside of Judaism. Paul remembers his King—the One who was destroyed by the powers of the world, both Jewish and Roman, but resurrected in triumph. Paul trusts Jesus with his life and trusts that he will make it to Rome as promised, no matter how much he speaks truth to the powers and authorities.

**Do you sometimes fail at being a truth-teller? Do you fear the cost of speaking truth? Talk with a trusted person how the promise of resurrection, and the grace of the Resurrected One can help you grow in wisdom and truth.**







## SESSION FIVE

READ

**Acts 23:12-35**

# ACTS 23:12-35

## INTRODUCTION

Paul is nearly invisible in this passage, but much like the rest of the Book of Acts, we see God as the primary actor behind the scenes.

Luke doesn't have to tell us anymore. We aren't shocked to see Paul protected through no efforts of his own and we know Who is at work. And it continues to be the enemy of the Jewish people, the Romans, that are the means of God's protection of Paul against his own people.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Matthew 5:33-37 and Matthew 23:16-22. Contrast Jesus' words on oath-taking and what is happening in this passage.
2. Read the tribune's letter to Felix. Did he tell the truth? Discuss what might be his motivation behind his retelling of the story.
3. We can't know the motivation of the tribune, but do you think his motives are any different than modern day people? Any different than you? Share a time when you curated the facts of a story to present yourself in a good light.
4. Acts 22 and 23 seems substantially about a Roman tribune who eagerly wants to carry out Roman law. Contrast that with the zeal of the forty Jewish men taking an oath to carry out their law. What is the irony?

5. How should we treat the law of the land? Now read Luke 20:19-26 and Romans 13:1-7.
  
6. What are we supposed to do when the law of the land conflicts directly with what biblical wisdom tells us? Can you give an example? Is it always straightforward?
  
7. Read Matthew 12:1-14. What is Jesus' point when it comes to the letter of the law? How might this relate to what's happening here? Do you think the forty oath-takers died?

# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL



Forty ready to kill and 470 ready to protect. It is an awesome sight. Aren't all parties trying to fulfill their people's law? The problem is determining which law takes precedence. Which is just? Think about it another way. The oath-driven Jews are willing to give their life based upon their Law to stop Paul. The Roman military are willing to fight with their lives for Roman law in protecting of Paul. But there is only one willing to truly lay down His life for Paul, the human. Implicitly, this has been Paul's argument to them all. There is One that died for him, and for them, and He was vindicated through His resurrection. That's something neither of their laws could accomplish. Salvation has come to Jew and Gentile and it is not an act of military might or human cunning. It is an act of God Himself in the person and work of Christ Jesus.

**Do you sometimes trust in law or push law before considering the gospel? Do you prefer the protections of your culture's law compared to living out the royal law of loving God and loving your neighbor?**







## SESSION SIX

READ

**Acts 24:1-27**

# ACTS 24:1-27

## INTRODUCTION

Another authority looking for answers, and Paul has not grown weary of giving a defense for the situation he finds himself in.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Boil down Tertullus' accusation about Paul. What three or four things is he specifically saying about Paul? Is there any accuracy to the charges?
2. How does Paul respond to the charges of the Jews? The charges in Jerusalem? The charges about his activities outside of Jerusalem? Has his story changed from Acts 23?
3. We really don't know the answer, but how might Felix have come to know "a rather accurate knowledge of the Way"? What might this say about the Way as it progressed through the Book of Acts?
4. Righteousness, self-control, and judgment are topics of conversation with Felix and his wife Drusilla. Give examples of other places the Apostle Paul has spoken of these things. (You can use an online tool like [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) or [www.blueletterbible.com](http://www.blueletterbible.com) to search Paul's letters).

5. Why do you think Felix was alarmed in verse 25? How has the gospel affected him, if at all?
  
6. Reading Acts 24:26-27, Felix wanted money, but he also wanted to do the Jews a favor. What drives Felix? How is his motivation similar to many in our culture today?
  
7. Paul waited in house arrest for two years. Enduring for our faith is clearly a theme when we talk about Paul. How might we train our faithfulness to respond in times of difficulty?

# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL



Felix's motivations are pretty clear. His desire to hold onto power is revealed in his desire to give "favor" (the Greek word for "grace") to the Jews and his greed is revealed in his hope for Paul to pay him. He is playing all of his options. It comes as no surprise that he might feel some alarm as he hears Paul speak about faith in Jesus including ideas like righteousness, self-control, and judgment. Righteousness and self-control are likely foreign to him and judgment sounds all too real. Maybe Luke is presenting this powerful couple as an image of gospel rejection, one a Gentile (Felix) and the other a Jew (Drusilla). The truth is that the human heart unhinged from the gospel is completely self-serving. We can be just like Felix.

Righteousness. Self-Control. Judgment. Without the first two, there is only the last. Without the Spirit of the Lord, we can't possibly achieve the first two. This is the "grace" given by Jesus. We cannot muster up enough strength, money, or good will from people to save ourselves. That requires the gift of the Son, this Resurrected One.

**Have you been watching someone who is acting more like Felix than Paul? Have you been praying for them? Have you not only spoken to them of His grace and mercy, but the hope that He promises?**







## SESSION SEVEN

READ  
**Acts 25:1-22**

# ACTS 25:1-22

## INTRODUCTION

Two years have passed and Paul is still under house arrest. Paul's situation was unimportant in the overall scheme of things. Luke does not speak to us of Paul's complaints nor his frustrations. He doesn't tell us much at all. We only hear of a changing of a governor, from Felix to Festus, but neither seem interested in Paul's plight, but certainly interested in giving "favor" to the Jews.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever felt like a pawn in someone else's game? Explain.
2. Last session, Felix wanted to do the Jews a favor, and now Festus is doing the same. What does Luke want us to recognize about rulers and powers?
3. Recall the command from Jesus in Acts 23:11. Reading Acts 25:10-12, how does Paul recognize his role in that command?
4. What is a difficult command from Jesus in scripture that you struggle with?

5. Paul says he does not “seek to escape death.” What do you think he means? What are the things you do consistently to escape death, and how should Paul’s words instruct us?
6. Compare the communications to those in authority in Acts 23:25-30 and here in Acts 25:14-21. What do they have in common? What do they have in common with the Gospel accounts about Jesus?
7. Can you think of situations where “the court of public opinion” can carry baseless accusations over long periods of time? Have you participated? Explain.
8. Paul has appealed to the highest court. Why does he appeal to Caesar? Do you think he cares about the ruling of this court or that court? Explain.

# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL



When will it stop? Two years waiting. Another governor who seems more interested in looking out for himself. Would you have given up by now? Would you ever utter the words “I do not seek to escape death”? Paul is worth imitating in many things, but his endurance for the gospel is incredible. What drives him?

There is a serious meta-message here. While Paul is appealing his case to Caesar, the highest King of the land, he does so because of his trust in the work of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He wants his case to go to the highest earthly court so he can declare the work of the divine Judge, Jesus Christ. He has a higher King and higher court in mind. His passion is to proclaim the resurrected Jesus to the power brokers of the world.

**Do we have such a passion? If your answer is “no,” set up a meeting with your pastor or wise Christian friend to help understand how to cultivate this desire.**







## **SESSION EIGHT**

READ

**Acts 25:23 - 26:32**

# ACTS 25:23 - 26:32

## INTRODUCTION

Paul now meets with King Agrippa. One more step up the ladder, and another witness to Paul's story and how the gospel has compelled him. If Paul had not appealed to Caesar, he may never have gained this audience. How is it possible that Paul would have the courage to stand before the King of the surrounding land and press him saying "do you believe in the prophets? I know that you believe." Bold.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been through multiple rounds of interviews for a job? If so, compare and contrast this experience to Paul's life in the last few chapters of Acts.
2. In Acts 26:6-7 Paul goes way back to the beginning of the Bible. What do you think he means when he is talking about the "promise made by God to our fathers"? How does it relate to what he has been stating as the reason for his current situation?
3. Paul looks back to his treatment of the Way and uses the phrase "raging in fury." Paul admits to his own disbelief and persecution of those who would share the message he now proclaims. What is his strategy?
4. Have you ever looked back on something you did that was driven by faith, but recognizing later the error in your motivation, method, or your heart toward those involved? Explain.

5. Acts 26:16-18 Paul recounts Jesus' words to him on the road to Damascus. Again, compare this to the original in Acts 9:4-9 and the retelling in Acts 22:6-16. Why might Luke include the expanded version for this audience?
6. Paul's heart is laid bare in Acts 26:29. From last week's application, have you determined if you share Paul's desire and if not, why not? What are things you could point to in your life that would validate your passion to spread the gospel of Christ?
7. If you consider the entire speech from Paul, identify words and phrases that reveal his tone and disposition toward his audience. How might this be helpful to us?
8. An earthly king rises and says that Paul has done "nothing deserving death" but also reveals how there is nothing he can or will do for him. Explain the irony when we consider Paul's message about Jesus.

# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL



How crazy to hear Agrippa's words, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar," but there's no regret in Paul. This text has an image of a King rising from his throne to state that he cannot save Paul. Paul is driven by a better King who rises from His throne and condescends to save not just Paul, but anyone who would submit to His kingdom. And how does that kingdom come? Through the sacrifice of the King Himself, and His resurrection from the grave.

Not all of us will gain an audience with such a powerful man. That's not the point. Paul is using every talent, experience, and knowledge that God has given him to make his way through a cultural cloud of witnesses. He has become a herald and ambassador for his King.

**Imagine doing this on a smaller scale. What about in your workplace starting with one person? What about in your group of friends or at your school? Your King is worth the effort.**







## SESSION NINE

READ

**Acts 27:1-44**

# ACTS 27:1-44

## INTRODUCTION

The whole time since his arrest, Paul has been in the presence of Roman military or leadership. The soldiers who saved him. The tribune that wasn't sure whether to torture him or release him. The governors that seemed to see him as a pawn in their political game. Now, a centurion named "Julius" of the Augustan Cohort. It is ironic that the apostle to the Gentiles is held captive by the rulers of the Gentile world. How many times do you think each of them heard the stories Paul had to tell?

# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Acts 19:28-29, Colossians 4:10-11, and Philemon 23-24. What do we know about Aristarchus? How would you describe him based upon these few verses?
2. Read Acts 17:1-9. How was Paul's reception in Thessalonica? What does this say about Aristarchus?
3. In Acts 27:3, 43, Julius the centurion is kind and protects Paul. Where are other examples in the New Testament where centurions are painted in a positive light? (e.g. Matthew 27, Luke 7, Acts 10)
4. In Acts 27:35, what does the language seem to allude to? What do you think is happening? If they are not all Christians, how might Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 help us clarify?

5. Paul has a vision from an angel assuring the safety of all on the vessel. What does Paul do to show obedience to that message?
6. Acts 27:29-30 speaks of sailors “praying for day to come” and then coming up with a plan to save themselves. Are we any different? Discuss.
7. Consider the book of Jonah in the Old Testament. How might you compare Paul’s plight and response to God compared to Jonah’s?
8. At this point, do you think Paul’s journey might have less resistance on his travels to Rome? Explain. With all the struggles experienced in this journey, what might you conclude the natural world is saying about Paul and his message? Describe a time when you felt like nature itself was against you. Was it true?

# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL



This journey toward Rome is full of shared challenges. Everyone on board has the same risks whether prisoner, pilot, or centurion. While Luke is simply recounting the history of Paul's journey, we could use this journey as an analogy for our journey in the church. Reliance and attention to the wind is necessary. When unpredictable storms come up, it is a good idea to remove unnecessary stuff that puts everyone at risk. Sometimes these things are good things, like food and tackle, but reliance on them over keeping attention to the way the wind is driving the ship is putting our trust in the wrong direction. We need to remain watchful for those who think salvation can be found by abandoning the ship. Okay, the analogy breaks down, but you should get the point. On this ship, Paul is in a group of mostly non-believers, but his faith operates within a body, better stated, a family. The larger group matters. This is a difficult concept for the Western world since we are told to be self-reliant, autonomous operators.

Paul knew who the real King was. He knew that carrying that knowledge together with others was essential to proclaim the kingdom well. "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance" is a reference from Isaiah that Paul picks up twice in his letters. The church proclaims that message in different places, languages, and contexts. **Do you prefer to operate as an individual? What are ways you can focus on being a part of the church family? What are the habits you need to break or new rhythms you need to practice to make being a part of the church family second nature?**







## **SESSION TEN**

READ

**Acts 28:1-16**

# ACTS 28:1-16

## INTRODUCTION

Shipwrecked and now snake-bit, Paul continues toward his goal. Rome. While the scenes of his trials before the Sanhedrin and the Roman authorities may have dulled our memories to the miraculous that had been consistent in Paul's missionary journeys, Luke reminds us that Paul's move to the "ends of the earth" continue with the power of the Spirit.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The natives of Malta showed “unusual kindness” to Paul and those with him, similar to Jesus’ teaching on loving strangers (Luke 10:33–34, Matthew 25:35–40). What challenges do we face in practicing this kind of hospitality today?
2. Paul is bitten by a poisonous viper and survives. How do serpent stories play into the story of Scripture? (e.g. Genesis 3, Numbers 21:4-9, Luke 10:19) How might Paul’s snake story in Malta fit into this biblical witness?
3. The people of Malta assumed Paul was guilty when bitten. Do you ever think this way about things that happen to you and how it relates to your faith? Should you see the God of the Bible seeking retributive justice? Explain.
4. In Acts 14, Paul was worshipped as a god in Lystra. On Malta, the same mistake is made. How does Paul respond in each case? What might explain the difference?

5. How does Paul's healing of Publius and those that follow, mirror parts of Jesus' life in the Gospel accounts?
6. In Acts 23:11, Jesus promised Paul he would testify in Rome, but that has been a long and challenging road. In a fallen world, how realistic is it to assume an easy road? In what ways has your journey been challenging?
7. The gospel reached Rome well ahead of Paul. (Romans 1:1-15, Acts 18:2) What does this show about God's work preparing the way for mission? Does he do the same for you and your church family? Discuss.
8. Paul finally arrives in Rome after storms, shipwrecks and imprisonment. How does Paul's perseverance encourage you when things are difficult?

# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL



The work of Paul's missionary journeys from the earlier parts of Acts are showing their impact. The power of the Spirit continues to heal through Paul. The message of the gospel has made its way through the Roman world before Paul gets there. The Lord's hand is still carrying the mission along. It's a simple thought. What Paul experienced over two thousand years ago continues to quake through the millennia.

**Do we trust that the Spirit is operative in our lives? Are we looking for His fingerprints along the way? Do we only account for the good and happy events or do we also allow the difficult parts to teach us Godly wisdom?**







## SESSION ELEVEN

READ

**Acts 28:17-31**

# ACTS 28:17-31

## INTRODUCTION

Like on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, Paul picks up Jesus methods and uses all of Scripture to point to how He is the Messiah, the promised King, that they were expecting. He is the redemption for His people and all of creation, but like always this message cuts like a knife, separating those that trust from those that scoff.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do you think Paul means when he says he was ‘compelled’ to make an appeal to Caesar? Where else does Paul speak this way? (Acts 19:21, 20:22)
2. Paul says he will not bring charges against his own people. Is this simply loyalty, or something deeper? (1 Corinthians 6:5-8) How can faith guide us when conflict arises with other Christians?
3. Paul continues his pattern of bringing the gospel to the Jew first, then the Gentile. This time, unable to go to the synagogue, he invites Jewish leaders to him. Is it surprising that they accepted his invitation? Why or why not?
4. The Jews spent a whole day with Paul, debating the gospel. What does this show about how seriously they took the gospel? How much time do we give to wrestling with spiritual truth today?

5. Verse 24 shows another instance of mixed response to the gospel. How is the reaction of the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27-36) similar or different from the Jews in Rome?
6. The passage that ends the conversation with the Roman Jews is Isaiah 6:9-10, which the gospel writers also reference. (Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40) How do these verses challenge Paul's audience? How do they challenge us as hearers today?
7. Paul again spends two years under arrest yet proclaims the kingdom of God unhindered and with boldness. How does Paul's example of boldness through the Holy Spirit meet you in your current circumstances?
8. How does God's kingdom differ from Rome's empire? In what ways does this final passage call back to Acts 1:8? Why might Luke choose to end Acts this way?

# ILLUMINATE THE GOSPEL

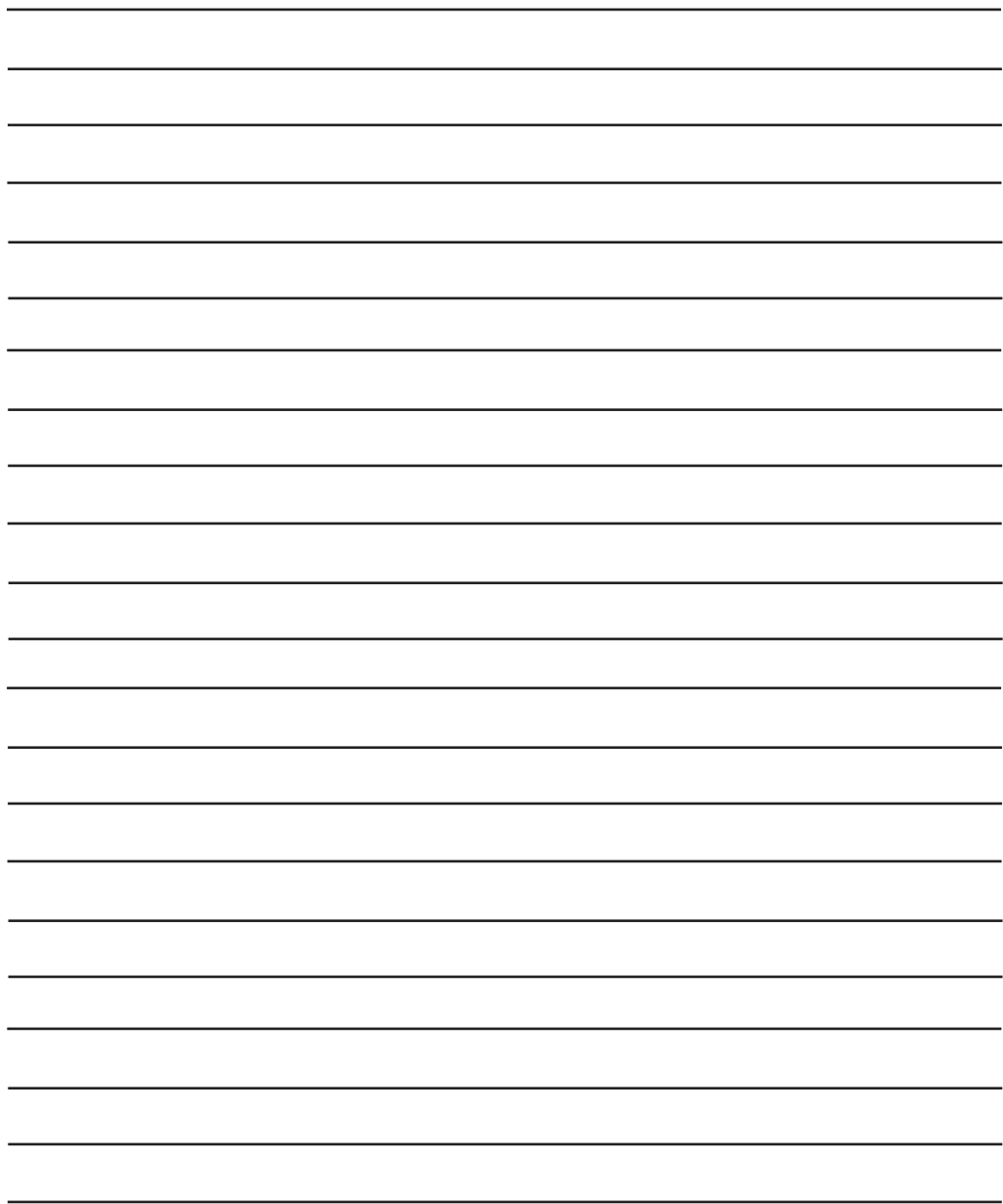


This is the end of the story of the early church. The book does not include the closure that one might expect from a modern movie with a climax and resolve. It ends with the Greek words translated “with all boldness without hindrance.” It’s like it hasn’t ended yet, and that’s the big point. The Messiah’s people, like Paul, continue to carry His gospel proclamation into every corner of creation. Every nation. Every language. You and I are being called into the story. We continue the same work.

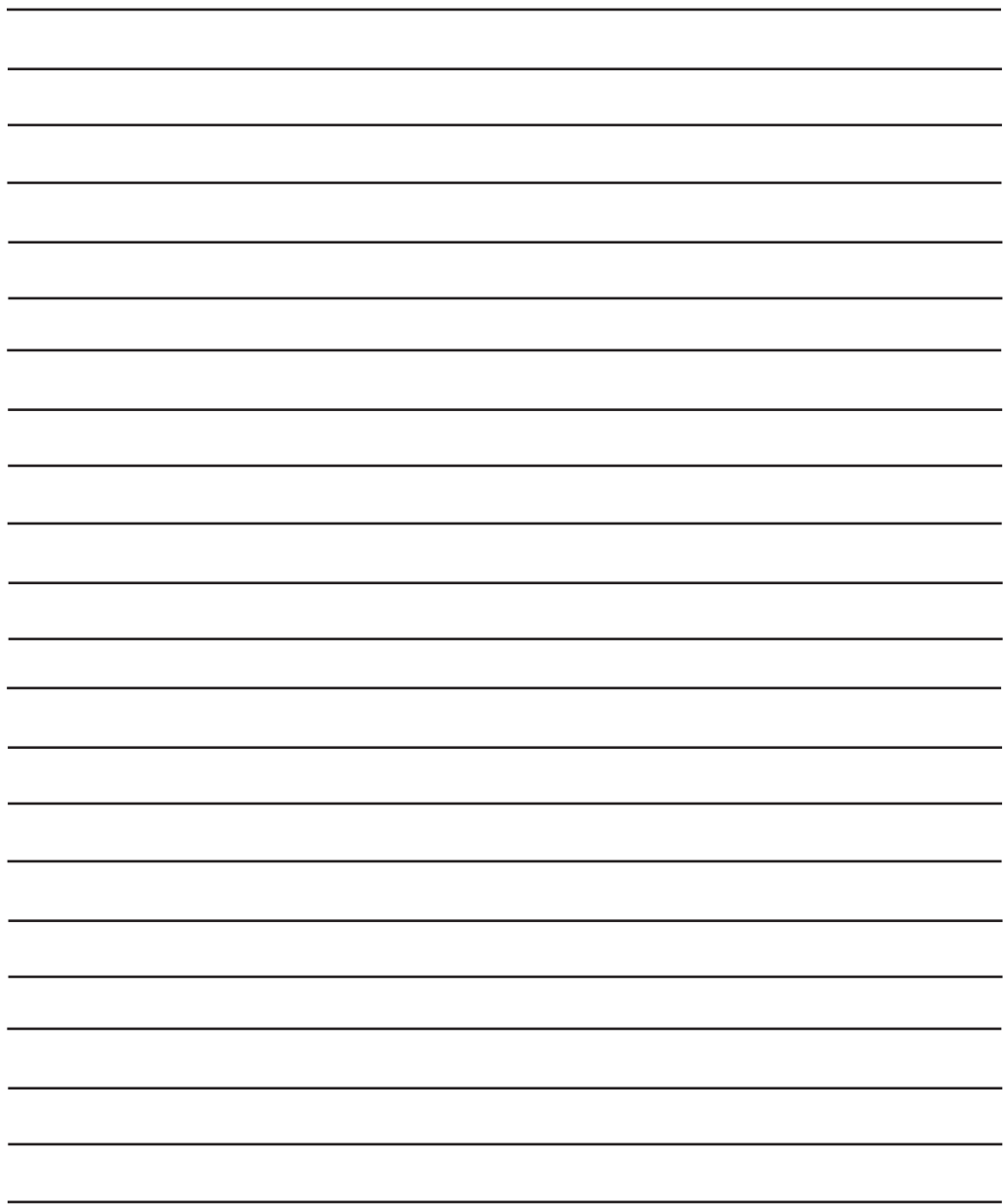
**How are we doing? What can we do better? Knowing Paul’s boldness and the hindrance that he faced, are we taking up the same mantle every day? If you are a Christian, you know how the story ends and it . . . is . . . glorious. Let the One who makes it glorious be the fuel for our fight and our endurance in the race.**

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