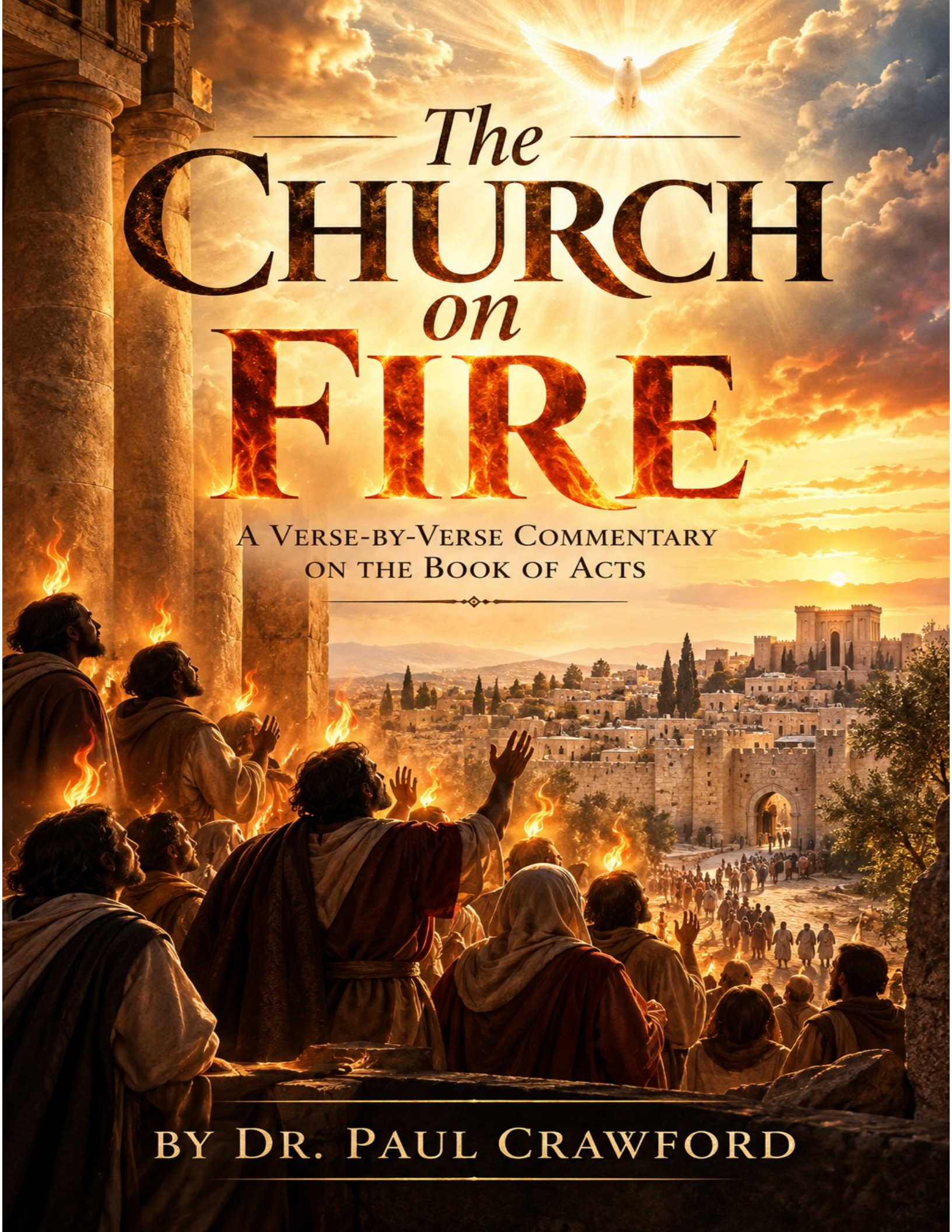


The background of the entire cover is a dramatic, high-contrast image. In the foreground, several men in ancient-style robes are seen from behind, looking out over a city. Some of them have flames rising from their heads or hands, suggesting a state of intense prayer or spiritual fire. In the middle ground, a large, ancient city with stone walls and towers is visible, with a large crowd of people gathered in a central square. In the background, a bright, golden sun or light source is visible on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the scene. In the upper center, a white dove with its wings spread is silhouetted against the bright light, symbolizing the Holy Spirit. The overall atmosphere is one of awe, hope, and divine presence.

The CHURCH *on* FIRE

A VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY
ON THE BOOK OF ACTS

BY DR. PAUL CRAWFORD

The Church on Fire

A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Book of Acts

By Dr. Paul Crawford

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACTS CHAPTER 1 — The Ascension and the Waiting Church

1. Introduction to the Book of Acts — Acts 1:1–3
2. The Promise of the Holy Spirit — Acts 1:4–5
3. The Disciples Ask About the Kingdom — Acts 1:6–7
4. Power to Be Witnesses — Acts 1:8
5. Jesus Ascends into Heaven — Acts 1:9
6. The Angels Promise Christ Will Return — Acts 1:10–11
7. The Disciples Return to Jerusalem — Acts 1:12–14
8. Peter Addresses the Believers — Acts 1:15–20
9. Qualifications for Judas' Replacement — Acts 1:21–22
10. Matthias Is Chosen — Acts 1:23–26

ACTS CHAPTER 2 — Pentecost: The Church on Fire

1. The Day of Pentecost Arrives — Acts 2:1
2. The Sound of a Mighty Wind — Acts 2:2
3. Tongues Like Fire Appear — Acts 2:3
4. Filled with the Holy Spirit — Acts 2:4
5. The Nations Hear the Gospel — Acts 2:5–13
6. Peter Explains Pentecost — Acts 2:14–21
7. Jesus of Nazareth Proclaimed — Acts 2:22–24
8. David's Prophecy of the Resurrection — Acts 2:25–32
9. Jesus Exalted at God's Right Hand — Acts 2:33–36
10. "What Shall We Do?" — Acts 2:37
11. Repent and Be Baptized — Acts 2:38–40
12. Three Thousand Are Saved — Acts 2:41
13. The Life of the Early Church — Acts 2:42–47

ACTS CHAPTER 3 — The Lame Man Walks

1. Peter and John Go to the Temple — Acts 3:1
2. A Lame Beggar at the Beautiful Gate — Acts 3:2–3

3. “Silver and Gold Have I None” — Acts 3:4–6
4. The Man Is Healed — Acts 3:7–10
5. The Crowd Gathers in Solomon’s Porch — Acts 3:11
6. Peter Gives Glory to Jesus — Acts 3:12–16
7. A Call to Repentance — Acts 3:17–21
8. Moses Foretold the Coming Prophet — Acts 3:22–23
9. The Prophets Pointed to Christ — Acts 3:24–26

ACTS CHAPTER 4 — Boldness Under Persecution

1. Peter and John Are Arrested — Acts 4:1–4
2. Five Thousand Men Believe — Acts 4:4
3. Questioned by the Religious Leaders — Acts 4:5–7
4. Peter Filled with the Holy Spirit — Acts 4:8–10
5. Christ the Rejected Cornerstone — Acts 4:11
6. Salvation in No Other Name — Acts 4:12
7. The Boldness of Peter and John — Acts 4:13–14
8. The Council Commands Them to Be Silent — Acts 4:15–18
9. “We Cannot Stop Speaking” — Acts 4:19–22
10. The Church Prays for Boldness — Acts 4:23–30
11. The Place Is Shaken — Acts 4:31
12. The Believers Share with One Another — Acts 4:32–35
13. Barnabas Demonstrates Generosity — Acts 4:36–37

ACTS CHAPTER 5 — Purity, Power, and Persecution

1. Ananias and Sapphira Deceive the Church — Acts 5:1–2
2. Peter Exposes Their Sin — Acts 5:3–4
3. The Death of Ananias — Acts 5:5–6
4. The Death of Sapphira — Acts 5:7–10
5. Great Fear Comes upon the Church — Acts 5:11
6. Signs and Wonders among the People — Acts 5:12–16
7. The Apostles Are Arrested — Acts 5:17–18
8. An Angel Opens the Prison — Acts 5:19–21
9. The Empty Prison Confounds the Leaders — Acts 5:22–25
10. The Apostles Stand before the Council — Acts 5:26–28
11. “We Must Obey God Rather Than Men” — Acts 5:29–32
12. Gamaliel Gives Wise Counsel — Acts 5:33–39
13. Beaten Yet Rejoicing — Acts 5:40–41
14. Teaching and Preaching Jesus Daily — Acts 5:42

ACTS CHAPTER 6 — Servants, Growth, and Stephen's Witness

1. A Problem within the Growing Church — Acts 6:1
2. The Apostles Establish Priorities — Acts 6:2–4
3. Seven Servants Are Chosen — Acts 6:5–6
4. The Word of God Continues to Spread — Acts 6:7
5. Stephen's Powerful Ministry — Acts 6:8
6. Opposition Arises against Stephen — Acts 6:9–10
7. False Witnesses Are Recruited — Acts 6:11–14
8. Stephen's Face Like an Angel — Acts 6:15

ACTS CHAPTER 7 — Stephen's Final Sermon

1. Stephen Begins His Defense — Acts 7:1–2
2. God Calls Abraham — Acts 7:2–8
3. Joseph Rejected by His Brothers — Acts 7:9–16
4. Israel Multiplies in Egypt — Acts 7:17–19
5. The Birth and Early Life of Moses — Acts 7:20–29
6. God Calls Moses at the Burning Bush — Acts 7:30–34
7. Moses Delivers Israel — Acts 7:35–38
8. Israel Rejects Moses and Turns to Idolatry — Acts 7:39–43
9. The Tabernacle and the Temple — Acts 7:44–50
10. Stephen Confronts the Religious Leaders — Acts 7:51–53
11. Stephen Sees Jesus Standing in Heaven — Acts 7:54–56
12. Stephen Is Stoned — Acts 7:57–60

ACTS CHAPTER 8 — The Gospel Spreads Beyond Jerusalem

1. Saul Persecutes the Church — Acts 8:1–3
2. Scattered Believers Preach the Word — Acts 8:4
3. Philip Preaches in Samaria — Acts 8:5–8
4. Simon the Sorcerer Believes — Acts 8:9–13
5. Peter and John Come to Samaria — Acts 8:14–17
6. Simon Attempts to Buy Spiritual Power — Acts 8:18–24
7. The Gospel Spreads through Samaritan Villages — Acts 8:25
8. Philip Is Sent toward Gaza — Acts 8:26
9. Philip Meets the Ethiopian Official — Acts 8:27–31
10. Isaiah's Prophecy Explained — Acts 8:32–35
11. The Ethiopian Believes and Is Baptized — Acts 8:36–38
12. Philip Is Taken Away by the Spirit — Acts 8:39–40

ACTS CHAPTER 9 — Saul Meets the Risen Christ

1. Saul Threatens the Disciples — Acts 9:1–2
2. A Light from Heaven — Acts 9:3–4
3. “Saul, Saul, Why Are You Persecuting Me?” — Acts 9:4–5
4. Saul Is Led Blind into Damascus — Acts 9:6–9
5. The Lord Calls Ananias — Acts 9:10–16
6. Saul Receives His Sight — Acts 9:17–19
7. Saul Immediately Preaches Christ — Acts 9:20–22
8. A Plot to Kill Saul — Acts 9:23–25
9. Barnabas Introduces Saul to the Apostles — Acts 9:26–30
10. The Church Enjoys a Time of Peace — Acts 9:31
11. Peter Heals Aeneas — Acts 9:32–35
12. Dorcas Dies in Joppa — Acts 9:36–39
13. Peter Raises Dorcas from the Dead — Acts 9:40–43

ACTS CHAPTER 10 — The Gospel Comes to the Gentiles

1. Cornelius, a God-Fearing Centurion — Acts 10:1–2
2. An Angel Appears to Cornelius — Acts 10:3–8
3. Peter’s Vision on the Rooftop — Acts 10:9–16
4. The Messengers Arrive — Acts 10:17–23
5. Peter Enters the House of Cornelius — Acts 10:24–27
6. God Shows No Partiality — Acts 10:28–35
7. Peter Preaches Jesus Christ — Acts 10:36–43
8. The Holy Spirit Falls upon the Gentiles — Acts 10:44–46
9. Gentile Believers Are Baptized — Acts 10:47–48

ACTS CHAPTER 11 — The Gentile Mission Defended

1. Peter Is Questioned in Jerusalem — Acts 11:1–3
2. Peter Recounts His Vision — Acts 11:4–10
3. Peter Explains the Visit to Cornelius — Acts 11:11–14
4. The Holy Spirit Comes upon the Gentiles — Acts 11:15–17
5. The Church Glorifies God — Acts 11:18
6. The Gospel Reaches Antioch — Acts 11:19–21
7. Barnabas Is Sent to Antioch — Acts 11:22–24
8. Barnabas Finds Saul — Acts 11:25–26
9. Believers Are First Called Christians — Acts 11:26
10. Agabus Predicts a Famine — Acts 11:27–28
11. The Church Sends Relief — Acts 11:29–30

ACTS CHAPTER 12 — Peter Delivered from Prison

1. Herod Persecutes the Church — Acts 12:1
2. James Is Martyred — Acts 12:2
3. Peter Is Imprisoned — Acts 12:3–5
4. The Church Prays Earnestly — Acts 12:5
5. An Angel Frees Peter — Acts 12:6–11
6. Peter Goes to Mary's House — Acts 12:12
7. Rhoda Recognizes Peter's Voice — Acts 12:13–16
8. Peter Reports His Deliverance — Acts 12:17
9. Herod Executes the Guards — Acts 12:18–19
10. Herod Accepts Worship — Acts 12:20–22
11. Herod Is Struck Down — Acts 12:23
12. The Word of God Continues to Grow — Acts 12:24–25

ACTS CHAPTER 13 — The First Missionary Journey Begins

1. Prophets and Teachers at Antioch — Acts 13:1
2. The Holy Spirit Calls Barnabas and Saul — Acts 13:2–3
3. The Missionaries Sail to Cyprus — Acts 13:4–5
4. Elymas Opposes the Gospel — Acts 13:6–8
5. Paul Confronts Elymas — Acts 13:9–12
6. John Mark Returns to Jerusalem — Acts 13:13
7. Paul Preaches in Pisidian Antioch — Acts 13:14–16
8. God's Work through Israel's History — Acts 13:17–22
9. Jesus, the Promised Savior — Acts 13:23–25
10. Christ's Death and Resurrection — Acts 13:26–37
11. Forgiveness through Jesus Christ — Acts 13:38–41
12. The Gentiles Desire to Hear More — Acts 13:42–44
13. Jewish Opposition Arises — Acts 13:45–47
14. The Gentiles Rejoice — Acts 13:48–49
15. Paul and Barnabas Are Expelled — Acts 13:50–52

ACTS CHAPTER 14 — Churches Established through Opposition

1. Ministry at Iconium — Acts 14:1–3
2. The City Becomes Divided — Acts 14:4–7
3. A Lame Man Is Healed at Lystra — Acts 14:8–10
4. The Crowd Calls Paul and Barnabas Gods — Acts 14:11–13
5. The Apostles Reject False Worship — Acts 14:14–18
6. Paul Is Stoned and Left for Dead — Acts 14:19–20
7. The Gospel Is Preached in Derbe — Acts 14:20–21

8. Strengthening the Disciples — Acts 14:21–22
9. Elders Are Appointed in the Churches — Acts 14:23
10. Paul and Barnabas Return to Antioch — Acts 14:24–26
11. Reporting What God Had Done — Acts 14:27–28

ACTS CHAPTER 15 — The Jerusalem Council

1. The Controversy over Circumcision — Acts 15:1–2
2. Paul and Barnabas Travel to Jerusalem — Acts 15:3–5
3. The Apostles and Elders Consider the Matter — Acts 15:6
4. Peter Testifies about Gentile Salvation — Acts 15:7–11
5. Paul and Barnabas Report God’s Work — Acts 15:12
6. James Gives Scriptural Counsel — Acts 15:13–21
7. The Council Sends a Letter — Acts 15:22–29
8. The Gentile Believers Rejoice — Acts 15:30–35
9. Paul Proposes Another Missionary Journey — Acts 15:36
10. Paul and Barnabas Disagree over Mark — Acts 15:37–39
11. Barnabas Takes Mark; Paul Chooses Silas — Acts 15:39–41

ACTS CHAPTER 16 — The Gospel Reaches Macedonia

1. Timothy Joins Paul and Silas — Acts 16:1–5
2. The Spirit Redirects the Missionaries — Acts 16:6–8
3. The Macedonian Vision — Acts 16:9–10
4. Lydia Hears the Gospel — Acts 16:11–15
5. A Slave Girl Is Delivered — Acts 16:16–18
6. Paul and Silas Are Beaten and Imprisoned — Acts 16:19–24
7. Singing at Midnight — Acts 16:25
8. The Prison Is Shaken — Acts 16:26
9. The Philippian Jailer Asks How to Be Saved — Acts 16:27–30
10. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” — Acts 16:31–34
11. Paul Demands Proper Treatment — Acts 16:35–39
12. The Missionaries Encourage the Believers — Acts 16:40

ACTS CHAPTER 17 — Turning the World Upside Down

1. Paul Preaches in Thessalonica — Acts 17:1–4
2. Opposition from Unbelieving Jews — Acts 17:5–9
3. The Bereans Receive the Word — Acts 17:10–12
4. Opposition Follows Paul to Berea — Acts 17:13–15
5. Paul Is Troubled by Athens’ Idolatry — Acts 17:16
6. Paul Reasons in the Marketplace — Acts 17:17–21
7. The Unknown God Proclaimed — Acts 17:22–23

8. The Creator Does Not Live in Temples Made by Hands — Acts 17:24–25
9. God Made All Nations — Acts 17:26–28
10. God Commands All People to Repent — Acts 17:29–31
11. Reactions to the Resurrection — Acts 17:32–34

ACTS CHAPTER 18 — Ministry in Corinth

1. Paul Meets Aquila and Priscilla — Acts 18:1–3
2. Paul Reasons in the Synagogue — Acts 18:4–6
3. Crispus Believes in the Lord — Acts 18:7–8
4. The Lord Encourages Paul — Acts 18:9–11
5. Paul Is Brought before Gallio — Acts 18:12–17
6. Paul Departs Corinth — Acts 18:18
7. Ministry at Ephesus — Acts 18:19–21
8. Paul Returns to Antioch — Acts 18:22
9. The Third Missionary Journey Begins — Acts 18:23
10. Apollos Arrives in Ephesus — Acts 18:24–25
11. Priscilla and Aquila Instruct Apollos — Acts 18:26
12. Apollos Ministers Powerfully in Achaia — Acts 18:27–28

ACTS CHAPTER 19 — Revival and Riot in Ephesus

1. Paul Meets Disciples in Ephesus — Acts 19:1–7
2. Paul Teaches in the Synagogue — Acts 19:8–9
3. Daily Teaching in the School of Tyrannus — Acts 19:9–10
4. Extraordinary Miracles through Paul — Acts 19:11–12
5. The Seven Sons of Sceva — Acts 19:13–16
6. The Name of Jesus Is Magnified — Acts 19:17
7. Believers Burn Their Magic Books — Acts 19:18–20
8. Paul Plans to Go to Jerusalem and Rome — Acts 19:21–22
9. Demetrius Stirs Up Opposition — Acts 19:23–27
10. “Great Is Diana of the Ephesians!” — Acts 19:28–34
11. The City Clerk Calms the Crowd — Acts 19:35–41

ACTS CHAPTER 20 — Paul’s Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

1. Paul Travels through Macedonia and Greece — Acts 20:1–6
2. Worship at Troas — Acts 20:7
3. Eutychus Falls from the Window — Acts 20:8–9
4. Eutychus Is Restored to Life — Acts 20:10–12
5. Paul Travels toward Miletus — Acts 20:13–16
6. The Ephesian Elders Are Summoned — Acts 20:17
7. Paul Reviews His Ministry — Acts 20:18–21

8. Bound in Spirit toward Jerusalem — Acts 20:22–24
9. Innocent of the Blood of All Men — Acts 20:25–27
10. Shepherd the Church of God — Acts 20:28
11. Warning against Savage Wolves — Acts 20:29–31
12. Commended to God and His Word — Acts 20:32
13. Paul's Example of Selfless Ministry — Acts 20:33–35
14. A Tearful Farewell — Acts 20:36–38

ACTS CHAPTER 21 — Paul Arrives in Jerusalem

1. Paul Sails toward Jerusalem — Acts 21:1–6
2. Ministry at Tyre and Ptolemais — Acts 21:7
3. Paul Stays with Philip the Evangelist — Acts 21:8–9
4. Agabus Warns Paul — Acts 21:10–11
5. Paul Is Ready to Die for Christ — Acts 21:12–14
6. Paul Arrives in Jerusalem — Acts 21:15–17
7. Paul Reports to James and the Elders — Acts 21:18–20
8. Paul Participates in a Purification Rite — Acts 21:21–26
9. Paul Is Seized in the Temple — Acts 21:27–30
10. The Crowd Attempts to Kill Paul — Acts 21:31
11. Roman Soldiers Rescue Paul — Acts 21:32–36
12. Paul Requests Permission to Speak — Acts 21:37–40

ACTS CHAPTER 22 — Paul's Testimony before the Crowd

1. Paul Addresses the People — Acts 22:1–2
2. Paul Describes His Jewish Background — Acts 22:3–5
3. Paul Recounts His Conversion — Acts 22:6–11
4. Ananias Restores Paul's Sight — Acts 22:12–16
5. Paul's Vision in Jerusalem — Acts 22:17–21
6. The Crowd Rejects Paul's Gentile Mission — Acts 22:22–23
7. Paul Is Ordered to Be Examined — Acts 22:24
8. Paul Reveals His Roman Citizenship — Acts 22:25–29
9. Paul Is Brought before the Sanhedrin — Acts 22:30

ACTS CHAPTER 23 — The Plot against Paul

1. Paul Faces the Sanhedrin — Acts 23:1
2. The High Priest Orders Paul Struck — Acts 23:2–5
3. Paul Divides the Council over the Resurrection — Acts 23:6–10
4. The Lord Encourages Paul — Acts 23:11
5. A Conspiracy to Kill Paul — Acts 23:12–15
6. Paul's Nephew Learns of the Plot — Acts 23:16–22

7. Paul Is Transferred under Heavy Guard — Acts 23:23–24
8. Claudius Lysias Writes to Governor Felix — Acts 23:25–30
9. Paul Arrives in Caesarea — Acts 23:31–35

ACTS CHAPTER 24 — Paul before Governor Felix

1. Tertullus Accuses Paul — Acts 24:1–9
2. Paul Begins His Defense — Acts 24:10–13
3. Paul Confesses His Faith in the Way — Acts 24:14–16
4. Paul Explains Why He Came to Jerusalem — Acts 24:17–21
5. Felix Delays His Decision — Acts 24:22–23
6. Paul Reasons about Righteousness and Judgment — Acts 24:24–25
7. Felix Hopes for a Bribe — Acts 24:26
8. Paul Remains Imprisoned for Two Years — Acts 24:27

ACTS CHAPTER 25 — Paul Appeals to Caesar

1. Festus Arrives in Jerusalem — Acts 25:1–5
2. Paul Is Tried before Festus — Acts 25:6–8
3. Festus Suggests a Trial in Jerusalem — Acts 25:9
4. Paul Appeals to Caesar — Acts 25:10–12
5. King Agrippa Visits Festus — Acts 25:13
6. Festus Explains Paul’s Case — Acts 25:14–21
7. Agrippa Desires to Hear Paul — Acts 25:22
8. Paul Appears before Agrippa — Acts 25:23
9. Festus Explains His Dilemma — Acts 25:24–27

ACTS CHAPTER 26 — Paul’s Defense before King Agrippa

1. Paul Begins His Defense — Acts 26:1–3
2. Paul Describes His Life as a Pharisee — Acts 26:4–5
3. The Hope of the Resurrection — Acts 26:6–8
4. Paul Describes His Persecution of Christians — Acts 26:9–11
5. Paul Recounts His Encounter with Jesus — Acts 26:12–15
6. Christ Commissions Paul — Acts 26:16–18
7. Paul Obeys the Heavenly Vision — Acts 26:19–23
8. Festus Accuses Paul of Madness — Acts 26:24–25
9. Paul Appeals Directly to Agrippa — Acts 26:26–27
10. “Almost You Persuade Me” — Acts 26:28–29
11. Paul Is Declared Innocent — Acts 26:30–32

ACTS CHAPTER 27 — Shipwreck on the Way to Rome

1. Paul Sails for Rome — Acts 27:1–8
2. Paul Warns of Coming Danger — Acts 27:9–10
3. The Centurion Rejects Paul’s Warning — Acts 27:11–12
4. A Violent Storm Strikes — Acts 27:13–20
5. Paul Gives Hope to the Crew — Acts 27:21–26
6. The Ship Nears Land — Acts 27:27–29
7. Sailors Attempt to Escape — Acts 27:30–32
8. Paul Encourages Everyone to Eat — Acts 27:33–38
9. The Ship Runs Aground — Acts 27:39–41
10. The Soldiers Plan to Kill the Prisoners — Acts 27:42–43
11. Everyone Reaches Shore Safely — Acts 27:44

ACTS CHAPTER 28 — The Gospel Reaches Rome

1. Safe on the Island of Malta — Acts 28:1–2
2. Paul Is Bitten by a Viper — Acts 28:3–6
3. Paul Heals the Father of Publius — Acts 28:7–8
4. Many on Malta Are Healed — Acts 28:9–10
5. Paul Continues toward Rome — Acts 28:11–15
6. Paul Arrives in Rome — Acts 28:16
7. Paul Meets with the Jewish Leaders — Acts 28:17–22
8. Paul Explains the Kingdom of God — Acts 28:23
9. Some Believe and Others Reject — Acts 28:24
10. Paul Quotes the Prophet Isaiah — Acts 28:25–27
11. Salvation Sent to the Gentiles — Acts 28:28–29
12. Paul Preaches Boldly in Rome — Acts 28:30–31

Preface

The book of Acts is one of the most exciting and important books in the New Testament. It records the birth, growth, struggle, and expansion of the early church under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. Acts is not simply a record of what the apostles accomplished. It is a testimony of what God accomplished through ordinary men and women who were surrendered to His will, filled with His Spirit, and committed to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The story begins in Jerusalem with a small group of believers waiting for the promise of the Father. Jesus had risen from the dead. He had appeared to His disciples. He had taught them concerning the kingdom of God. Before ascending into heaven, He gave them a mission that would shape the history of the church:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

That statement in Acts 1:8 provides the basic outline for the entire book.

The gospel begins in Jerusalem. It moves throughout Judea. It crosses cultural and religious barriers into Samaria. It then spreads throughout the Roman world until the apostle Paul is preaching Christ in Rome itself.

Acts is the story of a gospel that could not be stopped.

Religious leaders tried to silence it.

Persecution attempted to crush it.

Prisons attempted to contain it.

Political authorities attempted to control it.

False teachers attempted to corrupt it.

Cultural barriers attempted to restrict it.

Yet the Word of God continued to spread.

The church was opposed, but it grew.

The apostles were threatened, but they preached.

Believers were scattered, but wherever they went, they carried the gospel with them.

That is why I have chosen the title **The Church on Fire**.

The fire described in this book is not merely emotional excitement or religious enthusiasm. It represents a church alive with the presence and power of God. On the Day of Pentecost, tongues resembling fire rested upon the believers as they were filled with the Holy Spirit. From that moment forward, the message of Jesus Christ began moving outward with extraordinary power.

The church in Acts was a praying church.

It was a preaching church.

It was a witnessing church.

It was a giving church.

It was a suffering church.

It was a missionary church.

And above all, it was a church dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

This verse-by-verse commentary has been written to help the reader slow down and carefully examine the inspired record that Luke has given us. Every verse contributes something to the unfolding story of the early church. Some verses contain great sermons. Others record miracles, journeys, conflicts, conversions, imprisonments, or conversations. Even details that may appear minor often provide valuable historical, theological, and practical insight.

Throughout this commentary, special attention will be given to the meaning of the biblical text, the historical setting, important doctrines, key individuals, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the growth of the church, the missionary work of the apostles, and the practical application of these truths to believers today.

Acts is also a book filled with people whose lives were transformed by Jesus Christ.

We meet Peter, once fearful but now boldly proclaiming the resurrection.

We meet Stephen, whose faithful witness continues even as stones are being thrown at him.

We meet Philip, who carries the gospel into Samaria and then explains the Scriptures to an Ethiopian traveler.

We meet Barnabas, the encourager who recognizes God's work in others.

We meet Cornelius, whose conversion demonstrates that the gospel is for every nation.

And we meet Saul of Tarsus, a violent persecutor of Christians who encounters the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and becomes the apostle Paul, one of the greatest missionaries the church has ever known.

Behind every one of these individuals stands the sovereign hand of God.

The Holy Spirit directs missionaries.

He opens doors.

He closes doors.

He gives boldness.

He empowers preaching.

He guides the church.

He calls servants.

He comforts believers.

He advances the gospel.

For this reason, the book of Acts has sometimes been described as the acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles. That description captures an important truth. The human servants are visible, but the divine power behind their ministry belongs to God.

Acts also reminds us that the early church was not perfect. There were disagreements, failures, hypocrisy, persecution, cultural tensions, doctrinal questions, and difficult decisions. Yet God continued to work through His people.

That should encourage the church today.

The same gospel that transformed lives in the first century still transforms lives today.

The same Jesus whom Peter preached is still Lord.

The same message Paul carried across the Roman world is still the message the church must proclaim.

The same command to make Christ known remains before every generation of believers.

Although the historical events recorded in Acts belong to the beginning of the church age, the spiritual principles revealed throughout this book remain deeply relevant.

The church still needs prayer.

The church still needs biblical preaching.

The church still needs spiritual courage.

The church still needs missionary vision.

The church still needs unity around the truth.

The church still needs believers who are willing to stand for Christ regardless of the cost.

And the church still needs to depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit rather than human strength.

My prayer is that this commentary will do more than increase biblical knowledge. Knowledge is important, but biblical truth should always lead to spiritual transformation.

As you study the book of Acts verse by verse, I hope you will ask several questions.

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does it teach me about Jesus Christ?

What does it reveal about the Holy Spirit?

What does it teach about the mission of the church?

What can I learn from the believers who came before me?

And most importantly:

How should this truth change the way I live?

The church described in Acts was not content to remain comfortable and silent. These believers carried the gospel into homes, synagogues, marketplaces, cities, prisons, courts, and distant lands. They understood that Jesus Christ had entrusted them with a message the world desperately needed to hear.

That responsibility has not changed.

The fire that burned in the hearts of the early believers should challenge every generation of Christians.

May God use **The Church on Fire: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Book of Acts** to deepen your understanding of Scripture, strengthen your faith in Christ, increase your dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and renew your desire to make the gospel known.

The book of Acts ends with Paul preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ “with all boldness and without hindrance.”

The book ends.

But the mission continues.

May the church of our generation once again burn with a holy passion for Christ, His Word, and His gospel.

Dr. Paul Crawford

Prologue

There are moments in history when everything changes.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was such a moment.

The disciples had watched Him die. They had seen the tomb sealed. They had known the fear, confusion, and sorrow that followed the crucifixion. Then, on the third day, everything changed.

Jesus was alive.

The risen Christ appeared to His followers, spoke with them, taught them, and confirmed beyond doubt that death had not defeated Him. The One who had been crucified now stood victorious over the grave.

But before He ascended into heaven, Jesus gave His followers a command.

They were not to hide.

They were not to remain in one place.

They were not to keep the message of salvation to themselves.

They were to go.

They were to witness.

They were to proclaim.

They were to carry the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, from Judea to Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth.

Yet Jesus also told them to wait.

The mission was too great for human strength alone.

They needed power from above.

So the disciples returned to Jerusalem and waited.

They prayed.

They gathered together.

They trusted the promise of Christ.

And then the Day of Pentecost came.

Suddenly, there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind.

Tongues resembling fire appeared.

The believers were filled with the Holy Spirit.

And the church stepped into its mission.

Peter, who had once denied Jesus, stood before the crowd and preached Christ with boldness.

Thousands believed.

The church grew.

The gospel spread.

Opposition came almost immediately.

Religious leaders threatened the apostles.

Believers were arrested.

Stephen was killed.

Persecution scattered the church.

But persecution did not extinguish the fire.

It spread it.

The believers who were scattered carried the gospel wherever they went.

Philip preached in Samaria.

An Ethiopian official heard the Scriptures explained and believed.

Saul of Tarsus, one of the church's fiercest enemies, encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and became Paul the apostle.

Peter entered the home of Cornelius and witnessed the gospel crossing another major barrier.

Missionaries were sent from Antioch.

Churches were established across the Roman world.

Cities were shaken.

Prisons became places of worship.

Courtrooms became pulpits.

Shipwrecks became opportunities for witness.

Every attempt to stop the gospel seemed only to carry it farther.

This is the world we enter when we open the book of Acts.

Acts is not a quiet book.

It moves.

It travels.

It preaches.

It confronts.

It suffers.

It rejoices.

It advances.

Again and again, Luke records a remarkable truth: the Word of God continued to grow.

Kings could not stop it.

Priests could not stop it.

Prisons could not stop it.

Mobs could not stop it.

Storms could not stop it.

Distance could not stop it.

The gospel was moving because God was moving.

At the center of the story stands Jesus Christ.

Although He ascends into heaven in the opening chapter, He is never absent from the book.

He directs His servants.

He calls Saul.

He strengthens Paul.

He builds His church.

And through the Holy Spirit, His mission continues.

That is one of the great truths of Acts.

The church does not create the mission.

Christ gives the mission.

The church does not create the message.

Christ is the message.

The church does not create the power.

The Holy Spirit provides the power.

The men and women in Acts were ordinary people entrusted with an extraordinary gospel.

Some were fishermen.

Some were servants.

Some were businessmen.

Some were government officials.

Some were scholars.

Some were former enemies of the faith.

What united them was not personality, education, wealth, or social standing.

They had encountered Jesus Christ.

And they believed He was worth telling the world about.

That conviction changed everything.

The church in Acts understood that Christianity was not meant to be confined to a building or restricted to a weekly gathering.

The gospel belonged in the streets.

It belonged in homes.

It belonged in synagogues.

It belonged in marketplaces.

It belonged before rulers.

It belonged in prisons.

It belonged on ships.

It belonged in every city and among every people.

The early believers carried the name of Jesus everywhere they went.

Some were welcomed.

Others were beaten.

Some saw great numbers believe.

Others were driven from cities.

Some witnessed miracles.

Others buried faithful servants who had given their lives for Christ.

But through every victory and every hardship, the mission continued.

That is what makes Acts so challenging to the modern church.

It forces us to ask difficult questions.

Have we become comfortable where the early church was courageous?

Have we become silent where they were bold?

Have we depended upon programs where they depended upon prayer?

Have we relied upon human ability where they relied upon the Holy Spirit?

Have we forgotten that the gospel is still the power of God unto salvation?

Acts does not call us merely to admire the early church.

It calls us to remember what the church is supposed to be.

A worshiping church.

A praying church.

A teaching church.

A witnessing church.

A generous church.

A courageous church.

A missionary church.

A church centered on Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The title **The Church on Fire** describes more than the flames that appeared at Pentecost.

It describes a people whose hearts had been captured by the risen Christ.

They possessed a message they could not keep silent.

They had witnessed a Savior they could not deny.

They had received a commission they could not ignore.

The fire spread from Jerusalem.

Then Judea.

Then Samaria.

Then across seas, cultures, and kingdoms.

By the final chapter, Paul sits under Roman guard in the heart of the empire.

Yet he is still preaching.

Still teaching.

Still proclaiming Jesus Christ.

Acts ends without telling us everything that happened next.

In one sense, that unfinished feeling is appropriate.

The mission did not end with Paul.

The gospel continued moving.

The church continued witnessing.

Generation after generation carried the message forward.

And now the responsibility has reached us.

We stand in the same great story.

The locations have changed.

The cultures have changed.

The languages have changed.

But the gospel has not changed.

Jesus Christ is still Lord.

The world still needs the message of salvation.

And the church is still called to be His witness.

As we begin this verse-by-verse journey through Acts, we are not merely opening an ancient history book.

We are opening the record of how God took a small group of believers, filled them with His Spirit, and used them to carry the gospel toward the ends of the earth.

It is the story of courage.

The story of sacrifice.

The story of mission.

The story of the Holy Spirit at work through surrendered people.

It is the story of a church on fire.

And the question that confronts us at the beginning of this study is simple:

Does that same fire still burn in us?

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 1 — The Ascension of Jesus and the Choosing of Matthias

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 1 begins where the Gospel of Luke ends.

Jesus has risen from the dead.

For forty days He appears to His disciples, gives them convincing proofs that He is alive, and teaches them about the kingdom of God.

But before the disciples begin their mission, Jesus gives them an important command:

Wait.

They are not to rush immediately into ministry.

They are to remain in Jerusalem until they receive the promised Holy Spirit.

Then Jesus gives them the great outline for the entire book of Acts:

“You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

That verse becomes the geographical and theological framework of Acts.

The gospel begins in Jerusalem.

It spreads through Judea.

It crosses longstanding barriers into Samaria.

Eventually it moves outward toward the nations.

Acts 1 also records the ascension of Jesus.

The disciples watch as Christ is taken into heaven.

Then two angels give them an extraordinary promise:

This same Jesus will return.

The chapter ends with the disciples praying together and choosing Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot among the Twelve.

Acts 1 therefore stands between two major events:

The resurrection of Christ.

And:

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The disciples are waiting between promise and fulfillment.

But their waiting is not empty.

They pray.

They remain united.

They study Scripture.

They prepare for what God is about to do.

The central truth of Acts 1 is:

The risen Christ commissions His followers to become Spirit-empowered witnesses while they faithfully wait for His promised return.

I. LUKE CONTINUES THE STORY OF JESUS

Acts 1:1 — “All That Jesus Began to Do and Teach”

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach.”

Luke begins Acts by referring to his earlier book.

That earlier book is the Gospel of Luke.

Luke and Acts therefore belong together.

The Gospel of Luke records what Jesus:

Began to do and teach.

Acts records how Jesus continued His work through the Holy Spirit and His followers.

Cross References

Luke 1:1

Many people have attempted to write an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us.

Luke 1:3

Therefore, after carefully investigating everything from the beginning, I also decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.

John 20:31

But these things have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life through His name.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus' earthly ministry did not end when He ascended into heaven.

He continued His work through His people by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Key Truth

The church does not invent Christ's mission.

The church continues Christ's mission.

II. JESUS PREPARED HIS APOSTLES

Acts 1:2 — Instructions Through the Holy Spirit

“Until the day He was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen.”

Jesus deliberately prepared the apostles.

They were chosen by Him.

They were instructed by Him.

And their ministry would depend upon the Holy Spirit.

Cross References

Luke 24:51

While Jesus was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven.

Mark 16:19

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

Luke 6:13

When daylight came, Jesus called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also called apostles.

Spiritual Principle

Those whom Christ sends, Christ first prepares.

The apostles were not sent without instruction.

They had learned directly from Jesus.

Application

Zeal is important.

But zeal without biblical preparation can become dangerous.

Godly ministry should be grounded in:

- Truth.
 - Prayer.
 - Character.
 - Calling.
 - Dependence upon the Holy Spirit.
-

III. JESUS GAVE MANY PROOFS OF HIS RESURRECTION

Acts 1:3 — Forty Days with the Risen Christ

“After His suffering, He presented Himself alive to them with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”

Christianity rests upon the historical reality of the resurrection.

Luke does not describe the resurrection as a private feeling experienced by the disciples.

He says Jesus:

“Presented Himself alive.”

And He did so:

“With many convincing proofs.”

Cross References

1 Corinthians 15:5

The risen Jesus appeared to Peter, and afterward He appeared to the Twelve.

John 20:27

Then Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Luke 24:15

While the two disciples were talking and discussing these things together, Jesus Himself came near and began walking with them.

Jesus appeared repeatedly.

He spoke.

He ate.

He taught.

He invited examination of His wounds.

The apostles did not proclaim merely that Jesus' teachings continued.

They proclaimed:

Jesus Himself was alive.

Key Truth

The resurrection is not a minor doctrine of Christianity. It is at the heart of the Christian message.

IV. JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE KINGDOM

For forty days Jesus spoke:

“About the kingdom of God.”

The kingdom had been central throughout His ministry.

Even after the resurrection, Jesus continued teaching about God's sovereign rule and redemptive purposes.

Spiritual Principle

The resurrection did not change Jesus' message—it confirmed it.

The King had defeated death.

His kingdom could not be stopped.

V. WAIT FOR THE FATHER'S PROMISE

Acts 1:4 — “Do Not Leave Jerusalem”

“On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He gave this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about.’”

The disciples had a mission.

But they were not yet to begin it.

Jesus said:

“Wait.”

This is important.

The disciples had:

- Seen the risen Christ.
- Heard His teaching.
- Received His commission.
- Experienced His miracles.

Yet Jesus still said:

Wait for the Holy Spirit.

Cross References

Luke 24:49

Jesus said, “I am sending upon you what My Father promised. Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from heaven.”

John 14:16

Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper who will remain with you forever.”

John 15:26

“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father—He will testify about Me.”

Spiritual Principle

God's work must be done through God's power.

Human enthusiasm could not substitute for the Holy Spirit.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never run ahead of God's power simply because you understand God's assignment.

VI. BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 1:5 — The Promise of Spiritual Power

“For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

John's baptism prepared people through repentance.

But something greater was coming.

The disciples would experience the promised ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Cross References

Matthew 3:11

John said, “I baptize you with water as a sign of repentance, but the One coming after me is more powerful than I am. I am not worthy even to carry His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Mark 1:8

John said, “I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

John 1:33

John said, “I did not know who He was at first, but the One who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The One upon whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

The promise points forward directly to Pentecost in Acts 2.

VII. THE DISCIPLES ASK ABOUT ISRAEL'S KINGDOM

Acts 1:6 — “Will You Restore the Kingdom?”

“Then they gathered around Him and asked, ‘Lord, are You going to restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?’”

The disciples still expected the restoration of Israel.

Their question was not merely about personal salvation.

They were thinking about God's kingdom promises.

Cross References

Luke 24:21

The disciples said, “We had hoped that Jesus was the One who was going to redeem Israel. Besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.”

Matthew 24:3

As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately and asked, “Tell us, when will these things happen? What will be the sign of Your coming and of the completion of the age?”

Isaiah 1:26

I will restore your judges as they were before and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness and the Faithful City.

Jesus does not rebuke them for believing that God has a kingdom purpose.

He redirects their attention away from the timetable.

VIII. GOD CONTROLS THE TIMES AND SEASONS

Acts 1:7 — “It Is Not for You to Know”

“He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority.’”

The disciples wanted a calendar.

Jesus gave them a commission.

They wanted to know:

When?

Jesus told them what they needed to do:

Witness.

Cross References

Matthew 24:36

But no one knows the exact day or hour—not the angels in heaven, nor the Son in His earthly ministry—but only the Father.

Mark 13:32

No one knows that day or hour—not the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

1 Thessalonians 5:1

Brothers and sisters, you do not need me to write to you about the times and seasons.

Spiritual Principle

God has not called believers to calculate what He has chosen not to reveal.

Prophecy should produce faithfulness, not endless speculation.

Application

The better question is not:

“Can I determine the date?”

But:

“Am I faithfully serving Christ today?”

IX. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF ACTS

Acts 1:8 — “You Will Be My Witnesses”

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8 is one of the key verses in the entire book.

It contains:

The Power

The Holy Spirit.

The Purpose

Witnessing for Christ.

The Place

The entire world.

Cross References

Isaiah 49:6

God says, “It is too small a thing for you merely to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back the preserved people of Israel. I will also make you a light to the nations so that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

Luke 24:48

Jesus said, “You are witnesses of these things.”

Matthew 28:19

Jesus said, “Therefore go and make disciples among all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Jerusalem

Their immediate city.

Judea

The surrounding region.

Samaria

A place marked by religious and ethnic tension with the Jews.

Ends of the Earth

The mission would extend to all nations.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Holy Spirit gives power not merely for spiritual experience but for spiritual mission.

X. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A WITNESS?

A witness tells what he knows to be true.

The apostles had seen:

- Jesus' ministry.
- His miracles.
- His crucifixion.
- His resurrection.

- His ascension.

Their message was centered upon Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Christian witnessing is not fundamentally about promoting ourselves. It is about pointing people toward Jesus Christ.

A witness says:

This is who Jesus is.

This is what Jesus has done.

This is why you should believe in Him.

XI. JESUS ASCENDS INTO HEAVEN

Acts 1:9 — Taken Up Before Their Eyes

“After He said this, He was taken up before their eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight.”

The ascension was visible.

The disciples watched Jesus leave.

Cross References

Luke 24:51

While Jesus was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven.

2 Kings 2:11

As Elijah and Elisha continued walking and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire with horses of fire appeared and separated them, and Elijah went up into heaven in a whirlwind.

Mark 16:19

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

The ascension marked an important transition.

Jesus' earthly ministry had reached its conclusion.

His heavenly ministry continued.

Key Truth

The ascended Christ is not absent in the sense of being inactive.

He reigns.

He intercedes.

He sends the Spirit.

He directs His church.

XII. TWO ANGELS APPEAR

Acts 1:10 — Looking Toward Heaven

“As they were looking intently into the sky as He was going, suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.”

The disciples remained looking toward heaven.

Then two heavenly messengers appeared.

Cross References

Luke 24:4

While the women stood there puzzled, suddenly two men in bright clothing appeared beside them.

John 20:12

Mary saw two angels dressed in white sitting where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the feet.

Mark 16:5

When the women entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

The angels now redirect the disciples' attention.

XIII. THIS SAME JESUS WILL RETURN

Acts 1:11 — The Promise of Christ's Return

“They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.’”

This is one of the clearest promises concerning the return of Jesus Christ.

Notice the words:

“This same Jesus.”

The Jesus who ascended is the Jesus who will return.

Cross References

Matthew 24:30

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Revelation 1:7

Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, including those who pierced Him. All peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him. Yes, it will certainly happen.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

The Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. The dead who belong to Christ will rise first.

Spiritual Principle

The ascension guarantees the return.

Jesus went visibly.

Jesus will return visibly.

Jesus went bodily.

Jesus will return personally.

Application

The doctrine of Christ's return should produce:

- Hope.
 - Holiness.
 - Faithfulness.
 - Urgency.
 - Expectation.
-

XIV. THE DISCIPLES RETURN TO JERUSALEM

Acts 1:12 — Obedience After the Ascension

“Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.”

Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem.

They obeyed.

Cross References

Luke 24:52

The disciples worshiped Jesus and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

Zechariah 14:4

On that day His feet will stand upon the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. The mountain will split in two from east to west, forming a great valley.

Luke 19:29

As Jesus approached Bethphage and Bethany near the hill called the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples ahead.

Spiritual Principle

Faith often begins by obeying what Christ has already made clear.

They did not yet know everything that would happen.

But they knew what they were supposed to do next.

XV. THE ELEVEN APOSTLES GATHER

Acts 1:13 — The Upper Room

“When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.”

The eleven remaining apostles gathered together.

Judas Iscariot was absent.

The list reminds us that the group had suffered loss and betrayal.

Yet the mission continued.

Cross References

Matthew 10:2

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew; then James son of Zebedee and his brother John.

Luke 22:12

The man will show you a large upstairs room already furnished. Prepare the meal there.

Mark 3:16

These are the twelve Jesus appointed: Simon, whom He named Peter—

Spiritual Principle

God's work can continue even after disappointment, betrayal, and loss.

Judas' failure did not destroy Christ's mission.

XVI. THE CHURCH WAITS IN PRAYER

Acts 1:14 — United and Constant in Prayer

“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.”

This is one of the great pictures of the early church.

Before Pentecost:

They prayed.

Before preaching to thousands:

They prayed.

Before the church spread across the world:

They prayed.

Cross References

John 7:5

At that time even Jesus' own brothers did not believe in Him.

Acts 2:42

The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread together, and prayer.

John 19:25

Standing near the cross of Jesus were His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

A significant transformation had occurred.

Jesus' brothers had once been unbelieving.

Now they were gathered with the disciples in prayer.

Key Truth

The resurrection changed skeptics into worshipers.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Great movements of God are often preceded by ordinary believers gathering faithfully in prayer.

XVII. PETER STANDS AMONG THE BELIEVERS

Acts 1:15 — About 120 Believers

“In those days Peter stood up among the believers—a group numbering about a hundred and twenty—and said,”

Peter now begins functioning publicly among the disciples.

This is significant.

Peter had denied Jesus three times.

Yet Christ had restored him.

Failure had not become the end of Peter's story.

Cross References

Acts 2:14

Then Peter stood up with the eleven apostles, raised his voice, and addressed the crowd.

1 Corinthians 15:6

After that, Jesus appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote, though some had died.

Luke 24:33

The two disciples got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven apostles and the others gathered together.

Spiritual Principle

A past failure does not automatically disqualify a repentant and restored servant from future usefulness.

XVIII. SCRIPTURE HAD TO BE FULFILLED

Acts 1:16 — Judas and Prophecy

“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David about Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.”

Peter interprets Judas' betrayal in light of Scripture.

Notice his view of the Bible.

He says the Holy Spirit spoke:

“Through David.”

This reflects both divine inspiration and human authorship.

Cross References

Psalms 41:9

Even my close friend whom I trusted, the one who shared my bread, has turned against me.

John 13:18

Jesus said, “I am not speaking about all of you. I know those I have chosen. But this happened so that Scripture would be fulfilled: ‘The one who ate My bread has turned against Me.’”

Luke 22:47

While Jesus was still speaking, a crowd arrived. Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss Him.

Spiritual Principle

Human evil cannot overthrow God's sovereign purposes.

Judas was responsible for his betrayal.

Yet God was not surprised by it.

XIX. JUDAS HAD SHARED IN THE MINISTRY

Acts 1:17 — One of the Twelve

“He was one of our number and shared in this ministry.”

Judas had been close to Jesus outwardly.

He had traveled with the apostles.

He had heard Christ teach.

He had witnessed miracles.

He had participated in ministry.

Yet outward association did not equal inward faithfulness.

Cross References

Matthew 10:4

Among the twelve was Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Jesus.

Luke 6:16

The apostles included Judas son of James and Judas Iscariot, who became the betrayer.

John 6:70

Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.”

Spiritual Warning

Proximity to spiritual things does not guarantee a transformed heart.

A person can attend church.

Know Scripture.

Participate in ministry.

Have religious friends.

And still need genuine saving faith.

XX. THE TRAGIC END OF JUDAS

Acts 1:18 — The Field Connected with His Betrayal

“With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open, and all his intestines spilled out.”

Luke describes the terrible aftermath of Judas' betrayal.

Matthew records that Judas returned the silver and hanged himself.

Acts describes what happened in connection with the field purchased with the betrayal money.

Cross References

Matthew 27:3

When Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, saw that Jesus had been condemned, he was filled with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.

Matthew 27:5

Judas threw the silver coins into the temple, left, and went away and hanged himself.

Matthew 27:7

After discussing the matter, the priests used the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.

Spiritual Warning

Sin often promises reward but eventually produces destruction.

Judas received money.

But he lost far more than he gained.

XXI. THE FIELD OF BLOOD

Acts 1:19 — Akeldama

“Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.”

The place became associated permanently with Judas' betrayal and death.

Cross References

Matthew 27:8

That is why the field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Matthew 27:10

They used the money to buy the potter's field, just as the Lord had commanded through the prophet.

Zechariah 11:13

Then the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter—the magnificent price at which they valued me.” So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter.

Spiritual Principle

Choices leave consequences.

Judas' decision affected far more than one moment.

XXII. PETER APPEALS TO THE PSALMS

Acts 1:20 — “Let Another Take His Office”

“For,” said Peter, “it is written in the book of Psalms: ‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and, ‘May another take his place of leadership.’”

Peter draws upon two Psalms.

He believed Judas' vacancy should be filled.

Cross References

Psalm 69:25

May their place become deserted, and may no one remain living in their tents.

Psalm 109:8

May his days be few, and may another person take his position.

John 17:12

Jesus prayed, “While I was with them, I protected them by the power of Your name. None of them was lost except the son of destruction, so that Scripture would be fulfilled.”

Spiritual Principle

The early church made decisions by looking to Scripture.

Prayer mattered.

Circumstances mattered.

But Scripture provided the framework.

XXIII. QUALIFICATIONS FOR JUDAS' REPLACEMENT

Acts 1:21 — Someone Who Had Been with Jesus

“Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us.”

The replacement needed firsthand experience of Jesus' ministry.

Cross References

John 15:27

Jesus said, “You also must testify about Me because you have been with Me from the beginning.”

Acts 10:41

Jesus was not seen by everyone after His resurrection, but by witnesses God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.

Luke 8:1

After this, Jesus traveled from town to town and village to village, preaching and announcing the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with Him.

The apostolic role involved unique eyewitness testimony.

XXIV. A WITNESS OF THE RESURRECTION

Acts 1:22 — From John's Baptism to the Ascension

“Beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

The central qualification was clear.

The person must be able to testify concerning the resurrection.

Cross References

Acts 10:37

You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism John preached.

Acts 10:41

God did not allow the risen Jesus to appear to everyone, but to witnesses He had chosen beforehand—to us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.

Luke 24:48

Jesus said, “You are witnesses of these things.”

Key Truth

The resurrection stands at the center of apostolic preaching.

The apostles were not primarily witnesses of a philosophy.

They were witnesses of a Person:

The risen Jesus Christ.

XXV. TWO MEN ARE NOMINATED

Acts 1:23 — Joseph and Matthias

“So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas, also known as Justus, and Matthias.”

Two qualified men were identified.

Both apparently met the requirements Peter described.

Cross References

Proverbs 16:33

People may cast the lot into the lap, but its final decision belongs to the Lord.

1 Chronicles 24:5

The priestly divisions were assigned by lot because leaders from the descendants of Eleazar and Ithamar both served as officials in God's sanctuary.

Acts 6:5

The proposal pleased the whole group, so they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, along with Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch.

Spiritual Principle

God often works through responsible human evaluation combined with dependence upon His direction.

XXVI. GOD KNOWS THE HEART

Acts 1:24 — “Show Us Whom You Have Chosen”

“Then they prayed, ‘Lord, You know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two You have chosen.’”

Before making the final decision, they prayed.

Notice what they confessed about God:

“You know everyone's heart.”

Human beings see outward appearance.

God sees motives, desires, character, and inner reality.

Cross References

1 Samuel 16:7

The Lord told Samuel, “Do not judge by his appearance or his height, because I have rejected him. The Lord does not see things the way people see them. People look at outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

1 Kings 8:39

Then hear from heaven, Your dwelling place. Forgive and act. Treat each person according to his ways, because You alone know every human heart.

John 2:24

But Jesus did not entrust Himself to them because He knew what was in every person.

Spiritual Principle

Leadership should never be selected merely by appearance, charisma, popularity, or human impression.

Character matters.

God sees what people cannot.

XXVII. THE VACANT APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

Acts 1:25 — Judas Left His Place

“To take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.”

Judas abandoned his calling through betrayal.

The church sought someone to fill the vacant position.

Cross References

John 17:12

Jesus prayed, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by Your name. None was lost except the son of destruction, so that Scripture would be fulfilled.”

Matthew 27:5

Judas threw the silver into the temple, went away, and hanged himself.

Psalms 109:8

May his days be few, and may another take his position.

Spiritual Warning

Privilege does not eliminate personal responsibility.

Judas had enormous opportunity.

But opportunity without faithfulness becomes wasted privilege.

XXVIII. MATTHIAS IS CHOSEN

Acts 1:26 — Added to the Eleven

“Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.”

The final lot fell to Matthias.

Casting lots had Old Testament precedent as a means of seeking a decision under God's providence.

Cross References

Proverbs 16:33

The lot may be cast into the lap, but every decision ultimately comes under the Lord's sovereign direction.

Leviticus 16:8

Aaron must cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat.

Jonah 1:7

The sailors said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots to discover who is responsible for this trouble.” They cast lots, and the lot identified Jonah.

Important Observation

After the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, casting lots does not become the normal pattern for church decision-making.

The New Testament increasingly emphasizes:

- Prayer.
- Scripture.
- Wisdom.
- Spiritual qualification.
- Guidance by the Holy Spirit.

Key Truth

The church must seek God's direction rather than merely trusting human preference.

XXIX. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 1

1. The Resurrection Is Foundational

Jesus gave:

“Many convincing proofs.”

Christian faith rests upon the risen Christ.

Principle:

Without the resurrection, there is no Christian gospel.

2. God's Work Requires God's Power

The disciples were told to wait for the Holy Spirit.

Principle:

Ministry attempted without dependence upon God becomes human activity rather than spiritual power.

3. Christians Are Called to Be Witnesses

Jesus said:

“You will be My witnesses.”

Principle:

Every believer has a responsibility to point others toward Christ.

4. The Mission Is Global

Jerusalem was only the beginning.

The gospel was destined for:

The ends of the earth.

Principle:

The church cannot become satisfied with reaching only people who are familiar, nearby, or culturally similar.

5. Jesus Will Return

The angels said:

“This same Jesus... will come back.”

Principle:

Christian hope is centered upon the personal return of Jesus Christ.

6. Prayer Prepares God's People

Before Pentecost, the disciples prayed together.

Principle:

Waiting upon God should produce prayer, not passivity.

7. God Uses Faithful People to Continue His Mission

Judas failed.

Matthias was chosen.

The mission continued.

Principle:

Individual servants may fail, but Christ's mission will not fail.

XXX. THE GREAT OUTLINE OF ACTS

Acts 1:8 provides a natural outline for the entire book.

Jerusalem

Acts 1–7 largely focuses upon the witness in Jerusalem.

Judea and Samaria

Acts 8–12 shows the gospel spreading beyond Jerusalem.

The Ends of the Earth

Acts 13–28 records the expanding mission, especially through Paul's missionary work.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel is always moving outward.

It crosses:

- Geographic boundaries.
- Ethnic boundaries.
- Cultural boundaries.
- Social boundaries.

Because Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

XXXI. WAITING DOES NOT MEAN DOING NOTHING

The disciples were told:

“Wait.”

But notice what they did while waiting.

They obeyed.

They gathered.

They prayed.

They studied Scripture.

They addressed leadership needs.

They prepared.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical waiting is active dependence upon God.

Waiting does not mean:

“God is doing nothing, so I will do nothing.”

It means:

“I will remain faithful while God prepares what comes next.”

XXXII. THE EARLY CHURCH WAS UNITED IN PRAYER

Acts 1:14 says:

“They all joined together constantly in prayer.”

Unity preceded Pentecost.

Prayer preceded Pentecost.

Dependence preceded Pentecost.

Application

Churches often search for:

- Better programs.
- Better marketing.
- Better technology.
- Better methods.
- Better organization.

Those things can have value.

But Acts begins somewhere deeper:

Prayer.

Principle:

A praying church recognizes that spiritual results ultimately require spiritual power.

XXXIII. WHAT ACTS 1 TEACHES ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is not presented merely as a spiritual influence.

He is central to the mission Christ gives His church.

The Spirit Was Promised by the Father

Jesus called Him:

“The gift My Father promised.”

The Spirit Gives Power

“You will receive power.”

The Spirit Empowers Witness

The purpose of that power is connected directly with proclaiming Christ.

The Spirit Continues Christ's Work

Acts demonstrates Christ working through Spirit-empowered believers.

Key Truth

The book of Acts cannot be properly understood apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

XXXIV. WHAT ACTS 1 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

Acts 1 presents Jesus as:

The Risen Lord

He proved Himself alive.

The Teacher

He taught about God's kingdom.

The Promise-Giver

He promised the Holy Spirit.

The Commissioner

He sent His followers into the world.

The Ascended Lord

He returned to heaven.

The Coming King

He will return.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Jesus who died is alive, the Jesus who rose reigns, and the Jesus who ascended will return.

XXXV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does Luke mean when he says Jesus “began to do and teach” in his former book?

Luke is referring to the Gospel of Luke.

The word “**began**” suggests that Jesus' earthly ministry recorded in the Gospel was only the beginning of His continuing work.

Acts records how Christ continued His mission through the Holy Spirit working in His followers.

Question 2

What evidence did Jesus give that He had truly risen from the dead?

Acts 1:3 says Jesus appeared alive with many convincing proofs over forty days.

The Gospel accounts describe Him:

- Appearing repeatedly.
- Speaking with disciples.
- Eating with them.
- Showing His wounds.
- Allowing Thomas to examine the evidence.
- Teaching them.

The resurrection was presented as an objective event, not merely a spiritual feeling.

Question 3

Why did Jesus command the disciples to wait in Jerusalem?

Because they needed the promised Holy Spirit.

Knowledge alone was not enough.

Experience alone was not enough.

Human courage alone was not enough.

They needed God's power for God's mission.

Question 4

What does Acts 1:8 teach about the purpose of the Holy Spirit's power?

The Spirit empowers believers to witness about Jesus Christ.

Spiritual power is therefore not given merely for personal experience.

It is connected to mission.

Key Phrase:

“You will be My witnesses.”

Question 5

What do Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth represent?

They describe the expanding geographical movement of the gospel.

Jerusalem was the immediate location.

Judea represented the surrounding Jewish region.

Samaria represented a culturally and religiously divided neighboring region.

The ends of the earth represented the nations.

This becomes the basic outline of Acts.

Question 6

What does the ascension teach us about Jesus?

The ascension shows that Jesus' earthly ministry reached a new stage.

He returned to heaven and was exalted.

The New Testament teaches that He reigns at God's right hand and continues His work as Lord.

The ascension also prepares for the sending of the Holy Spirit.

Question 7

Will Jesus literally return?

Acts 1:11 presents His return as a real future event.

The angels said:

“This same Jesus... will come back in the same way you have seen Him go.”

The disciples saw Him ascend.

Scripture teaches that He will return personally and visibly.

Question 8

What did the disciples do while waiting for Pentecost?

They:

- Obeyed Jesus.
- Returned to Jerusalem.
- Gathered together.
- Continued in prayer.
- Studied Scripture.
- Addressed the vacancy left by Judas.
- Prepared themselves for what God would do.

This demonstrates active waiting.

Question 9

What does Judas teach us about outward association with Christianity?

Judas lived close to Jesus outwardly but betrayed Him.

This warns us that external association with spiritual things does not automatically equal genuine faith. A person can participate in religious activity without possessing a transformed heart.

Question 10

Why was the resurrection so important in selecting Judas' replacement?

The replacement needed to become:

“A witness with us of His resurrection.”

The apostles' central message was that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

Their authority as foundational witnesses was tied closely to firsthand testimony concerning Christ.

Question 11

What does Acts 1:24 teach about leadership selection?

The disciples prayed:

“Lord, You know everyone's heart.”

This teaches that spiritual leadership should not be chosen merely by outward qualities.

Character matters.

God sees what human beings cannot see.

Question 12

What should Acts 1 change about the way Christians live today?

Acts 1 should cause believers to live:

- Dependent upon the Holy Spirit.
 - Committed to prayer.
 - Focused upon witnessing.
 - Confident in Christ's resurrection.
 - Expectant concerning Christ's return.
 - Faithful while waiting.
 - Concerned about taking the gospel outward.
-

XXXVI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 1 asks several important questions.

Do I Really Believe Jesus Is Alive?

The early church was built upon that conviction.

Am I Trying to Serve God in My Own Strength?

Jesus told the disciples to wait for divine power.

Am I Being a Witness?

Who in my life hears about Christ because I am there?

What Is My Jerusalem?

Who is immediately around me?

What Is My Judea?

Where can my witness expand?

What Is My Samaria?

Who do I find difficult, unfamiliar, or culturally different?

Am I Living as Though Jesus Could Return?

Christ's return should influence present faithfulness.

Is Prayer Central to My Life?

The early church waited prayerfully.

Am I Faithful While Waiting?

Waiting seasons are preparation seasons.

XXXVII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Stare at Heaven When Christ Has Given You a Mission on Earth”

The disciples watched Jesus ascend.

They continued staring toward heaven.

Then the angels asked:

“Why do you stand here looking into the sky?”

Jesus had already told them what to do.

Wait for the Holy Spirit.

Then become witnesses.

This creates a powerful principle.

Christians should look forward to Christ's return.

But expectation must never become inactivity.

We are not called merely to watch the sky.

We are called to work until He returns.

Principle:

The proper response to the promise of Christ's return is faithful mission, not passive speculation.

XXXVIII. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 1 stands at the doorway of one of the greatest movements in history.

Jesus is risen.

The disciples know He is alive.

They have received their mission.

But before the church explodes outward across the Roman world, there is a quiet room in Jerusalem.

A relatively small group of believers is praying.

They do not yet know everything that is about to happen.

Peter has not yet preached his Pentecost sermon.

Three thousand people have not yet believed.

Stephen has not yet given his testimony.

Philip has not yet preached in Samaria.

Saul has not yet become Paul.

The missionary journeys have not yet begun.

The gospel has not yet reached Rome.

But everything is ready.

Jesus has given the promise.

The mission has been defined.

The disciples are praying.

And the Holy Spirit is coming.

Acts 1 therefore reminds us:

Never despise the preparation stage of God's work.

Before public power came private prayer.

Before worldwide mission came faithful waiting.

Before thousands believed, a small group obeyed.

The church did not begin with impressive buildings.

It began with:

A risen Savior.

A promised Spirit.

A praying people.

And a worldwide mission.

The same mission still stands:

Be witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Tell people that He died.

Tell people that He rose.

Tell people that forgiveness is available through Him.

Tell people that He reigns.

Tell people that He is coming again.

And until He returns:

Keep witnessing.

Keep praying.

Keep obeying.

Keep going.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

Thank You that our faith rests upon a living Savior.

Thank You for the convincing testimony of those who saw Him alive after His resurrection.

Teach us to depend completely upon Your Holy Spirit.

Keep us from attempting spiritual work through human strength alone.

Give us power to become faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Help us begin where You have placed us.

Give us courage to witness in our Jerusalem.

Lead us beyond what is familiar into our Judea and Samaria.

Give us a heart for people throughout the world.

Thank You that Jesus ascended into heaven and reigns as Lord.

Thank You for the promise that this same Jesus will return.

Help us live every day in expectation of His coming.

Keep us from becoming obsessed with dates and speculation while neglecting the mission You have already given us.

Make us a praying people.

Teach churches to depend upon You rather than merely depending upon programs, personalities, methods, or human ability.

When we experience seasons of waiting, help us remain faithful.

Teach us to pray.

Teach us to obey.

Teach us to prepare.

And when You open the door, give us courage to move.

Protect spiritual leaders from the tragedy of Judas.

Give us hearts that are genuine, faithful, humble, and obedient.

Raise up men and women who will carry the gospel faithfully into the world.

May everything we do point people toward Jesus Christ.

Until the day He returns, let us faithfully fulfill His command:

“You will be My witnesses.”

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” — Acts 1:8

Central Truth

The risen and ascended Jesus Christ gives His followers the Holy Spirit's power to become His witnesses throughout the world while they faithfully await His promised return.

Acts 1 in One Sentence

The risen Jesus prepares His disciples for worldwide mission by promising the Holy Spirit, commissioning them as His witnesses, ascending into heaven with the promise of His return, and leading the praying church to prepare for the work ahead.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 2 — The Coming of the Holy Spirit and Peter's Sermon

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 2 records one of the most important turning points in the history of the church.

Jesus had promised His disciples:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”

In Acts 2, that promise is fulfilled.

The believers are gathered together on the Day of Pentecost when suddenly a sound like a rushing wind fills the house. What appear to be flames of fire rest upon them, and they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

They begin speaking in languages they had not learned.

Visitors from many nations hear the mighty works of God proclaimed in their own native languages.

The miracle draws a crowd.

Some are amazed.

Others mock.

Then Peter stands.

The same Peter who had denied Jesus only weeks earlier now boldly proclaims Jesus Christ before a large crowd.

Peter explains that the coming of the Holy Spirit fulfills the prophecy of Joel.

He then proclaims:

- The ministry of Jesus.
- The crucifixion of Jesus.
- The resurrection of Jesus.
- The exaltation of Jesus.
- The lordship of Jesus.
- The Messiahship of Jesus.

The people are deeply convicted and ask:

“Brothers, what should we do?”

Peter calls them to repentance.

About three thousand people receive the message and are baptized.

The chapter ends by showing what the newborn church looked like.

They devoted themselves to:

The apostles' teaching.

Fellowship.

Breaking bread.

Prayer.

They shared generously.

They worshiped together.

They praised God.

And the Lord continued adding people to the church.

Acts 2 therefore teaches us:

The Holy Spirit empowers the church to proclaim the risen Christ, and the gospel creates a new community devoted to truth, fellowship, prayer, generosity, and worship.

I. THE DAY OF PENTECOST ARRIVES

Acts 2:1 — Together in One Place

“On the day of Pentecost, all the believers were together in one place.”

Pentecost was an important Jewish feast.

It occurred fifty days after Passover and was connected with the harvest.

Jewish worshipers gathered in Jerusalem from many different regions.

God chose this moment to pour out the Holy Spirit.

Cross References

Leviticus 23:16

Count fifty days until the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then present a new grain offering to the Lord.

Deuteronomy 16:10

Celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God by bringing a voluntary offering according to how the Lord your God has blessed you.

Exodus 34:22

Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year.

Pentecost already celebrated harvest.

Now a greater spiritual harvest was about to begin.

By the end of the chapter:

About three thousand people would believe.

Spiritual Principle

God often prepares circumstances long before we recognize what He is doing.

Jerusalem was filled with visitors.

The disciples were together.

The promise had been given.

Everything was ready.

II. A SOUND FROM HEAVEN

Acts 2:2 — Like a Powerful Rushing Wind

“Suddenly, a sound came from heaven like a powerful, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.”

The sound came:

“From heaven.”

Luke does not say that a literal wind blew through the house.

He says the sound was:

“Like”

a powerful rushing wind.

Wind is frequently associated with the movement and power of God's Spirit.

Cross References

John 3:8

Jesus said, “The wind blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you do not know exactly where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

Ezekiel 37:9

Then the Lord told me, “Prophesy to the breath. Say, ‘Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these dead bodies so that they may live.’”

Exodus 19:16

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning. A thick cloud covered the mountain, and a very loud trumpet sound was heard. Everyone in the camp trembled.

Spiritual Principle

The coming of the Holy Spirit was God's action, not human achievement.

The disciples did not manufacture Pentecost.

God sent the Spirit.

III. WHAT LOOKED LIKE FIRE

Acts 2:3 — Flames Rest Upon Them

“Then what looked like flames of fire appeared and settled on each one of them.”

Luke carefully says:

“What looked like flames of fire.”

Fire often symbolizes God's:

- Presence.
- Holiness.
- Purification.
- Power.

Cross References

Exodus 3:2

The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

Isaiah 6:6

Then one of the seraphim flew to me holding a burning coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs.

Matthew 3:11

John said, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but the One coming after me is greater than I am. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Key Truth

God's presence that once appeared dramatically in particular places was now visibly connected with His people.

The Spirit rested upon each believer present.

IV. FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 2:4 — Speaking in Other Languages

“Everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.”

The believers spoke languages they had not naturally learned.

The ability came:

“As the Spirit enabled them.”

Cross References

Joel 2:28

God says, “Afterward I will pour out My Spirit upon all kinds of people. Your sons and daughters will speak God's message, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.”

Acts 10:46

The Jewish believers heard the Gentiles speaking in other languages and praising the greatness of God.

Acts 19:6

When Paul placed his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in other languages and prophesied.

Spiritual Principle

The Holy Spirit gives ability for the mission God assigns.

The languages at Pentecost had a missionary purpose.

People from many nations were about to hear about God's mighty works.

V. PEOPLE FROM MANY NATIONS WERE IN JERUSALEM

Acts 2:5 — Devout Jews from Everywhere

“At that time, devout Jews from every nation under heaven were staying in Jerusalem.”

God had arranged the circumstances perfectly.

Jewish worshipers from many regions had traveled to Jerusalem for Pentecost.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 16:16

Three times each year all your males must appear before the Lord your God at the place He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths.

Isaiah 66:18

The Lord says, “I know their works and their thoughts. The time is coming when I will gather people from every nation and language, and they will come and see My glory.”

Zechariah 8:22

Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord of hosts and pray for His favor.

Spiritual Principle

God can use ordinary events and human movement to accomplish extraordinary purposes.

VI. EVERYONE HEARD HIS OWN LANGUAGE

Acts 2:6 — The Crowd Is Amazed

“When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were amazed because each one heard the believers speaking in their own native language.”

The miracle was understandable.

The crowd heard recognizable languages.

Cross References

Genesis 11:7

God said, “Come, let Us go down and confuse their language so they will no longer understand one another.”

Genesis 11:9

That is why the city was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth and scattered the people across the earth.

1 Corinthians 14:10

There are many different languages in the world, and every one of them has meaning.

Pentecost provides a striking contrast with Babel.

At Babel, human rebellion led to confusion and scattering.

At Pentecost, God's Spirit enabled people from different language groups to hear God's mighty works.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel does not erase human diversity; it carries God's truth across human boundaries.

VII. THE GALILEANS AMAZE THE CROWD

Acts 2:7 — “Aren’t These Galileans?”

“They were completely astonished. ‘Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?’ they asked.”

The crowd recognized that these speakers were Galileans.

Yet they were speaking many languages fluently.

Cross References

Acts 1:11

The angels said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who was taken from you into heaven will return in the same way you saw Him go.”

Matthew 26:73

After a little while, those standing nearby said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, because your way of speaking gives you away.”

John 7:52

They answered Nicodemus, “Are you also from Galilee? Search the Scriptures and see whether a prophet is expected to come from Galilee.”

Spiritual Principle

God delights in using ordinary people to accomplish work that clearly requires His power.

VIII. EACH PERSON HEARS HIS NATIVE LANGUAGE

Acts 2:8 — A Supernatural Sign

“Then how is it that each of us hears them in our own language where we were born?”

The miracle could not easily be dismissed.

The listeners recognized their own native languages.

Cross References

Genesis 11:1

At that time the whole earth had one language and used the same words.

1 Corinthians 12:10

The Spirit gives one person the ability to perform miracles, another prophecy, another discernment of spirits, another different kinds of languages, and another the interpretation of languages.

1 Corinthians 14:10

There are many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without meaning.

Key Truth

God was making His message understandable to people from many nations.

IX. THE NATIONS REPRESENTED

Acts 2:9 — From East to West

“Parthians, Medes, Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia.”

Luke begins listing the regions represented in Jerusalem.

Cross References

Genesis 10:22

The sons of Shem included Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, writes to God's chosen people scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

Esther 1:1

During the reign of King Ahasuerus, his empire stretched from India to Ethiopia and included 127 provinces.

The list emphasizes the broad reach of the miracle.

X. PEOPLE FROM AFRICA AND ROME

Acts 2:10

“Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, the regions of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome—both Jews and converts to Judaism—”

The crowd represented a remarkable geographic range.

Cross References

Acts 6:9

Opposition arose from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including people from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia. They began arguing with Stephen.

Matthew 27:32

As the soldiers went out, they met a man from Cyrene named Simon, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross.

Acts 28:16

When Paul arrived in Rome, he was allowed to live by himself with a soldier guarding him.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel was already being heard by people connected with regions that would later become major areas of Christian witness.

XI. DECLARING THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD

Acts 2:11

“Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonderful works of God in our own languages!”

Notice what they were speaking about.

Not themselves.

Not their spiritual experience.

Not their own greatness.

They were declaring:

“The wonderful works of God.”

Cross References

Titus 1:12

One of the Cretans' own writers said, “Cretans are always liars, dangerous beasts, and lazy gluttons.”

Galatians 1:17

Paul said, “I did not immediately go to Jerusalem to consult those who were apostles before me. Instead I went into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.”

Psalms 145:5

I will meditate upon the glorious splendor of Your majesty and upon Your wonderful works.

Spiritual Principle

The Holy Spirit directs attention toward the greatness of God.

XII. “WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?”

Acts 2:12

“They were all amazed and puzzled. ‘What does this mean?’ they asked one another.”

A supernatural event created a spiritual question.

Peter is about to answer that question through Scripture.

Cross References

Luke 24:4

While they were confused about what had happened, suddenly two men dressed in shining clothing stood beside them.

Mark 9:10

The disciples kept Jesus' words among themselves and discussed what He meant by rising from the dead.

John 20:9

They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

Spiritual Principle

Miracles may create questions, but God's Word provides the explanation.

XIII. SOME PEOPLE MOCK

Acts 2:13 — “They’ve Had Too Much Wine”

“But some made fun of them and said, ‘They’ve just had too much wine.’”

Not everyone responded positively.

Some mocked what they did not understand.

Cross References

Ephesians 5:18

Do not become drunk with wine, because that leads to reckless living. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 14:23

If the entire church gathers and everyone speaks in different languages, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?

1 Samuel 1:14

Eli said to Hannah, “How long will you remain drunk? Put away your wine.”

Spiritual Principle

People may ridicule what God is doing when they interpret spiritual realities only through natural assumptions.

XIV. PETER STANDS AND SPEAKS

Acts 2:14 — A Changed Man

“Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice, and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews, and all of you living in Jerusalem, listen carefully.’”

This is the same Peter who denied knowing Jesus.

Now he stands publicly and boldly proclaims Him.

Cross References

Acts 4:8

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel—”

Acts 4:13

When the leaders saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were ordinary, untrained men, they were amazed. They recognized that these men had been with Jesus.

Luke 22:32

Jesus told Peter, “I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Key Truth

The Holy Spirit can transform fearful disciples into courageous witnesses.

XV. THEY ARE NOT DRUNK

Acts 2:15

“These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine o’clock in the morning!”

Peter quickly rejects the accusation.

The explanation is not drunkenness.

It is prophecy being fulfilled.

Cross References

Acts 3:1

Peter and John went to the temple at three o'clock in the afternoon, the time of prayer.

Mark 15:25

It was about nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified Jesus.

John 4:6

Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired from His journey, sat beside the well. It was about noon.

XVI. JOEL'S PROPHECY IS BEING FULFILLED

Acts 2:16

“No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.”

Peter interprets Pentecost through Scripture.

Cross References

Joel 2:28

God says, “Afterward I will pour out My Spirit upon all kinds of people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.”

Joel 2:32

Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Deliverance will come from Mount Zion and Jerusalem among those whom the Lord calls.

Numbers 11:29

Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Spiritual experiences must be interpreted by Scripture, not Scripture interpreted by spiritual experiences.

XVII. GOD WILL POUR OUT HIS SPIRIT

Acts 2:17

“In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.’”

The coming of the Spirit marks a major stage in God's redemptive plan.

Cross References

Joel 2:28

God says, “Afterward I will pour out My Spirit upon all kinds of people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.”

Numbers 11:29

Moses said, “I wish all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would place His Spirit upon them.”

Ezekiel 39:29

The Lord says, “I will no longer hide My face from them, because I will pour out My Spirit upon the house of Israel.”

Spiritual Principle

The Spirit's ministry is not restricted to one social class, age group, or gender.

XVIII. MEN AND WOMEN WILL SERVE

Acts 2:18

“Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”

God's Spirit empowers both men and women for service.

Cross References

Joel 2:29

“Even upon My male servants and female servants, I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”

Numbers 11:29

Moses said, “I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that He would place His Spirit upon them.”

Galatians 3:28

In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, because all believers are one in Christ Jesus.

Key Truth

The Holy Spirit distributes His work according to God's purpose, not human status.

XIX. SIGNS CONNECTED WITH THE DAY OF THE LORD

Acts 2:19–20

“I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and clouds of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes.”

Joel's prophecy stretches beyond Pentecost toward the great Day of the Lord.

Cross References

Joel 2:30

I will show wonders in the heavens and upon the earth: blood, fire, and columns of smoke.

Matthew 24:29

Jesus said, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will no longer give its light, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

Revelation 6:12

When the sixth seal was opened, there was a great earthquake. The sun became dark like black cloth, and the moon became like blood.

Joel 2:31

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and fearful Day of the Lord comes.

Amos 5:20

The Day of the Lord will be darkness and not light, deep gloom without brightness.

Spiritual Principle

Pentecost points forward as well as backward.

God's redemptive plan is moving toward final fulfillment.

XX. EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE LORD WILL BE SAVED

Acts 2:21

“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

This is the gracious center of Joel's prophecy.

Judgment is coming.

But salvation is offered.

Cross References

Joel 2:32

Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Deliverance will be found among those whom the Lord calls.

Romans 10:13

Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Romans 10:9

If you openly confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Key Truth

The gospel invitation is open to everyone who genuinely calls upon the Lord in faith.

XXI. JESUS WAS PUBLICLY APPROVED BY GOD

Acts 2:22

“People of Israel, listen! Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know.”

Peter moves directly to Jesus.

The miraculous signs of Jesus' ministry were public evidence.

Cross References

John 3:2

Nicodemus said to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know You are a teacher who has come from God, because no one could perform the signs You do unless God were with him.”

Acts 10:38

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. Jesus went around doing good and healing everyone oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him.

John 5:36

Jesus said, “The works the Father has given Me to complete—the very works I am doing—testify that the Father has sent Me.”

XXII. GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

Acts 2:23

“This man was handed over to you by God’s plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, nailed Him to the cross and killed Him.”

This verse holds two truths together.

Jesus' death occurred according to:

God's definite plan and foreknowledge.

Yet the people who crucified Him remained morally responsible.

Cross References

Acts 4:28

They did what Your power and purpose had already determined beforehand should happen.

1 Peter 1:20

Christ was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Luke 22:22

Jesus said, “The Son of Man will go according to what God has determined, but how terrible it will be for the man who betrays Him.”

Spiritual Principle

God's sovereignty does not erase human responsibility.

The cross was not an accident.

Neither was human wickedness excused.

XXIII. DEATH COULD NOT HOLD JESUS

Acts 2:24

“But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the power of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him.”

This is the great reversal.

Men killed Jesus.

But God raised Him.

Cross References

Romans 1:4

Jesus was powerfully declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead according to the Spirit of holiness.

Acts 13:34

God raised Jesus from the dead, never again to return to decay.

1 Corinthians 15:20

But Christ has truly been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have died.

Key Truth

Death did not defeat Jesus. Jesus defeated death.

XXIV. DAVID SPOKE PROPHETICALLY

Acts 2:25–28

Peter now quotes Psalm 16.

“I saw the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”

Cross References

Psalm 16:8

I keep the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Psalm 121:5

The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your protector beside you.

Psalm 73:23

Yet I am always with You. You hold me by my right hand.

Peter continues:

“Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope.”

Cross References

Psalm 16:9

Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices. My body also rests securely.

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice.

1 Peter 1:8

Though you have not seen Christ, you love Him. Though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with indescribable and glorious joy.

Peter continues:

“Because You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One decay.”

Cross References

Psalm 16:10

You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see decay.

Acts 13:35

Therefore another Psalm says, “You will not allow Your Holy One to see decay.”

Acts 2:31

David saw ahead and spoke about the resurrection of the Messiah, saying He would not be abandoned to the grave and His body would not decay.

Then:

“You have made known to me the paths of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence.”

Cross References

Psalm 16:11

You show me the path of life. In Your presence is complete joy, and at Your right hand are pleasures forever.

Psalm 21:6

You have given him blessings forever and filled him with joy in Your presence.

John 15:11

Jesus said, “I have told you these things so that My joy may remain in you and your joy may be complete.”

XXV. DAVID'S TOMB PROVES HE WAS SPEAKING BEYOND HIMSELF

Acts 2:29

“Brothers, I can tell you confidently that our ancestor David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.”

Peter's reasoning is simple.

David died.

David's body experienced death.

Therefore Psalm 16 ultimately pointed beyond David.

Cross References

1 Kings 2:10

David died and was buried in the City of David.

Nehemiah 3:16

Nehemiah son of Azbuk repaired the wall as far as the place opposite the tombs of David.

Acts 13:36

David served God's purpose in his own generation, died, was buried with his ancestors, and his body decayed.

XXVI. GOD PROMISED DAVID A KING

Acts 2:30

“But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that one of his descendants would sit on his throne.”

David knew God's covenant promise.

Cross References

2 Samuel 7:12

The Lord told David, “When your days are complete and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your descendant after you, one who comes from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.”

Psalm 132:11

The Lord made a faithful promise to David that He will not take back: “I will place one of your descendants upon your throne.”

Psalm 89:3

The Lord said, “I have made a covenant with My chosen one. I have sworn to David My servant.”

Key Truth

Jesus is not merely risen Savior. He is the promised Davidic King.

XXVII. DAVID FORESAW THE RESURRECTION

Acts 2:31

“Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did His body see decay.”

Peter interprets Psalm 16 as Messianic prophecy.

Cross References

Isaiah 53:10

Yet it was the Lord's purpose that the Servant suffer. When His life is offered for sin, He will see His descendants and prolong His days, and the Lord's purpose will succeed through Him.

Psalm 16:10

You will not abandon me to the grave or allow Your Holy One to see decay.

Acts 13:35

Scripture also says, “You will not allow Your Holy One to see decay.”

XXVIII. “WE ARE ALL WITNESSES”

Acts 2:32

“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.”

Peter's sermon rests upon eyewitness testimony.

Cross References

Acts 1:8

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses.”

Acts 3:15

Peter said, “You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.”

1 Corinthians 15:15

If Christ has not been raised, then we would be false witnesses about God because we testified that God raised Christ from the dead.

Spiritual Principle

The early Christian message centered upon a factual claim: Jesus rose from the dead.

XXIX. JESUS POURED OUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 2:33

“Now exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.”

Pentecost is connected directly to the exalted Christ.

Jesus is risen.

Jesus is exalted.

Jesus sends the Spirit.

Cross References

Acts 5:31

God exalted Jesus to His right hand as Prince and Savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Philippians 2:9

Therefore God highly exalted Jesus and gave Him the name above every name.

John 16:7

Jesus said, “It is for your benefit that I go away. If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.”

Key Truth

Pentecost is evidence that the risen Jesus reigns.

XXX. THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD

Acts 2:34–35

“For David did not ascend into heaven, and yet he said: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’”

Peter quotes Psalm 110.

Cross References

Psalm 110:1

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool beneath Your feet.”

Matthew 22:44

Jesus quoted Scripture: “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet.’”

Mark 12:36

David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, said, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet.’”

Cross References for Verse 35

Psalm 110:1

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool beneath Your feet.”

Hebrews 1:13

God never said to any angel, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool beneath Your feet.”

Hebrews 10:13

Christ now waits until His enemies are placed beneath His feet.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus is not waiting to become Lord. He is already enthroned.

XXXI. JESUS IS LORD AND MESSIAH

Acts 2:36

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

Peter reaches the climax of the sermon.

Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is Messiah.

Cross References

Philippians 2:11

Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, bringing glory to God the Father.

Romans 10:9

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Acts 5:31

God exalted Jesus to His right hand as Prince and Savior so that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A faithful gospel sermon must ultimately bring people face-to-face with Jesus Christ.

XXXII. THE PEOPLE ARE CUT TO THE HEART

Acts 2:37

“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’”

The sermon produced conviction.

They were:

“Cut to the heart.”

Cross References

Acts 16:30

The jailer brought Paul and Silas out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Zechariah 12:10

The Lord says, “I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer upon the house of David and the people of Jerusalem. They will look upon Me whom they pierced, and they will mourn deeply.”

Luke 3:10

The crowds asked John, “What then should we do?”

Spiritual Principle

True preaching does more than inform the mind. God's truth confronts the heart.

XXXIII. REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED

Acts 2:38

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Peter calls for a decisive response.

Repent

Turn away from sin and toward God.

Be Baptized

Publicly identify with Jesus Christ.

Receive Forgiveness

God offers forgiveness through Christ.

Receive the Holy Spirit

The Spirit belongs to those who belong to Christ.

Cross References

Acts 3:19

Therefore repent and turn back to God so that your sins may be wiped away.

Luke 24:47

Jesus said that repentance for the forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Mark 1:4

John appeared in the wilderness baptizing and preaching a baptism of repentance connected with forgiveness of sins.

Important Truth

Repentance is not merely feeling sorry about sin. It is turning toward God in faith.

XXXIV. THE PROMISE EXTENDS OUTWARD

Acts 2:39

“This promise is for you and your children and for all who are far away—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

The promise would not remain confined to those standing in Jerusalem.

Cross References

Isaiah 57:19

God says, “Peace, peace to those who are far away and to those who are near. I will heal them.”

Ephesians 2:13

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Joel 2:32

Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved, among all whom the Lord calls.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel reaches both the near and the far.

XXXV. PETER WARNS THE CROWD

Acts 2:40

“With many other words he warned them and pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’”

Peter did more than present information.

He pleaded.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 32:5

They have acted corruptly toward God. They are no longer behaving like His faithful children because they are a twisted and crooked generation.

Philippians 2:15

Live as blameless and pure children of God in the middle of a crooked and twisted generation, shining among them like lights in the world.

Matthew 17:17

Jesus said, “You unbelieving and twisted generation, how long must I remain with you?”

Spiritual Principle

The gospel contains both invitation and warning.

XXXVI. THREE THOUSAND ARE ADDED

Acts 2:41

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

Pentecost produced an extraordinary harvest.

Cross References

Acts 4:4

Many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

Acts 5:14

More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to the believers.

Acts 6:7

The Word of God continued spreading, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly.

Key Truth

Peter preached, but the Lord produced the harvest.

The church grew because God was working through His Word and Spirit.

XXXVII. FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Acts 2:42

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

This verse gives four characteristics of the newborn church.

1. Apostles' Teaching

They learned biblical truth.

2. Fellowship

They shared life together.

3. Breaking Bread

They ate together and remembered Christ.

4. Prayer

They depended upon God.

Cross References

Acts 20:7

On the first day of the week, the believers gathered to break bread together, and Paul spoke to them.

1 Corinthians 10:16

The cup of blessing for which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ, and the bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

Hebrews 10:25

Do not stop meeting together, as some have made a habit of doing. Instead, encourage one another, especially as you see the Day approaching.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A healthy church is built upon truth, fellowship, worship, and prayer.

XXXVIII. AWE FILLED THE PEOPLE

Acts 2:43

“Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.”

God confirmed the apostolic witness through extraordinary signs.

Cross References

Acts 5:12

The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people.

Mark 16:20

The disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message through accompanying signs.

Hebrews 2:4

God also testified to the message through signs, wonders, various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.

Spiritual Principle

The miracles pointed beyond the apostles to the God whose message they proclaimed.

XXXIX. BELIEVERS SHARED WITH ONE ANOTHER

Acts 2:44

“All the believers were together and shared everything they had.”

Their new relationship with Christ created new concern for one another.

Cross References

Acts 4:32

The entire group of believers was united in heart and soul. No one claimed that his possessions were exclusively his own, but they shared with one another.

Deuteronomy 15:4

There should be no poor person among you, because the Lord will greatly bless you in the land He gives you.

1 John 3:17

If someone has material possessions and sees a fellow believer in need but closes his heart against that person, how can God's love remain in him?

Spiritual Principle

Genuine faith creates practical compassion.

XL. GENEROSITY MET REAL NEEDS

Acts 2:45

“They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”

The generosity was voluntary and need-driven.

Cross References

Acts 4:34

There was no needy person among them, because from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them.

Acts 4:35

They brought the proceeds and placed them at the apostles' feet, and the money was distributed to anyone who had need.

Luke 12:33

Jesus said, “Sell possessions and give to those in need. Make for yourselves treasure in heaven that never runs out.”

Important Truth

Christian generosity is motivated by love, not forced equality.

The emphasis is upon believers willingly using resources to help others.

XLI. WORSHIP IN THE TEMPLE AND HOMES

Acts 2:46

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”

The early church combined:

Public gathering.

And:

Personal fellowship.

Cross References

Acts 5:42

Every day in the temple and from house to house, they continued teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Luke 24:53

The disciples remained continually at the temple praising God.

Acts 3:1

Peter and John went up to the temple at the time of prayer.

Spiritual Principle

Christian community should extend beyond formal gatherings into everyday life.

XLII. THE LORD ADDS TO THE CHURCH

Acts 2:47

“Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

The chapter ends by emphasizing God's work.

Who added people?

“The Lord.”

Cross References

Acts 5:14

More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Acts 11:24

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people were brought to the Lord.

Acts 16:5

The churches were strengthened in faith and increased in number every day.

Spiritual Principle

Church growth is ultimately God's work.

Believers preach.

Believers witness.

Believers pray.

Believers serve.

But:

The Lord saves.

XLIII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 2

1. God Keeps His Promises

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost fulfilled that promise.

Principle:

What God promises, God fulfills.

2. The Holy Spirit Empowers Gospel Witness

The Spirit's coming resulted immediately in proclamation.

Principle:

Spiritual power should produce Christ-centered witness.

3. Jesus Christ Is the Center of Christian Preaching

Peter's sermon focused upon:

- Jesus' life.
- Jesus' death.
- Jesus' resurrection.
- Jesus' exaltation.
- Jesus' lordship.

Principle:

A sermon can discuss many biblical truths, but faithful Christian preaching must ultimately point people to Christ.

4. God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility Stand Together

Jesus died according to God's predetermined purpose.

Yet wicked people remained accountable.

Principle:

God remains sovereign without making human sin morally innocent.

5. The Proper Response to the Gospel Is Repentance and Faith

The people asked:

“What should we do?”

Peter answered:

“Repent.”

Principle:

The gospel demands a response.

6. The Church Is a Community, Not Merely a Meeting

The believers shared:

- Teaching.
- Fellowship.
- Meals.
- Prayer.
- Possessions.
- Worship.
- Daily life.

Principle:

Biblical Christianity is personal, but it is never meant to remain isolated.

7. God Produces Spiritual Growth

The Lord added people daily.

Principle:

Faithfulness belongs to the church; results belong to God.

XLIV. THE TRANSFORMATION OF PETER

Acts 2 provides one of the clearest demonstrations of God's restoring grace.

Only weeks earlier Peter had denied Jesus.

Now Peter stands before thousands.

What changed?

He Had Seen the Risen Christ

His faith had been strengthened by resurrection reality.

He Had Been Restored by Jesus

Christ had not discarded him.

He Had Received the Holy Spirit

Now he spoke with spiritual boldness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can turn yesterday's failure into tomorrow's testimony when a person is restored and surrendered to Him.

XLV. WHAT PETER'S SERMON TEACHES ABOUT PREACHING

Peter's sermon gives us an important biblical model.

It Was Scripture-Based

Peter quoted Joel.

He quoted Psalm 16.

He quoted Psalm 110.

It Was Christ-Centered

Jesus dominated the message.

It Was Doctrinal

Peter explained:

- Providence.
- Crucifixion.
- Resurrection.
- Messianic prophecy.
- Exaltation.
- Lordship.

It Was Direct

Peter said:

“Whom you crucified.”

It Called for a Response

The sermon did not merely end with information.

The people asked:

“What should we do?”

Ministry Principle

Faithful preaching explains Scripture, exalts Christ, confronts sin, proclaims grace, and calls for response.

XLVI. WHAT ACTS 2 TEACHES ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is central to Acts 2.

The Spirit Was Promised

Jesus had already told the disciples He was coming.

The Spirit Was Given by God

Pentecost was divine initiative.

The Spirit Empowered Speech

The believers spoke as the Spirit enabled them.

The Spirit Fulfilled Scripture

Peter connected the event with Joel.

The Spirit Exalted Christ

Peter's Spirit-empowered message focused upon Jesus.

The Spirit Created Community

The believers' lives were transformed after Pentecost.

Key Truth

The Holy Spirit does not merely produce unusual experiences; He produces Christ-centered witness and transformed community.

XLVII. THE PATTERN OF CONVERSION IN ACTS 2

The crowd experienced a clear spiritual progression.

They Heard the Word

Peter preached Christ.

They Were Convicted

They were:

“Cut to the heart.”

They Asked What to Do

Conviction produced urgency.

They Repented

Peter called them to turn toward God.

They Were Baptized

They publicly identified with Christ.

They Joined the Believers

About three thousand were added.

They Grew

They devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer.

Principle:

Biblical conversion produces a changed direction and a new devotion to Christ.

XLVIII. THE FOUR DEVOTIONS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

Acts 2:42 should continually challenge churches.

1. Biblical Teaching

A healthy church wants to know God's Word.

2. Fellowship

A healthy church develops genuine relationships.

3. Breaking Bread

A healthy church remembers Christ and shares life together.

4. Prayer

A healthy church recognizes its dependence upon God.

Application

A church can possess:

Beautiful facilities.

Modern technology.

Excellent organization.

Large attendance.

Professional music.

Strong programs.

Yet still be spiritually weak if these four foundations are neglected.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The strength of a church is measured less by what it attracts and more by what it is devoted to.

XLIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What happened on the Day of Pentecost?

The believers were gathered together when a sound like a powerful rushing wind filled the house.

What looked like flames of fire appeared.

The believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

This fulfilled Jesus' promise that His followers would receive power from the Holy Spirit.

Question 2

Were the languages in Acts 2 understandable human languages?

The passage emphasizes that visitors from different regions heard the believers speaking in:

“Our own language where we were born.”

Acts 2 presents the miracle as recognizable languages understood by the people present.

Question 3

Why were so many nations represented in Jerusalem?

Pentecost was one of Israel's important feast periods, bringing Jewish worshipers and converts from many regions to Jerusalem.

God used this gathering to spread the message outward.

People from many places heard about God's mighty works.

Question 4

Why did Peter quote the prophet Joel?

Peter wanted the crowd to understand that the coming of the Holy Spirit was not meaningless confusion.

God had promised through Joel that He would pour out His Spirit.

Peter interpreted the event through Scripture.

Question 5

What was the main subject of Peter's sermon?

Jesus Christ.

Peter proclaimed:

- His miracles.
- His crucifixion.
- His resurrection.
- His fulfillment of prophecy.
- His exaltation.
- His lordship.
- His Messiahship.

The Holy Spirit's coming led to Christ-centered preaching.

Question 6

How can Jesus' crucifixion be both God's plan and the responsibility of wicked people?

Acts 2:23 teaches both truths.

God's redemptive plan included the cross.

At the same time, those who betrayed and crucified Jesus acted wickedly and remained responsible for their choices.

Scripture affirms divine sovereignty and human accountability together.

Question 7

Why was it impossible for death to hold Jesus?

Because Jesus is the promised Messiah and Son of God.

Death could not permanently conquer Him.

God raised Him from the dead in fulfillment of Scripture.

His resurrection demonstrates His victory over death.

Question 8

What does it mean that the crowd was “cut to the heart”?

They became deeply convicted by the truth they heard.

They realized the seriousness of their sin and asked:

“What should we do?”

True conviction does not merely produce discomfort.

It creates a desire to respond rightly to God.

Question 9

What is repentance?

Repentance is a genuine turning of heart and life away from sin and toward God.

It involves more than regret.

It includes a changed mind about sin, agreement with God, and a new direction of life rooted in faith.

Question 10

What were the first Christians devoted to?

Acts 2:42 identifies four things:

- Apostolic teaching.
- Fellowship.
- Breaking bread.
- Prayer.

These became foundational practices of the early church.

Question 11

Why did the believers share their possessions?

Their love for Christ created concern for one another.

When believers had needs, others willingly used their resources to help.

Their generosity reflected transformed hearts.

Question 12

Who caused the church to grow?

Acts 2:47 says:

“The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

The believers faithfully preached and lived the gospel.

But God produced the spiritual harvest.

L. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 2 asks several important questions.

Am I Depending Upon the Holy Spirit?

Or am I trying to live the Christian life entirely through human strength?

Is My Life Pointing People Toward Jesus?

The Spirit-filled believers declared God's mighty works.

Do I Know Scripture Well Enough to Understand Spiritual Truth?

Peter interpreted Pentecost through God's Word.

Is Christ Central to My Message?

Peter preached Jesus.

Have I Truly Responded to the Gospel?

The crowd was convicted and asked:

“What should we do?”

Am I Devoted to Biblical Teaching?

Do I hunger for God's Word?

Am I Practicing Genuine Fellowship?

Am I connected with other believers?

Is Prayer Central in My Life?

The early church was devoted to prayer.

Am I Generous Toward People in Need?

Faith affected their possessions.

Do I Depend Upon God for Results?

The Lord added people to the church.

LI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Spirit-Filled Christianity Always Points to Jesus”

Pentecost included extraordinary signs.

Wind.

Fire.

Languages.

A huge crowd.

But Peter does not build his sermon around the signs.

He quickly directs attention toward Jesus.

Jesus lived.

Jesus performed miracles.

Jesus was crucified.

Jesus rose.

Jesus was exalted.

Jesus poured out the Spirit.

Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is Messiah.

That gives us an important principle:

The clearest evidence of Spirit-filled ministry is not fascination with the Spirit Himself but faithful exaltation of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ.

Spirit-filled preaching should glorify Christ.

Spirit-filled churches should glorify Christ.

Spirit-filled believers should glorify Christ.

LII. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 2 begins with believers waiting.

It ends with thousands worshiping.

It begins with about 120 followers gathered together.

It ends with about three thousand added to them.

It begins in one room.

The message quickly reaches people from many nations.

What caused the difference?

Not a new marketing strategy.

Not political influence.

Not wealth.

Not impressive buildings.

Not human celebrity.

The Holy Spirit came.

The Word was preached.

Jesus Christ was exalted.

People were convicted.

Sinners repented.

Believers were baptized.

A church community formed.

And the Lord added to their number.

This gives us a powerful picture of genuine spiritual awakening.

When God moves:

Christ is exalted.

Scripture is proclaimed.

Sin is confronted.

Repentance occurs.

Lives change.

Believers gather.

Prayer increases.

Generosity grows.

Fellowship deepens.

Worship becomes sincere.

And the gospel moves outward.

Acts 2 therefore challenges every believer and every church.

Do not merely ask:

“How can we become larger?”

Ask:

“Are we filled with the Spirit?”

Do not merely ask:

“How can we attract attention?”

Ask:

“Are we proclaiming Christ?”

Do not merely ask:

“What programs should we create?”

Ask:

“Are we devoted to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer?”

Do not merely ask:

“Why isn't the church growing?”

Ask:

“Are we faithfully doing what Christ commanded while depending upon God for the harvest?”

The pattern of Acts 2 remains powerful:

The Spirit empowers.

The church witnesses.

The gospel is proclaimed.

People respond.

Christ builds His church.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for fulfilling Your promise and sending the Holy Spirit.

Thank You that You did not leave Your people powerless to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ.

Fill our lives with a deep dependence upon Your Spirit.

Give us courage to speak about Jesus.

Give us wisdom to understand Scripture.

Give us boldness like Peter.

Transform our failures into testimonies of Your restoring grace.

Help us proclaim Jesus clearly.

May we never become distracted from the central message:

Jesus died.

Jesus rose.

Jesus reigns.

Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is Messiah.

And salvation is offered through Him.

Convict hearts through Your Word.

Bring genuine repentance.

Save those who call upon Your name.

Build churches that are devoted to biblical teaching, genuine fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer.

Give us generous hearts.

Teach us to care for brothers and sisters who are in need.

Remove selfishness, pride, division, and hypocrisy.

Give Your people glad and sincere hearts.

May our homes become places of fellowship.

May our churches become places of truth.

May our lives become testimonies of grace.

And may Jesus Christ receive all the glory.

We recognize that we cannot save anyone.

We cannot manufacture revival.

We cannot produce spiritual life.

Therefore we depend upon You.

Do through Your church what human ability cannot accomplish.

And continue adding to Your people those who are being saved.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” — Acts 2:42

Central Truth

The Holy Spirit empowers believers to proclaim the risen Jesus Christ, calling sinners to repentance and creating a new community devoted to biblical truth, fellowship, prayer, generosity, and worship.

Acts 2 in One Sentence

At Pentecost the promised Holy Spirit comes upon the believers, Peter boldly proclaims the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord and Messiah, thousands respond in repentance and faith, and

the Spirit-empowered church begins its life of teaching, fellowship, prayer, generosity, worship, and gospel growth.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 3 — The Healing at the Beautiful Gate and Peter's Bold Preaching

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 3 shows what happened as the Spirit-empowered church began carrying out the mission Jesus gave in Acts 1:8.

Peter and John were going to the temple at the regular time of prayer when they encountered a man who had been unable to walk from birth.

Every day this man was carried to the temple gate called Beautiful.

Every day he depended upon others.

Every day he asked people for money.

On this particular day, he asked Peter and John.

Peter gave him something far greater than silver or gold.

He said:

“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”

Immediately the man's feet and ankles became strong.

He stood.

He walked.

He jumped.

And he praised God.

The miracle attracted a crowd, but Peter immediately refused to accept credit for what had happened.

He directed everyone's attention toward Jesus Christ.

Peter then preached another powerful sermon.

He proclaimed that:

- Jesus is God's glorified Servant.
- Jesus is the Holy and Righteous One.
- Jesus is the Author of life.
- God raised Jesus from the dead.
- Faith in Jesus brought the man's healing.
- The suffering of Christ fulfilled prophecy.
- People must repent and turn to God.
- Jesus is the Prophet promised by Moses.
- Jesus fulfills God's covenant promises.
- God's blessing is intended to turn people away from sin.

Acts 3 therefore teaches an essential principle:

The power of God should always point people toward the Person of Jesus Christ.

I. PETER AND JOHN GO TO PRAYER

Acts 3:1 — The Hour of Prayer

“One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—about three in the afternoon.”

Peter and John were apostles.

They had witnessed Pentecost.

They had seen thousands saved.

Yet they continued practicing prayer.

Spiritual power had not made prayer unnecessary.

It made prayer even more important.

Cross References

Psalm 55:17

Evening, morning, and noon I cry out to God in my distress, and He hears my voice.

Daniel 6:10

When Daniel learned that the order had been signed, he went home. The windows of his upstairs room opened toward Jerusalem. Three times each day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had always done.

Exodus 29:39

Offer one lamb in the morning and the other lamb in the evening.

Spiritual Principle

Spirit-filled believers should also be prayerful believers.

Peter and John did not say:

“We experienced Pentecost, so prayer is no longer necessary.”

They continued seeking God.

Application

Power without prayer eventually becomes presumption.

Ministry without prayer becomes human effort.

II. A MAN LAME FROM BIRTH

Acts 3:2 — Carried Every Day

“Now a man who had been lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.”

This man's condition was lifelong.

He had never known what it was like to walk.

Every day someone had to carry him.

Every day he depended upon generosity from others.

Cross References

John 9:1

As Jesus was walking along, He saw a man who had been blind from birth.

Acts 14:8

In Lystra there was a man who could not use his feet. He had been unable to walk from birth and had never walked.

Acts 4:22

The man who had been miraculously healed was more than forty years old.

Acts 4 tells us that this man was over forty years old.

For more than four decades he had lived with this disability.

Spiritual Principle

A long-standing problem is not beyond God's power.

Time does not weaken God.

What has been impossible for decades is still not impossible for Him.

III. THE MAN ASKS FOR MONEY

Acts 3:3 — Expecting Alms

“When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.”

The man knew what he thought he needed.

Money.

He had probably made the same request thousands of times.

Cross References

Luke 16:20

At the gate of the rich man's house lay a poor man named Lazarus, whose body was covered with sores.

Deuteronomy 15:11

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to open your hand generously to your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy.

Proverbs 19:17

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and the Lord will repay that person for what he has done.

Key Truth

Sometimes we ask God for what we think we need while He sees a much deeper need.

The man wanted enough money for another day.

God was about to transform his life.

IV. “LOOK AT US”

Acts 3:4 — Peter Gets His Attention

“Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, ‘Look at us!’”

Peter did not ignore the man.

He saw him.

He gave him his attention.

Cross References

Acts 14:9

Paul looked directly at the man and saw that he had faith to be healed.

Mark 10:21

Jesus looked at the man and loved him.

Luke 22:61

The Lord turned and looked directly at Peter. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had told him.

Spiritual Principle

Ministry often begins by truly seeing the person in front of us.

Crowds matter.

But individuals matter too.

Peter and John were going to prayer.

Yet they were not too busy with religious activity to notice someone in need.

V. EXPECTING TO RECEIVE SOMETHING

Acts 3:5

“So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.”

He expected money.

He had no idea what was actually coming.

Cross References

Luke 18:35

As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting beside the road begging.

Mark 10:49

Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man and said, “Take courage! Get up! He is calling you.”

John 9:8

The man's neighbors and those who had previously seen him begging asked, “Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?”

Spiritual Principle

God's answer may be far greater than our expectation.

The beggar expected coins.

He received strength in his legs.

VI. SILVER AND GOLD I DO NOT HAVE

Acts 3:6 — What Peter Did Have

“Then Peter said, ‘I don’t have silver or gold, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’”

This is one of the most memorable statements in Acts.

Peter did not possess financial wealth.

But he possessed something infinitely greater.

He knew Jesus Christ.

Cross References

1 Peter 1:18

You know that you were not redeemed from your empty way of life with temporary things such as silver or gold.

Acts 4:10

Peter said, “Let all of you and all the people of Israel know that this man stands before you healed by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead.”

Mark 16:18

Jesus said that His followers would lay hands upon the sick, and they would recover.

Spiritual Principle

The church's greatest treasure is not money, property, influence, or political power. It is Jesus Christ and the gospel.

Money has value.

But money cannot:

Forgive sin.

Give eternal life.

Reconcile a sinner to God.

Conquer death.

Only Christ can do that.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never confuse what the church possesses materially with what the church possesses spiritually.

VII. “IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST”

Peter did not say:

“By my power.”

He said:

“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”

The name represents Christ's authority and person.

This was not a magical phrase.

Peter was acting as Christ's representative under Christ's authority.

Spiritual Principle

The power was not in Peter. The power belonged to Jesus.

VIII. IMMEDIATE STRENGTH

Acts 3:7 — Feet and Ankles Made Strong

“Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong.”

The healing was immediate.

The man's body did not gradually improve over several months.

His feet and ankles received strength at once.

Cross References

Isaiah 35:6

Then the person who cannot walk will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the person who cannot speak will shout for joy. Water will break out in the wilderness and streams will flow in the desert.

Mark 1:31

Jesus went to Simon's mother-in-law, took her by the hand, and helped her up. The fever left her immediately, and she began serving them.

Acts 9:41

Peter took Tabitha by the hand and helped her stand. Then he called the believers and widows and presented her alive.

Key Truth

When God heals, He is not limited by the severity or length of the condition.

IX. WALKING, JUMPING, AND PRAISING GOD

Acts 3:8

“He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.”

The man who had been carried into the area now entered on his own feet.

Notice his response:

Walking.

Jumping.

Praising God.

Cross References

Isaiah 35:6

Then the lame person will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless will sing for joy.

John 5:9

Immediately the man was healed. He picked up his mat and began to walk.

Luke 5:25

Immediately the healed man stood up in front of everyone, picked up the mat he had been lying on, and went home praising God.

Spiritual Principle

Grace should produce gratitude.

The healed man did not merely enjoy his new ability.

He praised the God who had transformed him.

X. EVERYONE SAW HIM

Acts 3:9

“All the people saw him walking and praising God.”

The miracle became public evidence.

Cross References

Luke 18:43

Immediately the blind man received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

Mark 2:12

The man got up, immediately picked up his mat, and walked out in front of everyone. The people were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”

Psalm 148:13

Let everyone praise the name of the Lord, because His name alone is exalted. His glory is above the earth and heavens.

Spiritual Principle

A transformed life can become a testimony visible to other people.

XI. THEY KNEW WHO HE WAS

Acts 3:10

“And they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.”

The crowd knew this man.

He had been there every day.

Nobody could easily dismiss what happened.

Cross References

John 9:8

His neighbors and those who had seen him begging asked, “Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?”

Acts 4:14

Since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with Peter and John, the leaders had nothing they could say against them.

Mark 5:42

Immediately the girl stood up and began walking around. She was twelve years old. Everyone who saw this was completely amazed.

Key Truth

The evidence was standing in front of them.

XII. THE CROWD RUNS TO PETER AND JOHN

Acts 3:11 — Solomon's Colonnade

“While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade.”

The miracle created an opportunity for preaching.

Cross References

John 10:23

Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon's Colonnade.

Acts 5:12

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people, and the believers regularly gathered together in Solomon's Colonnade.

Acts 4:13

When the leaders saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized they were ordinary men without formal rabbinic training, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

A miracle is not the final message. It can become an opportunity to proclaim the gospel.

Peter immediately begins preaching Christ.

XIII. PETER REFUSES THE GLORY

Acts 3:12 — “Why Are You Looking at Us?”

“When Peter saw this, he said to them: ‘Fellow Israelites, why are you surprised? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we made this man walk?’”

Peter refuses celebrity status.

He says:

“Do not look at us as though we did this by our own power.”

Cross References

Acts 14:15

Paul and Barnabas shouted, “Why are you doing this? We are human beings just like you. We are bringing you good news so that you will turn from these worthless things to the living God.”

Acts 10:26

Peter told Cornelius, “Stand up. I am only a man myself.”

John 3:27

John answered, “A person can receive only what is given from heaven.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A faithful servant redirects glory away from himself and toward Christ.

Spiritual ministry becomes dangerous when people begin worshiping the messenger instead of the One who sent him.

XIV. GOD HAS GLORIFIED JESUS

Acts 3:13

“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of our fathers—has glorified His servant Jesus. You handed Him over to be killed, and you disowned Him before Pilate, even though Pilate had decided to let Him go.”

Peter connects Jesus with Israel's covenant God.

The God worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has glorified Jesus.

Cross References

Exodus 3:6

God said to Moses, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Isaiah 52:13

The Lord says, “Look, My Servant will act wisely. He will be raised, lifted up, and greatly exalted.”

John 19:15

The crowd shouted, “Take Him away! Take Him away! Crucify Him!” Pilate asked, “Should I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king except Caesar.”

Spiritual Principle

Human rejection of Jesus did not cancel God's exaltation of Jesus.

XV. THE HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS ONE

Acts 3:14

“You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you instead.”

Peter presents a terrible contrast.

They rejected:

The Holy and Righteous One.

And requested:

A murderer.

Cross References

Isaiah 53:11

After His suffering, My righteous Servant will see the result of His work and be satisfied.
Through His knowledge He will make many righteous, because He will carry their sins.

Luke 23:18

The crowd shouted together, “Take this man away! Release Barabbas to us!”

Mark 1:24

The unclean spirit cried out, “I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”

Spiritual Principle

Sin reverses moral judgment.

Human rebellion can reject righteousness while embracing evil.

XVI. THEY KILLED THE AUTHOR OF LIFE

Acts 3:15

“You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.”

The irony is staggering.

They killed:

The Author of life.

But death could not hold Him.

Cross References

Hebrews 2:10

It was fitting for God, for whom and through whom everything exists, to make the Author of their salvation complete through suffering as He brings many sons and daughters to glory.

Acts 5:30

The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed Him by hanging Him on a cross.

Acts 2:32

God raised this Jesus to life, and all of us are witnesses of it.

Key Truth

The gospel is built upon the great reversal: humanity killed Jesus, but God raised Him.

XVII. FAITH IN JESUS' NAME

Acts 3:16

“By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through Him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.”

Peter explains the miracle clearly.

The man was healed through faith connected to Jesus Christ.

Cross References

Acts 4:10

Peter said, “This man stands before you healed through the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead.”

Matthew 9:22

Jesus turned and saw the woman. He said, “Take courage, daughter. Your faith has made you well.” From that moment she was healed.

Acts 14:9

Paul looked directly at the man and saw that he had faith to be healed.

Spiritual Principle

Faith has power because of the Person in whom faith rests.

Faith itself is not a magical force.

Jesus is the source.

XVIII. THEY ACTED IN IGNORANCE

Acts 3:17

“Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.”

Peter speaks firmly but compassionately.

He does not excuse their actions.

But he acknowledges their ignorance.

Cross References

Luke 23:34

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.”

1 Timothy 1:13

Paul said, “I was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent man. But I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.”

1 Corinthians 2:8

None of the rulers of this age understood God's wisdom, because if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Spiritual Principle

Ignorance does not make sin harmless, but God's mercy reaches ignorant sinners.

XIX. THE MESSIAH'S SUFFERING FULFILLED PROPHECY

Acts 3:18

“But this is how God fulfilled what He foretold through all the prophets, saying that the Messiah would suffer.”

The cross was not a failure of prophecy.

It fulfilled prophecy.

Cross References

Isaiah 53:5

He was pierced because of our rebellion and crushed because of our sins. The punishment that brought us peace was placed upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.

Luke 24:26

Jesus said, “Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then enter His glory?”

Luke 24:44

Jesus said, “Everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to be fulfilled.”

Key Truth

The suffering Messiah was always part of God's redemptive plan.

XX. REPENT AND TURN TO GOD

Acts 3:19 — Sins Wiped Away

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”

Peter's sermon now reaches its appeal.

The people must:

Repent.

And:

Turn to God.

Cross References

Acts 2:38

Peter said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ in connection with the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Isaiah 43:25

The Lord says, “I am the One who wipes away your rebellion for My own sake, and I will no longer hold your sins against you.”

Acts 26:20

Paul said, “I preached that people should repent, turn to God, and demonstrate their repentance by the way they live.”

What Does Repentance Mean?

Repentance is more than regret.

It involves:

A changed mind.

A changed direction.

A turning from sin.

A turning toward God.

“Wiped Out”

The picture is powerful.

Sin creates a record of guilt.

God offers complete forgiveness.

Spiritual Principle

Repentance turns toward the God who alone can erase guilt.

XXI. TIMES OF REFRESHING

Peter says repentance leads to:

“Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.”

Sin exhausts.

Guilt burdens.

Distance from God dries the soul.

God's presence refreshes.

Spiritual Principle

True spiritual refreshing comes from restored fellowship with God.

The world offers distraction.

God offers restoration.

XXII. THE RETURN OF THE MESSIAH

Acts 3:20

“And that He may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.”

Peter looks toward Christ's future return.

Cross References

Acts 1:11

The angels said, “This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will return in the same way you saw Him go.”

1 Thessalonians 1:10

Believers wait for God's Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming judgment.

Revelation 22:20

Jesus says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Key Truth

The Jesus who came once will come again.

XXIII. THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS

Acts 3:21

“Heaven must receive Him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.”

Christ remains in heaven until God's appointed time.

Cross References

Acts 1:11

This same Jesus who was taken into heaven will return in the same way the disciples saw Him go.

Matthew 17:11

Jesus answered, “Elijah does come first and will restore all things.”

Isaiah 65:17

The Lord says, “Look, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former troubles will no longer be remembered or come to mind.”

Spiritual Principle

God's redemptive plan moves toward restoration, not endless disorder.

Sin will not have the final word.

XXIV. MOSES PROMISED A COMING PROPHET

Acts 3:22

“For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything He tells you.’”

Peter identifies Jesus with the Prophet promised by Moses.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 18:15

Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people. You must listen to Him.”

Deuteronomy 18:18

The Lord said, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people. I will put My words in His mouth, and He will tell them everything I command Him.”

John 1:21

The religious leaders asked John, “Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” They asked, “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.”

Spiritual Principle

Jesus is not merely one teacher among many. God commands people to listen to Him.

XXV. THE DANGER OF REFUSING CHRIST

Acts 3:23

“Anyone who does not listen to Him will be completely cut off from their people.”

The promise of the Prophet includes a warning.

Rejecting Him has consequences.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 18:19

The Lord said, “I Myself will hold accountable anyone who refuses to listen to My words spoken by the prophet.”

Leviticus 23:29

Anyone who refuses to humble himself on that day must be removed from among the people.

Hebrews 12:25

Be careful that you do not refuse the One who speaks. If people did not escape when they rejected God's warning on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the One who warns us from heaven?

Key Truth

Jesus demands a response.

Neutrality toward Christ is ultimately impossible.

XXVI. THE PROPHETS SPOKE ABOUT THESE DAYS

Acts 3:24

“Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.”

Peter places Jesus within the entire prophetic storyline.

Cross References

1 Samuel 3:20

All Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord.

Hebrews 1:1

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many different times and in many different ways.

Luke 24:27

Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained to the disciples what the Scriptures said concerning Himself.

Spiritual Principle

The Bible tells one unfolding story that reaches its fulfillment in Christ.

XXVII. HEIRS OF THE PROPHETS AND THE COVENANT

Acts 3:25

“And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’”

Peter reminds Israel of its covenant privilege.

But privilege brings responsibility.

Cross References

Genesis 22:18

God told Abraham, “Through your offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed because you obeyed My voice.”

Genesis 12:3

God told Abram, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will deal with those who dishonor you. Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Galatians 3:8

Scripture foresaw that God would make the Gentiles right with Himself through faith and announced the gospel beforehand to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”

Key Truth

God's promise to Abraham always included blessing for the nations.

XXVIII. GOD SENT JESUS FIRST TO ISRAEL

Acts 3:26

“When God raised up His servant Jesus, He sent Him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

This is a powerful definition of blessing.

Peter does not define blessing primarily as:

Money.

Comfort.

Prosperity.

Ease.

He says God's blessing involves:

Turning people away from wickedness.

Cross References

Acts 13:46

Paul and Barnabas said, “It was necessary that God's Word be spoken to you first. But since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles.”

Matthew 15:24

Jesus said, “I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Romans 1:16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew and also to the Gentile.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

One of God's greatest blessings is deliverance from the sin that destroys us.

XXIX. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 3

1. Jesus Is Greater Than Silver and Gold

The lame man expected money.

He received healing through Christ.

Principle:

Material help has value, but humanity's deepest need is ultimately spiritual.

2. Miracles Must Point Toward Christ

Peter refused personal glory.

Principle:

When God works through us, the attention should move toward Jesus, not toward us.

3. Jesus Is the Author of Life

Peter used extraordinary language for Christ.

Jesus is:

Holy.

Righteous.

Servant.

Author of life.

Messiah.

Prophet.

Principle:

Christianity stands or falls upon the identity of Jesus Christ.

4. The Resurrection Is Central

Peter again declares:

“God raised Him from the dead.”

Principle:

A gospel without the resurrection is not the apostolic gospel.

5. Repentance Leads Toward Forgiveness

Peter says:

“Repent and turn to God.”

Principle:

The gospel does not merely announce forgiveness; it calls sinners to turn toward God.

6. God's Blessing Extends to All Nations

The Abrahamic promise anticipated worldwide blessing.

Principle:

Jesus is Israel's Messiah and the Savior whose gospel reaches the nations.

XXX. WHAT THE LAME MAN TEACHES US

The lame man provides a remarkable spiritual picture.

He began the day:

Unable to walk.

Dependent upon others.

Sitting outside.

Begging.

Expecting coins.

He ended the encounter:

Standing.

Walking.

Leaping.

Entering the temple.

Praising God.

Spiritual Principle

An encounter with the power of Christ can completely change the direction of a life.

XXXI. WHAT PETER TEACHES US ABOUT MINISTRY

Peter demonstrates several essential principles.

He Saw the Need

He noticed the lame man.

He Refused False Glory

He said:

“Why are you looking at us?”

He Exalted Jesus

Christ became the center of his explanation.

He Confronted Sin

Peter did not avoid difficult truth.

He Proclaimed the Resurrection

The gospel remained central.

He Called for Repentance

He demanded a response.

He Offered Hope

Sins could be wiped away.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful ministry sees people, serves people, points to Jesus, confronts sin, and offers the hope of grace.

XXXII. “SILVER AND GOLD I DO NOT HAVE”

This statement deserves deeper consideration.

Peter had no money to offer the man.

But that did not mean Peter had nothing to offer.

Sometimes churches become convinced that ministry requires enormous financial resources.

Resources can certainly help ministry.

But money is not the source of spiritual life.

The early church possessed something far greater.

The gospel.

The Holy Spirit.

Prayer.

Truth.

Christ.

Principle

A poor church with Christ possesses greater eternal treasure than a wealthy church that has lost the gospel.

XXXIII. “WHY DO YOU STARE AT US?”

Peter understood a danger that every Christian leader should understand.

People can begin admiring the servant instead of worshiping the Savior.

Peter refused that.

He immediately said:

“Not our power.”

“Not our godliness.”

The miracle belonged to Jesus.

Application

Pastors should point toward Christ.

Teachers should point toward Christ.

Musicians should point toward Christ.

Missionaries should point toward Christ.

Every Christian servant should point toward Christ.

Principle

The faithful servant disappears behind the glory of the Master.

XXXIV. WHAT ACTS 3 TEACHES ABOUT REPENTANCE

Acts 3:19 says:

“Repent and turn to God.”

This gives two sides of biblical repentance.

Turning From

Sin.

Rebellion.

Self-rule.

Unbelief.

Turning To

God.

Faith.

Obedience.

Christ.

Result

“Your sins may be wiped out.”

Spiritual Principle

Biblical repentance is not merely walking away from something wrong; it is turning toward Someone right.

XXXV. TIMES OF REFRESHING

Peter connects repentance with:

“Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.”

The word picture is deeply hopeful.

Sin dries the soul.

God refreshes.

Guilt burdens.

God forgives.

Fear enslaves.

God gives peace.

Separation wounds.

God reconciles.

Key Truth

The refreshing we most desperately need comes from God's presence rather than changed circumstances alone.

XXXVI. THE OLD TESTAMENT POINTS TO JESUS

Peter's sermon draws from several major Old Testament themes.

Abraham

All nations will be blessed.

Moses

A Prophet is coming.

Samuel and the Prophets

They pointed forward to these days.

The Suffering Messiah

The prophets foretold His suffering.

Restoration

The prophets looked toward God's final work.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Old Testament is not disconnected from Jesus; its covenant promises, prophetic expectations, and redemptive storyline move toward Him.

XXXVII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why were Peter and John going to the temple?

They were going at the regular time of prayer.

This demonstrates that prayer remained central even after Pentecost.
Receiving the Holy Spirit did not make prayer unnecessary.
It deepened their dependence upon God.

Question 2

How long had the lame man been disabled?

He had been lame from birth.
Acts 4:22 adds that he was more than forty years old.
His condition was therefore well known and longstanding.
This made the miracle particularly powerful evidence.

Question 3

Why is Peter's statement about silver and gold important?

It demonstrates that Peter's greatest resource was not material wealth.
He possessed the message and authority of Jesus Christ.
Money might have helped the man temporarily.
The healing transformed his circumstances dramatically.
Spiritually, the larger principle is that Christ offers what earthly wealth can never provide.

Question 4

Did Peter claim the power to heal came from himself?

No.
Peter specifically rejected that idea.
He asked:
“Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we made this man walk?”
He attributed the healing to Jesus Christ.

Question 5

Why does Peter call Jesus the Author of life?

The title emphasizes Christ's unique relationship to life itself.

The people killed the One connected with the very source and giver of life.

Yet God raised Him from the dead.

The title magnifies the greatness and authority of Christ.

Question 6

What role did faith play in the man's healing?

Acts 3:16 says that faith connected with the name of Jesus made the man strong.

The power was not in faith as an independent force.

The power rested in Jesus Christ.

Faith receives what Christ provides.

Question 7

What does Peter mean when he says the people acted in ignorance?

They did not fully understand who Jesus was or the significance of what they were doing.

However, Peter does not say ignorance removed their responsibility.

Instead, he calls them to repentance.

God's mercy reaches people who have sinned in ignorance.

Question 8

What does it mean for sins to be “wiped out”?

It pictures complete removal.

God does not merely cover over guilt as though pretending it never happened.

Through His saving grace, He forgives the repentant sinner and removes the record of guilt.

Question 9

What are the “times of refreshing”?

The phrase communicates restoration and renewal coming from God's presence.

In the immediate sermon, Peter connects repentance, forgiveness, and God's redemptive purposes.

The principle is that true spiritual renewal comes from God.

Question 10

Who is the Prophet Moses promised?

Peter identifies the fulfillment with Jesus Christ.

Moses said God would raise up a Prophet whom the people must hear.

Peter applies that promise directly to Christ.

Question 11

How does Abraham's covenant connect with the gospel?

God promised Abraham that through his offspring all nations would be blessed.

Peter shows that God's work through Jesus participates in the fulfillment of that worldwide blessing.

The gospel is therefore not restricted to one people group.

Question 12

What does Acts 3:26 teach about God's definition of blessing?

God sent Jesus:

“To bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

This means deliverance from sin is itself an extraordinary blessing.

We should not define blessing only in terms of money, health, comfort, or success.

XXXVIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 3 asks us several serious questions.

Am I Prayerful?

Peter and John were going to pray.

Do I Notice People in Need?

They saw the man others probably passed every day.

What Do I Believe People Need Most?

Do I think material solutions alone can solve spiritual problems?

Do I Give Christ the Glory?

When something good happens through my ministry, who receives the credit?

Am I Willing to Confront Sin?

Peter preached grace without avoiding uncomfortable truth.

Have I Repented and Turned to God?

The invitation remains:

“Repent and turn to God.”

Do I Understand God's Blessing Correctly?

God's greatest blessing may be turning us away from what is destroying us.

Am I Pointing Others Toward Jesus?

That was Peter's purpose.

XXXIX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Give People Only What They Ask for When Christ Offers What They Truly Need”

The lame man asked for money.

Peter could have given him a coin if he had one.

That might have helped him buy food.

But it would not have changed his fundamental condition.

Instead, through Christ's power, the man received something greater.

He received the ability to walk.

This illustrates a broader spiritual principle.

People often ask for:

Better circumstances.

More money.

Less stress.

Improved relationships.

Physical comfort.

Personal success.

These concerns can be legitimate.

But beneath every temporary need stands humanity's greatest need:

Reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

The church should care about physical needs.

The early church certainly did.

But the church must never forget its greatest treasure:

Jesus Christ.

XL. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 3 begins with a man sitting outside the temple.

He cannot walk.

He depends upon other people.

He asks for money.

Then he encounters two followers of Jesus.

Within moments:

His feet become strong.

His ankles become strong.

He stands.

He walks.

He leaps.

He praises God.

People gather.

And Peter preaches Jesus.

That sequence is important.

The miracle never becomes the destination.

It becomes a doorway to the gospel.

Peter refuses to say:

“Look what we can do.”

Instead he says:

“Look to Jesus.”

Jesus is the One God glorified.

Jesus is the Holy One.

Jesus is the Righteous One.

Jesus is the Author of life.

Jesus was crucified.

Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Jesus is the Prophet foretold by Moses.

Jesus is God's means of blessing.

Then Peter gives the proper response:

Repent.

Turn to God.

And the promise follows:

Your sins may be wiped out.

That is the greater miracle.

A healed body is wonderful.

A forgiven sinner is eternally significant.

Physical healing changes earthly life.

Forgiveness through Christ changes eternity.

Acts 3 therefore calls us to keep the gospel at the center.

Help people physically.

Show compassion.

Meet needs when possible.

Pray for healing.

But never stop there.

Point people toward Jesus.

Because silver and gold cannot save.

Human power cannot save.

Religion cannot save.

Good intentions cannot save.

But Jesus Christ:

Died.

Rose.

Reigns.

Forgives.

Restores.

And still calls people:

“Repent and turn to God.”

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the power and authority of Jesus Christ.

Thank You that Peter and John understood that their greatest treasure was not silver or gold but the Savior they knew and proclaimed.

Give us eyes to see people around us who are hurting.

Keep us from becoming so busy with religious activity that we walk past people You have placed in our path.

Give us compassion.

Give us wisdom.

Give us courage.

And above all, help us point people toward Jesus.

Keep us from seeking glory for ourselves.

When You use us, remind us that the power belongs to You.

When people praise us, help us redirect that praise toward Christ.

Thank You that Jesus is the Holy and Righteous One.

Thank You that He is the Author of life.

Thank You that although He was crucified, You raised Him from the dead.

Strengthen our faith in the risen Christ.

Give us courage to proclaim repentance clearly.

Help us never weaken the gospel by removing its call to turn away from sin.

Thank You that sins can be wiped away.

Thank You that forgiveness is real.

Thank You that times of refreshing come from Your presence.

Turn our hearts toward You.

Turn us away from wickedness.

Help us understand that freedom from sin is one of Your greatest blessings.

Make our churches places where people encounter biblical truth, genuine compassion, prayer, and the clear message of Jesus Christ.

May every act of ministry lead people beyond us to Him.

May every blessing produce praise.

May every opportunity become an opportunity for witness.

And may the name of Jesus Christ be honored in everything we do.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” — Acts 3:19

Central Truth

The risen Jesus Christ has power to restore, forgive, and transform, and every work done in His name should lead people toward repentance, faith, and worship rather than toward human glory.

Acts 3 in One Sentence

After Jesus heals a man lame from birth through Peter and John, Peter refuses personal glory and boldly proclaims the risen Christ, calling the people to repent, turn to God, receive forgiveness, and recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah and Prophet foretold throughout Scripture.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 4 — Boldness Before the Sanhedrin and Unity in the Church

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 4 records the first major persecution against the growing church.

Peter and John had just witnessed the healing of a man who had been unable to walk for more than forty years.

The miracle drew a crowd.

Peter preached Jesus Christ.

He proclaimed the resurrection.

He called the people to repentance.

Many believed.

But not everyone welcomed the message.

The priests, the temple authorities, and especially the Sadducees became deeply disturbed because Peter and John were teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus.

The apostles were arrested and brought before the same religious leadership that had opposed Jesus.

They were questioned:

“By what power or what name did you do this?”

Peter's answer was direct.

The healed man was standing because of:

Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Then Peter proclaimed one of the strongest statements concerning salvation found anywhere in Scripture:

“Salvation is found in no one else.”

The religious leaders could see Peter and John's courage.

They knew these men did not possess the formal religious training of the ruling class.

Yet there was something unmistakable about them:

They had been with Jesus.

The leaders commanded them to stop speaking in Christ's name.

Peter and John refused.

They declared:

“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

After their release, the believers gathered for prayer.

Remarkably, they did not primarily pray for protection.

They prayed for:

Boldness.

God answered.

The place where they were meeting was shaken.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit.

And they continued speaking God's Word courageously.

The chapter ends by describing extraordinary unity and generosity within the church.

Acts 4 therefore demonstrates that opposition does not have to silence the church.

Instead:

Persecution can become an occasion for greater boldness, deeper prayer, stronger unity, and clearer proclamation of Jesus Christ.

I. OPPOSITION ARRIVES WHILE THE GOSPEL IS BEING PREACHED

Acts 4:1 — Religious Leaders Confront Peter and John

“While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came up to them.”

Peter and John were still speaking when opposition arrived.

The resistance did not come because they were causing violence.

It came because they were preaching Jesus.

Cross References

Matthew 22:23

That same day some Sadducees came to Jesus. They were people who said there is no resurrection from the dead, and they questioned Him.

Luke 20:27

Some Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to Jesus and asked Him a question.

Acts 5:17

Then the high priest and those with him, who belonged to the party of the Sadducees, became filled with jealousy.

The Sadducees were especially disturbed because they denied resurrection.

Peter and John were publicly proclaiming that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Spiritual Principle

Truth often meets resistance precisely where it challenges deeply held unbelief.

The apostles did not adjust the message to avoid controversy.

They remained faithful to what they had witnessed.

II. THE RESURRECTION BECOMES THE POINT OF CONFLICT

Acts 4:2 — Proclaiming Resurrection in Jesus

“They were greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.”

The apostles' doctrine created the conflict.

They taught that resurrection was not merely a distant theological possibility.

It had already been demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

Cross References

Acts 17:18

Some philosophers said, “What is this man trying to say?” Others replied, “He seems to be proclaiming foreign gods,” because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

Acts 23:8

The Sadducees say there is no resurrection, no angel, and no spirit, but the Pharisees believe in all three.

1 Corinthians 15:12

If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

Key Truth

The resurrection was not a side issue in apostolic preaching. It stood at the center of the gospel.

III. THE APOSTLES ARE ARRESTED

Acts 4:3 — Put in Jail

“They seized them and put them in jail until the next day, since it was already evening.”

The apostles' first major public confrontation ends with imprisonment.

But imprisonment does not silence the message already preached.

Cross References

Acts 5:18

The authorities arrested the apostles and placed them in the public jail.

Luke 21:12

Jesus said, “Before all these things happen, people will seize you, persecute you, hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and bring you before kings and governors because of My name.”

John 7:44

Some of the people wanted to arrest Jesus, but no one laid hands on Him.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness to Christ does not guarantee freedom from opposition.

Sometimes obedience brings conflict.

Jesus had already warned His followers that persecution would come.

IV. THE WORD CONTINUES TO BEAR FRUIT

Acts 4:4 — About Five Thousand Men Believe

“But many who heard the message believed; and the number of men grew to about five thousand.”

Peter and John were arrested.

But the gospel was not arrested.

This verse begins with an important word:

“But.”

The authorities imprisoned the messengers.

But many believed.

Cross References

Acts 2:41

Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized, and about three thousand people were added that day.

Acts 5:14

More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to the believers.

Acts 6:7

God's Word continued to spread, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

People may imprison God's servants, but they cannot imprison God's Word.

Opposition may slow human movement.

It cannot stop divine truth.

V. THE RULERS GATHER

Acts 4:5 — The Council Meets

“The next day the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.”

The Sanhedrin represented the highest Jewish religious council.

Peter and John were now standing before powerful men.

Cross References

Luke 22:66

When morning came, the elders of the people, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law gathered together, and Jesus was brought before their council.

Matthew 26:59

The chief priests and the entire council were searching for false testimony against Jesus so they could put Him to death.

John 11:47

Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the council and asked, “What are we going to do? This man is performing many signs.”

Key Truth

Peter and John were standing before the same kind of authority that had condemned Jesus.

That makes their courage even more remarkable.

VI. THE HIGH PRIESTLY FAMILY IS PRESENT

Acts 4:6

“Annas the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others of the high priest’s family.”

These were influential religious leaders.

Annas and Caiaphas had also been involved in the trial of Jesus.

Cross References

Luke 3:2

During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, God's Word came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

John 18:13

They took Jesus first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.

John 18:24

Then Annas sent Jesus, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.

Spiritual Principle

The people who opposed Jesus now opposed those who proclaimed Jesus.

This fulfilled Christ's warning that servants should not expect to be treated better than their Master.

VII. “BY WHAT POWER OR WHAT NAME?”

Acts 4:7

“They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’”

The council wanted to know the source of the miracle.

Their question gave Peter exactly the opportunity he needed.

Cross References

Matthew 21:23

Jesus entered the temple and began teaching. The chief priests and elders came to Him and asked, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”

Mark 11:28

They asked Jesus, “By what authority are You doing these things? Who gave You authority to do them?”

Luke 20:2

They said to Jesus, “Tell us by what authority You are doing these things. Who gave You this authority?”

Spiritual Principle

Opposition can unintentionally create opportunities for gospel witness.

The rulers wanted an explanation.

Peter gave them Jesus.

VIII. PETER IS FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 4:8

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people!’”

Peter's boldness was not merely personality.

He was:

“Filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Cross References

Luke 12:12

Jesus said, “The Holy Spirit will teach you at that very time what you should say.”

Matthew 10:20

Jesus said, “It will not simply be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

Luke 21:15

Jesus said, “I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict.”

Jesus had promised His disciples help when they stood before hostile authorities.

Now the promise was being fulfilled.

Spiritual Principle

God gives grace for the moment in which obedience is required.

IX. ON TRIAL FOR AN ACT OF KINDNESS

Acts 4:9

“If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed—”

Peter exposes the strange nature of the trial.

A man had been healed.

A good deed had taken place.

Yet Peter and John were being interrogated.

Cross References

Acts 3:6

Peter told the man, “I do not have silver or gold, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”

Acts 3:16

Peter said, “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong.”

Acts 5:27

The apostles were brought before the council, and the high priest questioned them.

Spiritual Principle

People can oppose God's work even when its fruit is clearly good.

The issue was not really the man's healing.

The issue was the name of Jesus.

X. JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH HEALED THE MAN

Acts 4:10

“Then know this—you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.”

Peter's answer is fearless.

He does not soften the truth.

He tells the council:

You crucified Jesus.

God raised Jesus.

Jesus healed this man.

Cross References

Acts 2:36

Peter said, “Let all Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

Acts 3:16

Peter said, “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know has been made strong.”

Acts 2:24

But God raised Jesus from the dead, freeing Him from the power of death, because death could not keep its hold upon Him.

Key Truth

The authority behind the miracle was the risen Jesus Christ.

XI. THE REJECTED STONE BECOMES THE CORNERSTONE

Acts 4:11

“Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’”

Peter quotes Psalm 118.

The religious leaders were supposed to be builders of Israel's spiritual life.

Yet they rejected the very One upon whom God's redemptive work was centered.

Cross References

Psalm 118:22

The stone rejected by the builders has become the chief cornerstone.

Isaiah 28:16

Therefore the Lord God says, “Look, I am laying a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone and a sure foundation. The one who trusts in Him will not be shaken.”

Matthew 21:42

Jesus said, “Have you never read in Scripture: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

Spiritual Principle

Human rejection cannot overturn God's choice.

Men rejected Christ.

God exalted Him.

XII. SALVATION IS FOUND IN CHRIST ALONE

Acts 4:12

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

This is one of Scripture's clearest declarations concerning the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

Peter does not say:

Jesus is one path among many.

He says:

“No one else.”

Cross References

John 14:6

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

1 Timothy 2:5

There is one God and one Mediator between God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus.

Acts 10:43

All the prophets testify about Jesus that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.

Key Truth

Salvation is exclusive in its source but universal in its invitation.

There is one Savior.

And everyone who believes in Him may be saved.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The church has no authority to offer people another way of salvation when God has given salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

XIII. ORDINARY MEN WITH EXTRAORDINARY BOLDNESS

Acts 4:13

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

The council recognized that Peter and John lacked elite rabbinic training.

Yet their boldness and understanding were undeniable.

Then the rulers recognized something:

“These men had been with Jesus.”

Cross References

Matthew 11:25

Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and educated and revealed them to ordinary people.”

John 7:15

The Jewish leaders were amazed and asked, “How does this man know so much when He has never studied under our teachers?”

Luke 21:15

Jesus said, “I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist.”

Spiritual Principle

Formal education has value, but no education can substitute for knowing Christ and being filled with His Spirit.

Application

The question is not merely:

“What degrees do you have?”

But also:

“Have you been with Jesus?”

XIV. THE EVIDENCE WAS STANDING THERE

Acts 4:14

“But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.”

The leaders could argue with Peter.

But the healed man stood beside him.

Cross References

Acts 3:10

The people recognized him as the same man who had sat begging at the Beautiful Gate, and they were filled with wonder at what had happened.

John 9:25

The man who had been blind said, “Whether He is a sinner or not, I do not know. One thing I do know: I was blind, but now I can see.”

Titus 2:8

Speak with soundness that cannot be condemned so that anyone opposing you may be ashamed because there is nothing bad to say about us.

Spiritual Principle

A transformed life can become powerful evidence that is difficult to dismiss.

XV. THE COUNCIL CONFERS PRIVATELY

Acts 4:15

“So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together.”

The leaders needed to decide how to respond.

Cross References

John 11:47

The chief priests and Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we doing? This man performs many signs.”

Matthew 27:1

Early in the morning all the chief priests and elders of the people made plans concerning Jesus.

Psalms 2:2

The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.

XVI. THEY COULD NOT DENY THE MIRACLE

Acts 4:16

“What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. ‘Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a remarkable sign, and we cannot deny it.’”

This statement is striking.

The leaders did not claim the miracle was fake.

They admitted:

“We cannot deny it.”

Cross References

John 11:47

The religious leaders said, “What are we going to do? This man is performing many miraculous signs.”

John 12:19

The Pharisees said to one another, “Look, we are accomplishing nothing. The whole world is going after Him.”

John 3:2

Nicodemus told Jesus, “We know You have come from God as a teacher, because no one could perform the signs You do unless God were with him.”

Spiritual Warning

Evidence alone does not always produce faith.

A hardened heart can acknowledge evidence while still resisting its implications.

XVII. THEY TRY TO SILENCE THE NAME OF JESUS

Acts 4:17

“But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

Their concern was not truth.

Their concern was stopping the message from spreading.

Cross References

Acts 5:28

The high priest said, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.”

Jeremiah 20:9

Jeremiah said, “If I say, ‘I will not mention Him or speak anymore in His name,’ His Word becomes like a fire burning in my heart and shut up in my bones. I become weary trying to hold it in, and I cannot.”

Matthew 10:18

Jesus said, “Because of Me you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the nations.”

Spiritual Principle

The world often tolerates religion until religion clearly proclaims the authority of Jesus Christ.

XVIII. THE COUNCIL COMMANDS SILENCE

Acts 4:18

“Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

The command was clear.

No preaching.

No teaching.

No Jesus.

Cross References

Acts 5:40

The council called the apostles in, had them beaten, and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus.

Acts 5:28

The leaders said, “We strictly ordered you not to teach in this name.”

Jeremiah 26:8

After Jeremiah finished saying everything the Lord commanded him to say, the priests, prophets, and people seized him and said, “You must die!”

Spiritual Principle

There are moments when obedience to God creates unavoidable conflict with human authority.

XIX. OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN

Acts 4:19

“But Peter and John replied, ‘Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to Him? You be the judges!’”

Peter and John recognize a hierarchy of authority.

Human authorities have real authority.

But human authority is never higher than God's authority.

Cross References

Acts 5:29

Peter and the other apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than human beings.”

Exodus 1:17

But the Hebrew midwives feared God and did not obey the king of Egypt's command to kill the male babies.

Daniel 3:18

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, “Even if God does not rescue us, understand, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up.”

Important Principle

Christians should respect lawful authority, but when human authority directly commands disobedience to God, obedience to God comes first.

XX. “WE CANNOT HELP SPEAKING”

Acts 4:20

“As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Peter and John were eyewitnesses.

They had seen:

Jesus' ministry.

His crucifixion.

His resurrection.

His ascension.

They could not pretend these things had never happened.

Cross References

1 John 1:3

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us.
Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah 20:9

Jeremiah said, “God's Word is like a fire within me. I grow tired of trying to hold it in, and I cannot.”

1 Corinthians 9:16

Paul said, “If I preach the gospel, I have no reason to boast because I am compelled to do it.
How terrible it would be for me if I did not preach the gospel.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A heart convinced of the gospel cannot remain permanently silent about Christ.

XXI. THE APOSTLES ARE RELEASED

Acts 4:21

“After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.”

The leaders threatened them but released them.

Public reaction made punishment difficult.

Cross References

Acts 5:26

The captain and officers brought the apostles without using force because they feared the people might stone them.

Luke 20:19

The religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus immediately, but they feared the people.

Matthew 21:46

They looked for a way to arrest Jesus, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people regarded Him as a prophet.

Spiritual Principle

God can restrain opposition through circumstances even when opponents remain hostile.

XXII. THE MAN WAS OVER FORTY YEARS OLD

Acts 4:22

“For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.”

Luke emphasizes the duration of the man's disability.

He had never walked for more than forty years.

Cross References

Acts 3:2

A man who had been lame from birth was carried daily to the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg.

Acts 9:33

Peter found a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years because he was paralyzed.

Acts 14:8

In Lystra there sat a man who had been unable to walk from birth.

Key Truth

The miracle was unmistakable because the man's condition was longstanding and publicly known.

XXIII. PETER AND JOHN RETURN TO THE CHURCH

Acts 4:23

“On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.”

When Peter and John were released, they returned to the believers.

They did not isolate themselves.

They went back to their spiritual community.

Cross References

Acts 12:12

Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many people were gathered and praying.

Acts 15:4

When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, apostles, and elders, and they reported everything God had done through them.

Mark 6:30

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported everything they had done and taught.

Spiritual Principle

Believers need spiritual community especially after seasons of opposition.

XXIV. THE CHURCH RESPONDS WITH PRAYER

Acts 4:24

“When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. ‘Sovereign Lord,’ they said, ‘You made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.’”

The believers respond to threats by praying.

Their prayer begins not with the size of their enemies but with the greatness of God.

Cross References

Exodus 20:11

In six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them, and He rested on the seventh day.

Nehemiah 9:6

You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, the highest heavens and all their stars, the earth and everything upon it, the seas and everything in them. You give life to everything.

Psalms 146:6

The Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. He remains faithful forever.

Spiritual Principle

Prayer becomes stronger when fear is replaced by a fresh vision of God's sovereignty.

They did not begin:

“Lord, look how powerful the Sanhedrin is.”

They began:

“You made heaven and earth.”

XXV. SCRIPTURE EXPLAINS THEIR OPPOSITION

Acts 4:25

“You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?’”

The church interprets opposition through Psalm 2.

Cross References

Psalm 2:1

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plan something that will never succeed?

2 Peter 1:21

Prophecy never came from human will, but holy men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Samuel 23:2

David said, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me, and His Word was on my tongue.”

Key Truth

The early church believed Scripture was spoken by the Holy Spirit through human authors.

XXVI. THE RULERS OPPOSE GOD'S ANOINTED ONE

Acts 4:26

“The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.”

The opposition against Christ fulfilled the pattern described in Psalm 2.

Cross References

Psalm 2:2

The kings of the earth take their stand, and rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.

Luke 23:12

Herod and Pilate became friends that day, although they had previously been enemies.

Revelation 19:19

John saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against the One sitting on the horse and against His army.

Spiritual Principle

Human opposition against Christ ultimately becomes opposition against God Himself.

XXVII. HEROD AND PILATE FULFIL THE PATTERN

Acts 4:27

“Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed.”

Different groups united against Jesus.

Herod.

Pilate.

Gentiles.

Israelite leaders.

Cross References

Luke 23:12

Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that day, though they had previously been enemies.

Matthew 27:2

They bound Jesus, led Him away, and handed Him over to Pilate the governor.

Psalms 2:2

The rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.

Spiritual Principle

People divided by many other issues can become strangely united in opposition to Christ.

XXVIII. GOD REMAINS SOVEREIGN

Acts 4:28

“They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”

This verse teaches God's sovereignty over the crucifixion.

The conspirators acted willingly and wickedly.

Yet their actions did not surprise God or derail His plan.

Cross References

Acts 2:23

Jesus was handed over according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, and wicked people crucified and killed Him.

Ephesians 1:11

In Christ we received an inheritance according to the plan of the One who works everything according to the purpose of His will.

Isaiah 46:10

The Lord says, “I declare the end from the beginning and tell what will happen before it occurs. My purpose will stand, and I will accomplish everything I desire.”

Spiritual Principle

Human opposition never places God's ultimate purposes in danger.

God is never surprised.

God is never outmaneuvered.

XXIX. THE CHURCH PRAYS FOR BOLDNESS

Acts 4:29

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness.”

This may be one of the most challenging prayers in Acts.

They do not primarily pray:

“Remove every threat.”

They pray:

“Make us bold.”

Cross References

Ephesians 6:19

Paul said, “Pray also for me, that words may be given to me whenever I speak so that I may boldly make known the mystery of the gospel.”

Philippians 1:14

Because of Paul's imprisonment, many believers became more confident in the Lord and dared to speak God's Word without fear.

Acts 4:31

After they prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke God's Word boldly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The early church did not pray merely for easier circumstances. It prayed for greater faithfulness within difficult circumstances.

XXX. THEY ASK GOD TO CONTINUE WORKING

Acts 4:30

“Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

They ask God to continue confirming the gospel through His power.

Cross References

Acts 5:12

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people.

Mark 16:20

The disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message through accompanying signs.

Acts 14:3

Paul and Barnabas remained there a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by allowing signs and wonders through their hands.

Spiritual Principle

The church sought power not for entertainment but for the advancement of the gospel.

XXXI. THE PLACE IS SHAKEN

Acts 4:31

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

God answers their prayer.

The place shakes.

They are filled with the Spirit.

And the result is exactly what they requested:

Bold proclamation.

Cross References

Acts 2:4

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 16:26

Suddenly there was a powerful earthquake, and the prison foundations were shaken. The doors opened, and everyone's chains came loose.

Acts 2:2

Suddenly a sound like a powerful rushing wind came from heaven and filled the entire house.

Key Truth

The evidence of Spirit-filled boldness is faithful proclamation of God's Word.

XXXII. THE BELIEVERS ARE ONE IN HEART AND MIND

Acts 4:32

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.”

Opposition outside the church produced deeper unity inside the church.

Cross References

Acts 2:44

All the believers were together and shared what they had with one another.

Acts 2:45

They sold property and possessions and distributed the proceeds to anyone who had need.

Philippians 2:2

Make my joy complete by being united in mind, having the same love, being one in spirit, and sharing one purpose.

Spiritual Principle

Christian unity is deeper than organizational cooperation. It involves shared love, shared purpose, and shared devotion to Christ.

XXXIII. GREAT POWER AND GREAT GRACE

Acts 4:33

“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all.”

Two phrases stand together:

Great power.

Great grace.

Cross References

Acts 1:8

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses.”

1 Corinthians 15:15

If Christ had not been raised, the apostles would have been false witnesses because they testified that God raised Christ.

Acts 6:8

Stephen, full of faith and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A powerful church should also be a gracious church.

Power without grace can become harshness.

Grace without truth can become weakness.

The early church displayed both.

XXXIV. THERE WERE NO NEEDY PEOPLE AMONG THEM

Acts 4:34

“There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales—”

Their unity became practical generosity.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 15:4

There should be no poor person among you, because the Lord will richly bless you in the land He gives you.

Acts 2:45

The believers sold possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to anyone who had need.

Acts 5:1

A man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property.

Important Truth

The selling of property was voluntary.

Acts 5 makes this clear.

The believers were not forced to surrender ownership.

Their generosity flowed from love.

Spiritual Principle

Grace loosens the grip of possessions upon the heart.

XXXV. DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO NEED

Acts 4:35

“And put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.”

Resources were distributed according to actual need.

Cross References

Acts 2:45

They sold property and possessions and gave to anyone according to that person's need.

Acts 5:2

Ananias kept back part of the money for himself, with his wife's knowledge, and brought the rest and placed it at the apostles' feet.

2 Corinthians 8:14

At the present time your abundance can supply their need, and later their abundance may supply your need so there may be fairness.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical generosity seeks to relieve genuine need.

XXXVI. BARNABAS — THE SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Acts 4:36

“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, which means ‘son of encouragement’—”

Barnabas enters the story.

His original name was Joseph.

But the apostles gave him a name reflecting his character:

Barnabas — Son of Encouragement.

Cross References

Acts 9:27

Barnabas took Saul and brought him to the apostles. He explained how Saul had seen the Lord and how he had preached boldly in Damascus in Jesus' name.

Acts 11:24

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people were brought to the Lord.

Acts 13:2

While the church was worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Spiritual Principle

The church needs encouragers.

Barnabas would later encourage:

Saul.

John Mark.

Gentile believers.

Missionary churches.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Some of the most important people in ministry are those who strengthen others so they can fulfill God's calling.

XXXVII. BARNABAS GIVES GENEROUSLY

Acts 4:37

“Sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

Barnabas demonstrates the generosity described in the previous verses.

Cross References

Acts 5:1

Ananias and Sapphira also sold property, though their story would reveal a very different heart.

Acts 2:45

The believers sold property and possessions to meet the needs of others.

Leviticus 25:23

The Lord said, “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land belongs to Me, and you are foreigners and temporary residents with Me.”

Spiritual Principle

Barnabas' generosity flowed from a heart that valued people above possessions.

His example also prepares for the contrast with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

XXXVIII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 4

1. The Resurrection Is Central to the Gospel

The apostles were persecuted because they proclaimed resurrection in Jesus.

Principle:

Christianity cannot be separated from the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. Salvation Is Found in Christ Alone

Peter declared:

“Salvation is found in no one else.”

Principle:

Jesus Christ is not merely a helpful religious teacher. He is the only Savior.

3. Ordinary People Can Be Used Extraordinary Ways

Peter and John were described as ordinary men.

Yet their boldness astonished the council.

Principle:

God does not require celebrity status before He can use someone powerfully.

4. Being with Jesus Changes People

The council recognized:

“They had been with Jesus.”

Principle:

Time spent with Christ should become visible in our character, courage, and speech.

5. God Must Be Obeyed Above Human Authority

Peter and John refused to stop preaching.

Principle:

When human commands contradict God's commands, believers must remain faithful to God.

6. Prayer Produces Boldness

The church prayed.

God answered.

They spoke the Word boldly.

Principle:

Prayer is not an escape from mission; prayer empowers mission.

7. Grace Produces Generosity

The believers willingly shared.

Principle:

A church transformed by grace should become compassionate toward real needs.

XXXIX. THE TRANSFORMATION OF PETER

The boldness of Peter deserves special attention.

Only a short time earlier:

Peter had denied Jesus.

He had feared a servant girl.

He had denied knowing Christ three times.

Now he stands before the most powerful religious court in Jerusalem and declares:

Jesus Christ is risen.

Jesus Christ healed this man.

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone.

Jesus Christ is the only Savior.

What changed?

Peter Had Seen the Risen Christ

The resurrection transformed his understanding.

Peter Had Been Restored by Christ

Jesus forgave and recommissioned him.

Peter Had Received the Holy Spirit

Acts 4:8 specifically says Peter was filled with the Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

God can transform fear into boldness when a surrendered believer depends upon the Holy Spirit.

XL. “THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS”

This may be one of the greatest descriptions any Christian could receive.

The council did not say:

They were wealthy.

They were influential.

They were highly educated.

They were politically powerful.

They said:

“They had been with Jesus.”

Application

What do people recognize about us?

Do they recognize:

Christlike compassion?

Biblical conviction?

Humility?

Courage?

Truth?

Grace?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The greatest qualification for Christian influence is a life unmistakably shaped by fellowship with Jesus Christ.

XLI. WHAT ACTS 4 TEACHES ABOUT PERSECUTION

The apostles experienced opposition almost immediately.

This teaches us several truths.

Persecution Does Not Mean God Has Abandoned His People

Peter and John were obeying God when they were arrested.

Persecution Can Create Witnessing Opportunities

The arrest placed Peter before the Sanhedrin.

Persecution Can Strengthen Prayer

The church prayed more deeply.

Persecution Can Increase Boldness

They asked God for courage.

Persecution Cannot Stop the Gospel

Thousands continued believing.

Key Truth

Opposition does not automatically mean the mission is failing. Sometimes opposition appears because the mission is succeeding.

XLII. THE PRAYER OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Acts 4:24–30 provides one of Scripture's great models of prayer under pressure.

They Began with God's Sovereignty

“Sovereign Lord.”

They Remembered Creation

God made everything.

They Prayed Scripture

They quoted Psalm 2.

They Interpreted Opposition Biblically

Their enemies were not outside God's control.

They Trusted God's Sovereignty

The cross itself had occurred within God's predetermined plan.

They Acknowledged the Threat

They did not pretend danger was imaginary.

They Asked for Boldness

This was their greatest request.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical prayer does not deny the threat; it places the threat beneath the sovereignty of God.

XLIII. WHAT THEY DID NOT PRAY

It is instructive to notice what is missing.

They did not primarily pray:

“Lord, destroy the Sanhedrin.”

They did not pray:

“Lord, make everyone like us.”

They did not pray:

“Lord, remove every difficult circumstance.”

They prayed:

“Enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness.”

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes the most important prayer is not:

“Lord, change my circumstances.”

But:

“Lord, make me faithful in these circumstances.”

XLIV. HOLY SPIRIT BOLDNESS

Acts 4:31 demonstrates what biblical boldness looks like.

They were filled with the Spirit.

Then:

“They spoke the Word of God boldly.”

Boldness is not:

Rudeness.

Anger.

Pride.

Argumentativeness.

Insensitivity.

Biblical boldness is:

Courageous faithfulness to God's truth despite opposition.

Principle

Boldness speaks truth without surrendering love.

XLV. THE CHURCH WAS UNITED

Acts 4:32 says:

“All the believers were one in heart and mind.”

This does not mean every believer had identical personalities or opinions about every minor matter.

Their unity was centered around:

Christ.

The gospel.

The mission.

Love for one another.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical unity is not uniformity. It is shared devotion to Christ and His purposes.

XLVI. GREAT POWER AND GREAT GRACE

Acts 4:33 gives a beautiful description:

“Great power.”

And:

“Great grace.”

Some people want power without grace.

Others talk about grace without spiritual power.

The early church had both.

Power

They testified boldly to the resurrection.

Grace

They cared deeply for one another.

Principle

A Spirit-filled church should be strong in truth and rich in grace.

XLVII. BARNABAS — THE MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Barnabas becomes one of the most important supporting figures in Acts.

His ministry reminds us that not every powerful ministry takes place in front of a crowd.

Barnabas would later stand beside Saul when others feared him.

He would recognize God's work among Gentile believers.

He would travel as a missionary.

He would give John Mark another opportunity after failure.

Spiritual Principle

Encouragement can change the course of another person's ministry.

Application

Ask yourself:

Who is stronger in Christ because I encouraged them?

XLVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why were the Sadducees disturbed by Peter and John's preaching?

The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead.

Peter and John were publicly proclaiming that Jesus had risen and that resurrection was real.

Their message directly challenged Sadducean theology and authority.

Question 2

Did the apostles' arrest stop people from believing?

No.

Acts 4:4 says many who heard the message believed, and the number of men reached about five thousand.

This demonstrates that opposition could not prevent God's Word from bearing fruit.

Question 3

What gave Peter courage before the Sanhedrin?

Acts 4:8 says:

“Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit.”

His courage flowed from dependence upon God.

Jesus had promised that the Spirit would help His followers when they stood before hostile authorities.

Question 4

What does Acts 4:12 teach about salvation?

It teaches that salvation is found exclusively in Jesus Christ.

There is no other name given by God through which sinners must be saved.

Christian salvation is therefore Christ-centered.

Question 5

Why were the religious leaders amazed at Peter and John?

They recognized that Peter and John were ordinary men without elite religious education.

Yet these men spoke with extraordinary courage and wisdom.

The leaders recognized that:

“They had been with Jesus.”

Question 6

Why could the council not deny the miracle?

The healed man was standing there.

His disability had been publicly known for decades.

Everyone knew a remarkable sign had occurred.

The leaders themselves admitted that they could not deny it.

Question 7

What did Peter and John mean when they said they must listen to God rather than men?

They recognized that human authority is subordinate to divine authority.

Normally Christians should respect lawful authorities.

However, when authorities command believers to disobey a direct command from God, loyalty to God must come first.

Question 8

Why did Peter and John refuse to stop preaching?

They had personally witnessed the reality of Jesus Christ.

They had seen His ministry.

They had seen Him risen.

They had received His commission.

Therefore they said:

“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Question 9

What did the believers pray for after Peter and John were threatened?

They prayed for boldness to continue speaking God's Word.

This reveals their priorities.

They were more concerned about faithfulness than comfort.

Question 10

What happened after the believers prayed?

The place where they were gathered was shaken.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit.

And they spoke God's Word boldly.

God directly answered the central request of their prayer.

Question 11

What does Acts 4 teach about Christian unity?

The believers were described as one in heart and mind.

Their unity resulted in practical generosity.

They viewed their possessions as resources God could use to help fellow believers.

Question 12

Who was Barnabas?

Barnabas was originally named Joseph.

He was a Levite from Cyprus.

The apostles called him Barnabas, meaning:

“Son of Encouragement.”

He demonstrated generosity by selling a field and donating the proceeds.

He would later become an important encourager, missionary, and ministry partner.

XLIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 4 asks us several serious questions.

Would I Remain Faithful Under Opposition?

Peter and John refused to stop speaking about Jesus.

Is Jesus Clearly Central to My Understanding of Salvation?

Peter said:

“Salvation is found in no one else.”

Can People Tell That I Have Been with Jesus?

Does time with Christ shape my life?

Am I More Concerned About Human Approval or God's Approval?

Peter and John chose obedience to God.

What Do I Pray for When Pressure Comes?

Only escape?

Or boldness?

Am I Connected to Other Believers?

Peter and John immediately returned to their church family.

Am I Generous?

Does grace affect the way I use my resources?

Am I an Encourager?

Who am I helping become stronger in Christ?

L. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Ask God Merely to Remove the Opposition—Ask Him to Increase Your Boldness”

The church faced real threats.

The religious leaders had authority.

Peter and John had already spent a night in jail.

Future persecution could become much worse.

Yet the believers did not primarily pray:

“Make everything easy.”

They prayed:

“Enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness.”

That is spiritual maturity.

They understood:

The mission mattered more than comfort.

Faithfulness mattered more than popularity.

The gospel mattered more than safety.

Principle

Courage is not the absence of opposition. Courage is faithfulness to Christ within opposition.

LI. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 4 begins with opposition and ends with generosity.

It begins with apostles being arrested.

It ends with believers being united.

It begins with religious leaders trying to silence the name of Jesus.

It ends with the church speaking God's Word boldly.

The chapter reveals a church that could not be easily intimidated.

Why?

Because they believed Jesus was alive.

They knew the resurrection was true.

They believed salvation was found in Christ alone.

They knew God was sovereign.

They understood Scripture.

They prayed.

They depended upon the Holy Spirit.

They loved one another.

And they refused to stop speaking about Jesus.

That combination is powerful.

A church does not become courageous merely by becoming louder.

A church becomes courageous by becoming convinced.

Convinced that Jesus is Lord.

Convinced that Jesus rose.

Convinced that salvation is in Christ alone.

Convinced that God's Word is true.

Convinced that God's sovereignty is greater than human opposition.

Convinced that prayer matters.

Convinced that the Holy Spirit empowers witness.

Then the church can say:

“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Acts 4 challenges every believer:

Do not allow fear to silence truth.

Do not allow opposition to weaken faith.

Do not allow human authority to replace divine authority.

Do not allow suffering to isolate you from the church.

Do not allow possessions to control your heart.

Do not allow ministry success to replace dependence upon prayer.

And above everything:

Stay close enough to Jesus that people can tell you have been with Him.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the courage You gave Peter and John.

Thank You that when they stood before powerful leaders, Your Holy Spirit gave them wisdom and boldness.

Give us that same commitment to truth.

Help us never be ashamed of Jesus Christ.

Give us confidence to proclaim clearly that salvation is found in Him alone.

Keep us from compromising the gospel because we fear rejection, criticism, ridicule, or opposition.

Make our lives reflect time spent with Jesus.

May people see Christlike love in us.

May they see biblical conviction.

May they see humility.

May they see courage.

When authorities or culture pressure us to disobey You, give us wisdom to respond respectfully but faithfully.

Teach us to say with Peter and John:

“We must obey God.”

When opposition comes, teach us how to pray.

Keep us from asking only for easier circumstances.

Give us courage to ask for greater boldness.

Fill us with Your Holy Spirit.

Help us speak Your Word faithfully.

Make our churches united in heart and mind.

Remove selfishness.

Teach us generosity.

Open our eyes to believers who have genuine needs.

Raise up more Barnabases—men and women who encourage, strengthen, support, and restore others.

Thank You that human opposition cannot defeat Your purposes.

Thank You that the gospel cannot be imprisoned.

Thank You that Jesus Christ is risen.

And thank You that there is salvation in His name.

Give us grace to remain faithful until Christ returns.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” — Acts 4:12

Central Truth

The risen Jesus Christ is the only Savior, and believers filled with the Holy Spirit are called to proclaim Him boldly, obey God above human pressure, pray courageously, live in unity, and care generously for one another.

Acts 4 in One Sentence

When Peter and John are arrested for proclaiming the resurrection, they boldly testify that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone, refuse to be silenced, and return to a praying, Spirit-filled, united, and generous church that continues speaking God's Word with courage.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 5 — Fear in the Church, Power in the Spirit, Boldness Before Men

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 5 presents a striking combination of holiness, power, persecution, courage, and growth.

The chapter begins inside the church.

Ananias and Sapphira sell property and pretend to give the entire amount to God while secretly keeping part of the money for themselves.

Their sin is not that they kept part of the money.

Peter makes it clear that the property belonged to them and that the money remained under their control.

Their sin was hypocrisy.

They wanted the reputation of complete sacrifice without actually making the sacrifice they claimed.

Peter tells Ananias:

“You haven’t lied to men but to God.”

The judgment is immediate and severe.

Both Ananias and Sapphira die.

The result is:

“Great fear seized the whole church.”

The chapter then moves from judgment within the church to extraordinary works of God among the people.

The apostles perform signs and wonders.

The sick are healed.

People tormented by evil spirits are delivered.

More men and women believe in the Lord.

But growing spiritual influence creates growing opposition.

The religious leaders become jealous.

The apostles are arrested.

An angel opens the prison doors and tells them to return to the temple and continue preaching.

When they are arrested again and brought before the Sanhedrin, Peter declares:

“We must obey God rather than men!”

The apostles continue proclaiming:

- Jesus was crucified.
- God raised Him from the dead.
- God exalted Him as Prince and Savior.
- Repentance and forgiveness are available through Him.
- The Holy Spirit bears witness to these truths.

The council becomes furious and wants to kill them.

Then Gamaliel advises caution.

His reasoning is simple:

If this movement is merely human, it will collapse.

But:

“If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

The apostles are beaten and released.

Their reaction is astonishing.

They leave:

“Rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

Then they continue preaching Jesus every day.

Acts 5 therefore teaches:

A holy church must fear God more than man, obey God despite opposition, proclaim Christ boldly, and trust that no human force can stop a work that truly comes from Him.

I. ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA SELL PROPERTY

Acts 5:1 — A Generous Appearance

“A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of land.”

On the surface, their action looked very similar to what Barnabas had done at the end of Acts 4.

Barnabas sold property and brought the proceeds to the apostles.

Now Ananias and Sapphira do something that appears similar.

But the heart behind the action is very different.

Cross References

Acts 4:37

Barnabas sold a field he owned, brought the money, and placed it at the apostles' feet.

Joshua 7:1

But the Israelites acted unfaithfully concerning what had been devoted to God. Achan secretly took some of the forbidden things, and the Lord's anger burned against Israel.

Leviticus 19:11

You must not steal. You must not deceive one another or deal falsely with each other.

Spiritual Principle

Two actions may look identical outwardly while being completely different before God because God sees the heart.

II. THEY SECRETLY KEEP BACK PART OF THE MONEY

Acts 5:2 — Hidden Deception

“But he kept back part of the money for himself, with his wife's full knowledge. He brought only part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

The problem was not simply keeping part.

Peter will explain in verse 4 that Ananias had the right to keep the property or any portion of the money.

The sin was pretending that the partial gift represented the entire amount.

Cross References

Joshua 7:21

Achan confessed, “I saw a beautiful robe, silver, and gold among the plunder. I wanted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent.”

Leviticus 19:11

Do not steal, lie, deceive, or deal falsely with one another.

Acts 4:32

All the believers were united in heart and mind. No one treated possessions selfishly, but they willingly shared with one another.

Spiritual Principle

Hypocrisy wants the appearance of holiness without the reality of holiness.

Ananias wanted people to think:

“What a generous man.”

But God knew the truth.

III. LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 5:3

“Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep part of the money for yourself?’”

Peter exposes the spiritual seriousness of the deception.

Ananias had not merely misled people.

He had lied in the context of worship and spiritual devotion.

Cross References

Luke 22:3

Then Satan entered Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve.

John 13:2

During the evening meal, the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot the plan to betray Jesus.

Ephesians 4:30

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were marked for the day of redemption.

Important Truth

This verse contributes to the biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit's divine personhood.

Peter says Ananias lied:

“To the Holy Spirit.”

Then in verse 4 he says:

“You have lied to God.”

Spiritual Principle

Sin against God's people is ultimately sin before God Himself.

IV. THE PROPERTY WAS STILL HIS

Acts 5:4 — The Real Sin Was Deception

“Wasn’t the land yours before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? How could you do such a thing? You haven’t lied to men but to God.”

Peter makes the matter unmistakable.

Ananias was not required to sell the land.

He was not required to donate all the proceeds.

The giving was voluntary.

His sin was pretending.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 5:4

When you make a promise to God, do not delay in keeping it. God takes no pleasure in foolish promises. Fulfill what you have promised.

Numbers 30:2

If a man makes a vow to the Lord or binds himself with a promise, he must not break his word. He must do everything he said.

Acts 4:32

The believers were united in heart and mind, and they willingly shared their possessions.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God would rather receive an honest partial gift than a dishonest claim of total surrender.

God is not impressed by appearances.

He wants truth in the heart.

V. ANANIAS DIES

Acts 5:5 — Great Fear Comes

“When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. Great fear seized everyone who heard about it.”

The judgment was immediate.

Cross References

2 Samuel 6:7

The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because he handled the holy ark wrongly, and God struck him down there.

Leviticus 10:2

Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed Nadab and Abihu, and they died before the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:30

Because some believers treated the Lord's Supper wrongly, many among them were weak and sick, and some had died.

Spiritual Principle

God's grace never cancels God's holiness.

The early church was experiencing great grace and great power.

But that did not mean sin had become unimportant.

Key Truth

Revival without reverence becomes dangerous presumption.

VI. ANANIAS IS BURIED

Acts 5:6

“The young men came, wrapped up his body, carried him out, and buried him.”

There was no long delay.

Ananias was buried immediately.

Cross References

John 11:44

Lazarus came out of the tomb with his hands and feet wrapped in burial cloths and a cloth around his face.

Genesis 23:19

Afterward Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah near Mamre.

Acts 8:2

Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

Spiritual Principle

The suddenness of the event emphasized the seriousness of God's judgment.

VII. SAPPHIRA ARRIVES

Acts 5:7

“About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.”

Sapphira does not yet know that Ananias has died.

But she does know about the deception.

Cross References

Luke 24:18

Cleopas asked Jesus, “Are You the only visitor in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there these days?”

Ecclesiastes 9:12

People do not know when their time will come. Like fish caught in a net or birds caught in a trap, people may suddenly be overtaken by trouble.

Proverbs 27:1

Do not boast about tomorrow, because you do not know what one day may bring.

Spiritual Principle

We never know how quickly hidden sin may be exposed.

VIII. SAPPHIRA IS GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO TELL THE TRUTH

Acts 5:8

“Peter asked her, ‘Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?’ ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘that’s the price.’”

Peter gives Sapphira a direct opportunity to tell the truth.

She chooses to continue the lie.

Cross References

Joshua 7:19

Joshua told Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and tell me what you have done. Do not hide it from me.”

Matthew 26:15

Judas asked, “What are you willing to give me if I hand Jesus over to you?” They counted out thirty pieces of silver.

2 Kings 5:26

Elisha told Gehazi, “Did not my spirit go with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, clothes, or possessions?”

Spiritual Principle

An opportunity to confess is an opportunity for mercy, but persistent dishonesty hardens the heart further.

IX. THEY AGREED TO TEST THE SPIRIT

Acts 5:9

“Peter said, ‘How could you agree together to test the Spirit of the Lord? The men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.’”

The sin had been planned together.

They had agreed to maintain the false story.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 6:16

You must not test the Lord your God as you tested Him at Massah.

Exodus 17:2

The people argued with Moses and demanded water. Moses said, “Why are you quarreling with me? Why are you testing the Lord?”

Matthew 4:7

Jesus said, “Scripture also says: You must not test the Lord your God.”

Spiritual Principle

Unity in wrongdoing is not true unity.

A husband and wife should encourage each other toward righteousness, not cooperate in sin.

X. SAPPHIRA DIES

Acts 5:10

“At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. The young men came in, found her dead, and carried her out to be buried beside her husband.”

Sapphira experiences the same judgment.

Cross References

Genesis 3:19

God said, “You are dust, and to dust you will return.”

Numbers 16:32

The earth opened its mouth and swallowed the rebels, their households, and everything belonging to them.

1 Corinthians 11:30

Because of serious dishonor toward the Lord's Supper, many believers were weak and sick, and some had died.

Key Truth

God did not judge Ananias and Sapphira because they lacked generosity. He judged calculated spiritual deception.

XI. GREAT FEAR SEIZES THE CHURCH

Acts 5:11

“Great fear seized the whole church and everyone who heard about these events.”

This is the first use of the word **church** in Acts in this form within the narrative.

The church learned something vital:

God was among them.

And His holiness mattered.

Cross References

Acts 2:43

Everyone was filled with reverent awe, and many wonders and signs were performed through the apostles.

Acts 19:17

When the people of Ephesus heard what had happened, fear came upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in great honor.

1 Peter 1:17

Since you call upon a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live your time on earth with reverent fear.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A healthy church needs both the comfort of God's grace and the reverence produced by God's holiness.

XII. SIGNS AND WONDERS CONTINUE

Acts 5:12

“The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. All the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Porch.”

Judgment within the church did not stop God's work.

The apostles continued ministering publicly.

Cross References

Acts 3:11

The healed man held on to Peter and John while the astonished crowd gathered around them at Solomon's Colonnade.

John 10:23

Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon's Colonnade.

Mark 16:20

The disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message through accompanying signs.

Spiritual Principle

Holiness and power are not enemies.

God was purifying the church while also empowering its witness.

XIII. THE PEOPLE HELD THEM IN HIGH REGARD

Acts 5:13

“No one else dared join them, even though the people held them in high regard.”

The church was not viewed casually.

People recognized that something serious was happening.

Cross References

Acts 4:21

The leaders released Peter and John because they could not find a way to punish them, since all the people were praising God.

Luke 20:19

The religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus but feared the people.

Acts 2:47

The believers praised God and enjoyed favor with the people, and the Lord added to them daily those who were being saved.

Spiritual Principle

A church marked by God's holiness may attract sincere believers while discouraging shallow identification.

XIV. MORE PEOPLE BELIEVE

Acts 5:14

“Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.”

Fear did not stop genuine conversion.

Instead:

More and more believed.

Cross References

Acts 2:41

Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized, and about three thousand were added that day.

Acts 2:47

The Lord continued adding to the church those who were being saved.

Acts 11:24

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people were brought to the Lord.

Key Truth

A holy church does not prevent growth; genuine holiness can accompany genuine growth.

XV. THE SICK ARE BROUGHT INTO THE STREETS

Acts 5:15

“People brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.”

The apostles' ministry had become widely known.

People came with intense expectation.

Cross References

Mark 6:56

Wherever Jesus went, people placed the sick in public places and begged Him to let them touch even the edge of His clothing, and everyone who touched Him was healed.

Acts 19:12

Even cloths that had touched Paul's body were taken to the sick, and diseases left them and evil spirits went out.

Matthew 9:21

The woman said to herself, “If I can only touch His garment, I will be healed.”

Important Observation

Luke describes the people's actions and expectations.

The power still belongs to God, not to Peter's shadow as a magical object.

Spiritual Principle

God may work in extraordinary ways, but the glory must always remain His.

XVI. CROWDS COME FROM SURROUNDING TOWNS

Acts 5:16

“Crowds gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.”

The influence of the church was expanding beyond Jerusalem itself.

Cross References

Luke 6:18

People came to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by unclean spirits were also healed.

Mark 1:34

Jesus healed many people who were suffering from various diseases and drove out many demons.

Matthew 4:24

News about Jesus spread, and people brought to Him those suffering from diseases, severe pain, demon oppression, seizures, and paralysis, and He healed them.

Spiritual Principle

Compassion and gospel witness belong together.

The church proclaimed truth and ministered to suffering people.

XVII. JEALOUSY FUELS OPPOSITION

Acts 5:17

“Then the high priest and his associates, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.”

The problem was not lack of evidence.

The problem was the heart.

Cross References

Acts 4:1

The priests, temple captain, and Sadducees confronted Peter and John while they were speaking.

Genesis 37:11

Joseph's brothers became jealous of him, though his father kept the matter in mind.

Matthew 27:18

Pilate knew that the religious leaders had handed Jesus over because of envy.

Spiritual Principle

Jealousy can disguise itself as religious concern.

Leaders must constantly examine whether opposition comes from conviction or threatened pride.

XVIII. THE APOSTLES ARE ARRESTED AGAIN

Acts 5:18

“They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.”

This was not their first arrest.

Yet the apostles had not stopped preaching.

Cross References

Acts 4:3

The authorities seized Peter and John and placed them in jail until the next day.

Luke 21:12

Jesus said, "People will seize you, persecute you, and hand you over to prisons because of My name."

Matthew 10:17

Jesus warned, "Be careful. People will hand you over to councils and beat you in their synagogues."

Spiritual Principle

Repeated opposition did not produce reduced obedience.

XIX. AN ANGEL OPENS THE PRISON

Acts 5:19

"But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out."

The authorities locked the apostles in.

God opened the doors.

Cross References**Acts 12:7**

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared in Peter's prison cell, and a light shone. The angel struck Peter on the side, woke him, and said, "Get up quickly." His chains fell from his wrists.

Acts 16:26

Suddenly a violent earthquake shook the foundations of the prison. The doors opened and everyone's chains came loose.

Psalms 34:7

The angel of the Lord camps around those who fear Him and rescues them.

Key Truth

No prison can hold someone God chooses to release.

XX. “GO, STAND, AND TELL”

Acts 5:20

“The angel said, ‘Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people all about this new life.’”

Notice the command.

They were not freed merely so they could escape danger.

They were freed so they could continue the mission.

Cross References

Matthew 28:19

Jesus said, “Go and make disciples among all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

Acts 1:8

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses.”

Mark 16:15

Jesus said, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to everyone.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's deliverance often carries renewed responsibility.

He did not free them from prison so they could become silent.

He freed them so they could preach again.

XXI. THEY IMMEDIATELY OBEY

Acts 5:21

“At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.”

No delay.

No secret meeting to debate the wisdom of going back.

They obeyed.

Cross References

Acts 4:5

The rulers, elders, and teachers of the law gathered in Jerusalem.

Luke 22:66

At daybreak the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law assembled.

John 18:13

Jesus was first taken to Annas, who was connected with the high priestly family.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical obedience responds to God's command even when obedience may bring renewed danger.

XXII. THE JAIL IS EMPTY

Acts 5:22–23

The officers go to retrieve the apostles.

But they are gone.

“We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.”

Cross References

Acts 12:19

After Peter escaped, Herod searched for him but could not find him.

Psalms 91:11

God commands His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

Daniel 6:22

Daniel said, “My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths so they did not harm me.”

Matthew 28:2

Suddenly there was a great earthquake because an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled away the stone.

Acts 16:26

A violent earthquake shook the prison, the doors opened, and the prisoners' chains came loose.

Spiritual Principle

Human security systems are powerless when God decides to intervene.

XXIII. THE LEADERS ARE CONFUSED

Acts 5:24

“On hearing this, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.”

The authorities had power.

But they did not understand what was happening.

Cross References

Luke 24:4

The women stood confused at the empty tomb when two men in shining clothing suddenly appeared.

John 20:9

The disciples still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

Acts 2:12

The crowd was amazed and puzzled, asking one another, “What does this mean?”

Spiritual Principle

People who resist God's work may find themselves continually confused by what they cannot control.

XXIV. THE PRISONERS ARE PREACHING AGAIN

Acts 5:25

“Then someone came and said, ‘Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.’”

The scene is almost ironic.

The authorities think the apostles are in jail.

Instead, the apostles are back doing exactly what they were forbidden to do.

Cross References

Acts 4:20

Peter and John said, “We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

2 Timothy 2:9

Paul said, “I suffer trouble and chains like a criminal, but God's Word is not chained.”

Jeremiah 20:9

Jeremiah said, “God's Word is like a fire burning within me, and I cannot hold it back.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You can chain the preacher, but you cannot chain the Word of God.

XXV. THE APOSTLES ARE BROUGHT BACK

Acts 5:26

“At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles, but without violence, for they feared the people would stone them.”

The authorities feared the crowd.

Cross References

Matthew 21:26

The religious leaders said, “If we say John's baptism came from men, we fear the crowd because everyone regards John as a prophet.”

Luke 20:19

The teachers of the law wanted to arrest Jesus but feared the people.

Matthew 14:5

Herod wanted to kill John but feared the people because they considered John a prophet.

Spiritual Principle

People who do not fear God often become controlled by fear of other people.

XXVI. THE APOSTLES STAND BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 5:27

“The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.”

The apostles again stand before powerful authorities.

Cross References

Matthew 26:59

The chief priests and council sought evidence against Jesus so they could put Him to death.

John 18:19

The high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching.

Mark 14:53

They took Jesus to the high priest, where the chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law gathered.

Spiritual Principle

The path of the disciple sometimes follows the path of the Master.

Jesus stood before the council.

Now His apostles stand there too.

XXVII. “YOU HAVE FILLED JERUSALEM WITH YOUR TEACHING”

Acts 5:28

“He said, ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.’”

This accusation is actually a remarkable testimony to the church's effectiveness.

They had:

“Filled Jerusalem”

with teaching about Jesus.

Cross References

Acts 4:18

The council commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Matthew 27:25

The crowd had answered Pilate, “His blood be upon us and upon our children.”

Matthew 23:35

Jesus warned that guilt for righteous blood would come upon those who persisted in rejecting God's messengers.

Application

What would happen if a church today were accused of:

“You have filled your city with the teaching of Jesus”?

That would be a remarkable testimony.

XXVIII. WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN

Acts 5:29

“Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than men!’”

This is the principle already stated in Acts 4.

Cross References

Acts 4:19

Peter and John said, “Which is right in God's sight—to listen to you or to God? You decide.”

Daniel 3:18

The three Hebrew men told the king, “Even if God does not rescue us, we will not serve your gods or worship the image you have made.”

Exodus 1:17

The Hebrew midwives feared God and did not do what Pharaoh had commanded them.

Important Principle

This verse does not justify unnecessary rebellion against authority.

It applies when human authority directly contradicts God's command.

Key Truth

God is the believer's highest authority.

XXIX. GOD RAISED JESUS

Acts 5:30

“The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging Him on a cross.”

Again the apostles proclaim the resurrection.

They refuse to soften the message.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 21:23

Anyone hung upon a tree was under a curse, and the body was not to remain there overnight.

Acts 10:39

Peter said, “We are witnesses of everything Jesus did. They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree.”

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because Scripture says, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

Spiritual Principle

The cross reveals both human sin and God's saving purpose.

XXX. JESUS IS PRINCE AND SAVIOR

Acts 5:31

“God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Savior, that He might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

What humanity rejected, God exalted.

Cross References

Philippians 2:9

Therefore God highly exalted Jesus and gave Him the name above every name.

Acts 2:33

Jesus was exalted to God's right hand and received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father.

Luke 24:47

Jesus said that repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.

Key Truth

Jesus is both:

Prince.

And:

Savior.

He rules.

And He saves.

Spiritual Principle

The exalted Christ gives what sinners desperately need—repentance and forgiveness.

XXXI. THE HOLY SPIRIT ALSO BEARS WITNESS

Acts 5:32

“We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

The apostles testify.

The Spirit testifies.

Cross References

Acts 1:8

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses.”

John 15:26

Jesus said, “When the Helper comes, the Spirit of truth, He will testify about Me.”

Acts 2:38

Peter said, “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Spiritual Principle

Authentic Christian witness depends upon the Holy Spirit's testimony to Christ.

XXXII. THE COUNCIL BECOMES FURIOUS

Acts 5:33

“When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.”

The same truth that produces repentance in some people produces rage in others.

Cross References

Acts 7:54

When the council heard Stephen's words, they became furious and ground their teeth at him.

Luke 6:11

The religious leaders became filled with rage and discussed what they might do to Jesus.

John 11:53

From that day forward the leaders planned to put Jesus to death.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel always demands a response, but the response is not always repentance.

XXXIII. GAMALIEL STANDS UP

Acts 5:34

“But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered the men be put outside for a little while.”

Gamaliel was a respected teacher.

Later Paul would say he had studied under Gamaliel.

Cross References

Acts 22:3

Paul said, “I am a Jew born in Tarsus but raised in Jerusalem. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors.”

John 3:1

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews.

Proverbs 15:22

Plans fail when there is no wise counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

Spiritual Principle

God can use even someone outside the believing community to restrain greater harm.

XXXIV. GAMALIEL URGES CAUTION

Acts 5:35

“Then he addressed the assembly: ‘Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.’”

Gamaliel encourages careful thought rather than emotional reaction.

Cross References

Acts 2:22

Peter said, “People of Israel, listen to these words concerning Jesus of Nazareth.”

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to advice and accept correction so that you may become wise in the future.

Proverbs 1:5

Let the wise listen and increase in learning, and let the discerning receive guidance.

Spiritual Principle

Anger makes poor decisions. Wisdom pauses before acting.

XXXV. THE EXAMPLE OF THEUDAS

Acts 5:36

“Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers dispersed, and it all came to nothing.”

Gamaliel recalls a failed movement.

Cross References

Matthew 24:24

Jesus warned that false messiahs and false prophets would arise and perform signs in an attempt to deceive people.

Acts 21:38

A Roman commander asked Paul whether he was the Egyptian who had previously started a revolt and led thousands into the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 18:20

Any prophet who falsely claims to speak in God's name or speaks in the name of false gods must be held accountable.

Spiritual Principle

Human movements often collapse when the personality at their center disappears.

XXXVI. JUDAS THE GALILEAN

Acts 5:37

“After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers scattered.”

Gamaliel gives another historical example.

Cross References

Luke 2:2

This registration took place during the period connected with Quirinius governing Syria.

Acts 21:38

The Roman commander referred to an earlier revolutionary movement.

Matthew 26:31

Jesus told His disciples, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for Scripture says, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”

Spiritual Principle

Movements built merely upon human ambition eventually reveal their weakness.

XXXVII. IF IT IS HUMAN, IT WILL FAIL

Acts 5:38

“Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.”

Gamaliel advises restraint.

Cross References

Matthew 15:13

Jesus said, “Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up.”

Proverbs 19:21

Many plans fill a person's heart, but the Lord's purpose is what will stand.

Psalms 33:11

The plans of the Lord stand forever, and the purposes of His heart continue through every generation.

Spiritual Principle

Human schemes are temporary; God's purpose endures.

XXXVIII. IF IT IS FROM GOD, YOU CANNOT STOP IT

Acts 5:39

“But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

This is the central insight in Gamaliel's speech.

Cross References

Acts 9:5

Saul asked, “Who are You, Lord?” The answer came, “I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting.”

2 Chronicles 13:12

The king warned Israel, “Do not fight against the Lord, the God of your ancestors, because you will not succeed.”

Job 9:4

God is wise in heart and mighty in strength. Who has ever resisted Him successfully?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

No person, institution, government, or movement can ultimately defeat what God has determined to accomplish.

XXXIX. THE APOSTLES ARE BEATEN

Acts 5:40

“His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.”

Gamaliel prevented execution.

But the apostles were still beaten.

Cross References

Matthew 10:17

Jesus warned, “People will hand you over to councils and beat you in their synagogues.”

Acts 22:19

Paul later said, “Lord, they know that I went from synagogue to synagogue imprisoning and beating those who believed in You.”

Mark 13:9

Jesus said, “You will be handed over to councils and beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before rulers because of Me as a witness.”

Spiritual Principle

Deliverance does not always mean avoiding pain.

Sometimes God delivers through suffering rather than from suffering.

XL. THEY REJOICE IN SUFFERING

Acts 5:41

“The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

This response is astonishing.

They had just been beaten.

Yet they rejoiced.

Why?

Because they understood suffering for Christ as an honor.

Cross References

Matthew 5:12

Jesus said, “Rejoice and be glad when you suffer because of Me, because your reward in heaven is great. The prophets before you were persecuted in the same way.”

James 1:2

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face various trials.

1 Peter 4:13

Rejoice as you share in Christ's sufferings so that you may also rejoice greatly when His glory is revealed.

Spiritual Principle

Christian joy is not dependent upon painless circumstances.

They did not rejoice because pain felt good.

They rejoiced because suffering connected them with faithfulness to Christ.

XLI. THEY NEVER STOP PREACHING JESUS

Acts 5:42

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”

The council commanded:

Stop preaching.

The apostles responded:

They never stopped.

Cross References

Acts 2:46

Every day the believers continued meeting together in the temple courts and sharing meals in their homes.

Acts 20:20

Paul said, “I did not hold back anything that would help you. I taught you publicly and from house to house.”

Colossians 1:28

We proclaim Christ, warning and teaching everyone with wisdom so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Key Truth

The message remained:

Jesus is the Christ.

Not politics.

Not personalities.

Not apostles.

Not miracles.

Jesus.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Persecution changed the apostles' circumstances, but it never changed their message.

XLII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 5

1. God Sees the Heart

Ananias and Sapphira fooled people for a moment.

They did not fool God.

Principle:

Nothing hidden from people is hidden from God.

2. God Takes Holiness Seriously

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira brought reverent fear upon the church.

Principle:

Grace should never produce casual attitudes toward sin.

3. Spiritual Power Must Be Accompanied by Spiritual Integrity

The early church saw miracles.

But God also dealt with hypocrisy.

Principle:

Power without holiness is not the pattern of Acts.

4. Opposition Cannot Stop God's Work

The apostles were arrested.

God released them.

They were threatened.

They preached.

They were beaten.

They continued.

Principle:

The gospel moves forward despite opposition.

5. Obedience to God Comes First

Peter said:

“We must obey God rather than men.”

Principle:

When human authority directly contradicts God's command, loyalty to God must prevail.

6. Suffering for Christ Can Be an Honor

The apostles rejoiced after being beaten.

Principle:

Faithfulness matters more than comfort.

7. Jesus Must Remain the Message

They never stopped proclaiming:

“Jesus is the Christ.”

Principle:

The church's primary message is not itself. It is Jesus Christ.

XLIII. ANANIAS AND BARNABAS — TWO HEARTS

Acts places two property sales beside each other.

At the end of Acts 4:

Barnabas sells a field.

At the beginning of Acts 5:

Ananias sells land.

Outwardly they appear similar.

But inwardly they are opposite.

Barnabas

Gives sincerely.

Seeks no false appearance.

Strengthens the church.

Ananias

Gives deceptively.

Seeks the appearance of greater sacrifice.

Brings judgment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God evaluates not only what we give but why we give it.

XLIV. THE DANGER OF SPIRITUAL IMAGE-MAKING

Ananias and Sapphira wanted to appear more committed than they actually were.

That danger still exists.

People may want to appear:

More generous.

More spiritual.

More prayerful.

More knowledgeable.

More devoted.

More sacrificial.

Than they truly are.

Spiritual Principle

When maintaining a spiritual image becomes more important than maintaining spiritual integrity, hypocrisy has already begun.

Application

Ask:

Do I care more about what people think of my spiritual life or what God knows about my spiritual life?

XLV. WHAT ACTS 5 TEACHES ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

Several truths emerge.

The Holy Spirit Can Be Lied To

Acts 5:3.

Lying to the Spirit Is Lying to God

Acts 5:4.

The Spirit Bears Witness to Christ

Acts 5:32.

The Spirit Is Given in Connection with Belonging to and obeying God

The Spirit's presence identifies God's people.

Key Truth

The Holy Spirit is not merely an impersonal force. He acts personally and is treated in divine terms.

XLVI. “FILL JERUSALEM WITH YOUR TEACHING”

The high priest's accusation should challenge every church.

He essentially says:

“You have spread your message everywhere.”

Application

What would it look like for believers to fill:

Their neighborhood.

Their city.

Their workplace.

Their community.

With the teaching of Jesus Christ?

Not through coercion.

Not through anger.

But through:

Faithful preaching.

Personal witness.

Compassion.

Biblical teaching.

House-to-house discipleship.

Consistent Christian living.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A church fulfilling Acts 1:8 should become difficult for its community to ignore.

XLVII. “WE MUST OBEY GOD”

Acts 5:29 is often quoted, but it must be understood carefully.

Christians are not commanded to reject all civil authority.

Scripture repeatedly teaches respect for authority.

But earthly authority has limits.

When authorities say:

“Do not proclaim Jesus.”

And Christ says:

“Be My witnesses.”

The choice is clear.

Principle

Civil obedience is important, but divine obedience is supreme.

XLVIII. GAMALIEL'S WARNING

Gamaliel said:

“If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men.”

The history recorded in Acts demonstrates how significant those words became.

The apostles continued preaching.

The gospel spread beyond Jerusalem.

Then into Judea.

Then Samaria.

Then throughout the Roman world.

Persecution increased.

But the message spread.

Spiritual Principle

God's work may be opposed, but God's ultimate purpose cannot be defeated.

XLIX. SUFFERING AND JOY

Acts 5:41 creates a difficult but powerful combination.

Suffering.

And:

Rejoicing.

The apostles did not rejoice because physical pain was pleasant.

They rejoiced because they understood what their suffering represented.

They had been identified publicly with Jesus Christ.

Principle

Christian joy comes from knowing the meaning of suffering, not pretending suffering does not hurt.

L. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What was the primary sin of Ananias and Sapphira?

Their primary sin was deliberate deception.

They pretended that they had donated the full amount from the property sale while secretly keeping part for themselves.

Peter made clear that they were free to keep the property or the money.

Their sin was hypocrisy and lying before God.

Question 2

Why was their judgment so severe?

Acts emphasizes the holiness of God and the seriousness of deliberate spiritual deception within the early church.

Their judgment taught the newborn church that God's presence must not be treated casually.

The result was:

“Great fear seized the whole church.”

Question 3

Does Acts 5 teach that believers were forced to give all their possessions?

No.

Peter explicitly told Ananias that the land was his before it was sold and that the money remained under his control after the sale.

The giving was voluntary.

The sin was pretending to give more than they actually gave.

Question 4

What does Acts 5 teach about the Holy Spirit?

Peter says Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit and then says he had lied to God.

This supports the biblical teaching that the Holy Spirit is personal and divine.

The Holy Spirit also bears witness to Jesus Christ.

Question 5

Why did the religious leaders arrest the apostles?

The immediate reason was growing jealousy and opposition to the apostles' influence.

The apostles were performing signs, preaching Jesus, and gaining increasing attention.

The Sadducean leadership especially opposed their resurrection message.

Question 6

Why did the angel release the apostles from prison?

The angel did not release them merely for their comfort.

He commanded them:

“Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people all about this new life.”

Their freedom had a missionary purpose.

Question 7

What does “We must obey God rather than men” mean?

It means God's authority is higher than human authority.

Believers should respect lawful authorities, but when those authorities directly command something contrary to God's revealed will, obedience to God comes first.

Question 8

What message did the apostles give the Sanhedrin?

They proclaimed:

- Jesus was killed.
- God raised Jesus.

- God exalted Him.
 - Jesus is Prince and Savior.
 - He gives repentance.
 - He gives forgiveness.
 - The apostles and Holy Spirit bear witness to these truths.
-

Question 9

Who was Gamaliel?

Gamaliel was a respected Pharisee and teacher of the law.

Paul later said that he had studied under him.

Gamaliel advised the Sanhedrin not to kill the apostles but to consider whether the movement might actually be from God.

Question 10

Was Gamaliel's principle an infallible test for every religious movement?

The immediate point of his advice was caution: do not rashly attack something that might be God's work.

Not every successful movement comes from God, and not every struggling ministry is false.

All spiritual claims must still be tested by Scripture.

The enduring lesson is:

Be careful about opposing genuine work that God is doing.

Question 11

Why did the apostles rejoice after being beaten?

They believed suffering for Jesus was an honor.

They had been publicly identified with the One they loved and served.

Their joy came from faithfulness to Christ, not enjoyment of pain.

Question 12

Did the beating stop their preaching?

No.

Acts 5:42 says they continued:

Day after day.

In the temple.

From house to house.

They never stopped teaching and proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ.

LI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 5 confronts us with several serious questions.

Am I Honest Before God?

Or am I trying to create a spiritual image for people?

Do I Fear God?

Not with hopeless terror, but with reverent recognition of His holiness?

Am I More Concerned About Reputation or Integrity?

Ananias and Sapphira chose reputation.

Do I Obey God When Obedience Is Costly?

The apostles returned to preaching immediately.

Would I Continue Witnessing After Opposition?

They did not stop.

Is Jesus the Center of My Message?

The apostles proclaimed Him repeatedly.

How Do I Respond to Suffering for Christ?

With shame?

Bitterness?

Or recognition that faithfulness matters more than comfort?

Am I Helping Fill My Community with the Teaching of Jesus?

The apostles filled Jerusalem.

What am I doing where God has placed me?

LII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God Wants Truth in the Church and Boldness in the World”

Acts 5 contains two very different problems.

Inside the church:

Hypocrisy.

Outside the church:

Persecution.

God deals with both.

Inside the church, He purifies.

Outside the church, He empowers.

Ananias and Sapphira teach us:

Do not pretend before God.

Peter and the apostles teach us:

Do not become silent before men.

That creates an important balance.

The church must possess:

Integrity inwardly.

And:

Boldness outwardly.

Principle

A church that compromises truth inside will eventually lose its credibility outside.

God desires a holy people carrying a bold message.

LIII. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 5 begins with a lie.

It ends with the gospel being proclaimed every day.

It begins with judgment inside the church.

It ends with courage in the face of persecution.

The chapter teaches us that God cares deeply about His church.

He cares about:

Its purity.

Its honesty.

Its witness.

Its courage.

Its obedience.

Its message.

Ananias and Sapphira remind us:

God sees what is hidden.

The apostles remind us:

God empowers those who obey Him.

The prison reminds us:

Human chains cannot stop divine purpose.

The angel reminds us:

Deliverance has a purpose.

The Sanhedrin reminds us:

Opposition often rises when the gospel spreads.

Peter reminds us:

God must be obeyed above men.

Gamaliel reminds us:

No one can successfully fight against God.

The apostles' beating reminds us:

Faithfulness may cost something.

Their rejoicing reminds us:

Christ is worth the cost.

And verse 42 gives the final picture:

They kept going.

Every day.

Publicly.

Privately.

Temple courts.

Homes.

Teaching.

Preaching.

Jesus Christ.

Acts 5 therefore asks every Christian:

Can pressure silence you?

Can fear control you?

Can popularity corrupt you?

Can hypocrisy enter your heart?

Can suffering cause you to stop?

The apostles answered with their lives:

No.

They feared God.

They obeyed God.

They proclaimed Jesus.

And they trusted God with the results.

That remains the calling of the church.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the serious lessons of Acts Chapter 5.

Search our hearts.

Expose hypocrisy.

Remove deception.

Keep us from trying to appear more spiritual than we truly are.

Give us integrity before You.

Teach us to fear You with reverence and love.

Remind us that Your grace never makes Your holiness unimportant.

Purify Your church.

Make us honest.

Make us sincere.

Make us faithful.

Thank You for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thank You for the apostles who continued preaching even after arrest, threats, imprisonment, and beatings.

Give us that same courage.

When human pressure tells us to remain silent about Jesus, give us wisdom and boldness to obey You.

Help us declare:

“We must obey God rather than men.”

Thank You that Jesus was raised from the dead.

Thank You that He is exalted as Prince and Savior.

Thank You that repentance and forgiveness are available through Him.

May our lives bear witness to Him.

When opposition comes, keep us from fear.

When suffering comes, give us joy rooted in Christ.

When doors close, remind us that You can open doors no person can shut.

When enemies gather, remind us that no one can successfully fight against Your sovereign purposes.

Raise up churches that fill their communities with the teaching of Jesus.

Let the gospel move:

From pulpits.

From homes.

From ordinary conversations.

From faithful believers.

Day after day.

Keep Jesus Christ at the center of everything.

And may we never stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that:

Jesus is the Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than men!’” — Acts 5:29

Central Truth

God calls His church to holiness within, courage without, obedience above human pressure, and unwavering proclamation of the risen and exalted Jesus Christ.

Acts 5 in One Sentence

God purifies the early church through the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, demonstrates His power through signs and deliverance, strengthens the apostles to obey Him rather than men, and turns persecution into an occasion for joyful, unstoppable proclamation that Jesus is the Christ.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 6 — The Choosing of the Seven and the Rise of Stephen

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 6 shows the early church facing a different kind of challenge.

Until this point, much of the pressure against the church had come from the outside.

Religious leaders had threatened the apostles.

The apostles had been arrested.

They had been beaten.

They had been commanded to stop preaching.

Yet the church continued growing.

Now a problem develops inside the church.

As the number of disciples increases, some Greek-speaking Jewish believers complain that their widows are being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

This issue had the potential to create division between two groups of believers.

The apostles do not ignore the complaint.

They also refuse to abandon their God-given responsibility of prayer and preaching.

Instead, they develop a wise solution.

Seven qualified men are selected to oversee the practical ministry.

These men must be:

Respected.

Full of the Holy Spirit.

Full of wisdom.

The first man named is Stephen.

Stephen will soon become one of the most significant figures in the early chapters of Acts.

He is described as:

Full of faith.

Full of the Holy Spirit.

Full of God's grace.

Full of power.

Stephen performs great wonders and signs.

He speaks with such wisdom that his opponents cannot successfully answer him.

Unable to defeat his message through honest debate, they turn to false accusations.

Stephen is seized.

False witnesses testify against him.

He is brought before the Sanhedrin.

Yet as everyone looks at him, they see something remarkable:

“His face was like the face of an angel.”

Acts 6 therefore teaches several important truths.

Growth creates new challenges.

Church problems must be handled wisely.

Practical ministry matters.

Prayer and preaching must remain priorities.

Character matters more than position.

Spirit-filled servants can have powerful ministries.

And when truth cannot be defeated honestly, opposition may turn to slander.

The central truth of Acts 6 is:

A healthy church responds to growth with wisdom, protects both spiritual and practical ministry, chooses Spirit-filled servants, and continues advancing the Word of God despite opposition.

I. GROWTH CREATES A NEW PROBLEM

Acts 6:1 — The Widows Are Being Overlooked

“In those days, as the number of disciples kept growing, some Greek-speaking believers began complaining against the Hebrew-speaking believers. They said their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.”

The church was growing rapidly.

Growth was good.

But growth also created administrative challenges.

The complaint involved two groups.

Greek-Speaking Believers

These were Jewish believers whose primary language and cultural background were more Greek.

Hebrew-Speaking Believers

These were Jewish believers more closely connected with Hebrew or Aramaic language and Judean culture.

The complaint concerned widows.

Some widows were being neglected in the church's daily assistance.

Cross References

Acts 4:35

Believers brought the proceeds from property sales and placed them at the apostles' feet, and the resources were distributed to each person according to need.

James 1:27

Pure and genuine religion before God the Father includes caring for orphans and widows in their trouble and keeping oneself unstained by the world.

Deuteronomy 24:19

When you harvest your field and accidentally leave a bundle of grain behind, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow so that the Lord your God may bless the work of your hands.

Spiritual Principle

A growing church must pay attention to people who can easily be overlooked.

Widows were among the most vulnerable members of society.

God repeatedly commands His people to care for them.

Key Truth

Spiritual growth should never make a church less compassionate toward practical needs.

II. COMPLAINT CAN BECOME DIVISION IF IT IS IGNORED

The problem involved more than food.

It had the potential to create resentment between cultural groups.

One group could have concluded:

“They care more about their people than ours.”

That kind of suspicion can destroy unity quickly.

Spiritual Principle

Many church conflicts become larger because legitimate concerns are ignored until they become deep resentments.

The apostles respond before the problem destroys fellowship.

Application

Wise leadership listens carefully when people say:

“Someone is being overlooked.”

Not every complaint is correct.

But every serious complaint deserves fair consideration.

III. THE APOSTLES IDENTIFY THEIR PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY

Acts 6:2 — “It Is Not Right for Us to Neglect the Word”

“So the twelve apostles gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It is not right for us to neglect preaching the word of God in order to wait on tables.’”

The apostles are not saying that serving food is beneath them.

The issue is calling and priority.

Someone must care for the widows.

But the apostles must not abandon the ministry Christ specifically gave them.

Cross References

Exodus 18:17

Moses' father-in-law told him, “What you are doing is not good. You and the people will wear yourselves out because this responsibility is too heavy for you to carry alone.”

Acts 2:42

The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer.

1 Corinthians 9:16

Paul said, “If I preach the gospel, I have no reason to boast because I am obligated to preach. How terrible it would be for me if I did not preach the gospel.”

Spiritual Principle

Good ministries can compete with the best ministry if leaders do not understand their calling.

Serving widows mattered.

Preaching mattered.

Prayer mattered.

The solution was not choosing one and abandoning the other.

The solution was faithful delegation.

IV. DELEGATION IS NOT NEGLECT

Some leaders struggle to delegate because they believe:

“If I do not do everything myself, I am not being faithful.”

Acts 6 teaches the opposite.

Trying to do everything can cause leaders to neglect what God specifically called them to do.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Delegation is not abandoning responsibility; it is assigning responsibility wisely so every necessary ministry can be done well.

V. SEVEN QUALIFIED MEN ARE NEEDED

Acts 6:3 — Character Before Responsibility

“Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are respected, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them.”

The apostles establish qualifications.

Notice what they do not say.

Choose:

The wealthiest men.

The most popular men.

The best businessmen.

The strongest personalities.

They say choose men who are:

Respected

Their character must be known.

Full of the Holy Spirit

Their lives must demonstrate spiritual maturity.

Full of Wisdom

They must know how to handle people, problems, and resources wisely.

Cross References

Exodus 18:21

Moses was told, “Select capable men from among the people—men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain—and appoint them over groups of the people.”

Deuteronomy 1:13

Moses told Israel, “Choose wise, understanding, and respected men from each tribe, and I will appoint them as leaders over you.”

1 Timothy 3:8

Those who serve in recognized ministry must be worthy of respect, sincere, not controlled by wine, and not greedy for dishonest gain.

Spiritual Principle

Even practical church ministry requires spiritual character.

Handling food and finances may appear administrative.

God still cared deeply about the character of those doing it.

VI. THE MINISTRY OF PRAYER AND THE WORD

Acts 6:4

“And we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

This verse gives two great priorities of apostolic ministry.

Prayer

They needed communion with God.

Ministry of the Word

They needed to teach God's truth.

Cross References

Colossians 4:2

Continue faithfully in prayer. Stay spiritually alert and remain thankful.

2 Timothy 4:2

Preach the Word. Be ready whether the opportunity seems convenient or inconvenient.
Correct, rebuke, and encourage people with great patience and careful teaching.

Romans 12:12

Rejoice in hope, remain patient in trouble, and continue faithfully in prayer.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The preacher who has no time to pray and no time to study the Word has allowed something to replace his primary calling.

Programs matter.

Administration matters.

Visitation matters.

Meetings matter.

But prayer and the Word must remain central.

VII. THE CHURCH ACCEPTS THE PLAN

Acts 6:5 — Seven Men Are Chosen

“This plan pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, who had become a follower of Judaism.”

The congregation responds positively.

The seven are selected.

Interestingly, all seven names are Greek names.

This may indicate sensitivity toward the Greek-speaking believers who had raised the concern.

Stephen

Stephen receives special attention.

He is described as:

“A man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.”

Philip

Philip later becomes a major evangelistic figure in Acts 8.

Nicolas

Luke specifically notes that he was from Antioch and had converted to Judaism.

Cross References

Numbers 27:18

The Lord told Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand upon him.”

Acts 11:20

Some believers from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began speaking to Greek-speaking people also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus.

Acts 8:5

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed Christ to the people there.

Spiritual Principle

God often prepares today's servant for tomorrow's larger assignment.

Stephen begins with practical ministry.

Philip begins among the seven.

Both later become powerful public witnesses.

VIII. NO MINISTRY IS “JUST” A SMALL MINISTRY

Stephen was selected to help ensure fair distribution.

Soon he would preach one of the most powerful sermons in Acts.

Philip helped serve.

Soon he would evangelize Samaria and lead an Ethiopian man to Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness in one assignment can prepare a believer for another assignment.

Never say:

“I am only serving tables.”

If God gave the assignment, it matters.

IX. THE APOSTLES PRAY AND LAY HANDS ON THEM

Acts 6:6

“They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.”

The church recognizes and commissions these men.

The laying on of hands represented identification, recognition, and assignment.

Cross References

1 Timothy 4:14

Paul told Timothy, “Do not neglect the spiritual gift given to you through prophecy when the elders laid their hands upon you.”

Numbers 27:23

Moses laid his hands upon Joshua and commissioned him, just as the Lord had commanded through Moses.

Acts 13:3

After fasting and praying, the church leaders laid their hands upon Barnabas and Saul and sent them out.

Spiritual Principle

Church ministry should be approached prayerfully and deliberately.

Leadership assignment is not merely filling an empty position.

It involves spiritual responsibility.

X. THE WORD OF GOD CONTINUES TO SPREAD

Acts 6:7 — Rapid Growth Continues

“The word of God spread, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem grew rapidly. Even a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”

The solution to the church's internal problem produces healthy results.

The practical needs are addressed.

The apostles remain focused.

The Word spreads.

The church grows.

Cross References

Acts 12:24

But the Word of God continued to grow and spread.

Acts 19:20

In this powerful way, the Word of the Lord continued growing and prevailing.

John 12:42

Even many among the rulers believed in Jesus, though some were afraid to confess Him publicly because of the Pharisees.

Remarkable Detail

Luke says:

“A large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”

These were men deeply connected to Israel's temple system.

Yet they were coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

Key Truth

The gospel was penetrating even circles that had previously resisted Jesus.

XI. A HEALTHY CHURCH STRUCTURE HELPS THE GOSPEL ADVANCE

Acts 6:7 follows immediately after the church solves its ministry problem.

That connection is important.

Disorganization can hinder mission.

Unresolved conflict can distract leaders.

Neglected people can damage unity.

Wise structure can help remove unnecessary obstacles.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Church organization is not the mission, but good organization can protect the mission.

XII. STEPHEN IS FULL OF GRACE AND POWER

Acts 6:8

“Now Stephen, full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.”

Stephen had been chosen for practical ministry.

Now his public spiritual ministry becomes visible.

Cross References

Acts 4:33

With great power the apostles continued testifying to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace rested upon them all.

Luke 24:19

The disciples described Jesus of Nazareth as a prophet powerful in deed and word before God and all the people.

2 Corinthians 12:12

Paul said, “The signs of a true apostolic ministry were demonstrated among you with great perseverance through signs, wonders, and mighty works.”

Notice Stephen's Description

He was full of:

Faith.

The Holy Spirit.

Grace.

Power.

Spiritual Principle

Powerful ministry should flow from a Spirit-filled character rather than merely visible gifts.

XIII. OPPOSITION ARISES AGAINST STEPHEN

Acts 6:9

“Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen—as it was called—Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria, as well as from Cilicia and Asia. They began to argue with Stephen.”

As Stephen's influence increases, opposition appears.

Members of a synagogue begin debating with him.

Cross References

Acts 2:9

Among those present at Pentecost were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and people from many regions of the Roman world.

Acts 21:39

Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city.”

Acts 9:29

Saul spoke and debated with Greek-speaking Jews, but they attempted to kill him.

Spiritual Principle

Effective ministry often attracts opposition.

Truth shines.

Resistance rises.

XIV. THEY CANNOT DEFEAT STEPHEN'S WISDOM

Acts 6:10

“But they could not stand up against the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.”

Stephen was not merely clever.

His wisdom was connected with the Holy Spirit.

Cross References

Luke 21:15

Jesus said, “I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict.”

Exodus 4:12

God told Moses, “Now go. I will help you speak and teach you what to say.”

Luke 12:12

Jesus said, “The Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”

Key Truth

Stephen's opponents could argue with him, but they could not overcome the Spirit-given wisdom of his message.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The servant of God does not need to win through anger when truth and Spirit-given wisdom are sufficient.

XV. WHEN ARGUMENT FAILS, THEY TURN TO SLANDER

Acts 6:11

“Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, ‘We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’”

They could not defeat Stephen honestly.

So they manufactured accusations.

Cross References

Matthew 26:59

The chief priests and the entire council searched for false testimony against Jesus so they could put Him to death.

1 Kings 21:10

Jezebel ordered that two dishonest men be seated opposite Naboth and falsely accuse him of cursing God and the king.

Psalms 27:12

Do not hand me over to my enemies, because false witnesses have risen against me and breathe out violence.

Spiritual Principle

When people cannot answer truth, they may attack the character of the person speaking it.

Slander is not proof that someone is wrong.

XVI. FALSE ACCUSATION HAS A LONG BIBLICAL HISTORY

Joseph was falsely accused.

Naboth was falsely accused.

Jeremiah was accused.

Jesus was falsely accused.

Stephen is falsely accused.

Later Paul would experience similar accusations.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness does not guarantee that people will represent you fairly.

The believer's responsibility is to remain truthful even when others are not.

XVII. THE CROWD IS STIRRED UP

Acts 6:12

“So they stirred up the people, the elders, and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.”

Stephen's opponents manipulate public opinion.

Cross References

Matthew 26:57

Those who arrested Jesus took Him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and elders had gathered.

Mark 14:1

The chief priests and teachers of the law were looking secretly for a way to arrest Jesus and kill Him.

Acts 21:30

The entire city became stirred up, and the people seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple.

Spiritual Principle

Crowds can be manipulated by accusation, fear, and emotion.

Truth must never be decided merely by majority reaction.

XVIII. STEPHEN STANDS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Stephen now stands before the same council that had confronted:

Jesus.

Peter.

John.

The apostles.

Now Stephen.

Spiritual Principle

The opposition may change targets, but the conflict remains centered upon Jesus Christ and His gospel.

XIX. FALSE WITNESSES TESTIFY

Acts 6:13

“They produced false witnesses, who testified, ‘This man never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.’”

The accusations focus on:

The temple.

The law of Moses.

Stephen's enemies portray him as an enemy of Israel's sacred institutions.

Cross References

Matthew 26:61

False witnesses said about Jesus, “This man said, ‘I am able to destroy God's temple and rebuild it in three days.’”

Mark 14:58

Some testified, “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days build another not made with hands.’”

Jeremiah 26:11

The priests and prophets told the officials, “This man deserves death because he has prophesied against this city.”

Spiritual Principle

False accusations often contain distorted pieces of truth.

Stephen likely taught about Christ's fulfillment of the law and temple.

His enemies twisted that teaching into blasphemy.

XX. JESUS AND STEPHEN FACE SIMILAR ACCUSATIONS

There is a deliberate similarity between Stephen's trial and Jesus' trial.

Both faced:

False witnesses.

Religious hostility.

Charges involving the temple.

The Sanhedrin.

Distorted testimony.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithfulness to Jesus may cause His servants to walk paths that resemble the path their Master walked.

XXI. THEY ACCUSE STEPHEN OF TEACHING TEMPLE DESTRUCTION

Acts 6:14

“We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

Again the accusation centers on Jesus and the temple.

Cross References

John 2:19

Jesus answered, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Matthew 24:2

Jesus said concerning the temple buildings, “Do you see all these things? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left upon another. Every one will be thrown down.”

Mark 13:2

Jesus said, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another. Every stone will be thrown down.”

Important Truth

Jesus did predict the destruction of the temple.

But He also spoke of His own body as the true temple in John 2.

Stephen's message likely emphasized that God's redemptive purposes centered in Christ, not merely in a physical building.

Spiritual Principle

Religious people can become so attached to sacred structures and traditions that they fail to recognize the One those things were meant to point toward.

XXII. STEPHEN'S FACE IS LIKE THE FACE OF AN ANGEL

Acts 6:15

“Everyone who was sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.”

This is one of the most remarkable descriptions in Acts.

Stephen stands accused.

His enemies lie about him.

He is surrounded by hostile leaders.

Yet his face reflects unusual peace and radiance.

Cross References

Exodus 34:29

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai carrying the two tablets of testimony, he did not realize that the skin of his face was shining because he had been speaking with God.

2 Corinthians 3:7

Paul described the glory connected with Moses' ministry, saying that the Israelites could not look steadily at Moses' face because of its fading glory.

Matthew 28:3

The angel's appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was white as snow.

Spiritual Principle

God can give His servants supernatural peace even when circumstances around them are hostile.

Stephen's face did not reflect panic.

It reflected heaven.

XXIII. THE FACE REVEALS THE HEART

Stephen was facing lies.

Yet there is no record of rage.

No panic.

No desperation.

No revenge.

His face appeared:

“Like the face of an angel.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A Spirit-filled life is often most visible when pressure reveals what is inside.

Pressure does not create character.

It exposes character.

XXIV. FIVE GREAT CHARACTERISTICS OF STEPHEN

Acts 6 gives a remarkable spiritual portrait.

1. Stephen Was Full of Faith

He trusted God.

2. Stephen Was Full of the Holy Spirit

His ministry flowed from God's presence.

3. Stephen Was Full of Grace

His power was not harsh or self-centered.

4. Stephen Was Full of Power

God worked through him.

5. Stephen Was Full of Wisdom

His opponents could not defeat his Spirit-directed reasoning.

Spiritual Principle

Stephen's public power rested upon private character.

XXV. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 6

1. Church Growth Creates New Responsibilities

Growth is good.

But growth produces new needs.

Principle:

Healthy growth requires wise adjustment.

2. Problems Should Be Addressed Before They Divide the Church

The apostles did not ignore the widows' complaint.

Principle:

Wise leaders deal with genuine concerns rather than hoping they disappear.

3. Prayer and the Word Must Remain Central

The apostles protected their primary ministry.

Principle:

A church loses spiritual strength when prayer and Scripture are crowded out by constant administration.

4. Practical Ministry Requires Spiritual Character

The seven had to be respected, Spirit-filled, and wise.

Principle:

There are no spiritually insignificant assignments in God's church.

5. Faithfulness in Small Assignments Can Lead to Greater Responsibility

Stephen and Philip began serving practical needs.

Both became powerful witnesses.

Principle:

Never despise the assignment God gives you today.

6. Truth Often Produces Opposition

Stephen's ministry brought resistance.

Principle:

Opposition is not always evidence that something is wrong; sometimes people oppose precisely because truth has exposed them.

7. God Gives Peace Under Pressure

Stephen's face reflected unusual calm even before hostile judges.

Principle:

The Holy Spirit can produce heavenly peace in earthly conflict.

XXVI. WHAT ACTS 6 TEACHES ABOUT CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Acts 6 provides several principles for healthy leadership.

Leaders Must Listen

The apostles listened to a legitimate complaint.

Leaders Must Prioritize

They knew their primary responsibility.

Leaders Must Delegate

They did not attempt to control everything personally.

Leaders Must Establish Qualifications

Character mattered.

Leaders Must Involve the Congregation

The believers participated in selecting the seven.

Leaders Must Pray

The apostles prayed before commissioning them.

Leaders Must Protect the Mission

The final result was that God's Word continued spreading.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Healthy leadership is not doing everything; it is making sure everything necessary is faithfully handled while keeping God's priorities central.

XXVII. WHAT ACTS 6 TEACHES ABOUT SERVING

Serving tables might sound ordinary.

But the men chosen for this responsibility needed to be:

Full of the Spirit.

Full of wisdom.

Respected.

That tells us how God views service.

Spiritual Principle

God does not divide ministry into important spiritual work and unimportant practical work.

Everything done faithfully for Christ matters.

Helping a widow matters.

Preaching matters.

Prayer matters.

Administration matters.

Encouragement matters.

Giving matters.

Evangelism matters.

Different ministries.

One Lord.

XXVIII. THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING PEOPLE

The original problem involved widows who were:

“Being overlooked.”

That phrase should challenge every church.

Who is easily overlooked?

The elderly.

Widows.

Shut-ins.

Visitors.

Poor families.

People without influence.

People from different cultures.

People without powerful connections.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus repeatedly directs attention toward people society tends to overlook.

A healthy church should do the same.

XXIX. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT SPIRITUAL POWER

Stephen was powerful.

But notice the order of his descriptions.

Acts 6:5:

Full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 6:8:

Full of grace and power.

Character precedes visible power.

Principle

Never pursue spiritual power while neglecting spiritual character.

God is more concerned about what a servant is than merely what a servant can do.

XXX. WHEN PEOPLE CANNOT DEFEAT THE MESSAGE

Stephen's opponents tried debate.

They failed.

Then they moved to:

Secret persuasion.

False witnesses.

Public agitation.

Arrest.

Spiritual Principle

When honest argument ends, dishonest opposition often begins.

The Christian must remain committed to truth even when others abandon truth.

XXXI. HOW TO RESPOND TO FALSE ACCUSATIONS

Stephen's example gives several principles.

Remain Calm

His face displayed peace.

Remain Truthful

He did not answer lies with lies.

Remain Spirit-Filled

His wisdom came from the Spirit.

Remain Ready to Speak

Acts 7 will show Stephen giving a powerful biblical defense.

Trust God

Stephen's future was not in the Sanhedrin's hands ultimately.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You cannot always control what people say about you, but you can control whether their accusations change your faithfulness.

XXXII. THE WORD OF GOD KEPT SPREADING

Acts 6:7 is a key verse.

A church conflict had developed.

But after wise action:

The problem was addressed.

Leaders were appointed.

The apostles stayed focused.

Unity was protected.

Then:

“The word of God spread.”

Spiritual Principle

Resolving internal problems biblically can remove distractions that hinder outward mission.

A divided church has difficulty presenting a united gospel witness.

XXXIII. EVEN PRIESTS BELIEVED

Luke specifically mentions that many priests became obedient to the faith.

This is significant because priests were deeply invested in the temple system.

Yet the gospel was reaching them.

Spiritual Principle

No group should be considered unreachable.

The gospel can reach:

Religious leaders.

Skeptics.

Outsiders.

Insiders.

The highly educated.

The ordinary.
The powerful.
The overlooked.

XXXIV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What caused the complaint in Acts 6?

Some Greek-speaking believers believed that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

The complaint involved both practical care and the possibility of cultural division.

Question 2

Did the apostles say caring for widows was unimportant?

No.

They created a structure specifically to make sure the need was handled properly.

Their point was that they should not abandon their primary responsibility of prayer and preaching to manage every practical detail themselves.

Question 3

Why were seven men chosen?

Seven qualified men were selected to take responsibility for the daily distribution so the apostles could remain focused upon prayer and the ministry of the Word.

The text does not explain why the specific number seven was chosen.

Question 4

What qualifications were required?

The men needed to be:

Respected.

Full of the Holy Spirit.

Full of wisdom.

This demonstrates that spiritual character mattered even for practical ministry.

Question 5

Were these seven men officially called deacons?

Acts 6 does not directly give them the title **deacon**.

However, their service has often been viewed as closely related to the later ministry of deacons because they were appointed to meet practical needs within the church.

We should distinguish what the text explicitly says from later church terminology.

Question 6

Why were prayer and the ministry of the Word so important to the apostles?

These were central to their calling.

They needed prayer because ministry depends upon God.

They needed the Word because the church needed biblical truth and the gospel needed to continue spreading.

Question 7

Who was Stephen?

Stephen was one of the seven men chosen.

He was described as:

- Full of faith.
- Full of the Holy Spirit.
- Full of grace.
- Full of power.
- Full of wisdom.

He later became the first Christian martyr recorded in Acts.

Question 8

Why could Stephen's opponents not defeat him in debate?

Acts 6:10 says they could not stand against:

“The wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.”

His effectiveness came from Spirit-given wisdom rather than mere intellectual skill.

Question 9

What did Stephen's opponents do when they could not defeat his arguments?

They secretly arranged false accusations.

They stirred up the people.

They produced false witnesses.

They had Stephen arrested.

This demonstrates the increasing hostility against the gospel.

Question 10

Why were the accusations against Stephen similar to those against Jesus?

Both were falsely accused regarding the temple.

Both faced the Sanhedrin.

Both had their teachings distorted.

Luke's account shows Stephen following a path similar to his Lord.

Question 11

What does it mean that Stephen's face was like the face of an angel?

The description communicates unusual radiance, peace, and divine favor.

The exact physical appearance is not explained further.

The emphasis is that Stephen displayed remarkable heavenly calm while standing before hostile accusers.

Question 12

What is the main lesson of Acts 6 for the church today?

The church must protect unity, care fairly for vulnerable people, choose spiritually qualified servants, preserve prayer and biblical teaching, and remain faithful when opposition arises.

XXXV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 6 asks several important questions.

Do I Notice People Who Are Being Overlooked?

Who around me may need care?

How Do I Respond to Complaints?

Do I become defensive?

Or do I ask whether there is a legitimate concern that needs attention?

Do I Understand My Primary Calling?

Am I allowing good activities to distract me from what God specifically assigned me to do?

Am I Willing to Delegate?

Or do I believe everything must depend upon me?

Is My Character Strong Enough for Responsibility?

Am I respected?

Spirit-filled?

Wise?

Do I Consider Practical Service Important?

Or do I only value visible ministry?

How Do I Respond When People Misrepresent Me?

With anger?

Retaliation?

Or Spirit-produced peace?

Does Pressure Reveal Christlike character in Me?

What shows on my face when life becomes difficult?

XXXVI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“A Growing Church Must Grow in Wisdom as Well as Numbers”

Acts 6 begins:

“The number of disciples kept growing.”

Growth was wonderful.

But growth created complexity.

More people meant:

More needs.

More relationships.

More cultural differences.

More responsibilities.

More opportunities for misunderstanding.

The apostles did not treat growth as proof that everything was automatically healthy.

They adapted wisely.

They protected prayer.

They protected preaching.

They strengthened practical care.

They involved qualified servants.

And what happened?

“The Word of God spread.”

Principle

Numerical growth without spiritual wisdom can create disorder, but Spirit-guided structure can help growth become healthy and sustainable.

XXXVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Character Must Come Before Position”

The seven were not selected merely because work needed to be done.

The apostles established qualifications first.

Before responsibility:

Reputation.

Before position:

Character.

Before public recognition:

Spiritual maturity.

Principle

The church should never lower spiritual qualifications simply because a position needs to be filled.

An empty position is safer than an unqualified leader.

XXXVIII. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 6 begins with a complaint.

It ends with Stephen standing before the Sanhedrin with the face of an angel.

Between those two moments we see a church learning how to grow faithfully.

The early believers were not perfect.

Even a Spirit-empowered church experienced problems.

People were overlooked.

Complaints developed.

Cultural tensions threatened unity.

But the presence of a problem did not mean the church had failed.

What mattered was how they responded.

The apostles listened.

They acted.

They delegated.

They established qualifications.

They prayed.

They protected the ministry of the Word.

And the church continued growing.

That is an important lesson.

Healthy churches do not pretend problems do not exist.

Healthy churches handle problems biblically.

Acts 6 also reminds us that practical servants can become powerful witnesses.

Stephen did not begin this chapter behind a pulpit.

He began among seven men chosen to serve people.

Yet his faithfulness revealed a man filled with:

Faith.

The Spirit.

Grace.

Power.

Wisdom.

Then opposition came.

But Stephen remained faithful.

His enemies could not defeat his message honestly.

So they lied.

They twisted his words.

They stirred up a crowd.

They brought him before powerful leaders.

Yet when everyone looked at Stephen:

They did not see terror.

They saw something resembling heaven.

That may be the greatest challenge of Acts 6.

When pressure comes:

What do people see in us?

Fear?

Anger?

Bitterness?

Pride?

Or evidence that we have been with God?

Acts 6 calls the church to become a people of:

Fairness.

Wisdom.

Prayer.

Biblical truth.

Service.

Character.

Courage.

Peace under pressure.

And when those things are present:

The Word of God continues to spread.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the lessons of Acts Chapter 6.

Give Your church wisdom as it grows.

Help us never overlook people who need compassion, care, and support.

Open our eyes to widows, the elderly, the poor, the forgotten, the lonely, and those who may feel pushed to the side.

Give church leaders wisdom to address problems fairly and quickly.

Protect churches from division caused by resentment, favoritism, cultural differences, or neglect.

Give pastors and teachers courage to protect the ministry of prayer and the Word.

Keep administrative responsibilities from crowding out spiritual priorities.

Raise up faithful servants.

Give us men and women who are respected, Spirit-filled, wise, humble, and trustworthy.

Teach us that no ministry done for Christ is insignificant.

Help us serve faithfully whether anyone notices or not.

Give us the character of Stephen.

Make us full of faith.

Make us full of Your Spirit.

Make us full of grace.

Give us wisdom.

Give us courage.

When opposition comes, help us speak truth without anger.

When people falsely accuse us, keep us from retaliation.

When pressure becomes intense, fill us with heavenly peace.

May our lives reflect Your presence so clearly that even our enemies recognize something different about us.

And through faithful preaching, faithful prayer, faithful service, and faithful witness:

Let Your Word continue to spread.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“And we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” — Acts 6:4

Central Truth

A healthy and growing church protects unity, cares for overlooked people, chooses Spirit-filled servants, keeps prayer and God's Word central, and produces believers whose faithfulness remains strong even under false accusation and opposition.

Acts 6 in One Sentence

As growth creates a challenge within the Jerusalem church, the apostles wisely appoint seven Spirit-filled servants so prayer and the Word remain central, allowing the gospel to spread rapidly while Stephen emerges as a powerful, wise, and courageous witness for Jesus Christ.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 7 — Stephen's Speech and Martyrdom

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 7 contains the longest recorded speech in the book of Acts and one of the most powerful defenses of the Christian faith in the New Testament.

Stephen stands before the Sanhedrin accused of speaking against:

Moses.

The law.

The temple.

Instead of merely defending himself, Stephen walks the council through Israel's history.

He speaks about:

- Abraham.
- Isaac.
- Jacob.
- Joseph.
- Moses.
- Israel in the wilderness.
- The tabernacle.
- David.
- Solomon.
- The prophets.

Stephen's argument is not random.

He is demonstrating several major truths.

First:

God's presence has never been confined to one location.

God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia.

God was with Joseph in Egypt.

God appeared to Moses in the wilderness.

God led Israel through the desert.

Therefore the religious leaders were wrong to think God's presence could be restricted to the temple.

Second:

Israel repeatedly rejected the very servants God sent to deliver them.

Joseph was rejected by his brothers.

Moses was rejected by his own people.

The prophets were persecuted.

Now the leaders had rejected Jesus Christ.

Third:

Religious privilege does not guarantee spiritual obedience.

Israel possessed:

The covenant.

Circumcision.

The law.

The tabernacle.

The temple.

The prophets.

Yet again and again the people resisted God.

Finally Stephen turns directly toward the council and says:

“You always resist the Holy Spirit—just as your ancestors did.”

The council becomes furious.

Stephen, however, remains full of the Holy Spirit.

He looks into heaven and sees:

The glory of God.

And:

Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

The council drags Stephen outside the city and stones him.

As he dies, Stephen prays two prayers remarkably similar to the prayers of Jesus from the cross.

First:

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Then:

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

Stephen becomes the first recorded Christian martyr in Acts.

Yet his death is not the end of the story.

Standing nearby is a young man named:

Saul.

The man who watches Stephen die will eventually become Paul the apostle and carry the gospel across the Roman world.

Acts 7 therefore teaches:

God's purposes continue even when His servants are rejected, persecuted, and killed, because His presence is not confined to buildings and His truth cannot be destroyed by human opposition.

I. STEPHEN IS QUESTIONED

Acts 7:1 — “Are These Things True?”

“Then the high priest asked Stephen, ‘Are these things true?’”

Stephen has been accused of speaking against Moses, the law, and the temple.

Now he is given an opportunity to answer.

Cross References

John 18:19

The high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching.

Matthew 26:62

The high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are You going to answer? What do You say about these accusations against You?”

Mark 14:60

The high priest stood before them and asked Jesus, “Are You not going to answer the accusations these men are bringing against You?”

Spiritual Principle

False accusation can become an opportunity for faithful testimony.

Stephen does not panic.

He does not respond with insults.

He begins with Scripture.

II. THE GOD OF GLORY APPEARS TO ABRAHAM

Acts 7:2

“Stephen replied, ‘Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.’”

Stephen begins before the temple.

Before Moses.

Before Israel possessed the promised land.

God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia.

Cross References

Genesis 11:31

Terah took Abram, Lot, and Sarai and left Ur of the Chaldeans intending to go toward Canaan. They traveled as far as Haran and settled there.

Genesis 15:7

The Lord told Abram, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession.”

Nehemiah 9:7

You are the Lord God who chose Abram, brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and gave him the name Abraham.

Key Truth

God's presence was active before there was a temple in Jerusalem.

Stephen is already challenging the idea that God can be confined to one building.

III. GOD CALLS ABRAHAM TO LEAVE

Acts 7:3

“God said, ‘Leave your country and your relatives, and go to the land I will show you.’”

Abraham's journey began with a divine command.

Cross References

Genesis 12:1

The Lord told Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.”

Hebrews 11:8

By faith Abraham obeyed when God called him to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance. He went out even though he did not know where he was going.

Genesis 12:4

Abram went as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him.

Spiritual Principle

Faith obeys God before it sees the entire path.

Abraham did not receive every detail.

He received enough truth to obey.

IV. ABRAHAM MOVES TOWARD THE PROMISE

Acts 7:4

“So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After his father died, God brought him to this land where you now live.”

God progressively led Abraham toward the land of promise.

Cross References

Genesis 11:32

Terah lived 205 years and died in Haran.

Genesis 12:5

Abram took Sarai, Lot, all their possessions, and the people connected with their household, and they set out for the land of Canaan.

Genesis 13:12

Abram lived in the land of Canaan while Lot settled near the cities of the plain.

Spiritual Principle

God's promises often unfold through stages rather than all at once.

V. ABRAHAM LIVES BY PROMISE

Acts 7:5

“God gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to put his foot on. But He promised to give it to him and to his descendants, even though Abraham had no child at the time.”

Abraham lived in the land but did not possess it as an inheritance during most of his life.

He lived by promise.

Cross References

Genesis 12:7

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your descendants.”

Genesis 15:3

Abram said, “You have given me no child, so someone born in my household will become my heir.”

Genesis 17:8

God told Abraham, “I will give you and your descendants the land where you now live as foreigners, all the land of Canaan, as a permanent possession, and I will be their God.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faith sometimes lives on a promise long before it possesses the fulfillment.

VI. GOD FORETELLS ISRAEL'S SUFFERING

Acts 7:6

“God told him, ‘Your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years.’”

Israel's suffering in Egypt did not surprise God.

Cross References

Genesis 15:13

God told Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will live as foreigners in a land that is not theirs. They will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.”

Exodus 1:14

The Egyptians made the Israelites' lives bitter with hard labor involving mortar, bricks, and every kind of field work.

Galatians 3:17

Paul explains that the law came 430 years after God's covenant promise and did not cancel the promise God had already established.

Spiritual Principle

God's foreknowledge of suffering does not mean God has lost control during suffering.

VII. GOD WILL JUDGE THE OPPRESSOR

Acts 7:7

“But I will judge the nation that enslaves them, and afterward they will come out and worship Me in this place.”

God promised both:

Judgment.

And deliverance.

Cross References

Genesis 15:14

God said, “I will judge the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.”

Exodus 3:12

God told Moses, “I will certainly be with you. When you bring the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

Exodus 7:4

The Lord said, “Pharaoh will not listen to you, so I will lay My hand upon Egypt and bring My people out by great acts of judgment.”

Key Truth

God sees oppression, remembers His covenant, and acts according to His timing.

VIII. THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION

Acts 7:8

“Then God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. So Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day. Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of the twelve patriarchs.”

Stephen acknowledges Israel's covenant heritage.

He is not rejecting Israel's history.

He is demonstrating that he understands it.

Cross References

Genesis 17:10

God told Abraham, “This is My covenant with you and your descendants: every male among you must be circumcised.”

Genesis 21:4

Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, just as God commanded.

Genesis 49:28

These are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father Jacob said when he blessed them.

Spiritual Principle

Religious signs are meaningful, but outward covenant signs never replace inward obedience to God.

That becomes central later in Stephen's sermon.

IX. THE PATRIARCHS REJECT JOSEPH

Acts 7:9

“The patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, so they sold him into slavery in Egypt. But God was with him.”

This begins one of Stephen's major patterns.

The brothers rejected Joseph.

But God was with Joseph.

Cross References

Genesis 37:11

Joseph's brothers became jealous of him, but his father kept thinking about what Joseph had said.

Genesis 37:28

When the Midianite traders came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him from the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver. The traders took Joseph to Egypt.

Genesis 39:2

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became successful while serving in the house of his Egyptian master.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Human rejection does not cancel divine presence.

Joseph was rejected by his brothers.

But:

“God was with him.”

X. GOD EXALTS THE REJECTED JOSEPH

Acts 7:10

“And rescued him from all his troubles. God gave Joseph wisdom and favor before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him governor over Egypt and all his household.”

The rejected brother becomes the ruler who will later save the family.

Cross References

Genesis 41:40

Pharaoh told Joseph, “You will be over my household, and all my people will obey your commands. Only in the throne itself will I be greater than you.”

Psalms 105:21

Pharaoh made Joseph master over his household and ruler over everything he possessed.

Genesis 41:39

Pharaoh told Joseph, “Since God has revealed all this to you, there is no one as wise and discerning as you.”

Spiritual Principle

God can use rejection as part of the path toward His greater purpose.

Joseph becomes an important picture in Stephen's argument.

The one rejected by his own people later becomes their deliverer.

XI. FAMINE BRINGS THE BROTHERS TO JOSEPH

Acts 7:11–12

“Then a famine struck Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering. Our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time.”

Cross References

Genesis 41:54

The seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had predicted. The famine spread throughout the lands, but there was food in Egypt.

Genesis 42:5

Jacob's sons went to Egypt to buy grain because the famine had reached Canaan.

Genesis 41:57

People from many lands came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph because the famine was severe everywhere.

Genesis 42:2

Jacob told his sons, "I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some so we may live and not die."

Genesis 42:3

Ten of Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain.

Genesis 43:1

The famine continued to be severe in the land.

Spiritual Principle

God can use circumstances people fear to bring them toward the very provision He has prepared.

XII. JOSEPH REVEALS HIMSELF

Acts 7:13

"On their second visit, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, and Pharaoh came to know Joseph's family."

The rejected brother is finally recognized.

Cross References

Genesis 45:1

Joseph could no longer control his emotions. He ordered everyone except his brothers to leave, and then he revealed himself to them.

Genesis 45:3

Joseph told his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” His brothers were terrified and could not answer him.

Genesis 45:16

News reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had arrived, and Pharaoh and his officials were pleased.

Spiritual Principle

Recognition sometimes comes after rejection.

Stephen is building toward Jesus.

Israel had rejected Christ.

But rejection did not change His true identity.

XIII. JACOB'S FAMILY COMES TO EGYPT

Acts 7:14–16

“Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family—seventy-five in all. Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. Their bodies were later carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb Abraham had bought.”

Cross References

Genesis 45:9

Joseph told his brothers, “Go quickly to my father and tell him that God has made me ruler over all Egypt. Come down to me without delay.”

Genesis 46:27

Jacob's entire household connected with the move into Egypt numbered seventy according to the Hebrew family reckoning recorded in Genesis.

Deuteronomy 10:22

Your ancestors went down to Egypt as seventy persons, but now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars.

Genesis 46:6

Jacob and his family took their livestock and possessions and went to Egypt.

Genesis 49:33

When Jacob finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Genesis 50:26

Joseph died at the age of 110. His body was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Genesis 33:19

Jacob purchased a piece of land near Shechem from the sons of Hamor.

Joshua 24:32

Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the land Jacob had purchased.

Genesis 50:13

Jacob's sons carried his body to Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah.

Important Observation

Stephen is summarizing patriarchal burial traditions in compressed form as part of a speech whose central purpose is theological, not to provide a detailed land-title chronology.

His main point remains:

God was directing Israel's history long before the temple existed.

XIV. GOD'S PROMISE DRAWS NEAR

Acts 7:17

“As the time for God’s promise to Abraham drew near, the people increased greatly in Egypt.”

God's promise was moving toward fulfillment.

Cross References

Exodus 1:7

The Israelites were fruitful, multiplied greatly, increased in number, and became extremely strong, so the land was filled with them.

Genesis 47:27

Israel settled in Egypt, acquired property, became fruitful, and multiplied greatly.

Exodus 1:20

God was good to the midwives, and the people continued increasing and became very strong.

Spiritual Principle

God may fulfill His promise during circumstances that look increasingly dangerous.

XV. A NEW KING OPPRESSES ISRAEL

Acts 7:18–19

“Then another king arose who did not know Joseph. He treated our ancestors harshly, forcing them to abandon their newborn babies so they would die.”

Cross References

Exodus 1:8

A new king arose over Egypt who did not recognize Joseph's importance.

Exodus 1:9

Pharaoh said, “Look, the Israelites have become too numerous and powerful for us.”

Exodus 1:10

Pharaoh said, “Come, we must deal wisely with them before they multiply further.”

Exodus 1:16

Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill the male babies at birth.

Exodus 1:22

Pharaoh commanded his people to throw every Hebrew baby boy into the Nile.

Exodus 1:11

The Egyptians appointed slave masters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor.

Spiritual Principle

God's covenant people may experience severe oppression without being abandoned by God.

XVI. MOSES IS BORN

Acts 7:20

“At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father’s house.”

At the height of danger, God prepares a deliverer.

Cross References

Exodus 2:2

Moses' mother gave birth to a son and saw that he was a beautiful child, so she hid him for three months.

Hebrews 11:23

By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months because they saw he was a special child and were not afraid of the king's command.

Exodus 2:3

When Moses' mother could no longer hide him, she placed him in a waterproof basket among the reeds along the Nile.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can begin preparing deliverance while oppression still appears to be winning.

XVII. MOSES IS RAISED IN PHARAOH'S HOUSE

Acts 7:21–22

“When he was left outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and raised him as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.”

Cross References

Exodus 2:5

Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe at the Nile and saw the basket among the reeds.

Exodus 2:10

When the child grew older, Moses' mother brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son.

Exodus 2:3

Moses had been placed in a basket among the reeds along the river.

1 Kings 4:30

Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt.

Exodus 4:10

Moses later told the Lord that he did not consider himself an eloquent speaker and felt slow in speech.

Luke 24:19

Jesus was described as a prophet powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.

Spiritual Principle

God can use education and preparation, but ability alone does not create God's timing.

XVIII. MOSES TRIES TO DEFEND HIS PEOPLE

Acts 7:23–24

“When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated, so he defended him and killed the Egyptian.”

Cross References

Exodus 2:11

After Moses had grown up, he went out to his own people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew.

Hebrews 11:24

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known merely as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Hebrews 11:25

He chose to suffer with God's people rather than enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin.

Exodus 2:12

Moses looked around, saw no one, killed the Egyptian, and hid the body in the sand.

Deuteronomy 32:35

The Lord says, “Vengeance belongs to Me, and repayment is Mine.”

Psalms 82:3

Defend the weak and the fatherless. Uphold the rights of the poor and oppressed.

Spiritual Principle

A right concern carried out in the wrong way can still produce serious consequences.

XIX. MOSES EXPECTS HIS PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND

Acts 7:25

“Moses thought his people would realize God was using him to rescue them, but they did not understand.”

This verse is central to Stephen's argument.

A deliverer appears.

His own people do not recognize him.

Cross References**Exodus 2:14**

The Hebrew man said to Moses, “Who made you ruler and judge over us?”

John 1:11

Jesus came to His own people, but His own did not receive Him.

Isaiah 53:3

The Servant was despised and rejected by people, a man of sorrows who knew suffering.

Spiritual Principle

God's chosen deliverer may be rejected before being recognized.

Joseph was rejected.

Moses was rejected.

Jesus was rejected.

XX. MOSES TRIES TO MAKE PEACE

Acts 7:26

“The next day he came upon two Israelites fighting. He tried to make peace between them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you hurt each other?’”

Cross References

Exodus 2:13

The next day Moses saw two Hebrew men fighting and asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you striking your fellow Hebrew?”

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are those who make peace, because they will be called children of God.

Genesis 13:8

Abram told Lot, “There should not be strife between you and me or between our herdsmen, because we are relatives.”

Spiritual Principle

Sin can create conflict even among people who should recognize their shared identity.

XXI. MOSES IS REJECTED

Acts 7:27–28

“But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’”

Cross References

Exodus 2:14

The man replied to Moses, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you planning to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”

Luke 12:14

Jesus answered, “Man, who appointed Me judge or arbitrator over you?”

Matthew 21:23

The religious leaders asked Jesus, “By what authority are You doing these things?”

Exodus 2:15

When Pharaoh heard what Moses had done, he tried to kill him, but Moses fled from Pharaoh.

John 8:37

Jesus told His opponents, “You are looking for a way to kill Me because My Word has no place in you.”

Key Truth

The rejected Moses becomes the deliverer God later sends back.

This strongly anticipates Stephen's charge concerning Jesus.

XXII. MOSES FLEES TO MIDIAN

Acts 7:29

“When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he lived as a foreigner and had two sons.”

Cross References**Exodus 2:15**

Moses fled from Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian.

Exodus 2:22

Moses named his son Gershom because he said, “I have become a foreigner in a foreign land.”

Exodus 18:4

Moses' other son was named Eliezer because Moses said, “The God of my father was my helper and saved me from Pharaoh's sword.”

Spiritual Principle

God may use long seasons of obscurity to prepare His servants.

Moses spends forty years away from Egypt.

XXIII. THE BURNING BUSH

Acts 7:30

“After forty years, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.”

Forty years earlier Moses had acted.

Now God calls him.

Cross References

Exodus 3:1

Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Exodus 3:2

The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire from within a bush that burned without being consumed.

Exodus 19:11

Israel was told to prepare for the Lord's descent upon Mount Sinai.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's timing may seem slow, but preparation is not wasted time.

XXIV. GOD SPEAKS TO MOSES

Acts 7:31–32

“When Moses saw it, he was amazed, and as he went closer to look, he heard the voice of the Lord: ‘I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.”

Cross References

Exodus 3:3

Moses said, “I will turn aside and see this amazing sight—why the bush is not burning up.”

Exodus 3:4

When the Lord saw Moses coming closer, God called to him from the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

Exodus 3:6

God said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Matthew 22:32

Jesus quoted God saying, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” and explained that God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Exodus 3:15

God told Moses that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had sent him.

Spiritual Principle

God remains faithful to His covenant across generations.

XXV. HOLY GROUND

Acts 7:33

“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.’”

The ground was holy because God was present.

Notice where this occurred:

Not Jerusalem.

Not the temple.

The wilderness.

Cross References

Exodus 3:5

God said, “Do not come any closer. Remove your sandals, because the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

Joshua 5:15

The commander of the Lord's army told Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, because the place where you stand is holy."

Ecclesiastes 5:1

Guard your steps when you approach the house of God. Come ready to listen rather than offering the sacrifice of fools.

Key Truth

God's presence makes a place holy; a place does not contain or control God's presence.

This strikes directly at Stephen's accusers.

XXVI. GOD SEES, HEARS, AND COMES DOWN

Acts 7:34

"I have seen the oppression of My people in Egypt, I have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. Now go, I am sending you back to Egypt."

Three phrases reveal God's compassion.

"I have seen."

"I have heard."

"I have come down."

Cross References

Exodus 3:7

The Lord said, "I have certainly seen the suffering of My people in Egypt. I have heard their cries because of their slave masters, and I know their pain."

Exodus 3:9

God said, "The cry of the Israelites has reached Me, and I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them."

Exodus 3:10

God told Moses, "Go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people Israel out of Egypt."

Spiritual Principle

God is never indifferent to the suffering of His people.

XXVII. THE REJECTED MOSES BECOMES THE DELIVERER

Acts 7:35

“This same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’—God sent him to be their ruler and deliverer.”

This is one of Stephen's strongest parallels.

The one Israel rejected:

God sent.

God authorized.

God used.

Cross References

Exodus 2:14

The Israelite said to Moses, “Who made you ruler and judge over us?”

Exodus 3:10

God said, “I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people out of Egypt.”

Isaiah 63:9

In all their distress God was distressed, and the messenger of His presence saved them. In His love and mercy He redeemed them.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Human rejection does not determine whom God has chosen.

This same pattern reaches its climax in Jesus Christ.

XXVIII. MOSES LEADS ISRAEL OUT

Acts 7:36

“He led them out of Egypt, performing wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years.”

Cross References

Exodus 14:21

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back with a powerful wind, making dry ground through the waters.

Exodus 7:3

God told Moses that He would multiply His signs and wonders in Egypt.

Numbers 14:33

Israel's children would wander in the wilderness for forty years because of the generation's rebellion.

Spiritual Principle

The rejected deliverer became the instrument of undeniable divine power.

XXIX. MOSES POINTED TO A GREATER PROPHET

Acts 7:37

“This is the same Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people.’”

Moses himself pointed beyond Moses.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 18:15

Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people. You must listen to Him.”

Deuteronomy 18:18

God said, “I will raise up a prophet like you from among their own people. I will put My words in His mouth.”

John 1:21

The religious leaders asked John, “Are you the Prophet?” and John answered, “No.”

Key Truth

Moses' ministry itself pointed forward toward Jesus Christ.

Therefore accepting Moses while rejecting Jesus was ultimately inconsistent with Moses' own testimony.

XXX. MOSES RECEIVES LIVING WORDS

Acts 7:38

“He was with the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors. He received the living words to pass on to us.”

Stephen does not dishonor Moses.

He honors Moses.

He calls God's revelation:

“Living words.”

Cross References

Exodus 19:3

Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain.

Deuteronomy 33:2

Moses described the Lord coming from Sinai in majesty and giving His fiery law to His people.

Galatians 3:19

Paul explains that the law was put into effect through angels and entrusted through a mediator.

Spiritual Principle

The problem was never the law. The problem was Israel's refusal to obey the God who gave it.

XXXI. ISRAEL REJECTS MOSES IN ITS HEART

Acts 7:39

“But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.”

Physically they were outside Egypt.

Spiritually Egypt remained inside them.

Cross References

Numbers 14:4

The Israelites said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and return to Egypt.”

Exodus 16:3

The Israelites complained that they wished they had died in Egypt where they had food rather than being brought into the wilderness.

Psalms 106:21

They forgot God their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A person can leave Egypt physically while still carrying Egypt in the heart.

Deliverance must affect both location and loyalty.

XXXII. ISRAEL DEMANDS OTHER GODS

Acts 7:40–41

“They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us.’ ... So they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and celebrated what their hands had made.”

Cross References

Exodus 32:1

The people told Aaron, “Make gods for us who will go before us, because we do not know what happened to Moses.”

Exodus 32:23

Aaron repeated that the people had asked him to make gods to lead them.

Exodus 32:8

God said Israel had quickly turned aside from His commands and made a calf to worship.

Exodus 32:4

Aaron fashioned the gold into the form of a calf, and the people declared it to be their god.

Exodus 32:6

The people rose early, offered sacrifices to the calf, ate, drank, and celebrated.

Psalms 106:19

At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an image made of metal.

Spiritual Principle

Idolatry celebrates what human hands make instead of worshiping the God who made human hands.

XXXIII. GOD GIVES THEM OVER

Acts 7:42–43

Stephen quotes the prophets to demonstrate Israel's persistent idolatry.

“But God turned away from them and let them worship the sun, moon, and stars.”

Cross References

Deuteronomy 4:19

Moses warned Israel not to look at the sun, moon, and stars and be drawn away to worship what God created.

Amos 5:25

God asked Israel whether their wilderness sacrifices had truly represented faithful worship toward Him.

Jeremiah 19:13

Houses in Jerusalem became defiled because people burned incense on rooftops to the stars and poured offerings to false gods.

Stephen continues:

“You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.”

Cross References

Amos 5:26

Israel carried shrines and images connected with false gods they had made for themselves.

2 Kings 17:6

The king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israelites into exile.

Leviticus 18:21

Israel was forbidden to sacrifice children to Molek or dishonor the name of God.

Spiritual Principle

Persistent rejection of God can result in God giving people over to the false worship they insist upon.

XXXIV. THE TABERNACLE WAS GOD'S DESIGN

Acts 7:44

“Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.”

Stephen is not against the tabernacle.

He acknowledges its divine origin.

Cross References

Exodus 25:9

God told Moses, “Make the tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I show you.”

Exodus 25:40

God said, “Be careful to make everything according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain.”

Exodus 38:21

The tabernacle connected with the covenant testimony was made according to the instructions God gave through Moses.

Spiritual Principle

Something can be genuinely ordained by God without being God Himself.

The tabernacle was sacred.

But it was never meant to imprison God's presence.

XXXV. THE TABERNACLE ENTERS THE LAND

Acts 7:45

“After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors brought it with Joshua when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained until the time of David.”

Cross References

Joshua 18:1

The whole congregation of Israel gathered at Shiloh and set up the tabernacle there.

2 Samuel 6:17

David brought the ark of the Lord into the tent he had prepared for it.

Joshua 24:8

God reminded Israel that He gave their enemies into their hands and brought them into the promised land.

Spiritual Principle

God's presence accompanied His people before Solomon's temple existed.

XXXVI. DAVID DESIRES A HOUSE FOR GOD

Acts 7:46

“David, who enjoyed God’s favor, asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.”

Cross References

2 Samuel 7:2

David told Nathan the prophet, “I live in a house of cedar while the ark of God remains in a tent.”

Psalm 132:5

David desired to find a dwelling place associated with the mighty God of Jacob.

1 Chronicles 17:1

David told Nathan, “I live in a cedar house, but the ark of the Lord remains under a tent.”

Spiritual Principle

David's desire honored God.

But God's presence was still greater than any building.

XXXVII. SOLOMON BUILDS THE TEMPLE

Acts 7:47

“But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.”

Cross References

1 Kings 6:1

Solomon began building the temple of the Lord during the fourth year of his reign.

1 Kings 8:20

Solomon declared that the Lord had fulfilled His promise and that he had built the temple for the name of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 3:1

Solomon began building the Lord's temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah.

Key Truth

Stephen is not denying that God authorized the temple.

He is denying that God can be confined to it.

XXXVIII. GOD DOES NOT LIVE IN HOUSES MADE BY HUMAN HANDS

Acts 7:48

“However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands.”

This directly addresses one of the accusations against Stephen.

Cross References

1 Kings 8:27

Solomon prayed, “Will God truly live upon the earth? Even the heavens and highest heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple I have built!”

Isaiah 66:1

The Lord says, “Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool. What kind of house could you build for Me?”

Acts 17:24

Paul later preached that the God who made the world does not live in temples made by human hands.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may meet people in buildings, but no building contains God.

XXXIX. HEAVEN IS GOD'S THRONE

Acts 7:49–50

“Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me? says the Lord. Or where will My resting place be? Has not My hand made all these things?”

Cross References

Isaiah 66:1

The Lord declares, “Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool. What house could you build for Me?”

Matthew 5:34

Jesus said not to swear by heaven because it is God's throne.

Matthew 23:22

Jesus said the person who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the One seated upon it.

Isaiah 66:2

The Lord says, “My hand made all these things, and so they came into being.”

Psalms 24:1

The earth belongs to the Lord, along with everything in it, the world and all who live within it.

Psalms 89:11

The heavens belong to You, and the earth also belongs to You. You established the world and everything in it.

Spiritual Principle

The Creator cannot be contained by something His creatures build.

XL. STEPHEN TURNS THE ACCUSATION AROUND

Acts 7:51

“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You always resist the Holy Spirit—just as your ancestors did.”

Until this point Stephen has spoken mainly historically.

Now he speaks directly.

Stiff-Necked

Unwilling to submit.

Uncircumcised Hearts and Ears

They possessed outward religious signs but lacked inward surrender.

Resist the Holy Spirit

They opposed God's message and messengers.

Cross References

Exodus 33:3

God described Israel as a stiff-necked people who repeatedly resisted Him.

Jeremiah 6:10

Jeremiah said the people's ears were closed and they were unable to listen to God's Word.

Isaiah 63:10

Israel rebelled and grieved God's Holy Spirit, and their rebellion brought judgment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Religious privilege becomes spiritually dangerous when outward identity replaces inward obedience.

XLI. THEY PERSECUTED THE PROPHETS

Acts 7:52

“Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him—”

Stephen connects the council directly with Israel's historical pattern.

Cross References

Matthew 23:31

Jesus told the religious leaders that they testified against themselves by admitting they were descendants of those who killed the prophets.

1 Thessalonians 2:15

Paul spoke of those who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted God's servants.

Acts 3:14

Peter told the people, “You rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be released instead.”

Key Truth

Jesus is the climax of God's rejected messengers.

Joseph rejected.

Moses rejected.

Prophets rejected.

Christ rejected.

Now Stephen is being rejected.

XLII. THEY RECEIVED THE LAW BUT DID NOT OBEY IT

Acts 7:53

“You who received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

Stephen answers the accusation that he opposes the law.

His answer is essentially:

You possess the law—but you do not obey it.

Cross References

Galatians 3:19

The law was put into effect through angels and entrusted through a mediator.

Hebrews 2:2

The message spoken through angels proved binding, and every violation received a just consequence.

Romans 2:23

Paul asked, “You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?”

Spiritual Principle

Possessing Scripture is not the same as obeying Scripture.

A Bible on the shelf does not transform anyone.

Truth must be believed and obeyed.

XLIII. THE SANHEDRIN BECOMES FURIOUS

Acts 7:54

“When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.”

Stephen's message exposes their hearts.

Their reaction is rage.

Cross References

Psalms 35:16

Wicked mockers gnashed their teeth against the righteous sufferer.

Matthew 8:12

Jesus described judgment with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Job 16:9

Job described his enemy tearing at him in anger and grinding his teeth against him.

Spiritual Principle

Conviction can lead either to repentance or resistance.

Acts 2:

People were cut to the heart and asked:

“What should we do?”

Acts 7:

People were cut to the heart and attacked the preacher.

XLIV. STEPHEN LOOKS TOWARD HEAVEN

Acts 7:55

“But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

The council looks at Stephen with rage.

Stephen looks toward heaven.

Cross References

John 12:41

Isaiah saw Christ's glory and spoke about Him.

Psalms 110:1

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool beneath Your feet.”

Luke 22:69

Jesus told the council that the Son of Man would be seated at the right hand of the power of God.

Important Observation

Jesus is commonly described as seated at God's right hand.

Here Stephen sees Him:

Standing.

Many Christian interpreters have understood this as a picture of Christ receiving, honoring, or bearing witness to His faithful martyr.

The text does not explicitly explain why Jesus stands, but the image is deeply powerful.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When earth rejects the faithful servant, heaven has not forgotten him.

XLV. STEPHEN SEES THE SON OF MAN

Acts 7:56

“‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’”

Stephen uses Jesus' own title:

“Son of Man.”

Cross References

Ezekiel 1:1

Ezekiel said the heavens were opened and he saw visions from God.

Matthew 26:64

Jesus told the Sanhedrin, “You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming upon the clouds of heaven.”

John 1:51

Jesus said, “You will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Key Truth

Stephen's vision confirms the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

The same council that rejected Jesus now hears Stephen declare that Jesus stands in heavenly glory.

XLVI. THEY REFUSE TO LISTEN

Acts 7:57

“At this they covered their ears and shouted loudly. They all rushed at him.”

The imagery is tragic.

Stephen had just accused them of having uncircumcised ears.

Now they physically cover their ears.

Cross References

Matthew 26:65

The high priest tore his clothing and accused Jesus of blasphemy.

Jeremiah 20:10

Jeremiah said he heard many whispering accusations and threats against him.

Amos 7:10

Amaziah accused Amos before the king because Amos' message was unwelcome.

Spiritual Principle

A person who continually refuses truth may eventually become unwilling even to hear it.

XLVII. STEPHEN IS DRAGGED OUT AND STONED

Acts 7:58

“They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. The witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.”

Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr recorded in Acts.

Cross References

Leviticus 24:14

A person convicted of blasphemy under Israel's law was to be taken outside the camp, and the witnesses were involved in the execution.

Numbers 15:36

The congregation took the offender outside the camp and carried out the judgment.

Acts 22:20

Paul later confessed, “When the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood there approving and guarding the coats of those killing him.”

A Young Man Named Saul

Luke quietly introduces Saul.

At this moment Saul is associated with persecution.

Later:

Saul will meet Jesus.

Saul will become Paul.

Paul will preach the gospel Stephen died proclaiming.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You never know who may be watching your faithfulness.

Stephen could not see what God would later do with Saul.

XLVIII. “LORD JESUS, RECEIVE MY SPIRIT”

Acts 7:59

“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’”

Stephen directs his dying prayer to Jesus.

Cross References

Luke 23:46

Jesus cried out, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” After saying this, He died.

Psalms 31:5

Into Your hand I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, Lord, faithful God.

1 Timothy 1:12

Paul thanked Christ Jesus our Lord for strengthening him and appointing him to service.

Key Truth

Stephen trusted Jesus with his final breath.

Spiritual Principle

The believer can entrust both life and death to Christ.

XLIX. STEPHEN FORGIVES HIS MURDERERS

Acts 7:60

“Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Stephen's final words resemble Jesus' prayer from the cross.

Cross References

Luke 23:34

Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.”

Matthew 5:44

Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

1 Corinthians 15:6

Paul spoke of believers who had died by using the language of those who had “fallen asleep.”

Spiritual Principle

Stephen did not merely preach Jesus—he died like a man transformed by Jesus.

His final prayer was not:

“Destroy them.”

It was:

“Do not hold this sin against them.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Forgiveness is most clearly revealed when we extend it to people who do not deserve it.

L. STEPHEN'S SPEECH IN ONE GREAT PATTERN

Stephen's sermon repeatedly shows the same pattern.

Joseph

Rejected by his brothers.

Then exalted by God.

Then used to save them.

Moses

Rejected by Israel.

Then sent back by God as ruler and deliverer.

The Prophets

Rejected and persecuted.

Yet they spoke God's truth.

Jesus

Rejected and killed.

Then raised and exalted by God.

Stephen

Rejected and killed.

Yet received into the presence of Christ.

Central Pattern

People may reject God's messenger without defeating God's message.

LI. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT GOD'S PRESENCE

Stephen's speech moves geographically.

Mesopotamia

God appears to Abraham.

Egypt

God is with Joseph.

Midian

God appears to Moses.

Sinai

God speaks.

Wilderness

God leads Israel.

Tabernacle

God dwells among His people.

Jerusalem

The temple is built.

But Stephen concludes:

“The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands.”

Spiritual Principle

God is not geographically imprisoned.

His presence cannot be controlled by buildings.

LII. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT RELIGIOUS TRADITION

The Sanhedrin possessed an extraordinary religious heritage.

They had:

Abraham.

Moses.

The covenant.

The law.

The temple.

The prophets.

Yet Stephen says:

“You always resist the Holy Spirit.”

Key Truth

A person can possess an impressive religious heritage while remaining spiritually resistant to God.

Religious history does not substitute for personal faith.

LIII. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT REJECTION

Stephen emphasizes repeated rejection.

Joseph's brothers rejected Joseph.

Israel rejected Moses.

Israel rejected the prophets.

The leaders rejected Christ.

Now they reject Stephen.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Rejecting God's messenger does not change God's truth; it only reveals the condition of the hearer's heart.

LIV. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT COURAGE

Stephen knew his audience was hostile.

He still told the truth.

But biblical courage is not merely speaking harshly.

Stephen first carefully walks through their shared history.

Then he applies it directly.

Spiritual Principle

Courage speaks truth clearly even when truth is costly.

Stephen's sermon cost him his life.

Yet he would not betray Christ to save himself.

LV. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Stephen's last words may be as powerful as his sermon.

A person can preach about forgiveness.

Stephen practiced it while being murdered.

He prayed:

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

Spiritual Principle

The deepest evidence of gospel transformation may appear in the way a believer treats enemies.

LVI. STEPHEN AND JESUS — IMPORTANT PARALLELS

Stephen's final hours resemble the final hours of Christ.

Jesus Faced False Witnesses

Stephen faced false witnesses.

Jesus Stood Before the Council

Stephen stood before the council.

Jesus Was Accused Regarding the Temple

Stephen was accused regarding the temple.

Jesus Was Taken Outside

Stephen was dragged outside the city.

Jesus Committed His Spirit to the Father

Stephen committed his spirit to Jesus.

Jesus Prayed for His Enemies

Stephen prayed for his enemies.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The goal of discipleship is not merely to believe truths about Jesus but to become increasingly like Jesus.

LVII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 7

1. God's Plan Unfolds Through History

Abraham.

Joseph.

Moses.

The prophets.

Jesus.

Principle:

Biblical history is moving toward God's redemptive purposes in Christ.

2. Human Rejection Does Not Stop God's Purpose

Joseph was rejected.

Moses was rejected.

Jesus was rejected.

Principle:

God's chosen servant may be rejected by people without being rejected by God.

3. God's Presence Is Not Limited to Buildings

God appeared and worked in many places long before the temple.

Principle:

No human structure contains the Most High God.

4. Religious Privilege Does Not Equal Obedience

Israel possessed extraordinary revelation but repeatedly rebelled.

Principle:

Knowing religious truth without obeying it can harden rather than transform the heart.

5. People Can Resist the Holy Spirit

Stephen accused the council of resisting God's Spirit through rejecting His truth.

Principle:

A hardened heart continually pushes away God's call to repentance.

6. Faithfulness May Cost Everything

Stephen remained faithful even when facing death.

Principle:

Christ is worthy of obedience even when obedience becomes costly.

7. Christians Are Called to Forgive Their Enemies

Stephen prayed for the people killing him.

Principle:

The gospel creates a kind of forgiveness the natural heart cannot produce by itself.

LVIII. WHY STEPHEN'S SPEECH MATTERS

Stephen is doing more than retelling Israelite history.

He is putting the Sanhedrin on trial.

They thought Stephen was defending himself.

By the end:

Stephen is confronting them.

The question becomes:

Who is truly rejecting Moses?

Stephen?

Or those who reject the Prophet Moses foretold?

Who is truly dishonoring the temple?

Stephen?

Or those who believe the Creator can be confined to it?

Who is truly disobedient to the law?

Stephen?

Or those who received the law and refused to obey it?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Word of God not only answers accusations; it exposes the heart of the accuser.

LIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did Stephen spend so much time reviewing Israel's history?

Stephen used Israel's history to demonstrate recurring patterns.

God worked outside Jerusalem.

God's servants were repeatedly rejected.

Israel repeatedly resisted divine revelation.

Stephen showed that the council's rejection of Jesus continued that same pattern.

Question 2

What did Abraham demonstrate about faith?

Abraham obeyed God's call even without knowing the full destination.

He lived by God's promise before he possessed its fulfillment.

His life demonstrates trusting obedience.

Question 3

Why is Joseph important in Stephen's argument?

Joseph was rejected by his own brothers but later exalted and used by God to save them.

That pattern anticipates Jesus, who was rejected by His own people but exalted by God.

Question 4

Why does Stephen emphasize Moses being rejected?

The council accused Stephen of dishonoring Moses.

Stephen shows that Israel's own ancestors rejected Moses.

Even more importantly, Moses foretold a coming Prophet whom God's people were commanded to hear.

Stephen identifies that greater fulfillment with Jesus.

Question 5

What does “they turned back to Egypt in their hearts” mean?

Although Israel had physically left Egypt, their desires still turned toward what Egypt represented.

They longed for their old life and turned from trusting God.

This teaches that outward separation from sin must be accompanied by inward transformation.

Question 6

Was Stephen against the temple?

Stephen was not denying that God had authorized the tabernacle or that Solomon built the temple.

His argument was that:

“The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands.”

God is greater than any building.

Question 7

What does “stiff-necked” mean?

The expression describes stubborn resistance.

It pictures someone unwilling to bow or submit.

Stephen accuses the council of continuing the same rebellious pattern as their ancestors.

Question 8

What does it mean that their hearts and ears were uncircumcised?

They possessed the outward sign of circumcision but lacked inward responsiveness to God.

Their hearts were resistant.

Their ears were unwilling to hear God's truth.

Question 9

How did the council respond to Stephen's message?

They became furious.

They gnashed their teeth.

They covered their ears.

They rushed at him.

They dragged him outside the city.

They stoned him.

Their reaction demonstrated the resistance Stephen had just described.

Question 10

What did Stephen see before he died?

He saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand.

This gave Stephen a heavenly perspective while facing earthly violence.

Question 11

Who was Saul in Acts 7:58?

Saul was a young man who stood with those killing Stephen and guarded their coats.

He later became the apostle Paul after encountering the risen Jesus.

Acts will soon show this transformation.

Question 12

What were Stephen's final prayers?

Stephen prayed:

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Then:

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

His final prayers reveal trust in Christ and forgiveness toward his enemies.

LX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 7 asks several serious questions.

Am I Willing to Follow God Like Abraham?

Even when I do not know every detail?

Do I Believe God Is Present Outside Religious Buildings?

Or have I reduced my view of God to places and traditions?

Am I Resisting Something God Has Clearly Said?

The Sanhedrin possessed Scripture but resisted its fulfillment.

Is There “Egypt” Still in My Heart?

Have I left certain sins outwardly while still longing for them inwardly?

Do I Honor Jesus as the Prophet, Deliverer, Righteous One, and Lord?**How Do I Respond When God's Word Confronts Me?**

With repentance?

Or defensiveness?

How Do I Respond to False Accusation?

Like Stephen?

Or with uncontrolled anger?

Could I Forgive Someone Who Seriously harmed me?

Stephen prayed for his killers.

Am I Living with Heaven in View?

Stephen looked upward while others looked at him with hatred.

LXI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Rejected Servant May Still Be the Servant God Has Chosen”

Stephen's sermon repeatedly returns to rejection.

Joseph was rejected.

But God was with him.

Moses was rejected.

But God sent him back as deliverer.

The prophets were rejected.

But their words were God's truth.

Jesus was rejected.

But God raised and exalted Him.

Stephen was rejected.

But heaven opened to receive him.

Principle

Human rejection is not the final verdict on a servant of God.

God's judgment matters more than public opinion.

LXII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Confuse Being Near Holy Things with Being Near God”

The Sanhedrin sat near the temple.

They knew the law.

They knew Moses.

They knew Israel's history.

They possessed religious authority.

Yet Stephen said:

“You always resist the Holy Spirit.”

That warning reaches every generation.

A person can be:

Near a Bible.

Near a church.

Near preaching.

Near Christian people.

Near religious activity.

And still have a heart far from God.

Principle

Spiritual proximity is not spiritual transformation.

God desires the heart.

LXIII. STEPHEN'S FINAL VICTORY

From an earthly perspective:

Stephen lost.

He was killed.

His enemies remained standing.

From heaven's perspective:

Stephen won.

He remained faithful.

He saw Christ.

He entrusted his spirit to Jesus.

He forgave his enemies.

He entered the presence of the Lord.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian victory is not always escaping suffering; sometimes victory means remaining faithful through suffering.

LXIV. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 7 begins with a courtroom.

It ends with a martyr.

Stephen begins surrounded by accusers.

He ends looking into heaven.

His enemies accuse him of rejecting Moses.

Stephen shows that their ancestors rejected Moses.

They accuse him of dishonoring the temple.

Stephen shows that the Creator cannot be contained by temples.

They accuse him of opposing the law.

Stephen shows that they received the law but refused to obey it.

Then Stephen reaches the heart of the issue:

“You always resist the Holy Spirit.”

That is the tragedy of Acts 7.

These men knew Scripture.

They knew history.

They knew religious tradition.

But when God's truth stood directly in front of them:

They covered their ears.

There may be no more dangerous spiritual condition than continually hearing truth while refusing to receive it.

Stephen demonstrates the opposite response.

He is:

Full of faith.

Full of wisdom.

Full of grace.

Full of power.

Full of the Holy Spirit.

When opposition rises:

He speaks truth.

When lies are told:

He remains faithful.

When the council becomes furious:

He looks toward heaven.

When stones begin falling:

He trusts Jesus.

When enemies kill him:

He forgives them.

Stephen did not merely give a great sermon.

He became the sermon.

His death proclaimed:

Jesus is worth suffering for.

Jesus is worth dying for.

Jesus receives His servants.

Jesus gives strength in persecution.

Jesus transforms hatred into forgiveness.

And while Stephen dies, a young man named Saul watches.

Stephen may never have known what God would eventually do with Saul.

But God knew.

The persecution of Acts 7 will help propel the gospel outward in Acts 8.

Saul the persecutor will become Paul the preacher.

The death of one servant will not stop God's mission.

Therefore Acts 7 leaves us with this great truth:

You may silence a witness, but you cannot silence the truth to which he bears witness.

God's purposes continue.

Christ still reigns.

The gospel still advances.

And faithful servants can face even death with their eyes fixed upon heaven.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the powerful testimony of Stephen.

Thank You for showing us through Scripture that Your purposes have been unfolding throughout history.

Thank You for calling Abraham.

Thank You for preserving Joseph.

Thank You for sending Moses.

Thank You for speaking through the prophets.

And above all, thank You for sending Jesus Christ.

Keep us from repeating the pattern of those who resisted Your messengers.

Give us soft hearts.

Give us listening ears.

Keep us from becoming stiff-necked and resistant to Your Spirit.

Help us never substitute religious tradition for genuine obedience.

Remind us that You are not confined to buildings.

You are the Creator of heaven and earth.

Teach us to worship You in spirit and truth.

Give us the faith of Abraham.

Give us the perseverance of Joseph.

Give us the courage of Moses.

Give us the boldness of Stephen.

When people falsely accuse us, help us remain truthful.

When opposition rises, fill us with Your Spirit.

When fear comes, turn our eyes toward heaven.

When we are mistreated, give us grace to forgive.

Thank You that Jesus is alive.

Thank You that He is exalted at Your right hand.

Thank You that believers can entrust their lives and deaths to Him.

Help us say with Stephen:

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

And give us enough grace to pray for our enemies:

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

Use our faithfulness in ways we may never see.

There may be a Saul watching.

There may be a future preacher observing.

There may be lives affected long after our own ministry seems finished.

Keep us faithful to the end.

May our lives and our deaths honor Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” — Acts 7:55

Central Truth

Throughout redemptive history people repeatedly rejected God's chosen servants, yet God's purposes continued; Stephen therefore calls his hearers to stop resisting the Holy Spirit, recognize the exalted Jesus Christ, and remain faithful to God even when obedience brings suffering.

Acts 7 in One Sentence

Stephen traces Israel's history from Abraham through Joseph, Moses, the wilderness, and the temple to expose a repeated pattern of resisting God's messengers, boldly identifies Jesus as the rejected Righteous One, and then dies as a Spirit-filled martyr forgiving his enemies while looking toward the exalted Christ in heaven.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 8 — The Gospel Spreads Beyond Jerusalem

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 8 marks a major turning point in the spread of the gospel.

Until this point, the church has been centered primarily in Jerusalem.

Jesus had already told His disciples:

“You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Now that promise begins unfolding dramatically.

The catalyst is persecution.

Stephen has been killed.

Saul approves of his death.

A great persecution breaks out against the church.

Believers are scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

From a human perspective, this looks disastrous.

But God turns persecution into expansion.

The believers who are scattered do not become silent.

They go everywhere:

“Preaching the word.”

Philip goes into Samaria and proclaims Christ.

The gospel crosses a major cultural boundary.

Samaritans believe.

People are healed.

Evil spirits are driven out.

And:

“There was great joy in that city.”

Acts 8 then introduces Simon the sorcerer.

Simon had amazed the people through magic and had gained a great reputation.

But when Philip preached the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, people believed and were baptized.

Simon himself professed belief and was baptized, but his later attempt to purchase spiritual power revealed that his heart was not right before God.

Peter tells him:

“Repent.”

The chapter then moves from a citywide awakening to one man traveling through the desert.

An angel directs Philip away from the crowds of Samaria toward a desert road.

There Philip meets an Ethiopian official reading Isaiah 53.

The Holy Spirit tells Philip:

“Go to that chariot.”

Philip hears the man reading Isaiah and asks:

“Do you understand what you are reading?”

The Ethiopian replies:

“How can I, unless someone explains it to me?”

Beginning with that very Scripture, Philip tells him:

The good news about Jesus.

The Ethiopian believes.

He is baptized.

And he goes on his way:

Rejoicing.

Acts 8 therefore shows the gospel moving:

From Jerusalem.

Into Samaria.

Toward Africa.

Across ethnic boundaries.

Across cultural boundaries.

Across religious boundaries.

And through both large public ministries and personal one-on-one conversations.

The central truth of Acts 8 is:

Persecution cannot stop the gospel, because the Holy Spirit directs faithful believers across human boundaries to proclaim Jesus Christ to people whom God has prepared to hear.

I. SAUL APPROVES STEPHEN'S DEATH

Acts 8:1 — Persecution Begins

“Saul agreed with the killing of Stephen. On that very day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. Everyone except the apostles was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”

Saul now becomes directly associated with the persecution of the church.

He approved Stephen's death.

Then persecution spreads.

Cross References

Acts 9:1

Saul continued breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord and went to the high priest seeking authority to arrest believers.

Matthew 10:23

Jesus said, "When people persecute you in one town, flee to another. You will not finish going through the towns before the Son of Man's purposes move forward."

Acts 1:8

Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Spiritual Principle

The persecution intended to destroy the church.

Instead, it helped fulfill Acts 1:8.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

What Satan intends to use for destruction, God can redirect for gospel expansion.

II. STEPHEN IS BURIED

Acts 8:2

"Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him."

Stephen was victorious spiritually.

But that did not mean his death brought no grief.

The believers mourned.

Cross References

Genesis 50:10

When Joseph's family reached the place of mourning near the Jordan, they mourned deeply for Jacob and observed a period of sorrow.

2 Chronicles 32:33

Hezekiah died and was buried with honor, and the people mourned his death.

Genesis 23:2

Sarah died, and Abraham went to mourn for her and weep.

Spiritual Principle

Christian hope does not forbid grief.

Believers can mourn deeply while still believing in resurrection.

III. SAUL TRIES TO DESTROY THE CHURCH

Acts 8:3

“But Saul began destroying the church. He went from house to house, dragging out men and women and throwing them into prison.”

Saul's persecution was intense and personal.

He entered homes.

Men and women were arrested.

Cross References

Acts 9:1

Saul continued threatening the Lord's disciples and seeking authority to capture them.

Galatians 1:13

Paul later said, “You have heard about my former way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it.”

1 Timothy 1:13

Paul later wrote, “I was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent man, but I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.”

Spiritual Principle

No one is beyond the reach of God's transforming grace.

The persecutor Saul will eventually become the preacher Paul.

IV. THE SCATTERED BELIEVERS PREACH

Acts 8:4

“Those who were scattered went everywhere, preaching the word.”

This verse is remarkable.

They lost:

Homes.

Security.

Community.

Normal routines.

Yet they carried the gospel with them.

Cross References

Acts 11:19

The believers scattered by persecution traveled into other regions and continued spreading the message.

Philippians 1:12

Paul said, “I want you to know that what has happened to me has actually helped advance the gospel.”

Acts 5:42

Day after day, publicly and from house to house, the believers continued teaching and proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Persecution scattered the believers geographically but could not silence them spiritually.

V. PHILIP PREACHES CHRIST IN SAMARIA

Acts 8:5

“Philip went to a city in Samaria and proclaimed Christ there.”

This is a major development.

Jewish-Samaritan hostility had existed for generations.

Yet Philip crosses that barrier.

Cross References

John 4:39

Many Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the testimony given about Him.

Acts 9:31

The church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria experienced peace, grew stronger, and increased through the encouragement of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8

Jesus said His witnesses would carry the gospel from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel crosses barriers people consider permanent.

VI. THE CROWDS LISTEN TO PHILIP

Acts 8:6

“Crowds paid close attention to what he said when they heard him and saw the miracles he performed.”

Philip's message and ministry drew widespread attention.

Cross References

Mark 16:20

The disciples went out preaching, and the Lord worked with them, confirming the message through accompanying signs.

John 6:2

A large crowd followed Jesus because they saw the miraculous signs He performed for the sick.

John 7:31

Many people believed in Jesus and said, “When the Messiah comes, will He perform more signs than this man has done?”

Spiritual Principle

Signs should confirm the message, not replace the message.

Philip's central work remained:

Proclaiming Christ.

VII. PEOPLE ARE DELIVERED AND HEALED

Acts 8:7

“Many evil spirits came out of people, screaming loudly, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.”

Philip's ministry demonstrates Christ's authority over both spiritual oppression and physical suffering.

Cross References**Mark 1:26**

The unclean spirit shook the man violently, cried out loudly, and came out of him.

Mark 5:13

Jesus gave the evil spirits permission to leave the man, and they entered the pigs.

Matthew 4:24

People brought to Jesus those suffering from diseases, severe pain, demonic oppression, seizures, and paralysis, and He healed them.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus Christ has authority over powers that human beings cannot control.

VIII. GREAT JOY COMES TO THE CITY

Acts 8:8

“So there was great joy in that city.”

The gospel produces joy.

Cross References

Acts 13:52

The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Luke 2:10

The angel said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.”

Nehemiah 8:10

The joy of the Lord is your strength.

Spiritual Principle

Where Christ brings freedom, forgiveness, healing, and hope, joy follows.

IX. SIMON THE SORCERER

Acts 8:9

“In that city there was a man named Simon, who had practiced sorcery and amazed the people of Samaria. He claimed to be someone great.”

Simon had built a reputation around himself.

He amazed people.

He wanted people to think he was great.

Cross References

Exodus 7:11

Pharaoh called his wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians performed signs through their secret arts.

Deuteronomy 18:10

Israel was forbidden to practice sorcery, divination, witchcraft, or other occult practices.

Acts 13:6

Paul later encountered a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual-sounding power is not automatically from God.

Every claim must be tested by truth.

X. THE PEOPLE CALL SIMON “THE GREAT POWER”

Acts 8:10

“And all the people, from the least to the greatest, said, ‘This man is the great power of God.’”

The people were spiritually deceived.

Cross References

Acts 14:11

When people saw Paul's miracle, they shouted that the gods had come down among them in human form.

Acts 12:22

The crowd shouted concerning Herod, “This is the voice of a god, not a man!”

Acts 28:6

After Paul survived a snakebite, the people changed their minds and began saying he was a god.

Spiritual Principle

Crowds can wrongly attribute divine power to human personalities.

Popularity is not proof of divine approval.

XI. SIMON'S MAGIC HAD CONTROLLED ATTENTION

Acts 8:11

“They followed him because he had amazed them with his magic for a long time.”

The people were impressed by extraordinary experiences.

Cross References

Revelation 13:3

The world was amazed by the beast and followed after him.

Deuteronomy 13:3

Israel was warned not to follow false spiritual claims merely because a sign occurred.

Galatians 3:1

Paul asked the Galatians who had spiritually confused or bewitched them away from the truth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never allow amazement to replace discernment.

Something spectacular is not necessarily something holy.

XII. PHILIP PREACHES THE KINGDOM AND JESUS

Acts 8:12

“But when Philip preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, many men and women believed and were baptized.”

The contrast is clear.

Simon magnified himself.

Philip magnified Jesus.

Cross References

Mark 16:16

Jesus taught that the one who believes and openly identifies with Him should be baptized.

Acts 2:38

Peter called the people to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:19

Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples among all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

True ministry directs attention away from the messenger and toward Jesus Christ.

XIII. SIMON ALSO BELIEVES AND IS BAPTIZED

Acts 8:13

“Simon himself believed and was baptized. He followed Philip everywhere, amazed by the great signs and miracles he saw.”

Simon responds outwardly.

He professes belief.

He is baptized.

He follows Philip.

Yet Luke emphasizes something concerning Simon:

He remains fascinated by:

Signs and miracles.

Cross References

John 2:23

Many people believed in Jesus' name when they saw the signs He performed.

Matthew 13:20

Jesus described seed received with immediate joy but lacking deep root.

John 12:42

Many leaders believed certain things about Jesus but were afraid to confess Him openly because they valued human approval.

Important Observation

Simon becomes a warning that outward response does not automatically prove inward transformation.

Later Peter will say:

“Your heart is not right before God.”

XIV. JERUSALEM HEARS THAT SAMARIA HAS RECEIVED THE WORD

Acts 8:14

“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.”

This was historically significant.

Samaritans were being incorporated into the expanding people of God.

Cross References

Acts 11:22

When news of gospel growth reached the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to investigate and encourage the believers.

Acts 11:1

The apostles and believers in Judea heard that Gentiles also had received God's Word.

Acts 15:2

Later major questions concerning Gentile believers were brought before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel creates one people of God across old ethnic and cultural divisions.

XV. PETER AND JOHN PRAY FOR THE SAMARITANS

Acts 8:15

“When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit.”

Cross References

Acts 19:2

Paul asked certain disciples whether they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed.

Acts 10:44

While Peter was preaching to Cornelius' household, the Holy Spirit came upon everyone who heard the Word.

John 7:39

Jesus spoke about the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive after He was glorified.

Spiritual Principle

The inclusion of Samaritans into the church was visibly confirmed by God's Spirit.

XVI. THE HOLY SPIRIT HAD NOT YET COME UPON THEM

Acts 8:16

“Because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

This is an unusual transitional event in Acts.

The sequence here differs from Acts 2 and Acts 10.

Cross References

Acts 19:5

When certain disciples heard the full message about Jesus, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 2:38

Peter connected repentance, baptism, forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 28:19

Jesus commanded baptism in the triune name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Important Observation

Acts records several transitional moments as the gospel moves from:

Jews.

To Samaritans.

To Gentiles.

The delay here likely highlights apostolic confirmation that Samaritan believers belonged fully to the same church rather than forming a separate Samaritan Christianity.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christ did not create a Jewish church and a Samaritan church—He created one church.

XVII. THEY RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 8:17

“Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

Cross References

Acts 19:6

Paul laid his hands upon certain believers, and the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Hebrews 6:2

The laying on of hands is included among basic teachings familiar to early believers.

Acts 9:17

Ananias placed his hands upon Saul and told him that the Lord had sent him so Saul might regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

God publicly demonstrated that Samaritan believers were fully included in His redeemed people.

XVIII. SIMON OFFERS MONEY

Acts 8:18

“When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the apostles’ hands, he offered them money.”

Simon's old way of thinking resurfaces.

He views spiritual power as something that can be purchased.

Cross References

2 Kings 5:16

Elisha refused payment from Naaman for the healing God had provided.

Matthew 10:8

Jesus told His disciples, “Freely you have received; freely give.”

Numbers 22:7

Balaam was approached with payment connected to using supposed spiritual power for selfish purposes.

Spiritual Principle

God's gifts cannot be turned into merchandise.

XIX. SIMON WANTS THE POWER FOR HIMSELF

Acts 8:19

“Saying, ‘Give me this power also so that everyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit.’”

Notice Simon's concern.

He does not ask:

“How can I know God better?”

He asks:

“How can I possess this power?”

Cross References

Numbers 22:17

Balak offered Balaam great honor and reward if he would use spiritual power for his desired purpose.

Matthew 7:22

Jesus warned that people may point to dramatic spiritual works while still lacking a genuine relationship with Him.

Acts 19:13

Some people later attempted to use Jesus' name as though spiritual authority were a technique they could possess.

Spiritual Principle

A desire for spiritual power can itself become sinful when the heart seeks influence rather than God.

XX. GOD'S GIFT CANNOT BE BOUGHT

Acts 8:20

“But Peter said, ‘May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God!’”

Peter responds strongly.

Cross References

2 Kings 5:27

Gehazi's greed concerning Naaman's healing brought severe judgment upon him.

Matthew 10:8

Jesus said, “Freely you have received; freely give.”

Isaiah 55:1

God invites the thirsty to come and receive what He provides without money and without price.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Grace cannot be purchased because grace, by definition, is God's gift.

XXI. SIMON'S HEART IS NOT RIGHT

Acts 8:21

“You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.”

This statement reaches the central problem.

Not merely his money.

Not merely his words.

His:

Heart.

Cross References

Psalm 78:37

Israel's heart was not steadfast toward God, and they were not faithful to His covenant.

1 Chronicles 12:17

David warned men approaching him that God knows the heart and judges hidden motives.

Psalm 51:10

David prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a faithful spirit within me.”

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual problems are ultimately heart problems.

XXII. SIMON IS CALLED TO REPENT

Acts 8:22

“Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you.”

Peter does not flatter Simon.

He calls him to repentance.

Cross References

Acts 3:19

Peter said, “Repent and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped away.”

Isaiah 55:7

Let the wicked abandon his way and the sinful person his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, who will have mercy and freely forgive.

Joel 2:14

The prophet calls sinners to return to God, recognizing that He is gracious and compassionate.

Spiritual Principle

The proper response to exposed sin is repentance, not defensiveness.

XXIII. SIMON IS TRAPPED IN SIN

Acts 8:23

“I see that you are full of bitterness and trapped in sin.”

Peter diagnoses Simon's spiritual condition severely.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 29:18

Moses warned against allowing a root to grow that produces poisonous and bitter fruit through turning away from God.

Hebrews 12:15

Believers are warned not to allow a root of bitterness to grow and cause trouble.

Proverbs 5:22

The wicked person's own sins capture him, and he becomes held by the cords of his sin.

Spiritual Principle

Sin promises freedom but ultimately creates slavery.

XXIV. SIMON ASKS PETER TO PRAY

Acts 8:24

“Then Simon answered, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, so that none of these things will happen to me.’”

Simon expresses fear concerning judgment.

The text does not tell us clearly whether his heart ultimately changed.

Cross References

Exodus 8:8

Pharaoh asked Moses and Aaron to pray that God's judgment would be removed.

Numbers 21:7

Israel confessed its sin and asked Moses to pray to the Lord for deliverance.

James 5:16

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.

Important Warning

A person can fear consequences without truly hating sin.

Genuine repentance seeks reconciliation with God, not merely escape from punishment.

XXV. THE GOSPEL SPREADS THROUGH SAMARITAN VILLAGES

Acts 8:25

“After Peter and John had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages along the way.”

The gospel's movement through Samaria continues.

Cross References

Luke 9:52

Jesus once sent messengers ahead into a Samaritan village.

John 4:40

Samaritans asked Jesus to remain with them, and He stayed there two days.

Acts 13:5

Paul and Barnabas later proclaimed God's Word in multiple cities as missionary work expanded.

Spiritual Principle

Yesterday's place of hostility can become tomorrow's mission field.

XXVI. GOD SENDS PHILIP TO A DESERT ROAD

Acts 8:26

“Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’”

Philip is experiencing successful ministry in Samaria.

Then God sends him away from the crowds.

Cross References

1 Kings 19:5

An angel touched Elijah and gave him instructions during his wilderness journey.

Genesis 16:7

The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the wilderness.

Judges 13:3

The angel of the Lord appeared and announced God's purpose concerning Samson's birth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may lead a servant away from a crowd because one person matters to Him.

XXVII. PHILIP OBEYS IMMEDIATELY

Acts 8:27

“So he started out, and on the way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, a high official under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was in charge of all her treasury. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship.”

Philip does not argue.

He goes.

And God's purpose becomes visible.

Cross References

Psalms 68:31

Representatives from Egypt and Cush will stretch out their hands toward God.

Isaiah 56:4

The Lord promises special inclusion and blessing to eunuchs who honor His covenant.

Zephaniah 3:10

Worshippers from beyond the rivers of Cush will bring offerings to God.

Spiritual Principle

Obedience often reveals God's reason only after the servant begins moving.

XXVIII. THE ETHIOPIAN IS READING SCRIPTURE

Acts 8:28

“And on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the prophet Isaiah.”

He had worshiped in Jerusalem.

Now he reads Scripture.

God has prepared his heart for the gospel.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 17:19

God's law was to be read regularly so that the reader would learn to fear the Lord and obey His Word.

Nehemiah 8:8

The teachers read God's law clearly and explained its meaning so the people could understand.

John 5:39

Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and these very Scriptures testify about Me."

Spiritual Principle

God can prepare a heart through Scripture before the evangelist ever arrives.

XXIX. THE SPIRIT DIRECTS PHILIP

Acts 8:29

"The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.'"

The angel directed Philip to the road.

Now the Holy Spirit directs him toward the person.

Cross References

Acts 10:19

While Peter was thinking about his vision, the Spirit told him that men were looking for him.

Ezekiel 3:12

The Spirit lifted Ezekiel and directed his prophetic ministry.

Acts 16:7

The Spirit later directed Paul and his companions concerning where they should and should not minister.

Spiritual Principle

Effective evangelism depends not only upon willingness to speak but sensitivity to God's direction.

XXX. “DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE READING?”

Acts 8:30

“Philip ran up and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’”

Philip begins with a question.

He does not force the conversation.

He listens first.

Cross References

Nehemiah 8:8

God's Word was read clearly and explained so the people could understand its meaning.

Luke 24:27

Beginning with Moses and the Prophets, Jesus explained what the Scriptures said concerning Himself.

Luke 24:45

Jesus opened the disciples' understanding so they could comprehend the Scriptures.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Good evangelism often begins by listening for the question God is already placing in someone's heart.

XXXI. “HOW CAN I UNLESS SOMEONE EXPLAINS IT?”

Acts 8:31

“The eunuch replied, ‘How can I, unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.”

The man was willing to learn.

Cross References

Romans 10:14

How can people call upon One they have not believed in? And how can they believe unless they hear? And how can they hear without someone preaching?

Romans 10:17

Faith comes through hearing, and hearing comes through the message concerning Christ.

Nehemiah 8:8

God's servants explained Scripture so the people understood what was being read.

Spiritual Principle

God uses people to help other people understand His Word.

XXXII. THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF ISAIAH

Acts 8:32

“The passage of Scripture he was reading was this: ‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth.’”

The Ethiopian is reading Isaiah 53.

Cross References

Isaiah 53:7

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to slaughter and remained silent like a sheep before its shearers.

John 1:29

John saw Jesus and said, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

1 Peter 1:19

Believers were redeemed through the precious blood of Christ, like that of a spotless and unblemished lamb.

Key Truth

Isaiah's suffering Servant finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

XXXIII. THE SERVANT IS HUMILIATED AND KILLED

Acts 8:33

“In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can speak of His descendants? For His life was taken from the earth.”

Cross References

Isaiah 53:8

He was taken away through oppression and unjust judgment. He was cut off from the land of the living because of the sin of the people.

Philippians 2:8

Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.

Daniel 9:26

Daniel foretold that the Anointed One would be cut off.

Spiritual Principle

The cross was not evidence that Jesus failed. It fulfilled God's redemptive plan.

XXXIV. THE ETHIOPIAN ASKS THE GREAT QUESTION

Acts 8:34

“The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about—himself or someone else?’”

This is the opening Philip needs.

Cross References

Isaiah 53:1

Isaiah asks who has believed the message and to whom the Lord's saving power has been revealed.

John 12:34

People questioned Jesus about the identity and mission of the Messiah and Son of Man.

1 Peter 1:11

The prophets searched carefully concerning the person and time indicated by the Spirit of Christ as He predicted Christ's sufferings and the glories that would follow.

Spiritual Principle

God had prepared both the Scripture and the question before Philip arrived.

XXXV. PHILIP PREACHES JESUS FROM ISAIAH

Acts 8:35

“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”

This is the heart of the encounter.

Philip begins with:

“That very passage.”

And ends with:

Jesus.

Cross References

Luke 24:27

Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained everything in Scripture concerning Himself.

Luke 24:44

Jesus said everything written about Him in the Law of Moses, Prophets, and Psalms had to be fulfilled.

John 5:46

Jesus said, “If you truly believed Moses, you would believe Me, because he wrote about Me.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful Bible teaching should ultimately help people see how Scripture points toward God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ.

XXXVI. THE ETHIOPIAN ASKS TO BE BAPTIZED

Acts 8:36

“As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. What would stop me from being baptized?’”

The Ethiopian wants to identify publicly with Christ.

Cross References

Matthew 3:6

People were baptized in the Jordan as they confessed their sins.

Acts 10:47

Peter later asked, “Can anyone prevent these people from being baptized with water, since they have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

Acts 2:38

Peter called believing hearers to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Baptism follows gospel response as a public declaration of identification with Christ.

XXXVII. THE ETHIOPIAN CONFESSES FAITH

Acts 8:37

“Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ The eunuch answered, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

The confession is clear.

Cross References

John 20:31

These things were written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life through His name.

Romans 10:9

If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Matthew 16:16

Peter said to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Important Textual Note

Acts 8:37 is included in the Crawford Standard Bible text supplied here. Some ancient Greek manuscripts do not contain this verse, while it appears in later manuscript traditions.

Its confession is fully consistent with New Testament teaching concerning faith in Christ.

Key Truth

Baptism does not replace faith; it follows personal belief in Jesus Christ.

XXXVIII. PHILIP BAPTIZES THE ETHIOPIAN

Acts 8:38

“He ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.”

Cross References

Matthew 3:16

After Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water.

Romans 6:4

Believers are buried with Christ through baptism into death so that, just as Christ was raised, they may walk in newness of life.

Acts 2:41

Those who accepted the message were baptized and added to the community of believers.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical faith is willing to identify openly with Jesus Christ.

XXXIX. THE ETHIOPIAN GOES ON HIS WAY REJOICING

Acts 8:39

“When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away. The eunuch did not see him again but went on his way rejoicing.”

Philip disappears from the encounter.

Yet the Ethiopian does not collapse spiritually because his faith was not centered on Philip.

His joy was in Christ.

Cross References

1 Kings 18:12

Obadiah feared that the Spirit of the Lord might suddenly carry Elijah somewhere unknown.

Ezekiel 3:12

The Spirit lifted Ezekiel and carried him according to God's direction.

2 Kings 2:16

The prophets wondered whether the Spirit of the Lord had carried Elijah to another place.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The goal of evangelism is not to make people dependent upon the messenger but devoted to Jesus Christ.

XL. PHILIP KEEPS PREACHING

Acts 8:40

“Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.”

Philip immediately continues his mission.

Cross References

Acts 21:8

Years later Paul stayed in Caesarea at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven.

Joshua 15:47

Ashdod, later known as Azotus, was among the cities located in the coastal region.

Acts 10:1

Caesarea later becomes important in Acts through Cornelius, a Roman centurion.

Spiritual Principle

A faithful evangelist keeps moving from one gospel opportunity to the next.

XLI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS

8

1. Persecution Cannot Stop the Gospel

The believers were scattered.

But wherever they went:

They preached.

Principle:

Opposition may change the location of ministry without changing the mission.

2. The Gospel Breaks Human Barriers

Samaria receives Christ.

An Ethiopian hears Christ.

Principle:

Jesus Christ is not the Savior of one ethnicity, culture, or nation only.

3. Great Spiritual Power Cannot Be Purchased

Simon tried to buy the gift of God.

Peter rebuked him.

Principle:

Grace is received, never purchased.

4. The Heart Matters More Than External Religious Actions

Simon professed belief and was baptized, yet Peter said:

“Your heart is not right before God.”

Principle:

External religious participation can never substitute for a right heart before God.

5. Scripture Points to Jesus

Philip began with Isaiah 53 and proclaimed Christ.

Principle:

The Bible's redemptive message reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

6. Baptism Follows Faith

The Ethiopian believed and then was baptized.

Principle:

Baptism publicly identifies the believer with Jesus Christ.

7. The Holy Spirit Directs Gospel Witness

Philip was directed to Samaria.

Then to a desert road.

Then to a specific chariot.

Principle:

God knows where spiritually prepared people are and can direct faithful servants toward them.

XLII. PERSECUTION BECOMES MISSION

Acts 8 gives one of Scripture's clearest examples of God turning opposition into advancement.

The persecutors wanted believers scattered.

They were scattered.

But the believers took the gospel with them.

Jerusalem's Enemies Thought:

“Drive them out.”

God's Providence Turned It Into:

“Send them out.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The enemy may change your address without being able to change your assignment.

XLIII. WHAT PHILIP TEACHES ABOUT EVANGELISM

Philip gives us a remarkable model.

He Preached to Crowds

Samaria.

He Ministered to Individuals

The Ethiopian.

He Crossed Cultural Boundaries

Samaritans.

An African official.

He Listened to the Holy Spirit

He went where God directed.

He Used Scripture

He began with Isaiah.

He Proclaimed Jesus

Christ was central.

He Led Toward Public Faith

The Ethiopian was baptized.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful evangelism is Spirit-directed, Scripture-grounded, Christ-centered, and personally responsive.

XLIV. FROM A CITY TO ONE PERSON

Philip had been involved in a citywide spiritual awakening.

Crowds listened.

Miracles occurred.

People believed.

Then God told Philip to go to a desert road.

That might have appeared like a step backward.

But one person mattered.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God measures ministry by faithfulness, not merely by crowd size.

One Ethiopian official was worth Philip's journey.

XLV. SIMON AND THE ETHIOPIAN — TWO RESPONSES

Acts 8 deliberately gives us two very different men.

Simon

Fascinated with power.

Interested in signs.

Wants spiritual authority.

Offers money.

Must be confronted about his heart.

The Ethiopian

Reading Scripture.

Asking questions.

Willing to learn.

Hears about Jesus.

Believes.

Is baptized.

Goes away rejoicing.

Spiritual Principle

Two people can encounter Christian ministry while responding for completely different reasons.

One wants power.

The other wants truth.

XLVI. WHAT ACTS 8 TEACHES ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Simon believed spiritual power could be bought.

Peter strongly rejects the idea.

Spiritual Gifts Are God's Gifts

Not human possessions.

Spiritual Gifts Are Not Commodities

They cannot be bought.

Spiritual Gifts Are Not Status Symbols

They are given for God's purposes.

Spiritual Gifts Must Never Become a Business

The gift belongs to God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The moment spiritual ministry becomes a tool for personal glory, influence, or financial exploitation, the heart has moved away from the purpose of the gift.

XLVII. WHAT ACTS 8 TEACHES ABOUT SCRIPTURE

The Ethiopian had Scripture.

But he needed understanding.

Philip did not replace the Bible.

He explained it.

Then he showed how the passage pointed to Christ.

Principle

Biblical teaching does not merely repeat words; it helps people understand what God's Word means and how it points to His redemptive truth.

XLVIII. ISAIAH 53 AND JESUS CHRIST

The Ethiopian was reading one of the great Old Testament passages concerning the suffering Servant.

Isaiah describes One who is:

Led like a lamb.

Silent before His oppressors.

Humiliated.

Denied justice.

Cut off from the land of the living.

Philip says:

This points to Jesus.

Key Truth

Jesus is the suffering Servant.

Jesus is the Lamb.

Jesus gave His life.

Jesus fulfills Scripture.

XLIX. THE GOSPEL AND RACIAL OR CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

Acts 8 intentionally moves beyond Jerusalem.

Samaritans receive the gospel.

An Ethiopian receives the gospel.

The movement predicted in Acts 1:8 is underway.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel destroys the idea that any ethnic group or nationality possesses a monopoly on God's saving grace.

Christ's gospel moves toward:

Every people.

Every nation.

Every language.

L. THE JOY OF ACTS 8

Joy appears repeatedly in connection with the gospel.

Samaria experiences:

“Great joy.”

The Ethiopian goes away:

“Rejoicing.”

Spiritual Principle

The gospel brings joy because it brings people into relationship with Jesus Christ.

Circumstances may remain difficult.

But salvation produces a deeper joy.

LI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What happened after Stephen's death?

A great persecution broke out against the Jerusalem church.

Believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Rather than becoming silent, they preached the Word wherever they went.

Question 2

How did persecution help spread the gospel?

Persecution forced believers outside Jerusalem.

As they relocated, they carried the message of Jesus with them.

Human opposition unintentionally helped fulfill Christ's command in Acts 1:8.

Question 3

Why was Philip's ministry in Samaria important?

Jews and Samaritans had longstanding hostility.

The Samaritan response to the gospel demonstrated that salvation through Christ crossed deeply rooted ethnic and cultural boundaries.

Question 4

Who was Simon the sorcerer?

Simon was a man who practiced magic and had gained a large following in Samaria.

People considered him unusually powerful.

After Philip preached, Simon professed belief and was baptized, but later his attempt to purchase spiritual power revealed serious corruption in his heart.

Question 5

What was wrong with Simon offering money?

Simon treated the Holy Spirit's gift as though spiritual authority could be purchased.

Peter strongly rejected this.

God's grace and spiritual gifts cannot be bought.

Question 6

Why did Peter tell Simon to repent?

Peter said Simon's heart was not right before God and that he was trapped in sin.

Simon needed more than correction of behavior.

He needed genuine repentance at the heart level.

Question 7

Why did Peter and John go to Samaria?

They came from Jerusalem after hearing that Samaritans had received God's Word.

Their involvement helped publicly confirm that Samaritan believers belonged fully to the same church established through Christ.

Question 8

Why did God send Philip away from a successful ministry to a desert road?

God had prepared one specific man to hear the gospel.

The Ethiopian official was reading Isaiah and searching for understanding.

God valued that individual enough to redirect Philip.

Question 9

What was the Ethiopian reading?

He was reading Isaiah 53, specifically the passage describing the suffering Servant being led like a lamb to slaughter.

Question 10

How did Philip explain Isaiah 53?

Acts 8:35 says Philip began with that very passage and told the Ethiopian:

“The good news about Jesus.”

Philip interpreted the suffering Servant in connection with Jesus Christ.

Question 11

What happened after the Ethiopian believed?

He requested baptism.

Philip baptized him.

Afterward the Ethiopian continued his journey rejoicing.

Question 12

What does Acts 8 teach us about evangelism?

We should:

- Go where God leads.
- Notice individuals as well as crowds.
- Listen carefully.
- Use Scripture.
- Explain the gospel.
- Point people to Jesus.
- Encourage genuine faith.

- Trust God with the results.
-

LII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 8 asks several important questions.

How Do I Respond When Difficult Circumstances Disrupt My Plans?

The scattered believers kept preaching.

Am I Willing to Cross Cultural Barriers?

Philip went to Samaria.

Do I Seek Spiritual Gifts for God's Glory or My Own Importance?

Simon wanted power.

Is My Heart Right Before God?

External religious activity is not enough.

Am I Sensitive to God's Direction?

Philip obeyed when God redirected him.

Am I Willing to Leave a Crowd for One Person?

God values individuals.

Can I Explain Scripture Clearly?

The Ethiopian needed someone to help him understand.

Can I Show Someone How Scripture Points to Jesus?

Philip could.

Am I Willing to Speak When God Opens a Door?

Philip ran toward the opportunity.

LIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Scattered Does Not Mean Silenced”

The believers in Jerusalem experienced:

Loss.

Fear.

Displacement.

Persecution.

Yet Acts 8:4 says:

“Those who were scattered went everywhere, preaching the word.”

They carried the gospel wherever they went.

Principle

Your circumstances may change dramatically, but your calling to represent Jesus remains.

A believer can witness:

At home.

At work.

In another city.

During hardship.

During transition.

During unexpected change.

The gospel is not tied to one location.

LIV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Chase Power When You Should Be Seeking God”

Simon saw something extraordinary.

He wanted the ability.

Peter saw the real problem:

“Your heart is not right before God.”

That warning applies beyond Simon.

It is possible to want:

Influence.

Platform.

Gifts.

Recognition.

Miracles.

Authority.

Without truly wanting God.

Principle

God is not a means to spiritual power; God Himself is the treasure.

LV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God Knows Where the Searching Heart Is”

The Ethiopian was traveling on a desert road.

He was reading Isaiah.

Philip did not know that when God first told him to go.

But God knew.

Principle

Before the evangelist arrives, God may already be preparing the hearer.

That should encourage believers to witness.

You do not know what God has already been doing in another person's heart.

LVI. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 8 begins with persecution.

It ends with preaching.

It begins with Stephen buried.

It ends with an Ethiopian rejoicing.

It begins with Saul trying to destroy the church.

It ends with Philip carrying the gospel toward new regions.

The enemies of the church thought scattering Christians would weaken Christianity.

Instead:

The gospel spread.

Samaria heard.

Villages heard.

An Ethiopian official heard.

The mission of Acts 1:8 was moving forward.

Acts 8 also warns us that not every religious response is the same.

Simon saw miracles and wanted power.

The Ethiopian read Scripture and wanted truth.

Simon asked:

“Give me this power.”

The Ethiopian effectively asked:

“Help me understand.”

One heart wanted spiritual influence.

The other heart wanted spiritual understanding.

Then Philip shows us what faithful ministry looks like.

He preached to crowds.

He spoke to one man.

He obeyed the angel.

He listened to the Spirit.

He knew Scripture.

He asked questions.

He explained truth.

And above everything:

He preached Jesus.

That is the great mission of the church.

Not merely to impress people.

Not merely to gather crowds.

Not merely to demonstrate religious activity.

But to help people understand:

Who Jesus is.

Why Jesus died.

How Jesus fulfills Scripture.

Why people must believe.

What it means to follow Him.

Acts 8 therefore calls every believer to remain available.

God may send you:

To a city.

To a neighborhood.

To a stranger.

To a coworker.

To one searching person.

The important thing is not the size of the audience.

The important thing is obedience.

Philip left revival in Samaria for one man on a desert road.

And because Philip obeyed:

One more person heard the gospel.

One more person believed.

One more person was baptized.

One more person went home rejoicing.

Never underestimate what God can do through one obedient believer who listens to His direction and opens the Scriptures to point someone toward Jesus Christ.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that persecution cannot stop Your gospel.

Thank You that when believers were scattered, Your Word continued spreading.

Give us that same faithfulness.

When our plans change, keep our mission clear.

When circumstances become difficult, keep us from becoming silent.

Give us courage to proclaim Jesus wherever You place us.

Break down cultural, racial, social, and personal barriers that keep us from reaching people with the gospel.

Give us the heart of Philip.

Make us willing to preach to crowds.

And make us willing to speak to one person.

Keep us from chasing spiritual power, influence, recognition, or popularity.

Guard us from the heart of Simon.

Create in us clean hearts.

Teach us to treasure You more than spiritual gifts.

Help us recognize that Your grace cannot be bought and Your Spirit cannot be manipulated.

Thank You for the Ethiopian who searched the Scriptures.

Give us hearts that hunger to understand Your Word.

Make us faithful teachers who explain Scripture clearly and point people toward Jesus.

Open our eyes to people You have already prepared.

Help us listen when Your Spirit directs us.

Give us courage to approach the chariot.

Give us wisdom to ask the right questions.

Give us clarity to explain the gospel.

And keep Jesus Christ at the center of everything we say.

Thank You that He is the Lamb who suffered.

Thank You that He gave His life.

Thank You that Scripture points to Him.

Thank You for salvation through His name.

May people believe.

May believers be baptized.

May the gospel spread.

And may many go on their way:

Rejoicing in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

**“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”
— Acts 8:35**

Central Truth

God turns persecution into gospel expansion, breaks down cultural barriers through Jesus Christ, exposes false motives, and directs Spirit-led believers toward people whose hearts He has prepared to hear and understand His Word.

Acts 8 in One Sentence

As persecution scatters the Jerusalem church, the gospel spreads into Samaria and beyond through Philip's Spirit-directed ministry, exposing Simon's corrupted desire for spiritual power while leading an Ethiopian seeker from Isaiah's prophecy to faith, baptism, and joy in Jesus Christ.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 9 — Saul's Conversion and Peter's Miracles

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 9 records one of the most dramatic conversions in the history of the church.

Saul had been present when Stephen was killed.

He approved of Stephen's death.

Then Saul began attacking the church with extraordinary violence.

He entered houses.

He arrested men and women.

He threw believers into prison.

His goal was clear:

Destroy the followers of Jesus.

But Saul was about to discover something he never expected.

The Jesus he believed was dead was alive.

As Saul traveled toward Damascus with authority to arrest believers, a bright light suddenly surrounded him.

He fell to the ground.

Then he heard a voice:

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Saul asked:

"Who are You, Lord?"

The answer changed his life forever:

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

The persecutor had encountered the risen Christ.

Saul entered Damascus blind.

For three days he did not eat or drink.

Meanwhile God spoke to an ordinary disciple named Ananias.

Ananias understandably feared Saul.

But God told him:

“Go, for he is My chosen instrument.”

Ananias obeyed.

Saul regained his sight.

He was baptized.

And almost immediately:

The man who had entered Damascus intending to arrest Christians began preaching that Jesus is the Son of God.

The persecutor became a preacher.

The destroyer of churches became a builder of churches.

The man who opposed the name of Jesus began risking his life for the name of Jesus.

Acts 9 also continues Peter’s ministry.

Peter heals Aeneas, who had been paralyzed for eight years.

Then in Joppa, Peter is called to the home where Tabitha—also known as Dorcas—has died.

Peter prays.

He says:

“Tabitha, get up.”

She opens her eyes.

She sits up.

And Peter presents her alive to the believers.

Acts 9 therefore demonstrates several great truths:

No sinner is beyond the reach of Christ.

God can completely transform a life.

God uses ordinary believers in extraordinary ways.

The gospel creates immediate new allegiance to Jesus.

Christ's power remains active through His servants.

The central truth of Acts 9 is:

The risen Jesus Christ can transform His fiercest enemy into His faithful servant, direct ordinary believers in His mission, strengthen His church, and demonstrate His authority through changed lives and powerful works.

I. SAUL CONTINUES THREATENING THE CHURCH

Acts 9:1 — Breathing Threats and Murder

“Saul was still breathing threats of murder against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest.”

Saul's opposition had not weakened after Stephen's death.

It had intensified.

Cross References

Acts 8:3

Saul began trying to destroy the church. He entered house after house, dragged out both men and women, and put them in prison.

Acts 22:4

Paul later said, “I persecuted the followers of this Way even to death, arresting both men and women and putting them in prison.”

Galatians 1:13

Paul said, “You have heard about my former life in Judaism, how violently I persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it.”

Spiritual Principle

Religious zeal can be terribly destructive when it is disconnected from truth.

Saul was sincere.

He was also wrong.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sincerity does not turn error into truth.

A person can be passionately committed and still be opposing God.

II. SAUL SEEKS AUTHORITY TO ARREST BELIEVERS

Acts 9:2 — Followers of “The Way”

“And asked for letters to the synagogues in Damascus so that if he found anyone following ‘the Way,’ men or women, he could arrest them and bring them to Jerusalem.”

Saul’s persecution was organized.

He wanted official authorization to capture believers outside Jerusalem.

Cross References

Acts 22:5

Paul later testified that the high priest and council could confirm that he received letters authorizing him to go to Damascus and arrest followers of Jesus.

Acts 26:12

Paul said, “I was traveling to Damascus with authority and a commission from the chief priests.”

Acts 8:3

Saul had already been entering homes and dragging believers away to prison.

“The Way”

Early Christianity was sometimes described as:

“The Way.”

This reflects the truth that following Jesus is not merely believing certain ideas.

It is a new way of life.

Spiritual Principle

Christianity is not only something we believe; it is a life we follow under the lordship of Christ.

III. A LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

Acts 9:3

“As he neared Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven shone around him.”

Saul was approaching Damascus confident in his mission.

Then heaven interrupted him.

Cross References

Acts 22:6

Paul later said, “About noon, as I came near Damascus, suddenly a very bright light from heaven flashed around me.”

Acts 26:13

Paul said that around midday he saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun shining around him and his companions.

2 Corinthians 4:6

The God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Christ knows how to interrupt a person who is moving rapidly in the wrong direction.

IV. “WHY ARE YOU PERSECUTING ME?”

Acts 9:4

“He fell to the ground and heard a voice say, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’”

Saul thought he was persecuting Christians.

Jesus said:

“You are persecuting Me.”

Cross References

Acts 22:7

Paul said, “I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’”

Acts 26:14

Paul said that he heard a voice from heaven asking why he was persecuting Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:9

Paul later said, “I am the least of the apostles and do not deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted God’s church.”

Key Truth

Jesus identifies deeply with His people.

To attack Christ’s church is to attack Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christ takes personally what is done to His people.

V. “I AM JESUS”

Acts 9:5

“He asked, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ The voice replied, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is useless for you to resist Me.’”

This is the moment Saul’s entire worldview collapses.

Jesus is alive.

Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is the One Saul has been opposing.

Cross References

Acts 22:8

Saul asked, “Who are You, Lord?” The answer came, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.”

Acts 26:15

Paul said, “I asked, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ The Lord replied, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’”

1 Timothy 1:13

Paul later said, “I was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent man, but I received mercy.”

Spiritual Principle

Conversion begins when a person sees Jesus differently.

Saul thought Jesus was a false Messiah.

Now he discovers:

Jesus is alive.

Jesus is Lord.

Jesus speaks from heaven.

Key Truth

You cannot successfully fight against Jesus Christ.

VI. “WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?”

Acts 9:6

“Trembling and amazed, Saul said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ The Lord said, ‘Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what to do.’”

Saul’s attitude changes immediately.

Before:

“What can I do against Christians?”

Now:

“Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Cross References

Acts 22:10

Saul asked, “What should I do, Lord?” Jesus told him to go into Damascus where he would be told what had been appointed for him.

Acts 26:16

Jesus told Saul to rise because He had appeared to appoint him as a servant and witness.

Ezekiel 2:1

God told Ezekiel, “Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

True conversion changes the question from “What do I want?” to “Lord, what do You want?”

VII. SAUL’S COMPANIONS STAND SPEECHLESS

Acts 9:7

“The men traveling with Saul stood speechless; they heard the voice but saw no one.”

Saul’s companions experienced something extraordinary.

But the personal message was directed to Saul.

Cross References

Acts 22:9

Paul later said that his companions saw the light but did not understand the voice speaking to him.

Daniel 10:7

Daniel saw a vision that the men with him did not see, though great fear came upon them.

John 12:29

When a voice came from heaven near Jesus, some people thought they had heard thunder while others said an angel had spoken.

Important Observation

Acts 9 emphasizes that the men heard the sound or voice, while Acts 22 explains that they did not understand the message addressed to Saul.

Spiritual Principle

People may witness the circumstances surrounding another person’s encounter with God without personally experiencing the same spiritual transformation.

VIII. THE MAN WHO CAME TO ARREST OTHERS MUST BE LED BY THE HAND

Acts 9:8

“Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he couldn’t see. They led him by the hand into Damascus.”

Saul entered the Damascus road as a powerful persecutor.

He entered Damascus blind and dependent.

Cross References

Acts 22:11

Paul said, “Because the brilliance of the light blinded me, my companions led me by the hand into Damascus.”

Acts 13:11

Later Paul would pronounce temporary blindness upon Elymas the sorcerer, who then needed someone to lead him by the hand.

Deuteronomy 28:29

Moses warned of judgment in which people would grope about as a blind person gropes in darkness.

Spiritual Principle

God sometimes humbles us before He uses us.

Saul needed to lose confidence in Saul before becoming useful to Christ.

IX. THREE DAYS OF BLINDNESS

Acts 9:9

“For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink.”

For three days Saul waits.

No persecuting.

No commanding.

No traveling under authority.

He is blind.

Silent.

Dependent.

Cross References

Esther 4:16

Esther called for a three-day fast before she approached the king during a moment of great crisis.

Jonah 1:17

Jonah remained inside the great fish for three days and three nights.

Matthew 12:40

Jesus compared His coming burial to Jonah's three days in the fish.

Spiritual Principle

God may use seasons of darkness and waiting to prepare a person for a completely new life.

X. GOD SPEAKS TO AN ORDINARY DISCIPLE

Acts 9:10

“In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ He answered, ‘Here I am, Lord.’”

Ananias was not one of the apostles.

He was a disciple.

Yet God used him in one of the most important conversion stories in church history.

Cross References

1 Samuel 3:4

The Lord called Samuel, and Samuel answered, “Here I am.”

Genesis 22:1

God called Abraham, and Abraham answered, “Here I am.”

Exodus 3:4

God called Moses from the burning bush, and Moses answered, “Here I am.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God often uses ordinary believers at extraordinary moments in His plan.

XI. “SAUL OF TARSUS—HE IS PRAYING”

Acts 9:11

“The Lord said, ‘Go to Straight Street, to the house of Judas, and ask for Saul of Tarsus. He is praying.’”

What a change.

Saul had come to Damascus to arrest praying believers.

Now:

Saul is praying.

Cross References

Acts 21:39

Paul later identified himself as a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia.

Acts 22:3

Paul said, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but raised in this city.”

Matthew 6:6

Jesus said, “When you pray, go into a private place, shut the door, and pray to your Father.”

Spiritual Principle

One evidence of a transformed heart is a new relationship with God.

XII. GOD PREPARES BOTH SAUL AND ANANIAS

Acts 9:12

“He has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come and lay hands on him to restore his sight.”

God is working on both sides of the encounter.

Saul sees Ananias coming.

Ananias is told to go.

Cross References

Mark 16:18

Jesus said His servants would lay hands on sick people and they would recover.

Acts 28:8

Paul later prayed for a sick man, laid hands upon him, and healed him.

2 Kings 5:11

Naaman had expected Elisha personally to come out, call upon God, and place his hand over the diseased area.

Spiritual Principle

God can prepare the messenger and the recipient before either understands the entire plan.

XIII. ANANIAS EXPRESSES HIS FEAR

Acts 9:13

“Ananias replied, ‘Lord, I have heard about this man and all the harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.’”

Ananias’ fear was understandable.

Saul was dangerous.

Cross References

Acts 8:3

Saul had been destroying the church, dragging believers from their homes and placing them in prison.

Galatians 1:13

Paul later admitted that he violently persecuted God's church.

1 Corinthians 15:9

Paul said he was unworthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God.

Spiritual Principle

Faith does not require pretending danger is unreal.

Ananias tells God exactly what concerns him.

XIV. SAUL HAS AUTHORITY TO ARREST BELIEVERS

Acts 9:14

"He has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name."

Ananias understood the threat.

Cross References

Acts 26:10

Paul said that he received authority from the chief priests to imprison many believers.

Acts 22:5

Paul testified that he carried letters authorizing arrests in Damascus.

John 15:21

Jesus warned that His followers would be mistreated because of His name.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes God calls us to obey Him in situations that legitimately frighten us.

XV. “HE IS MY CHOSEN INSTRUMENT”

Acts 9:15

“But the Lord said, ‘Go, for he is My chosen instrument to carry My name to the Gentiles, their kings, and the people of Israel.’”

Ananias sees Saul as a persecutor.

Jesus sees Saul’s future purpose.

Cross References

Acts 26:17

Jesus later described Saul’s mission to both Israel and the Gentiles.

Romans 1:5

Paul said that through Christ he received grace and apostleship to call people among the nations to the obedience of faith.

Galatians 1:16

Paul said God revealed His Son to him so that he might preach Christ among the Gentiles.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never assume a person’s past tells you everything about his future under the grace of God.

XVI. SAUL WILL SUFFER FOR CHRIST

Acts 9:16

“I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

Saul had caused suffering.

Now he would suffer as a servant of Christ.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:23

Paul later described imprisonments, beatings, dangers, and suffering beyond measure for Christ.

Acts 20:23

Paul said the Holy Spirit repeatedly warned him that imprisonment and suffering awaited him.

Philippians 1:29

Believers have been given not only the privilege of believing in Christ but also of suffering for His sake.

Spiritual Principle

God's calling does not guarantee an easy life.

For Saul, calling included suffering.

XVII. “BROTHER SAUL”

Acts 9:17

“So Ananias went and entered the house. He placed his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’”

The first recorded word Ananias says to Saul is:

“Brother.”

That is grace.

Cross References

Acts 8:17

Peter and John laid hands upon the Samaritan believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

1 Timothy 4:14

Timothy received recognition for ministry with the laying on of hands by spiritual leaders.

2 Timothy 1:6

Paul reminded Timothy to stir up the gift connected with the laying on of hands.

Spiritual Principle

Grace can turn former enemies into brothers.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel does not merely forgive enemies; it can bring them into the same family.

XVIII. SAUL REGAINS HIS SIGHT AND IS BAPTIZED

Acts 9:18

“Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.”

Saul’s physical sight returns.

His spiritual sight has already changed dramatically.

Cross References

Acts 22:13

Ananias told Saul, “Brother Saul, receive your sight,” and at that moment Saul could see him.

Acts 22:16

Ananias later told Saul to rise, be baptized, and call upon the name of the Lord.

Mark 8:25

Jesus placed His hands upon a blind man, and the man’s sight was fully restored.

Spiritual Principle

Conversion changes what a person sees spiritually before it changes where he goes physically.

XIX. SAUL JOINS THE DISCIPLES

Acts 9:19

“After eating, he regained his strength and spent some time with the disciples in Damascus.”

Saul came to Damascus to capture disciples.

Now he joins them.

Cross References

1 Kings 19:8

Elijah ate the food God provided and was strengthened for the journey ahead.

2 Corinthians 11:32

Paul later described danger he faced in Damascus under the authority of the governor.

Daniel 10:19

Daniel was told, “Be strong,” and received renewed strength.

Spiritual Principle

Conversion creates a new spiritual family.

XX. SAUL IMMEDIATELY PREACHES JESUS

Acts 9:20

“Right away, Saul began preaching in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.”

The transformation is unmistakable.

Previously:

Jesus was the enemy of Saul’s cause.

Now:

Jesus is Saul’s message.

Cross References

Romans 1:4

Jesus was powerfully declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead.

Mark 1:1

The gospel begins with Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

John 20:31

John wrote so that people might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life through His name.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A true encounter with Jesus changes what a person says about Jesus.

XXI. EVERYONE IS AMAZED

Acts 9:21

“Everyone who heard him was amazed, saying, ‘Isn’t this the man who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem? Didn’t he come here to arrest them?’”

The people knew Saul’s reputation.

That made his transformation even more powerful.

Cross References

Galatians 1:23

Churches heard the report: “The man who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.”

Acts 8:3

Saul had previously tried to destroy the church.

Acts 26:9

Paul later admitted that he had once believed he should do everything possible to oppose the name of Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

A changed life gives credibility to a changed message.

XXII. SAUL PROVES JESUS IS THE MESSIAH

Acts 9:22

“But Saul grew more powerful and confounded the Jews in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.”

Saul knew Scripture.

Now he understood Scripture through Christ.

Cross References

Acts 18:28

Apollos powerfully demonstrated from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.

Luke 24:27

Jesus explained from Moses and all the Prophets the Scriptures concerning Himself.

Acts 17:3

Paul later reasoned from Scripture that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead and that Jesus is that Messiah.

Spiritual Principle

Conversion does not destroy biblical learning; it gives biblical learning its proper center in Christ.

XXIII. PEOPLE PLOT TO KILL SAUL

Acts 9:23

“After many days, the Jews plotted to kill him.”

The persecutor has now become the persecuted.

Cross References

Acts 20:3

Paul later faced another plot against his life.

Acts 23:12

Some Jews formed a conspiracy and swore not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.

2 Corinthians 11:26

Paul later described repeated dangers from many groups during his ministry.

Spiritual Principle

Following Jesus may quickly change who considers you an ally and who considers you an enemy.

XXIV. THE GATES ARE WATCHED

Acts 9:24

“But Saul learned of their plan. They watched the city gates day and night to kill him.”

The danger was serious.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:32

Paul said that in Damascus the governor had the city guarded in order to arrest him.

Acts 23:21

Paul was warned that men were waiting in ambush to kill him.

Acts 25:3

Later enemies requested that Paul be transferred so they could ambush and kill him along the road.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom and faith are not opposites.

Knowing God protects us does not mean unnecessarily ignoring danger.

XXV. SAUL ESCAPES IN A BASKET

Acts 9:25

“But the disciples took him by night and lowered him in a basket through the city wall.”

The man who once entered Damascus carrying official letters leaves secretly in a basket.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:33

Paul later said, “I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped.”

Joshua 2:15

Rahab lowered the Israelite spies through a window because her house was built into the city wall.

1 Samuel 19:12

Michal lowered David through a window so he could escape from Saul's attempt to kill him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's servants do not always escape danger dramatically; sometimes deliverance looks like a basket through a wall.

XXVI. JERUSALEM DOES NOT TRUST SAUL

Acts 9:26

"When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him, not believing he was truly a disciple."

Their fear was understandable.

Saul's former reputation was terrifying.

Cross References

Galatians 1:18

Paul later said that after a period of time he went to Jerusalem and spent time with Peter.

Acts 22:17

Paul later described returning to Jerusalem and praying in the temple.

Acts 26:20

Paul testified that he preached repentance in Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea, and among the Gentiles.

Spiritual Principle

Forgiveness may be immediate, but rebuilding trust can take time.

The disciples were not necessarily being unforgiving.

They were cautious.

XXVII. BARNABAS STANDS WITH SAUL

Acts 9:27

“But Barnabas took him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and how he had preached boldly in Damascus in Jesus’ name.”

Once again Barnabas lives up to his name:

Son of Encouragement.

Cross References

Acts 4:36

Joseph, whom the apostles called Barnabas, was known as a son of encouragement.

Galatians 1:19

Paul later said that during this Jerusalem visit he also saw James, the Lord’s brother.

Acts 11:25

Barnabas later went to Tarsus specifically to look for Saul.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes a new believer needs one trusted person willing to say, “I believe God is at work in him.”

Barnabas becomes a bridge.

XXVIII. SAUL SPEAKS BOLDLY IN JERUSALEM

Acts 9:28

“So Saul stayed with them, moving freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the Lord’s name.”

Saul does not hide his faith.

Cross References

Acts 26:26

Paul later said that the events concerning Jesus had not happened secretly.

Ephesians 6:20

Paul asked believers to pray that he might speak the gospel boldly, even while in chains.

Acts 4:31

The early believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke God's Word boldly.

Spiritual Principle

The same city where Saul had persecuted Christians now hears Saul preach Christ.

XXIX. SAUL DEBATES THE GREEK-SPEAKING JEWS

Acts 9:29

“He debated with Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to kill him.”

This strongly echoes Stephen.

Stephen debated Greek-speaking Jews.

Saul had been connected with the persecution surrounding Stephen.

Now Saul enters similar ministry and faces similar opposition.

Cross References

Acts 6:9

Greek-speaking Jews from various regions debated with Stephen.

Acts 21:27

Later opponents would again stir up crowds against Paul.

Acts 23:12

Paul later faced a conspiracy to kill him.

Spiritual Principle

Grace can transform a man from participating in persecution to sharing in the sufferings of the persecuted.

XXX. SAUL IS SENT TO TARBUS

Acts 9:30

“When the believers learned of this, they took him to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.”

The church protects Saul.

Cross References

Acts 11:25

Barnabas later went to Tarsus looking for Saul.

Galatians 1:21

Paul later described going into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

Acts 22:3

Paul identified Tarsus as the city where he was born.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes leaving a dangerous location is wisdom, not cowardice.

XXXI. THE CHURCH EXPERIENCES PEACE AND GROWTH

Acts 9:31

“Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, living in the fear of the Lord, and grew in numbers.”

This verse summarizes healthy church life.

Peace

External pressure temporarily lessened.

Strength

The church became spiritually established.

Fear of the Lord

Believers lived reverently before God.

Encouragement of the Holy Spirit

They experienced divine help and comfort.

Growth

More people became believers.

Cross References

Acts 6:7

God's Word spread, and the number of disciples increased greatly.

Acts 16:5

The churches were strengthened in faith and increased in number daily.

Acts 2:47

The Lord continued adding to the church those who were being saved.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A healthy church walks in both the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Reverence and encouragement belong together.

XXXII. PETER TRAVELS TO LYDDA

Acts 9:32

“As Peter traveled through the region, he came to the believers in Lydda.”

The narrative returns to Peter.

Peter continues visiting and strengthening believers.

Cross References

Acts 8:14

Peter and John had previously traveled to Samaria to confirm the gospel's work there.

Acts 8:25

Peter and John preached in many Samaritan villages while returning to Jerusalem.

Matthew 9:35

Jesus traveled through towns and villages teaching, preaching, and ministering to people.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful ministry often involves going where people are rather than waiting for people to come to us.

XXXIII. AENEAS HAS BEEN PARALYZED FOR EIGHT YEARS

Acts 9:33

“There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years.”

His condition was longstanding.

Cross References

John 5:5

Jesus encountered a man who had suffered from a disabling condition for thirty-eight years.

Mark 2:3

People brought a paralyzed man to Jesus, carried by four men.

Acts 3:2

A man lame from birth had been carried daily to the temple gate.

Spiritual Principle

Length of suffering does not limit Christ’s authority.

XXXIV. “JESUS CHRIST HEALS YOU”

Acts 9:34

“Peter said, ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed.’ Immediately he got up.”

Peter makes the source of the healing clear.

He does not say:

“Peter heals you.”

He says:

“Jesus Christ heals you.”

Cross References

Mark 2:11

Jesus told the paralyzed man, “Get up, pick up your mat, and go home.”

Acts 3:6

Peter told the lame man, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”

John 5:8

Jesus told the disabled man, “Get up, pick up your mat, and walk.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful ministry gives Jesus the credit for what only Jesus can do.

XXXV. PEOPLE TURN TO THE LORD

Acts 9:35

“All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.”

Again the miracle points beyond itself.

People do not merely admire Peter.

They:

“Turned to the Lord.”

Cross References

Acts 4:4

Many who heard the gospel believed.

Isaiah 35:2

Isaiah describes people seeing the glory and majesty of the Lord.

Acts 19:17

When God’s power became widely known, the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored.

Spiritual Principle

The proper result of spiritual ministry is not admiration of the servant but turning toward the Lord.

XXXVI. TABITHA — A DISCIPLE KNOWN FOR GOOD WORKS

Acts 9:36

“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas). She was always doing good and helping the poor.”

Tabitha is remembered not for public preaching but for practical compassion.

Cross References

Proverbs 31:20

The godly woman opens her hand to the poor and reaches out to those in need.

1 Timothy 5:10

A godly widow is known for good works, hospitality, service, and helping those in trouble.

Galatians 2:10

Paul said the apostles urged him to remember the poor, something he was eager to do.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A life of quiet service can leave a powerful spiritual legacy.

XXXVII. TABITHA DIES

Acts 9:37

“About that time, she became sick and died. They washed her body and laid her in an upstairs room.”

A faithful disciple becomes sick and dies.

Cross References

2 Kings 4:21

The Shunammite woman laid her dead son on the prophet's bed in the upstairs room.

John 11:14

Jesus plainly told His disciples, "Lazarus is dead."

Acts 20:9

Eutychus later fell from an upper room and was taken up dead.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness to God does not mean believers never become sick or die.

Tabitha was godly.

She still died.

XXXVIII. THE DISCIPLES SEND FOR PETER

Acts 9:38

"Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples heard that Peter was there and sent two men urging him, 'Please come at once!'"

The believers act with urgency.

Cross References

2 Kings 4:22

The Shunammite woman urgently prepared to go find the prophet Elisha.

Mark 5:23

Jairus pleaded with Jesus to come because his daughter was near death.

Luke 7:6

A centurion sent friends asking Jesus to help his sick servant.

Spiritual Principle

Faith often expresses itself by seeking God's help in desperate circumstances.

XXXIX. TABITHA'S LIFE SPEAKS AFTER HER DEATH

Acts 9:39

“Peter went with them. When he arrived, they took him upstairs. All the widows stood around him crying and showing him the clothes Dorcas had made while she was alive.”

The widows held physical evidence of Tabitha's compassion.

Clothes she had made.

Cross References

2 Kings 4:32

Elisha entered the room where the dead child had been laid.

Luke 7:12

Jesus encountered a funeral procession where a grieving widow had lost her only son.

James 1:27

Pure religion includes caring for widows in their distress.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The value of a Christian life is often revealed by the people who were helped through it.

Tabitha left more than possessions.

She left evidence of love.

XL. PETER KNEELS AND PRAYS

Acts 9:40

“Peter sent them all out, knelt down and prayed. Then he turned to the body and said, ‘Tabitha, get up.’ She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up.”

Peter does not immediately speak to the body.

First:

He prays.

Cross References

2 Kings 4:33

Elisha entered the room, closed the door, and prayed to the Lord.

Mark 5:41

Jesus took Jairus' daughter by the hand and told her to rise.

John 11:43

Jesus cried out loudly, "Lazarus, come out!"

Spiritual Principle

Powerful ministry begins with dependence upon God.

Peter kneels before he speaks.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Prayer should come before presumption.

XLI. TABITHA IS PRESENTED ALIVE

Acts 9:41

"He took her by the hand, helped her to her feet, and presented her alive to the believers and widows."

The sorrow of the room becomes joy.

Cross References

1 Kings 17:23

Elijah carried the restored child downstairs and presented him alive to his mother.

Mark 5:42

Jairus' daughter immediately stood and began walking, and everyone was overwhelmed with amazement.

Luke 8:55

The girl's spirit returned, and she immediately stood up.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus Christ remains Lord over life and death.

XLII. MANY BELIEVE IN THE LORD

Acts 9:42

“This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.”

Again the miracle serves the gospel.

Cross References

John 11:45

Many people who saw what Jesus did in raising Lazarus believed in Him.

John 12:11

Many people were believing in Jesus because of Lazarus.

Acts 19:17

As God’s power became known, the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

Spiritual Principle

God’s works should direct attention toward faith in the Lord.

XLIII. PETER STAYS WITH SIMON THE TANNER

Acts 9:43

“Peter stayed in Joppa for many days with a man named Simon, a tanner.”

This detail prepares for Acts 10.

A tanner regularly worked with animal hides and dead animals, an occupation many strict Jews would have regarded as ceremonially uncomfortable or socially undesirable.

Peter is already being moved toward boundaries that God will challenge even more dramatically in the next chapter.

Cross References

Acts 10:6

Peter stayed with Simon the tanner, whose house was beside the sea.

Acts 10:32

Cornelius was told to send for Peter, who was staying with Simon the tanner.

Acts 11:5

Peter later described the vision he received while praying in Joppa.

Spiritual Principle

God often prepares His servants gradually for the next step of obedience.

XLIV. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 9

1. No One Is Beyond the Reach of Christ

Saul was actively persecuting believers.

Jesus stopped him.

Principle:

Never decide that someone is too hardened for God to save.

2. Conversion Changes Allegiance

Saul entered Damascus serving one purpose.

He soon began serving Jesus.

Principle:

Salvation is not merely adding Jesus to an old life; it places the whole life under a new Lord.

3. God Uses Ordinary Believers

Ananias was not a famous apostle.

Yet his obedience became part of Paul's conversion story.

Principle:

You do not have to be famous to become important in God's work.

4. God Can Redeem a Terrible Past

Saul had persecuted the church.

Christ made him a chosen instrument.

Principle:

Grace does not deny the past; grace transforms what comes next.

5. New Believers Need Christian Community

Ananias welcomed Saul.

Barnabas defended Saul.

The disciples protected Saul.

Principle:

Conversion brings people into the family of God.

6. Miracles Should Point to Jesus

Peter said:

“Jesus Christ heals you.”

People turned to the Lord.

Principle:

God's servant must never steal God's glory.

7. Quiet Service Matters

Tabitha was known for good works and helping the poor.

Principle:

A life of practical love can have enormous spiritual influence.

XLV. SAUL BEFORE AND AFTER MEETING JESUS

Before

Breathing threats.

Seeking arrests.

Destroying churches.

Opposing Jesus.

Feared by believers.

After

Praying.

Calling Jesus Lord.

Being baptized.

Joining disciples.

Preaching Jesus.

Proving Jesus is Messiah.

Suffering for Jesus.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The best evidence of conversion is not merely a story about what happened once—it is a transformed direction of life.

XLVI. WHAT SAUL'S CONVERSION TEACHES ABOUT GRACE

Saul did not earn Christ's attention.

He was not searching for Jesus.

He was traveling to arrest Jesus' followers.

Yet Christ confronted him.

Grace Interrupted Him

Grace Humbled Him

Grace Forgave Him

Grace Called Him

Grace Changed Him

Grace Used Him

Spiritual Principle

Grace can meet a sinner while he is still traveling in the wrong direction.

XLVII. WHAT ANANIAS TEACHES ABOUT OBEDIENCE

Ananias was afraid.

Yet he obeyed.

That matters.

He Listened to God

He Expressed His Concern Honestly

He Received God's Answer

He Went Anyway

He Called Saul "Brother"

Spiritual Principle

Courage is not the absence of fear; courage is obedience after fear has been brought before God.

XLVIII. WHAT BARNABAS TEACHES ABOUT ENCOURAGEMENT

Saul's conversion was real.

But others did not trust him yet.

Barnabas stood beside him.

Barnabas Saw Possibility

Barnabas Took a Risk

Barnabas Opened a Door

Barnabas Helped Build Trust

Crawford Bible Study Principle

An encourager can help someone move from a changed life into a useful life.

XLIX. WHAT ACTS 9 TEACHES ABOUT SUFFERING

Jesus told Saul:

“I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.”

This corrects the idea that God's calling always produces comfort.

Saul would experience:

Imprisonment.

Beatings.

Plots.

Shipwreck.

Rejection.

Hardship.

Yet he would remain faithful.

Principle

Christian calling is measured by faithfulness, not ease.

L. WHAT ACTS 9 TEACHES ABOUT THE CHURCH

Acts 9:31 presents a balanced church.

It had:

Peace.

Strength.

Fear of the Lord.

Encouragement of the Holy Spirit.

Growth.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy Christianity combines reverence, encouragement, maturity, and mission.

LI. AENEAS AND TABITHA — TWO MIRACLES, ONE LORD

Peter ministers in two different situations.

Aeneas

Paralyzed for eight years.

Jesus heals him.

Tabitha

Dead.

God restores her life through Peter's prayer.

In both cases the result is gospel impact.

People:

Turn to the Lord.

And:

Believe in the Lord.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The miracle is never greater than the Lord to whom the miracle points.

LII. TABITHA — THE POWER OF A USEFUL LIFE

Tabitha may not have been known as:

A preacher.

An apostle.

A theologian.

A public leader.

But when she died:

Widows wept.

They showed Peter the clothes she made.

Her ministry could be held in their hands.

Spiritual Principle

Some of the strongest sermons are lives spent quietly doing good.

Ask yourself:

What evidence of Christlike love would people remember if I were gone?

LIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What was Saul doing when Jesus appeared to him?

Saul was traveling to Damascus with authority to arrest followers of Jesus.
He was actively persecuting the church.

Question 2

Why did Jesus say Saul was persecuting Him?

Jesus identifies Himself with His people.

Saul was attacking Christians, but Christ described those attacks as persecution against Himself.

This reveals the deep union between Christ and His church.

Question 3

What changed first in Saul's life?

His understanding of Jesus changed.

He discovered that Jesus was not dead or defeated.

Jesus was alive and Lord.

That revelation changed Saul's entire direction.

Question 4

Why was Saul blind for three days?

The text records the blindness as the immediate result of his encounter with Christ.

During those days Saul was humbled, dependent, fasting, and praying.

It became a period of dramatic transition between persecutor and disciple.

Question 5

Who was Ananias?

Ananias was a disciple living in Damascus.

He was not introduced as an apostle or famous leader.

God used this ordinary believer to minister to Saul at a decisive moment.

Question 6

Why was Ananias afraid to go to Saul?

He knew Saul's reputation.

Saul had persecuted believers in Jerusalem and had authority to arrest Christians in Damascus.

His fear was based upon genuine danger.

Question 7

What did Jesus say Saul would become?

Jesus called Saul:

"My chosen instrument."

Saul would carry Christ's name before:

Gentiles.

Kings.

Israel.

His future mission would become extraordinarily broad.

Question 8

What happened after Saul regained his sight?

He was baptized, spent time with the disciples, and began preaching that Jesus is the Son of God.

Question 9

Why were believers in Jerusalem afraid of Saul?

They knew his former reputation and did not initially believe his conversion was genuine.

Barnabas helped confirm Saul's testimony and introduced him to the apostles.

Question 10

Who was Barnabas and what did he do?

Barnabas was known as the son of encouragement.

He took Saul to the apostles and explained Saul's encounter with Jesus and his bold preaching in Damascus.

Barnabas became a bridge between Saul and suspicious believers.

Question 11

Who was Tabitha?

Tabitha, also called Dorcas, was a disciple in Joppa known for doing good and helping the poor.

Her life had especially affected widows, who mourned deeply when she died.

Question 12

What happened after Peter raised Tabitha?

The news spread throughout Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

The miracle became an occasion for increased faith in Jesus Christ.

LIV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 9 asks several serious questions.

Have I Truly Encountered Jesus as Lord?

Saul's life changed because his understanding of Jesus changed.

Am I Fighting Something God Is Trying to Change in Me?

Saul learned resistance was useless.

Can God Use My Past?

Yes, but He must transform my direction.

Am I Available Like Ananias?

Would I obey even when God's assignment frightens me?

Can I Welcome Someone Whose Past Makes Me Uncomfortable?

Ananias called Saul:

“Brother.”

Am I an Encourager Like Barnabas?

Who needs someone to believe that God is working in them?

Does My Faith Produce Visible Change?

Saul immediately began proclaiming Christ.

Am I Doing Quiet Good Like Tabitha?

Who is helped because I follow Jesus?

LV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Write the Final Chapter of Someone God Has Not Finished With”

Ananias knew Saul’s history.

The believers knew Saul’s history.

Everyone knew Saul’s history.

But Jesus knew Saul’s future.

They saw:

Persecutor.

Jesus saw:

Chosen instrument.

They saw:

Danger.

Jesus saw:

Missionary.

They saw:

Enemy.

Jesus saw:

Servant.

Principle

God's grace can write a future that a person's past could never predict.

LVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God Often Uses One Obedient Believer to Help Launch Another Believer's Calling”

Without Ananias, Saul still belonged to Christ.

But Ananias became part of Saul's restoration, welcome, healing, and commissioning.

Later Barnabas became part of Saul's acceptance.

Principle

Do not underestimate the ministry of helping another person become who God has called them to become.

You may never preach to thousands.

But you may encourage someone who will.

LVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Changed Life Must Eventually Produce Changed Direction”

Saul did not merely say:

“I had an experience.”

His entire life changed.

He joined the people he had persecuted.

He preached the Jesus he had opposed.

He suffered for the name he had attacked.

Principle

Conversion is more than emotional experience; it is a new allegiance to Jesus Christ.

LVIII. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 9 begins with Saul breathing threats.

It ends with many people believing in the Lord.

At the beginning:

Saul wants Christians arrested.

By the middle:

Saul is preaching Christ.

At the beginning:

Christians fear Saul.

Soon:

Saul suffers beside them.

What caused the difference?

Jesus.

One encounter with the risen Christ changed everything.

Saul discovered:

Jesus is alive.

Jesus is Lord.

Jesus identifies with His church.

Jesus has authority over Saul.

Jesus has a purpose for Saul.

That remains the heart of conversion.

Christianity is not merely becoming more religious.

Saul was already religious.

It is not becoming more sincere.

Saul was already sincere.

It is not becoming more committed.

Saul was already committed.

Saul needed Jesus.

Acts 9 also reminds us that God uses ordinary people.

Ananias does not dominate the book of Acts.

But he obeyed one critical assignment.

Barnabas was willing to stand beside someone others feared.

Tabitha spent her life helping people quietly.

Peter continued traveling and ministering wherever God opened doors.

All of them mattered.

Acts 9 therefore speaks to every believer.

You may be:

A Saul who needs transformation.

An Ananias who needs courage.

A Barnabas who needs to encourage someone.

A Tabitha who needs to keep serving quietly.

A Peter who needs to keep going wherever God opens the next door.

Whatever the assignment:

Be faithful.

Jesus still transforms.

Jesus still calls.

Jesus still restores.

Jesus still uses ordinary people.

And Jesus still receives the glory.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the testimony of Saul's conversion.

Thank You that no sinner is beyond the reach of Your grace.

Thank You that Jesus can stop a person moving in the wrong direction and completely transform his life.

Search us.

Show us where we may be resisting You.

Give us hearts that ask:

“Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Thank You for Ananias.

Give us his courage.

Help us obey You even when Your assignment makes us afraid.

Give us grace to see people not only as they were but as they may become through Jesus Christ.

Thank You for Barnabas.

Make us encouragers.

Help us stand beside people who are trying to follow Christ but are struggling to be trusted or accepted.

Thank You for Saul.

Remind us that past sin does not have to become future identity when Christ transforms a life.

Thank You for Peter.

Keep us faithful in ministry.

Keep us prayerful.

Keep us dependent upon You.

Thank You for Aeneas and the reminder that Jesus Christ is powerful.

Thank You for Tabitha and the reminder that quiet service matters.

Make us people who do good.

Help us care for the poor.

Help us strengthen the weak.

Help us leave behind evidence of Christlike love.

Strengthen Your church.

Teach us to walk in the fear of the Lord.

Encourage us through the Holy Spirit.

And continue adding people who believe in Jesus.

May our lives proclaim the same truth Saul began preaching:

Jesus is the Son of God.

And:

Jesus is the Messiah.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But the Lord said, ‘Go, for he is My chosen instrument to carry My name to the Gentiles, their kings, and the people of Israel.’ — Acts 9:15

Central Truth

The risen Jesus Christ can transform His fiercest enemy into His chosen servant, use ordinary believers to advance His purposes, strengthen His church through the Holy Spirit, and demonstrate His authority through changed lives and powerful works.

Acts 9 in One Sentence

Jesus confronts Saul on the Damascus road and transforms the church's violent persecutor into a bold preacher of the gospel, while ordinary believers such as Ananias and Barnabas help him begin his new life and Peter's ministry continues demonstrating Christ's power through the healing of Aeneas and the restoration of Tabitha.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 10 — The Gospel Comes to the Gentiles

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 10 is one of the most important turning points in the entire book of Acts.

The gospel had already moved:

From Jerusalem.

Into Judea.

Into Samaria.

Now God makes unmistakably clear that the good news of Jesus Christ is also for the Gentiles.

The chapter centers on two men.

The first is:

Cornelius.

Cornelius was a Roman centurion living in Caesarea.

He was not Jewish.

Yet he is described as:

Devout.

God-fearing.

Generous.

Prayerful.

God sees his prayers and acts of generosity.

An angel tells him to send for Peter.

The second man is:

Peter.

Peter still carried cultural and religious assumptions concerning Gentiles.

Before Peter could enter Cornelius' house, God had to prepare Peter's heart.

While Peter prayed on a rooftop, he saw a vision of a large sheet containing all kinds of animals.

A voice told him:

“Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

Peter refused because he had never eaten anything ceremonially unclean.

Then the voice declared:

“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

Peter would soon understand that the vision concerned far more than food.

God was teaching him:

“Do not call anyone impure or unclean.”

When Peter arrives at Cornelius' house, he finds a room filled with people ready to hear God's Word.

Peter begins with a confession:

"I now realize that God does not show favoritism."

Then he preaches Jesus Christ.

He proclaims:

- Jesus was anointed by God.
- Jesus went about doing good.
- Jesus healed those oppressed by the devil.
- Jesus was crucified.
- God raised Him from the dead.
- Jesus appeared to chosen witnesses.
- Jesus is Judge of the living and the dead.
- Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.

Then something extraordinary happens.

Before Peter finishes speaking:

The Holy Spirit falls upon the Gentiles.

The Jewish believers who came with Peter are amazed.

God gives Gentile believers the same Holy Spirit.

There is no second-class church.

No separate Gentile gospel.

No inferior salvation.

Peter then asks:

"Surely no one can refuse water for these people to be baptized."

Acts 10 therefore teaches one of the great truths of the gospel:

Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background.

I. CORNELIUS THE CENTURION

Acts 10:1

"In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Regiment."

Cornelius was a Roman military officer.

A centurion traditionally commanded approximately one hundred soldiers, though actual numbers could vary.

He belonged to the Roman military establishment.

Cross References

Matthew 8:5

When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him asking for help.

Luke 7:2

A Roman centurion had a servant he valued greatly who was sick and near death.

Acts 27:1

When Paul was later sent to Rome, he was placed under the authority of a centurion named Julius.

Spiritual Principle

God's grace reaches people in every occupation and social position.

Roman soldier.

Jewish fisherman.

Ethiopian official.

Samaritan villager.

The gospel is not restricted by profession or nationality.

II. A DEVOUT AND PRAYERFUL MAN

Acts 10:2

“He was a devout man who feared God, along with his whole household. He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.”

Cornelius possessed several admirable qualities.

He Feared God

He respected and sought the true God.

His Household Was Influenced

His devotion affected those around him.

He Was Generous

His faith produced compassion.

He Prayed Regularly

He sincerely sought God.

Cross References

Acts 10:22

Cornelius was described as righteous, God-fearing, and respected among the Jewish people.

Proverbs 19:17

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and the Lord will remember that kindness.

Acts 16:14

Lydia was a worshiper of God whose heart the Lord opened so she responded to the gospel.

Important Truth

Cornelius was sincere, religious, generous, and prayerful.

Yet he still needed to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Good works may demonstrate spiritual hunger, but they cannot replace salvation through Jesus Christ.

III. CORNELIUS RECEIVES A VISION

Acts 10:3

“One afternoon about three o’clock, he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God who came to him and said, ‘Cornelius!’”

God responds to Cornelius’ seeking heart by directing him toward the gospel.

Cross References

Luke 1:11

An angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah while he was serving in the temple.

Daniel 9:21

While Daniel was praying, the angel Gabriel came to him with a message.

Acts 9:10

The Lord spoke to Ananias in Damascus through a vision.

Spiritual Principle

God knows how to bring truth to those who sincerely seek Him.

IV. GOD HAS NOTICED HIS PRAYERS

Acts 10:4

“Cornelius stared at him in fear and asked, ‘What is it, Lord?’ The angel replied, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been noticed by God.’”

God had seen what Cornelius was doing.

Cross References

Philippians 4:18

Paul described faithful giving as a fragrant offering, acceptable and pleasing to God.

Hebrews 6:10

God is not unjust. He will not forget the work and love shown in service to His people.

Psalms 141:2

Let my prayer rise before You like incense and my lifted hands like an evening sacrifice.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness unnoticed by people is still noticed by God.

V. SEND FOR PETER

Acts 10:5–6

“Now send men to Joppa to bring back Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

God could have explained the gospel directly through the angel.

Instead, He sends Cornelius to Peter.

Cross References

Acts 9:43

Peter had remained in Joppa with Simon the tanner.

Acts 10:32

Cornelius later repeated the instruction to send for Peter in Joppa.

Acts 11:13

Cornelius later explained that an angel told him to send for Peter.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God ordinarily uses human witnesses to proclaim the gospel to other human beings.

Angels can give directions.

But believers have been commissioned to preach Christ.

VI. CORNELIUS OBEYS

Acts 10:7–8

“When the angel left, Cornelius called two servants and a devout soldier who attended him. After explaining everything, he sent them to Joppa.”

Cornelius responds immediately.

Cross References

Acts 10:22

Cornelius’ messengers explained that he had been instructed to send for Peter.

Matthew 8:9

A centurion explained that he understood authority because he gave commands and expected obedience.

Acts 27:1

Roman centurions repeatedly appear in Acts as military authorities.

Luke 9:52

Jesus sent messengers ahead to prepare the way for Him.

Spiritual Principle

When God gives clear direction, obedience should not be unnecessarily delayed.

VII. PETER GOES TO PRAY

Acts 10:9

“The next day, as they approached the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray around noon.”

God is working simultaneously.

Cornelius is sending men.

Peter is praying.

Cross References

Psalms 55:17

Evening, morning, and noon I cry out to God, and He hears my voice.

Daniel 6:10

Daniel prayed three times each day, giving thanks to God.

Acts 3:1

Peter and John had gone to the temple at the regular time of prayer.

Spiritual Principle

Prayer often places believers in a position to receive God’s direction.

VIII. PETER FALLS INTO A TRANCE

Acts 10:10

“He became very hungry and wanted to eat, but while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.”

Peter’s physical hunger becomes part of the setting through which God teaches him.

Cross References

Numbers 12:6

God said He could reveal Himself to prophets through visions and dreams.

Acts 22:17

Paul later described falling into a trance while praying in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 1:1

Ezekiel saw visions of God when the heavens were opened.

Spiritual Principle

God can use ordinary circumstances as the setting for extraordinary instruction.

IX. HEAVEN OPENS

Acts 10:11

“He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.”

Cross References

Ezekiel 1:1

Ezekiel said the heavens opened and he saw visions of God.

Revelation 4:1

John saw an open door in heaven and received revelation.

Acts 7:56

Stephen declared that he saw heaven open and the Son of Man standing at God’s right hand.

Spiritual Principle

Peter is about to receive instruction that will radically expand his understanding of God’s mission.

X. ALL KINDS OF ANIMALS

Acts 10:12

“Inside were all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds.”

The sheet contained animals representing categories Peter had learned to distinguish under Old Testament dietary laws.

Cross References

Genesis 1:24

God commanded the earth to produce different kinds of living creatures.

Leviticus 11:4

Israel was given specific distinctions concerning animals that were considered clean or unclean for food.

Genesis 7:14

Noah's ark included different kinds of animals, livestock, creatures, and birds.

Spiritual Principle

God was preparing Peter to rethink distinctions that had shaped his life from childhood.

XI. “KILL AND EAT”

Acts 10:13

“Then a voice said, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’”

Peter receives a command that conflicts with his accustomed dietary practice.

Cross References

Genesis 9:3

God told Noah that living creatures could be used as food, just as plants had been given.

Romans 14:14

Paul later explained that nothing is ceremonially unclean in itself for the believer.

Mark 7:19

Jesus' teaching removed ceremonial food distinctions as a basis for spiritual purity.

Spiritual Principle

God sometimes must challenge deeply rooted assumptions before He can expand a servant's ministry.

XII. PETER OBJECTS

Acts 10:14

“Peter replied, ‘No, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’”

Peter’s response sounds contradictory:

“No.”

And:

“Lord.”

If Jesus is Lord, His command must ultimately govern.

Cross References

Ezekiel 4:14

Ezekiel protested that he had never knowingly defiled himself through ceremonially unclean food.

Leviticus 11:47

Israel was commanded to distinguish between clean and unclean animals.

Daniel 1:8

Daniel determined not to defile himself with the king’s food.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes obedience requires allowing God’s Word to correct even long-held religious assumptions.

XIII. “DO NOT CALL IMPURE WHAT GOD HAS MADE CLEAN”

Acts 10:15

“The voice spoke again, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’”

This becomes the central message of the vision.

Cross References

Mark 7:19

Jesus taught that food does not spiritually defile the heart.

Romans 14:14

Paul said he was convinced in the Lord Jesus that no food was inherently unclean.

1 Timothy 4:4

Everything God created is good and should not be rejected when received with thanksgiving.

Important Truth

Peter will soon understand that the vision is ultimately about:

People.

Acts 10:28 gives Peter's interpretation:

"God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean."

Spiritual Principle

God was removing a barrier that would hinder Peter from carrying the gospel to Gentiles.

XIV. THE VISION IS REPEATED THREE TIMES

Acts 10:16

"This happened three times, and then the sheet was taken back into heaven."

Repetition emphasizes certainty and importance.

Cross References

Genesis 41:32

Joseph explained that Pharaoh's dream was repeated because the matter had been firmly established by God.

2 Corinthians 12:8

Paul said he pleaded with the Lord three times concerning his affliction.

John 21:17

Jesus asked Peter three times whether he loved Him, pressing the lesson deeply into Peter's heart.

Spiritual Principle

God sometimes repeats a lesson because our old thinking is difficult to change.

XV. GOD'S TIMING BECOMES VISIBLE

Acts 10:17–18

While Peter is wondering about the vision:

Cornelius' men arrive.

Cross References

Daniel 8:15

Daniel pondered the meaning of a vision and sought understanding.

Luke 24:4

The women at the tomb were confused by what they had encountered until heavenly explanation came.

John 16:13

Jesus promised that the Spirit of truth would guide His followers into truth.

Acts 10:5

Cornelius had been specifically instructed to send for Peter.

Acts 9:43

Peter was staying at Simon the tanner's house.

Acts 11:13

Cornelius later repeated the angel's instruction.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can prepare the preacher and the hearer at the same time.

XVI. THE HOLY SPIRIT SPEAKS TO PETER

Acts 10:19–20

“While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit told him, ‘Three men are looking for you. Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation, for I have sent them.’”

The Holy Spirit makes the next step clear.

Cross References

Acts 8:29

The Spirit told Philip to go near the Ethiopian’s chariot.

Acts 13:2

The Holy Spirit directed the church to set apart Barnabas and Saul for missionary work.

Acts 11:12

Peter later explained that the Spirit told him to go with the Gentile messengers without hesitation.

Matthew 28:19

Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples among all nations.

Spiritual Principle

The Holy Spirit not only empowers mission; He directs mission.

XVII. PETER MEETS THE MESSENGERS

Acts 10:21–22

The messengers explain Cornelius’ character and vision.

Cross References

Acts 11:12

Peter later described traveling with the men as the Spirit directed.

John 18:5

People seeking Jesus identified whom they were looking for, and Jesus responded openly.

John 1:38

Jesus asked those following Him, “What are you looking for?”

Acts 10:2

Cornelius was already described as devout and God-fearing.

Luke 7:5

Another Roman centurion had been respected by Jewish elders because of his generosity and concern.

Acts 22:12

Ananias was described as a devout man respected by the Jewish community.

Spiritual Principle

God had prepared a Gentile household to receive apostolic gospel preaching.

XVIII. PETER INVITES GENTILES INTO THE HOUSE

Acts 10:23

“Peter invited them in as his guests.”

This small action is significant.

Peter begins crossing the barrier before he even arrives at Cornelius’ house.

Cross References

Acts 11:12

Six Jewish believers later accompanied Peter to Cornelius’ house.

Genesis 24:31

Hospitality was extended to a traveler who had arrived on an important mission.

3 John 1:8

Believers are encouraged to show hospitality to those serving the truth.

Spiritual Principle

Changed theology should produce changed behavior.

XIX. CORNELIUS GATHERS OTHERS

Acts 10:24

“Cornelius was expecting them and had gathered his relatives and close friends.”

Cornelius did not want the message only for himself.

He brought others.

Cross References

Luke 15:6

The man who found his lost sheep called friends and neighbors to rejoice with him.

Acts 16:15

Lydia’s household became involved in the gospel response and Christian hospitality.

John 4:53

A royal official believed, and his household also responded.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A person who expects God to speak should want others to hear too.

XX. CORNELIUS FALLS AT PETER’S FEET

Acts 10:25

“When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.”

Cornelius gives Peter more honor than Peter is willing to accept.

Cross References

Revelation 19:10

John fell before an angel, but the angel said, “Do not do that. Worship God.”

Revelation 22:8

John again fell before an angel in reverence and was corrected.

Acts 14:13

People later attempted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas after a miracle.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful servants refuse worship that belongs only to God.

XXI. “I AM ONLY A MAN”

Acts 10:26

“But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I am only a man myself.’”

Peter immediately rejects exaltation.

Cross References

Acts 14:15

Paul and Barnabas said, “We are human beings just like you.”

Revelation 19:10

The angel told John to worship God rather than a created servant.

Revelation 22:9

Again the angel said, “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant. Worship God.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The true servant of God points people upward, not toward himself.

XXII. PETER FINDS A HOUSE FULL OF PEOPLE

Acts 10:27

“While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.”

God had prepared an audience.

Cross References

Acts 10:24

Cornelius had gathered relatives and close friends.

Luke 14:23

Jesus told of inviting people so the house would be filled.

Acts 16:32

Paul and Silas preached the Word of the Lord to a jailer and everyone in his household.

Spiritual Principle

When God opens a gospel door, He may already have people gathered on the other side.

XXIII. PETER UNDERSTANDS THE VISION

Acts 10:28

“God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.”

This verse interprets the vision.

The ultimate issue was not merely dietary law.

It was Peter’s attitude toward Gentiles.

Cross References

Acts 10:15

God had told Peter not to call unclean what He had made clean.

Galatians 2:12

Peter later still struggled with social pressure concerning fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers.

John 4:9

The Samaritan woman recognized that Jews ordinarily avoided close social interaction with Samaritans.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel confronts prejudice wherever prejudice treats people as spiritually unreachable because of ethnicity or background.

XXIV. PETER COMES WITHOUT OBJECTION

Acts 10:29

“That is why I came without objection when I was sent for. May I ask why you sent for me?”

Peter obeyed what he understood.

Cross References

Acts 10:8

Cornelius sent his servants after receiving the angel’s instruction.

Romans 3:29

God is not the God of Jews only but also of Gentiles.

Acts 10:33

Cornelius explains that everyone is gathered to hear everything God commanded Peter to say.

Spiritual Principle

Revelation must lead to obedience.

XXV. CORNELIUS EXPLAINS THE VISION

Acts 10:30–32

Cornelius recounts the angelic message and God’s recognition of his prayer.

Cross References

Luke 24:4

Heavenly messengers appeared in shining clothing at Jesus’ tomb.

Acts 1:10

Two men in white clothing appeared when Jesus ascended.

Daniel 10:5

Daniel saw a heavenly messenger clothed in remarkable appearance.

Philippians 4:18

Generous giving offered sincerely to God is described as pleasing to Him.

Psalms 116:1

The psalmist loves the Lord because He hears prayer.

Hebrews 6:10

God remembers faithful service.

Acts 9:43

Peter was indeed staying with Simon the tanner.

Acts 10:6

The angel gave Cornelius exact directions.

Acts 11:13

Cornelius later repeated this testimony.

Spiritual Principle

God's providence was unmistakably coordinating the meeting between Cornelius and Peter.

XXVI. "WE ARE ALL HERE TO LISTEN"

Acts 10:33

"Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

This is one of the finest descriptions of a teachable congregation in Scripture.

They are:

Present.

Expectant.

Attentive.

Ready to hear everything.

Cross References**Acts 10:22**

Cornelius had been instructed to hear Peter's message.

James 1:19

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Nehemiah 8:3

The people listened attentively as God's Word was read.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The best hearer does not ask the preacher to say what he wants to hear, but what God has commanded him to say.

XXVII. GOD DOES NOT SHOW FAVORITISM

Acts 10:34

“Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize that God does not show favoritism.’”

Peter is learning something profound.

Cross References

Romans 2:11

There is no favoritism with God.

Deuteronomy 10:17

The Lord is the great and mighty God who shows no partiality.

Galatians 2:6

God does not judge people according to worldly status.

Spiritual Principle

God does not value one ethnicity as inherently more worthy of salvation than another.

XXVIII. PEOPLE FROM EVERY NATION

Acts 10:35

“But accepts from every nation those who fear Him and do what is right.”

Peter is not teaching salvation by good works.

His sermon will soon make clear that forgiveness comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Rather, he is recognizing that God is not restricted to one nationality and that sincere seekers are not excluded because of ethnicity.

Cross References

Micah 6:8

God calls people to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him.

Romans 10:12

There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile because the same Lord is Lord of all.

Revelation 7:9

John saw a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before God.

Key Truth

God's saving invitation extends across every national and ethnic boundary.

XXIX. JESUS CHRIST IS LORD OF ALL

Acts 10:36

“This is the message God sent to Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.”

Peter now begins preaching Christ.

Cross References

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful are the feet of the messenger who announces good news, peace, salvation, and God's reign.

Ephesians 2:17

Christ came and preached peace to those who were far away and those who were near.

Romans 10:12

The same Lord is Lord of everyone and richly blesses all who call upon Him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel crosses every boundary because Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

XXX. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS WAS PUBLICLY KNOWN

Acts 10:37

“You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism John preached.”

Peter grounds the gospel in historical events.

Cross References

Luke 4:14

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and news about Him spread.

Mark 1:14

After John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee preaching the good news of God.

Matthew 3:13

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

Spiritual Principle

Christian faith is rooted in events God accomplished in history, not merely abstract religious ideas.

XXXI. JESUS WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD

Acts 10:38

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

Peter summarizes Jesus’ earthly ministry.

Cross References

Luke 4:18

Jesus declared that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him to preach good news, freedom, recovery, and deliverance.

Isaiah 61:1

The prophet foretold the Spirit-anointed Servant who would bring good news and liberty.

Matthew 4:23

Jesus traveled throughout Galilee teaching, preaching the kingdom, and healing disease and sickness.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus' power was expressed through holiness, truth, compassion, and deliverance.

XXXII. JESUS WAS KILLED ON THE CROSS

Acts 10:39

“We are witnesses of everything He did in Judea and Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a cross.”

Peter does not avoid the cross.

Cross References

Acts 5:30

Peter had previously declared that Jesus was killed by being hung on a tree.

1 Peter 2:24

Christ carried our sins in His body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness.

Deuteronomy 21:23

A person hung upon a tree was associated with being under a curse.

Key Truth

The gospel includes the death of Jesus Christ.

XXXIII. GOD RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD

Acts 10:40

“But God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen.”

The cross was not the end.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 15:4

Christ was buried and raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Luke 24:34

The disciples declared that the Lord had truly risen.

Matthew 28:6

The angel said, “He is not here. He has risen, just as He said.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel is not merely that Jesus died—it is that the crucified Jesus rose.

XXXIV. CHOSEN WITNESSES SAW THE RISEN CHRIST

Acts 10:41

“He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.”

Jesus’ resurrection appearances were real and physical.

The apostles ate and drank with Him.

Cross References

Luke 24:43

Jesus ate food in the disciples’ presence after His resurrection.

John 21:13

Jesus gave bread and fish to His disciples after rising from the dead.

Acts 1:3

Jesus presented Himself alive after His suffering through many convincing proofs over forty days.

Spiritual Principle

The resurrection was not presented as a private feeling but as witnessed reality.

XXXV. JESUS IS JUDGE OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Acts 10:42

“He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one whom God appointed as Judge of the living and the dead.”

Jesus is not merely Savior.

He is Judge.

Cross References

2 Timothy 4:1

Christ Jesus will judge the living and the dead.

John 5:22

The Father has entrusted judgment to the Son.

Matthew 28:19

Jesus commands His followers to make disciples among all nations.

Spiritual Principle

The One who offers salvation is also the One before whom every person will ultimately stand.

XXXVI. EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES RECEIVES FORGIVENESS

Acts 10:43

“All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

This is the heart of Peter’s gospel invitation.

Everyone

Jew.

Gentile.

Roman.

Samaritan.

Every nation.

Who Believes

Forgiveness is received through faith.

In Him

Jesus Christ is the object of saving faith.

Receives Forgiveness

The sinner’s guilt is removed.

Cross References

Isaiah 53:5

The suffering Servant was wounded for our rebellion and crushed for our sins, and through His suffering peace and healing are provided.

Jeremiah 31:34

God promised a covenant in which He would forgive wickedness and remember sin no more.

Acts 13:38

Paul later proclaimed that forgiveness of sins is announced through Jesus Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel does not say that one nationality receives forgiveness—it says everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness.

XXXVII. THE HOLY SPIRIT FALLS WHILE PETER IS PREACHING

Acts 10:44

“While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.”

Peter had not finished.

God interrupted the sermon.

Cross References

Acts 2:4

At Pentecost the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:31

The believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke God’s Word boldly.

Acts 19:6

The Holy Spirit later came upon believers when Paul laid hands upon them.

Spiritual Principle

God Himself confirmed that Gentile believers were accepted through faith in Christ.

XXXVIII. THE JEWISH BELIEVERS ARE AMAZED

Acts 10:45

“The Jewish believers who had come with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.”

The word:

“Even”

reveals how surprising this was to them.

Cross References

Acts 11:18

When the Jerusalem believers heard Peter’s explanation, they glorified God and acknowledged that God had granted repentance leading to life to the Gentiles also.

Joel 2:28

God promised to pour out His Spirit upon all kinds of people.

Galatians 3:14

Through Christ, the promised Spirit comes to the nations through faith.

Spiritual Principle

God’s grace is often broader than our traditions expect.

XXXIX. THE GENTILES SPEAK AND PRAISE GOD

Acts 10:46

“For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.”

This provided visible evidence paralleling the Pentecost experience.

Cross References

Acts 2:11

At Pentecost people heard believers declaring the great works of God in different languages.

Acts 19:6

Certain believers later spoke in tongues and prophesied when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

1 Corinthians 14:2

Paul discusses the spiritual gift of tongues in the Corinthian church.

Key Truth

God gave clear evidence that Gentile believers had received the same Holy Spirit.

XL. “CAN ANYONE REFUSE WATER?”

Acts 10:47

“Surely no one can refuse water for these people to be baptized. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”

Peter sees the conclusion clearly.

If God has accepted them:

Who can exclude them?

Cross References

Acts 8:36

The Ethiopian asked, “Look, here is water. What would stop me from being baptized?”

Acts 11:17

Peter later said, “If God gave them the same gift He gave us, who was I to stand in God’s way?”

Galatians 3:27

Those baptized into Christ publicly identify themselves with Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The church must not exclude people whom God has clearly accepted through faith in Christ.

XLI. THE GENTILES ARE BAPTIZED

Acts 10:48

“So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.”

The Gentile believers are publicly identified with Jesus.

Cross References

Acts 2:38

Peter called believers to repent and be baptized in connection with Jesus Christ.

Acts 19:5

Believers were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 16:15

Lydia and her household were baptized after responding to the gospel.

Spiritual Principle

Baptism publicly confirms identification with the same Lord and the same gospel.

XLII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 10

1. God Hears Sincere Prayer

Cornelius prayed.

God noticed.

Principle:

God sees the person sincerely seeking Him.

2. Religious Devotion Is Not a Substitute for the Gospel

Cornelius was devout, generous, and prayerful.

He still needed Christ.

Principle:

Good works cannot replace saving faith in Jesus.

3. God Must Sometimes Change the Messenger Before He Uses the Messenger

Peter needed his own assumptions challenged.

Principle:

God may prepare our hearts before He opens the next ministry door.

4. God Does Not Show Ethnic Favoritism

Peter learned:

“God does not show favoritism.”

Principle:

No nationality possesses greater intrinsic access to salvation.

5. Jesus Is Lord of All

Not Lord of Jews only.

Not Lord of Gentiles only.

Principle:

The universal mission of the gospel rests on the universal lordship of Christ.

6. Forgiveness Comes Through Faith in Jesus

Peter declared:

“Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

Principle:

Salvation is by faith in Christ, not by ethnic identity or religious heritage.

7. The Holy Spirit Confirms One Church

Gentiles received the same Spirit.

Principle:

There is not one Spirit for Jewish believers and another for Gentile believers. Christ has one redeemed people.

XLIII. CORNELIUS — GOOD BUT STILL NEEDING THE GOSPEL

Cornelius is one of the strongest biblical examples showing why morality and religious devotion cannot replace Christ.

He:

Prayed.

Gave.

Feared God.

Led his household well.

Had a good reputation.

Yet God still sent Peter.

Why?

Because Cornelius needed the gospel.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel is not merely for obviously wicked people; it is also for respectable religious people who still need forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

XLIV. GOD PREPARED BOTH SIDES OF THE MEETING

Before Peter met Cornelius:

God spoke to Cornelius.

God spoke to Peter.

Cornelius was prepared to hear.

Peter was prepared to go.

Spiritual Principle

God is often working on both ends of a gospel conversation before the conversation begins.

This should encourage us to witness.

XLV. THE VISION WAS ABOUT PEOPLE

Peter initially saw animals.

But Peter himself interprets the meaning in verse 28:

“God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.”

Key Truth

The vision had implications for food.

But its central narrative purpose in Acts 10 concerns Gentile inclusion.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never use religious tradition to exclude people God commands you to reach.

XLVI. THE GOSPEL DESTROYS SPIRITUAL SUPERIORITY

Peter could no longer think:

We are spiritually superior because we are Jewish.

Cornelius could not think:

My devotion earns salvation.

Both men had something to learn.

Peter learned:

God shows no favoritism.

Cornelius learned:

Forgiveness comes through faith in Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

At the foot of the cross, human boasting disappears.

XLVII. WHAT PETER PREACHED

Peter's sermon provides an excellent gospel outline.

Jesus Christ Is Lord of All

Verse 36.

Jesus Was Anointed by God

Verse 38.

Jesus Went About Doing Good

Verse 38.

Jesus Was Crucified

Verse 39.

Jesus Rose on the Third Day

Verse 40.

Jesus Appeared to Witnesses

Verse 41.

Jesus Will Judge the Living and the Dead

Verse 42.

Everyone Who Believes Receives Forgiveness

Verse 43.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical evangelism explains who Jesus is, what Jesus did, and how sinners must respond to Him.

XLVIII. THE HOUSE THAT WAS READY TO HEAR

Cornelius says:

“We are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

What a congregation.

No entertainment required.

No persuasion to pay attention.

They were ready.

Spiritual Principle

A prepared heart can turn an ordinary sermon into a life-changing encounter with truth.

XLIX. “JESUS CHRIST — LORD OF ALL”

Acts 10:36 summarizes the entire chapter.

Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

If He is Lord of all:

The gospel must go to all.

Forgiveness may be offered to all.

The church must welcome all who truly believe.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The lordship of Christ destroys every artificial boundary we try to place around the gospel.

L. WHAT ACTS 10 TEACHES ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is active throughout the chapter.

The Spirit Directs Peter

He tells Peter to go.

The Spirit Confirms Gentile Salvation

He comes upon Cornelius' household.

The Spirit Creates Unity

Jewish believers see Gentiles receive the same gift.

Spiritual Principle

The Holy Spirit advances the mission of Jesus across human boundaries.

LI. WHAT ACTS 10 TEACHES ABOUT PREJUDICE

Peter says:

“God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.”

This is not permission to ignore sin.

Peter still preaches judgment, repentance, faith, and forgiveness.

The point is that no ethnic group should be rejected as inherently beyond God's saving grace.

Principle

The gospel condemns sin without condemning a race, nation, or ethnicity as spiritually unreachable.

LII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who was Cornelius?

Cornelius was a Roman centurion stationed in Caesarea.

He was a Gentile who feared God, prayed regularly, gave generously, and influenced his household toward reverence for God.

Question 2

Was Cornelius already saved simply because he was devout and generous?

Acts 10 presents Cornelius as sincere and responsive to God, but God still arranged for Peter to preach Jesus Christ to him.

Peter explicitly teaches that forgiveness comes through believing in Jesus.

Therefore religious devotion and good works did not replace the gospel.

Question 3

Why did God give Peter the vision of the animals?

God was challenging Peter's understanding of ceremonial uncleanness and preparing him to enter a Gentile home.

Peter himself explains the central lesson:

“God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.”

Question 4

What did the voice mean by saying, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean”?

In the immediate vision it addressed ceremonial food distinctions.

In the narrative of Acts 10, Peter understands it as preparing him not to reject Gentiles whom God intended to receive through the gospel.

Question 5

Why did Peter refuse Cornelius' act of reverence?

Peter understood that he was only a man.

He would not accept worship or exaltation that belonged to God.

Faithful servants point people toward God rather than receiving divine honor themselves.

Question 6

What did Peter learn about God?

Peter said:

“God does not show favoritism.”

He learned that nationality does not determine a person’s eligibility to hear and receive the gospel.

Question 7

What did Peter preach about Jesus?

Peter proclaimed that:

- Jesus is Lord of all.
 - God anointed Him.
 - He did good and healed.
 - He was crucified.
 - God raised Him from the dead.
 - He appeared to witnesses.
 - He is Judge of the living and dead.
 - Everyone who believes receives forgiveness through His name.
-

Question 8

How is a person forgiven according to Acts 10:43?

Peter says:

“Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

Forgiveness comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Question 9

What happened while Peter was still preaching?

The Holy Spirit came upon everyone who heard the message.

This visibly demonstrated God’s acceptance of Gentile believers.

Question 10

Why were the Jewish believers amazed?

They had not expected Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit in the same manner.

God showed them unmistakably that His saving grace included Gentiles.

Question 11

Why were the Gentiles baptized?

Peter recognized that they had received the Holy Spirit just as Jewish believers had.

Therefore there was no biblical reason to deny them baptism.

Question 12

What is the main lesson of Acts 10?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is for every nation, and everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins and belongs among God's redeemed people.

LIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 10 asks several important questions.

Am I Seeking God Sincerely?

Cornelius prayed and sought God.

Am I Depending on Good Works Instead of Christ?

Generosity and morality cannot replace the gospel.

Is There Someone I Have Decided God Could Never Reach?

Peter had to learn not to call people unclean.

Do I Have Prejudices God Needs to Correct?

Cultural habits can become spiritual barriers.

Am I Willing to Go When the Spirit Says Go?

Peter was told:

“Go with them without hesitation.”

Am I Ready to Hear Everything God Says?

Cornelius’ household was ready to listen.

Is My Gospel Centered on Jesus?

Peter preached Christ’s life, death, resurrection, lordship, judgment, and forgiveness.

Do I Welcome Believers God Has Welcomed?

Peter could not deny baptism to those God had clearly accepted.

LIV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Build a Wall Around Grace Where God Has Opened a Door”

Peter had inherited generations of separation between Jews and Gentiles.

Yet God told him:

“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

Then God sent Gentile messengers.

Then Peter entered a Gentile home.

Then Peter preached Christ.

Then God poured out the Holy Spirit.

The message could not have been clearer.

Principle

When God opens the gospel door to people, the church must not close it because of prejudice, tradition, ethnicity, or social distinction.

LV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Sincere Seeker Still Needs Jesus”

Cornelius was one of the finest moral men introduced in Acts.

Yet God did not tell him:

“Your prayers are enough.”

He sent Peter.

Why?

Because salvation is found in Christ.

Principle

Religious sincerity should lead a person toward Jesus, not become a substitute for Jesus.

LVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God May Need to Prepare the Evangelist Before He Reaches the Lost”

Cornelius was ready.

Peter was not.

Before Peter could preach to Cornelius:

Peter needed a vision.

Peter needed correction.

Peter needed his assumptions challenged.

Peter needed to obey.

Principle

Sometimes the greatest obstacle to the next mission field is not the lost person's unwillingness but the believer's unwillingness to cross the boundary.

LVII. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 10 begins with a Gentile praying.

It ends with Gentiles baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Between those two moments:

God prepares a seeker.

God prepares a preacher.

God breaks a barrier.

God opens a home.

God proclaims the gospel.

God gives the Holy Spirit.

God creates unmistakable unity.

Peter entered the chapter still thinking in categories shaped by separation.

He leaves the encounter declaring:

“God does not show favoritism.”

Cornelius entered the chapter as a sincere seeker.

He ends hearing:

“Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

That is the heart of Acts 10.

No one is saved because of:

Race.

Nationality.

Religious heritage.

Military position.

Morality.

Generosity.

Family background.

Human reputation.

People are forgiven through:

Faith in Jesus Christ.

And the Jesus Peter preaches is not a tribal Savior.

He is:

“Lord of all.”

That changes everything.

If Jesus is Lord of all:

The church must preach to all.

The gospel must be offered to all.

Believers must reject ethnic superiority.

Mission must cross cultural boundaries.

And everyone who believes must be welcomed as part of Christ’s people.

Acts 10 therefore calls the church to ask:

Who have we assumed would never listen?

Who have we treated as too different?

What boundaries have we mistaken for biblical barriers?

God may already be preparing them.

The Cornelius may already be praying.

The household may already be gathered.

The door may already be open.

The question is:

Will Peter go?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that You do not show favoritism.

Thank You that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

Thank You that the gospel reaches people from every nation, ethnicity, culture, and background.

Search our hearts.

Expose prejudice.

Expose pride.

Expose any attitude that causes us to think some people are more worthy of salvation than others.

Teach us the lesson You taught Peter:

Do not call anyone impure or unclean whom You are calling through the gospel.

Thank You for Cornelius.

Thank You for his sincere desire to know You.

But also remind us that sincerity alone cannot save.

Keep Jesus Christ at the center.

Thank You that He went about doing good.

Thank You that He was crucified.

Thank You that You raised Him from the dead.

Thank You that He appeared to witnesses.

Thank You that He is Judge of the living and the dead.

And thank You that:

Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.

Make us ready messengers.

When Your Spirit says:

“Go,”

help us go.

When You challenge our assumptions, give us humility to change.

When You open a door, give us courage to walk through it.

Give us congregations like Cornelius’ household—people ready to hear everything You have commanded.

Pour out Your Spirit upon Your people.

Break down sinful barriers.

Build unity around Jesus Christ.

And send the gospel from our churches, homes, communities, and lives to people everywhere.

May every nation hear.

May sinners believe.

May sins be forgiven.

May believers be baptized.

And may Jesus Christ be honored as:

Lord of all.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.” — Acts 10:43

Central Truth

God shows no favoritism, Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and everyone from every nation who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins and is welcomed into the one Spirit-filled people of God.

Acts 10 in One Sentence

God prepares both Cornelius and Peter to cross the Jew-Gentile barrier, Peter proclaims the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord of all, and the Holy Spirit falls upon the believing Gentiles, proving that forgiveness and full inclusion in God's people come through faith in Christ rather than nationality or religious tradition.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 11 — The Gospel Spreads to the Gentiles

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 11 continues one of the most important developments in the early church:

The gospel is spreading openly and unmistakably to the Gentiles.

Acts 10 recorded Peter entering the home of Cornelius, preaching Jesus Christ, and witnessing the Holy Spirit come upon Gentile believers.

Acts 11 begins with controversy.

The apostles and believers in Judea hear that Gentiles have received the Word of God.

But when Peter returns to Jerusalem, some Jewish believers criticize him.

Their complaint is not initially:

“Did they believe?”

It is:

“You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

This reveals how deeply old cultural and ceremonial boundaries remained in the minds of some believers.

Peter does not respond angrily.

He carefully explains what happened.

He recounts:

- His vision in Joppa.
- God’s command not to call unclean what God had made clean.
- The arrival of Cornelius’ messengers.
- The direction of the Holy Spirit.
- Cornelius’ angelic vision.
- The preaching of the gospel.
- The Holy Spirit falling upon the Gentiles.

Then Peter reaches the unavoidable conclusion:

“Who was I to stand in God’s way?”

When the believers hear this, they stop arguing.

Then they praise God and declare:

“God has granted even to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life.”

The chapter then shifts to Antioch.

Believers scattered by persecution travel far beyond Jerusalem.

Some begin preaching the Lord Jesus to Greeks also.

The Lord blesses the work.

Many believe.

Barnabas is sent to Antioch.

When he arrives, he sees the grace of God at work and rejoices.

Then Barnabas does something extremely important.

He goes to Tarsus to find Saul.

He brings Saul to Antioch.

For an entire year:

Barnabas and Saul teach the church.

And in Antioch:

The disciples are first called Christians.

The chapter ends with a prophecy of famine.

The believers in Antioch respond by giving generously to help the believers in Judea.

Acts 11 therefore shows us a church becoming:

More diverse.

More missionary.

More teachable.

More generous.

More clearly centered upon Jesus Christ.

The central truth of Acts 11 is:

God's salvation reaches Jew and Gentile alike, and a healthy church recognizes God's work, strengthens new believers through teaching and encouragement, and expresses gospel unity through practical generosity.

I. THE GENTILES RECEIVE THE WORD OF GOD

Acts 11:1

“The apostles and believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.”

News traveled quickly.

Something historic had happened.

Gentiles had received:

“The Word of God.”

Cross References

Acts 10:45

The Jewish believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even upon the Gentiles.

Acts 8:14

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

Acts 19:10

The Word of the Lord spread so widely that people throughout the region heard the message concerning Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Whenever the gospel crosses a new boundary, the church must be willing to recognize what God is doing.

II. PETER IS CRITICIZED

Acts 11:2

“When Peter went back to Jerusalem, some of the Jewish believers criticized him.”

Peter had obeyed God.

Yet believers still criticized him.

Cross References

Galatians 2:11

Paul later described confronting Peter openly when Peter’s behavior toward Gentile believers became inconsistent.

Acts 15:1

Some men later taught that Gentile believers needed circumcision according to the custom of Moses in order to be saved.

Acts 21:20

Many Jewish believers in Jerusalem remained deeply committed to traditional Jewish practices.

Spiritual Principle

Doing God's will does not guarantee that every believer will immediately understand or approve of what God is doing.

III. THE COMPLAINT CENTERS ON TABLE FELLOWSHIP

Acts 11:3

“They said, ‘You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.’”

Their concern reveals how strongly Jewish-Gentile separation shaped their thinking.

Cross References

Galatians 2:12

Peter later withdrew from eating with Gentile believers because he feared criticism from certain Jewish Christians.

Acts 10:28

Peter told Cornelius that God had shown him not to call any person impure or unclean.

Leviticus 20:26

God had called Israel to be holy and distinct from the surrounding nations.

Important Truth

The problem was not that God's Old Testament commands had been meaningless.

The problem was failing to understand how Christ had fulfilled and transformed the old covenant boundaries.

Spiritual Principle

Traditions formed around genuine biblical distinctions can become obstacles when God reveals their fulfillment in Christ.

IV. PETER EXPLAINS EVERYTHING CAREFULLY

Acts 11:4

“Peter explained everything to them in order.”

Peter does not insult his critics.

He explains.

Cross References

Luke 1:3

Luke explained that he carefully investigated the events and arranged them in an orderly account.

Acts 10:8

Cornelius had carefully explained his vision before sending messengers to Peter.

Acts 15:12

Later the church listened as Barnabas and Paul described what God had done among the Gentiles.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When misunderstanding arises, careful explanation is often better than immediate defensiveness.

V. PETER RECOUNTS THE VISION

Acts 11:5

“I was in Joppa praying, and in a vision I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners.”

Peter begins with prayer and divine revelation.

Cross References

Acts 10:9

Peter went onto the rooftop around noon to pray.

Acts 10:11

Peter saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet descending.

Acts 9:43

Peter had been staying in Joppa with Simon the tanner.

Spiritual Principle

Peter's actions toward Cornelius did not arise from personal rebellion against tradition; they arose from God's direction.

VI. PETER SEES ALL KINDS OF ANIMALS

Acts 11:6

"Inside were all kinds of animals, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds."

Cross References

Acts 10:12

Peter saw many kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds.

Genesis 1:24

God created the different kinds of land animals and living creatures.

Genesis 7:14

Noah entered the ark with every kind of animal and bird that God preserved.

Spiritual Principle

God used Peter's familiar understanding of clean and unclean food to prepare him for a larger lesson about people.

VII. "GET UP, PETER. KILL AND EAT."

Acts 11:7

"Then I heard a voice say to me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'"

Cross References

Acts 10:13

The voice in Peter's vision told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Genesis 9:3

After the flood, God told Noah that living creatures could be used for food.

Mark 7:19

Jesus taught that food does not spiritually defile the heart, thereby removing ceremonial food distinctions as a measure of holiness.

Spiritual Principle

God was teaching Peter that old ceremonial categories could no longer be used as barriers against those Christ was receiving.

VIII. PETER OBJECTS

Acts 11:8

"But I replied, 'No, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'"

Peter's response reveals how strongly the old pattern shaped him.

Cross References

Acts 10:14

Peter told the Lord that he had never eaten anything common or unclean.

Ezekiel 4:14

Ezekiel told God that he had never knowingly defiled himself with ceremonially unclean food.

Daniel 1:8

Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the king's food.

Spiritual Principle

Deeply rooted religious habits do not change instantly, even in sincere believers.

IX. GOD CORRECTS PETER'S THINKING

Acts 11:9

“The voice spoke again from heaven: ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’”

Cross References

Acts 10:15

God told Peter not to call unclean what He had made clean.

Romans 14:14

Paul explained that nothing is inherently unclean in itself under Christ.

1 Timothy 4:4

Everything God created is good when received with thanksgiving.

Key Truth

God's command was not merely about food.

Peter had already interpreted it concerning Gentiles:

Do not call people unclean whom God is receiving through Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The believer must let God's truth correct inherited prejudice.

X. THE VISION HAPPENS THREE TIMES

Acts 11:10

“This happened three times, and then it was all pulled back up into heaven.”

The repetition reinforces the certainty of the message.

Cross References

Acts 10:16

Peter's vision occurred three times before the sheet was taken back into heaven.

2 Corinthians 12:8

Paul said he asked the Lord three times to remove his affliction.

John 21:17

Jesus asked Peter three times whether he loved Him.

Spiritual Principle

God sometimes repeats a lesson because our hearts need repeated correction.

XI. THE MESSENGERS ARRIVE AT THE RIGHT MOMENT

Acts 11:11

“Just then three men came to the house where I was staying. They had been sent from Caesarea.”

The timing confirms the vision.

Cross References

Acts 10:19

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit told him that men were looking for him.

Acts 10:20

The Spirit told Peter to go with them without hesitation because God had sent them.

Acts 10:8

Cornelius had sent the men to Joppa after receiving the angel’s command.

Spiritual Principle

God’s providence often confirms God’s direction through circumstances that fit together unmistakably.

XII. THE SPIRIT TELLS PETER TO GO

Acts 11:12

“The Spirit told me to go with them without hesitation. These six brothers went with me, and we entered the man’s house.”

Peter emphasizes:

The Spirit told me.

Cross References

Acts 10:20

The Holy Spirit told Peter to go with the messengers because God had sent them.

Acts 10:23

Peter traveled with the messengers and several believers from Joppa.

Acts 15:9

Peter later said God made no distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Spiritual Principle

Peter did not enter Cornelius' house because social pressure forced him. He entered because the Holy Spirit directed him.

XIII. CORNELIUS HAD ALSO RECEIVED A MESSAGE

Acts 11:13

“He told us how he had seen an angel in his house who said, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon called Peter.’”

Peter was not the only person receiving divine guidance.

Cross References

Acts 10:3

Cornelius clearly saw an angel of God in a vision.

Acts 10:5

The angel told Cornelius to send men to Joppa for Peter.

Acts 10:22

Cornelius' messengers explained that an angel had instructed him to send for Peter.

Spiritual Principle

God prepared both the messenger and the hearer.

XIV. A MESSAGE THROUGH WHICH THEY WOULD BE SAVED

Acts 11:14

“He will bring you a message through which you and your household will be saved.”

This verse makes the necessity of the gospel unmistakable.

Cornelius was:

Devout.

Prayerful.

Generous.

God-fearing.

Yet he still needed:

A saving message.

Cross References

Acts 16:31

Paul and Silas told the jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

John 4:53

The royal official believed in Jesus, and faith spread through his household.

Acts 18:8

Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed in the Lord together with his household, and many others believed and were baptized.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Religious sincerity is not the saving message. Jesus Christ is.

XV. THE HOLY SPIRIT FALLS UPON THE GENTILES

Acts 11:15

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them just as He had come on us at the beginning.”

Peter connects Cornelius’ experience directly with Pentecost.

Cross References

Acts 2:4

At Pentecost the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:44

While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit came upon everyone hearing the message.

Acts 19:6

The Holy Spirit later came upon other believers during the expansion of the gospel.

Key Truth

Gentiles received the same Spirit, not a lesser Spirit.

XVI. PETER REMEMBERS THE WORDS OF JESUS

Acts 11:16

“Then I remembered what the Lord said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

Peter interprets the event through Jesus’ words.

Cross References

Acts 1:5

Jesus told the disciples, “John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew 3:11

John said that the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:16

John declared that Jesus would baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

The best interpretation of spiritual experience is rooted in the Word of God.

XVII. “WHO WAS I TO STAND IN GOD’S WAY?”

Acts 11:17

“So if God gave them the same gift He gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God’s way?”

This is Peter’s decisive argument.

God gave the gift.

God accepted the believers.

God acted.

Peter’s responsibility was to recognize it.

Cross References

Acts 15:8

Peter later said God showed His acceptance of Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He had given the Spirit to Jewish believers.

Romans 10:12

There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile because the same Lord is Lord of all.

Acts 10:47

Peter asked how anyone could refuse baptism to those who had received the Holy Spirit just as the Jewish believers had.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never oppose what God has clearly approved.

XVIII. THE CHURCH PRAISES GOD

Acts 11:18

“When they heard this, they stopped arguing and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has granted even to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life.’”

This is a beautiful response.

They were corrected.

Then they changed.

Then they praised God.

Cross References

Acts 13:48

Gentile hearers rejoiced when they heard the good news and glorified the Word of the Lord.

Romans 15:9

Gentiles glorify God because of His mercy.

2 Peter 3:9

God is patient, not wanting people to perish but calling them to repentance.

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual maturity is shown not by never being wrong, but by changing when God makes the truth clear.

Key Truth

Repentance leading to life is God’s gift to Gentiles as well as Jews.

XIX. PERSECUTION CONTINUES SPREADING THE GOSPEL

Acts 11:19

“Meanwhile, those who had been scattered by the persecution when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. They spoke the word only to Jews.”

The scattering that began in Acts 8 continues producing missionary expansion.

Cross References

Acts 8:1

After Stephen's death, great persecution scattered believers throughout Judea and Samaria.

Acts 8:4

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word.

Acts 7:60

Stephen died after praying for the people who were killing him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Persecution can scatter believers without scattering the mission.

XX. BELIEVERS BEGIN PREACHING TO GREEKS

Acts 11:20

“But some believers from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.”

This is a major development.

Ordinary believers begin proclaiming Jesus beyond Jewish circles.

Cross References

Acts 4:36

Barnabas himself was a Levite from Cyprus.

Acts 13:1

Antioch later became home to a diverse group of prophets and teachers.

Acts 17:4

Many Greeks later believed the gospel through Paul's preaching.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel naturally expands when believers understand that Jesus is Lord of all people.

XXI. THE LORD'S HAND IS WITH THEM

Acts 11:21

“The Lord’s hand was with them, and a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”

The growth is attributed to God’s power.

Cross References

Acts 4:4

Many people who heard the message believed.

Luke 1:66

The hand of the Lord was upon John as God prepared him for ministry.

Acts 5:14

More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to the church.

Spiritual Principle

Effective ministry depends upon the Lord’s hand, not merely human ability.

XXII. BARNABAS IS SENT TO ANTIOCH

Acts 11:22

“News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, so they sent Barnabas to Antioch.”

Jerusalem sends someone to evaluate and encourage the work.

Barnabas is an excellent choice.

Cross References

Acts 8:14

Jerusalem had previously sent Peter and John when Samaria received the Word.

Acts 4:36

Barnabas was known as the son of encouragement.

Acts 15:22

Barnabas later continued serving as a trusted representative in important church matters.

Spiritual Principle

New gospel work needs wise encouragement, not unnecessary suspicion.

XXIII. BARNABAS SEES THE GRACE OF GOD

Acts 11:23

“When he arrived and saw the grace of God at work, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.”

Barnabas did not arrive looking for reasons to criticize.

He looked for evidence of grace.

And when he saw it:

He was glad.

Cross References

Acts 13:43

Paul and Barnabas encouraged believers to continue in the grace of God.

Acts 14:22

They strengthened disciples and encouraged them to remain faithful.

2 Corinthians 6:1

Paul urged believers not to receive God’s grace without allowing it to transform their lives.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A spiritual encourager knows how to recognize grace when God is working in people unlike himself.

XXIV. BARNABAS — A GOOD MAN

Acts 11:24

“Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people were brought to the Lord.”

Luke gives Barnabas a remarkable description.

Good

His character was evident.

Full of the Holy Spirit

His life was Spirit-directed.

Full of Faith

He trusted God.

Fruitful

Many people were brought to the Lord.

Cross References

Acts 6:5

Stephen was also described as full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:36

Barnabas was known among the apostles as a son of encouragement.

Galatians 5:22

The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Spiritual Principle

Fruitful ministry grows from godly character, faith, and dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

XXV. BARNABAS GOES LOOKING FOR SAUL

Acts 11:25

“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul.”

Barnabas recognizes that the growing Antioch ministry needs help.

He remembers Saul.

Cross References

Acts 9:30

Saul had previously been sent from Caesarea to Tarsus.

Acts 9:27

Barnabas had earlier introduced Saul to the apostles.

Galatians 1:21

Paul later said he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Good leaders are not threatened by gifted people; they go looking for them.

XXVI. SAUL IS BROUGHT TO ANTIOCH

Acts 11:26

“When he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught many people. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.”

This verse contains three important developments.

Barnabas Brings Saul

Barnabas opens another door.

They Teach for One Year

Growth requires instruction.

The Disciples Are Called Christians

Their identity with Christ becomes publicly recognizable.

Cross References

Acts 26:28

King Agrippa later referred to becoming a Christian.

1 Peter 4:16

Peter later wrote that if someone suffers as a Christian, he should not be ashamed but glorify God.

Galatians 1:21

Paul had spent time in the regions near Tarsus before Barnabas brought him to Antioch.

Spiritual Principle

Evangelism brings people to Christ; teaching helps them grow in Christ.

XXVII. “CHRISTIANS”

The disciples were first called:

Christians

at Antioch.

The name centers their identity upon:

Christ.

Not nationality.

Not social status.

Not former religion.

Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The highest identity of the believer is not political, cultural, racial, or social—it is belonging to Jesus Christ.

XXVIII. PROPHETS COME TO ANTIOCH

Acts 11:27

“During this time, some prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.”

Prophetic ministry was active in the early church.

Cross References

Acts 13:1

The church at Antioch included prophets and teachers.

Acts 21:10

A prophet named Agabus later came and gave another message concerning Paul.

1 Corinthians 12:28

God appointed different ministries in the church, including apostles, prophets, and teachers.

Spiritual Principle

God gave different gifts and ministries for the strengthening and direction of the early church.

XXIX. AGABUS PREDICTS A FAMINE

Acts 11:28

“One of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted through the Spirit that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. This happened during the reign of Claudius.”

Agabus gives a specific warning.

Cross References

Acts 21:11

Agabus later gave another Spirit-directed prophetic warning concerning Paul’s imprisonment.

Luke 21:11

Jesus warned that famines and other disasters would occur.

Acts 18:2

Claudius is also mentioned later in Acts in connection with events affecting Jewish residents of Rome.

Spiritual Principle

God's warning should lead to faithful preparation, not panic.

XXX. THE DISCIPLES DECIDE TO HELP

Acts 11:29

“The disciples, each according to their ability, decided to provide help for the believers living in Judea.”

Their response to prophecy is practical.

They give.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each person should give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under pressure, because God loves a cheerful giver.

Romans 15:26

Gentile believers later gave financial help to poor believers in Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 16:2

Paul instructed believers to set aside resources regularly according to their prosperity.

Spiritual Principle

Christian generosity is according to ability, motivated by love, and directed toward real need.

XXXI. THE GIFT IS SENT THROUGH BARNABAS AND SAUL

Acts 11:30

“They did this, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.”

Barnabas and Saul become trusted servants carrying relief to Judea.

Cross References

Acts 12:25

Barnabas and Saul later returned after completing their relief mission.

Romans 15:25

Paul later described traveling to Jerusalem to serve the believers there.

Galatians 2:1

Paul later traveled again to Jerusalem with Barnabas.

Spiritual Principle

Gospel unity becomes visible through practical generosity.

Gentile believers are helping Jewish believers.

The gospel has turned strangers into family.

XXXII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 11

1. God's Salvation Is for All People

Jew and Gentile alike receive the gospel.

Principle:

No ethnic group possesses exclusive ownership of God's saving grace.

2. The Holy Spirit Confirms God's Acceptance

Peter points to the same Spirit being given to Gentiles.

Principle:

God Himself demonstrated that Gentile believers belonged fully to His people.

3. Mature Believers Change When God Makes Truth Clear

The Jerusalem believers stopped arguing and praised God.

Principle:

Humility receives correction.

4. Persecution Cannot Stop the Mission

Scattered believers continue preaching.

Principle:

What appears to be disruption may become expansion.

5. New Believers Need Encouragement and Teaching

Barnabas encouraged.

Barnabas and Saul taught.

Principle:

Conversion is the beginning of discipleship, not the end.

6. Christian Identity Is Centered in Christ

The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.

Principle:

Believers should be recognizable by their connection to Jesus Christ.

7. Gospel Unity Produces Generosity

Antioch believers helped Judean believers.

Principle:

The gospel does not merely connect hearts spiritually; it opens hands practically.

XXXIII. WHAT PETER TEACHES ABOUT RESPONDING TO CRITICISM

Peter could have said:

“I am an apostle. Do not question me.”

He did not.

Instead:

He explained.

He gave evidence.

He pointed to the Spirit’s work.

He remembered Jesus’ words.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Spiritual authority does not eliminate the value of patient explanation.

XXXIV. WHAT THE JERUSALEM BELIEVERS TEACH ABOUT CORRECTION

Their first reaction was criticism.

But their final reaction was worship.

That is significant.

They Listened

They Considered the Evidence

They Stopped Arguing

They Praised God

Spiritual Principle

A teachable believer values God’s truth more than winning an argument.

XXXV. “WHO WAS I TO STAND IN GOD’S WAY?”

This question reaches beyond Peter’s experience.

It asks every church:

Are we resisting something God has clearly revealed?

Are we creating barriers He did not create?

Are we excluding people He has received through faith in Christ?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Tradition becomes dangerous when preserving tradition requires opposing the clear work of God.

XXXVI. WHAT ANTIOCH TEACHES ABOUT A HEALTHY CHURCH

Antioch becomes one of the most important churches in Acts.

Why?

It Was Evangelistic

People preached Jesus.

It Was Diverse

Jewish and Gentile believers worshiped together.

It Was Encouraging

Barnabas strengthened believers.

It Was Teaching-Centered

Barnabas and Saul taught for a year.

It Was Generous

The church sent famine relief.

It Was Missionary

Acts 13 will show Antioch sending missionaries.

Spiritual Principle

A healthy church receives people, teaches people, strengthens people, gives to people, and eventually sends people.

XXXVII. BARNABAS — THE MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Barnabas appears repeatedly at crucial moments.

Saul Needed Acceptance

Barnabas stood beside him.

Antioch Needed Encouragement

Barnabas was sent.

Antioch Needed Teaching

Barnabas found Saul.

Believers Needed Relief

Barnabas helped carry it.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Encouragers do more than make people feel better; they help people become stronger and more useful in Christ.

XXXVIII. BARNABAS KNEW HE NEEDED HELP

Barnabas did not try to carry the entire Antioch ministry alone.

He went looking for Saul.

That reveals humility.

Spiritual Principle

Wise leaders recognize when God has gifted someone else to help accomplish the mission.

Pride says:

“I must do everything.”

Wisdom says:

“Who has God prepared to help?”

XXXIX. A WHOLE YEAR OF TEACHING

Barnabas and Saul taught the church for:

A whole year.

This demonstrates that discipleship requires sustained biblical instruction.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy churches do not merely count decisions; they teach disciples.

People need to learn:

Doctrine.

Obedience.

Prayer.

Holiness.

Christian relationships.

Mission.

Generosity.

The character of Christ.

XL. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

Acts 11:26 gives the historical name:

Christian.

The word points to identification with Christ.

A Christian is not merely:

A religious person.

A church attendee.

A moral person.

A cultural label.

A Christian is a person who belongs to Jesus Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If we bear Christ's name, our lives should increasingly reflect Christ's character.

XLI. THE GOSPEL TURNS STRANGERS INTO FAMILY

The end of Acts 11 is extremely important.

Gentile believers in Antioch send money to Jewish believers in Judea.

Old boundaries are collapsing.

These believers may never have met each other.

Yet they understood:

They are family in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel creates responsibility toward believers beyond our immediate congregation, culture, and location.

XLII. PROPHECY PRODUCES PREPARATION, NOT PANIC

Agabus predicts famine.

The disciples do not respond with hysteria.

They respond with generosity.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical awareness of future difficulty should produce faithful preparation and compassionate action rather than fear-driven panic.

XLIII. WHAT ACTS 11 TEACHES ABOUT REPENTANCE

The believers declare:

“God has granted even to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life.”

Repentance is not merely sorrow.

It is a turning that leads toward life in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

True repentance turns away from sin and toward the living God.

XLIV. WHAT ACTS 11 TEACHES ABOUT GRACE

Barnabas arrived at Antioch and:

“Saw the grace of God at work.”

Grace can become visible.

How?

Changed lives.

Faith.

Unity.

Love.

Commitment.

Growth.

Generosity.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Grace is invisible in its source but often visible in its results.

XLV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why were some Jewish believers upset with Peter?

They objected because Peter had entered the home of uncircumcised Gentiles and eaten with them.

Their concern reflected longstanding Jewish-Gentile separation.

Question 2

How did Peter respond to the criticism?

Peter carefully explained the entire event in order.

He described his vision, the Spirit's direction, Cornelius' angelic message, and the Holy Spirit coming upon the Gentiles.

Question 3

What was Peter's strongest evidence that God had accepted the Gentiles?

God gave them the same Holy Spirit He had given Jewish believers.

Peter therefore asked:

"Who was I to stand in God's way?"

Question 4

What did the Jerusalem believers do after hearing Peter's explanation?

They stopped arguing.

Then they praised God and acknowledged that God had granted repentance leading to life to Gentiles also.

Question 5

How did persecution help spread the gospel?

Believers scattered after Stephen's death traveled into other regions.

Wherever they went, they continued preaching.

The persecution therefore helped move the gospel beyond Jerusalem.

Question 6

What happened in Antioch?

Believers began preaching the Lord Jesus to Greeks.

The Lord blessed the ministry.

Many people believed and turned to Him.

Antioch became a major center of Christian growth and mission.

Question 7

Why was Barnabas sent to Antioch?

The Jerusalem church heard about the new work and sent Barnabas to see what was happening.

When Barnabas arrived, he recognized God's grace and encouraged the believers.

Question 8

Why did Barnabas go looking for Saul?

Barnabas understood that the growing Antioch church needed strong teaching.

He knew Saul had been called and gifted by God.

So he went to Tarsus, found Saul, and brought him to Antioch.

Question 9

Where were believers first called Christians?

At Antioch.

The name reflected their public identification with Jesus Christ.

Question 10

Who was Agabus?

Agabus was a prophet who predicted through the Holy Spirit that a severe famine would occur.

He later appears again in Acts 21.

Question 11

How did the Antioch believers respond to the famine prophecy?

They decided to send help to believers in Judea.

Each gave according to his or her ability.

Question 12

What is the main lesson of Acts 11?

God's saving grace extends to Gentiles as well as Jews, and the growing church must respond to that grace through humility, teaching, encouragement, mission, and generosity.

XLVI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 11 asks several important questions.

Can I Change My Mind When Scripture and God's Work Correct Me?

The Jerusalem believers did.

Am I More Committed to Christ Than to Tradition?

Peter had to learn this.

Do I Recognize God's Grace in People Different from Me?

Barnabas did.

Am I an Encourager?

Barnabas strengthened new believers.

Am I Willing to Seek Help in Ministry?

Barnabas went looking for Saul.

Am I Growing Through Biblical Teaching?

The Antioch believers received a year of instruction.

Does the Name “Christian” Fit My Life?

Can people see genuine identification with Christ?

Am I Generous Toward Believers in Need?

Antioch gave to Judea.

XLVII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“When God Makes His Will Clear, Stop Arguing and Start Praising”

The Jerusalem believers began with criticism.

Then Peter explained.

The evidence became clear.

God had given Gentiles the same Spirit.

What happened?

“They stopped arguing and praised God.”

Principle

Spiritual maturity means caring more about God being right than about ourselves being proven right.

XLVIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“A Healthy Church Needs Both Barnabas and Saul”

Barnabas brought:

Encouragement.

Warmth.

Recognition of grace.

Saul brought:

Teaching.

Doctrinal depth.

Missionary calling.

Together they served Antioch.

Principle

Healthy ministry often requires different gifts working together rather than one personality trying to do everything.

XLIX. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Gospel That Saves Also Creates Responsibility”

The Antioch believers received grace.

Then they gave grace.

They heard about suffering in Judea.

They responded financially.

Principle

Saved people should become serving people, and received grace should produce generous grace.

L. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 11 begins with criticism.

It ends with generosity.

It begins with believers struggling to understand Gentile inclusion.

It ends with Gentile believers helping Jewish believers.

That is the power of the gospel.

At the beginning, some believers say:

“You ate with them.”

By the end, believers from different backgrounds are acting like family.

Peter’s explanation teaches us humility.

God may sometimes work beyond our expectations.

When He does, we must be willing to listen.

The Jerusalem church gives us a good example.

They argued at first.

But when the evidence became clear:

They stopped.

They praised God.

That is spiritual maturity.

Antioch then shows us what happens when the gospel is allowed to cross barriers.

People believe.

Barnabas encourages.

Saul teaches.

Disciples become known as Christians.

Generosity grows.

Mission expands.

The church becomes increasingly recognizable as a people centered upon Jesus Christ.

Acts 11 therefore challenges every believer:

Do not let tradition become greater than truth.

Do not let cultural difference become greater than Christian unity.

Do not let conversion remain without discipleship.

Do not let spiritual growth remain without generosity.

Do not carry the name Christian while living disconnected from Christ.

And when God's grace appears in unexpected places:

Rejoice.

Encourage it.

Teach it.

Strengthen it.

Support it.

And never stand in God's way.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that Your salvation reaches all people.

Thank You that Jesus Christ is not only for one nation, one culture, or one background.

Thank You that repentance leading to life is available through Him.

Give us humble hearts.

When we misunderstand Your work, help us listen.

When Your Word corrects our traditions, help us obey.

Keep us from standing in Your way.

Teach us to recognize Your grace wherever You are truly working.

Give us the heart of Barnabas.

Make us encouragers.

Help us strengthen new believers.

Help us recognize gifts in others.

Keep us from jealousy in ministry.

Give us enough humility to go looking for people who can help advance Your work.

Thank You for Saul.

Thank You for the teaching ministry that helped strengthen Antioch.

Make our churches places of serious biblical instruction.

Help us become disciples who not only believe but grow.

Help us live worthy of the name:

Christian.

May our lives reflect Jesus Christ.

And when others suffer, make us generous.

Help us give according to our ability.

Teach us that the church is one family in Christ.

Break down prejudice.

Break down pride.

Break down unnecessary barriers.

Build churches that encourage, teach, give, serve, and send.

And may many people believe and turn to the Lord.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“When they heard this, they stopped arguing and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has granted even to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life.’” — Acts 11:18

Central Truth

God’s saving grace reaches Gentiles as well as Jews, and a healthy church humbly recognizes His work, strengthens believers through encouragement and biblical teaching, and demonstrates gospel unity through practical generosity.

Acts 11 in One Sentence

Peter explains how God unmistakably gave Gentile believers the same Holy Spirit, the Jerusalem church praises God for granting them repentance leading to life, and the gospel expands powerfully in Antioch where Barnabas and Saul teach the growing church, believers are first called Christians, and generous disciples send relief to suffering believers in Judea.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 12 — God Delivers, But Herod Falls

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 12 presents one of the strongest contrasts in the book of Acts.

On one side stands:

Herod.

A powerful king.

A man with political authority.

A man able to imprison believers.

A man able to order executions.

A man praised publicly as though he were divine.

On the other side stands:

The church.

Persecuted.

Grieving.

Praying.

Humanly powerless.

Yet Acts 12 reveals who truly possesses authority.

Herod kills James.

He arrests Peter.

He places Peter under heavy guard.

He plans to put Peter on public trial.

But while Peter sits in prison:

The church prays.

Then God acts.

An angel enters the prison.

Light fills the cell.

Peter's chains fall off.

The guards do not stop him.

The iron gate opens by itself.

Peter walks out free.

Meanwhile, the praying believers are so astonished by Peter's deliverance that they initially struggle to believe Rhoda when she announces:

"Peter is at the door!"

Acts 12 reminds us that sincere believers may pray faithfully while still being surprised by God's answer.

The chapter then turns back to Herod.

The man who could not keep Peter imprisoned later accepts praise from a crowd declaring:

"This is the voice of a god, not a man!"

Herod refuses to give glory to God.

Judgment comes immediately.

He dies.

Then Luke gives one of the most powerful contrasts in Acts:

Herod falls.

But:

"The word of God continued to grow and spread."

The king who opposed the church disappears.

The gospel keeps moving.

Acts 12 therefore teaches:

Human power is temporary, God's power is supreme, prayer matters, pride destroys, and no earthly ruler can stop the Word of God from advancing.

I. HEROD ATTACKS THE CHURCH

Acts 12:1

“About this time King Herod violently attacked some who belonged to the church.”

The persecution becomes political.

Herod uses government authority against believers.

Cross References

Acts 8:1

After Stephen was killed, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, scattering believers throughout Judea and Samaria.

Luke 21:12

Jesus warned, “People will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to religious authorities and prisons because of My name.”

John 15:20

Jesus said, “Remember what I told you: a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also.”

Spiritual Principle

The church should not be surprised when faithfulness to Christ brings opposition.

Jesus had already warned His followers.

II. JAMES IS KILLED

Acts 12:2

“He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.”

James becomes the first of the Twelve apostles recorded in Acts to die as a martyr.

This is the same James who followed Jesus with his brother John.

Cross References

Mark 10:39

Jesus told James and John that they would indeed share in the cup of suffering associated with following Him.

Matthew 20:23

Jesus told them that they would drink from His cup of suffering, though positions of honor belonged to the Father's sovereign decision.

Matthew 4:21

Jesus called James and John while they were working with their father Zebedee.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness does not guarantee physical deliverance from every danger.

James is killed.

Peter will be delivered.

Both belong to God.

This is an important truth.

God's sovereignty does not always look the same in every believer's life.

III. HEROD ARRESTS PETER

Acts 12:3

“When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he arrested Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.”

Herod notices that James' execution gains political approval.

So he continues.

Cross References

Acts 5:18

The apostles had previously been arrested and placed in the public jail.

Luke 22:1

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, also called Passover, was approaching.

John 11:53

Religious leaders had previously decided that Jesus should be killed.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When leaders value popularity more than righteousness, injustice can become politically useful.

Herod's motive was not justice.

It was approval.

IV. PETER IS HEAVILY GUARDED

Acts 12:4

“After arresting him, he put him in prison, guarded by four squads of soldiers. He intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.”

Herod takes extraordinary precautions.

Peter had already escaped prison once in Acts 5.

Herod apparently intends to make sure it does not happen again.

Cross References

Acts 5:18

The apostles had previously been placed in jail for preaching Jesus.

Matthew 27:66

The authorities secured Jesus' tomb by sealing the stone and posting a guard.

Acts 16:24

Paul and Silas were later placed in the inner prison with their feet secured.

Spiritual Principle

Human beings may increase security, but they cannot make God powerless.

More guards do not create a problem for God.

More chains do not create a problem for God.

More gates do not create a problem for God.

V. THE CHURCH PRAYS EARNESTLY

Acts 12:5

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”

This verse gives us the earthly situation and the spiritual response.

Peter Was in Prison

But:

The Church Was Praying

Herod had soldiers.

The church had prayer.

Cross References

James 5:16

The earnest prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Acts 4:31

After the believers prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke God’s Word boldly.

Matthew 18:19

Jesus taught about the power of believers agreeing together in prayer according to God’s will.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When the church cannot reach the prisoner, prayer can still reach the throne of God.

VI. PETER SLEEPS BEFORE HIS TRIAL

Acts 12:6

“The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while guards stood at the entrance.”

The scene is extraordinary.

Peter knows James has been killed.

Peter knows Herod intends to bring him out.

Yet:

Peter is sleeping.

Cross References

Acts 16:25

Paul and Silas later prayed and sang hymns to God while imprisoned.

Psalm 4:8

I will lie down and sleep in peace because You alone, Lord, make me dwell securely.

Psalm 3:5

I lie down and sleep; I wake again because the Lord sustains me.

Spiritual Principle

Peace is not always the absence of danger; sometimes peace is confidence in God while danger remains.

VII. AN ANGEL ENTERS THE CELL

Acts 12:7

“Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. The angel struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly!’ And the chains fell off his wrists.”

God intervenes suddenly.

Cross References

Acts 5:19

An angel of the Lord previously opened the prison doors and brought the apostles out.

Acts 16:26

A violent earthquake later opened prison doors and loosened chains around Paul and Silas.

Isaiah 61:1

God’s Anointed One announces freedom to captives and release for prisoners.

Key Truth

The chains did not have to be:

Picked.

Broken by Peter.

Unlocked by guards.

They simply:

Fell off.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

What is impossible for the prisoner is effortless for God.

VIII. PETER IS TOLD TO GET READY

Acts 12:8

“The angel said, ‘Put on your clothes and sandals.’ Peter did so. Then the angel said, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’”

Peter receives practical instructions.

Cross References

Exodus 12:11

Israel was told to eat the Passover prepared for immediate departure, with clothing and sandals ready.

Ephesians 6:15

Believers are told to have their feet prepared with readiness connected to the gospel of peace.

2 Kings 4:29

Elisha’s servant was told to prepare himself quickly and go on his mission without delay.

Spiritual Principle

God’s miraculous activity does not eliminate human obedience.

God removes the chains.

Peter still has to get dressed and walk.

IX. PETER THINKS HE IS SEEING A VISION

Acts 12:9

“Peter followed him out, but he didn’t realize it was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.”

The deliverance is so extraordinary Peter initially cannot process it.

Cross References

Acts 10:17

Peter had previously been puzzled while trying to understand the meaning of a vision.

Genesis 45:26

Jacob initially could not believe the astonishing report that Joseph was still alive.

Luke 24:11

The apostles initially struggled to believe the women’s report concerning Jesus’ resurrection.

Spiritual Principle

God can answer prayer in ways that exceed our immediate ability to understand what He is doing.

X. THE IRON GATE OPENS

Acts 12:10

“They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. They walked down one street, and then the angel left him.”

Obstacle after obstacle disappears.

First Guard

Passed.

Second Guard

Passed.

Iron Gate

Opened.

Cross References

Isaiah 45:2

God says, “I will go before you, level the rough places, break down bronze gates, and cut through iron bars.”

Psalms 107:14

God brought prisoners out of darkness and broke their chains.

Acts 16:26

God later opened prison doors through an earthquake.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When God opens the way, locked gates cannot overrule Him.

XI. PETER REALIZES GOD HAS DELIVERED HIM

Acts 12:11

“When Peter realized what had happened, he said, ‘Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent His angel and rescued me from Herod’s hand and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.’”

Peter now understands.

Cross References

Psalms 34:7

The angel of the Lord camps around those who fear Him and delivers them.

Daniel 6:22

Daniel said, “My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths so they could not harm me.”

2 Timothy 4:17

Paul said the Lord stood beside him, strengthened him, and rescued him from deadly danger.

Spiritual Principle

Deliverance should produce recognition of the Deliverer.

Peter does not say:

“I escaped.”

He says:

“The Lord rescued me.”

XII. PETER GOES TO THE PRAYING CHURCH

Acts 12:12

“When this dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered and praying.”

Peter knew where believers would be.

Praying.

Cross References

Acts 4:31

The early church had repeatedly gathered for powerful united prayer.

Colossians 4:10

John Mark was connected with Barnabas and later became important in Christian ministry.

Acts 1:14

The early believers devoted themselves continually to prayer.

Spiritual Principle

A praying church becomes a natural place to go when God has answered prayer.

XIII. RHODA COMES TO THE DOOR

Acts 12:13

“Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door.”

Rhoda becomes part of the story because she is the first believer inside to recognize Peter.

Cross References

Revelation 3:20

Jesus pictures Himself standing at the door and knocking.

Luke 12:36

Jesus described servants ready to open the door when their master returns.

Matthew 25:11

Jesus used the image of people arriving and calling at a closed door.

Spiritual Principle

God often includes ordinary people in extraordinary moments.

Rhoda was not an apostle.

Not a church leader.

Yet her testimony becomes part of Scripture.

XIV. RHODA FORGETS TO OPEN THE DOOR

Acts 12:14

“When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed that she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, ‘Peter is at the door!’”

This is one of the most human moments in Acts.

Rhoda is so excited that she forgets Peter is still standing outside.

Cross References

John 20:20

The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the risen Lord.

Luke 24:41

The disciples were so filled with joy and amazement that they struggled to process what they were seeing.

Genesis 45:26

Jacob's heart was stunned when he first heard that Joseph was alive.

Spiritual Principle

Great joy can sometimes arrive so suddenly that it temporarily overwhelms us.

XV. THE PRAYING CHURCH DOES NOT BELIEVE RHODA

Acts 12:15

“They told her, ‘You’re out of your mind.’ But she kept insisting that it was true. They said, ‘It must be his angel.’”

This is almost humorous.

They are praying for Peter.

Peter is at the door.

Rhoda tells them.

They do not believe her.

Cross References

Luke 24:11

The apostles thought the women's report about Jesus' resurrection sounded like nonsense and did not believe them.

Mark 16:11

When the disciples heard Jesus was alive, they initially refused to believe.

Matthew 18:10

Jesus taught that angels have a special ministry connected with God's care for His people.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes believers pray with more faith than they realize and are still surprised when God answers.

XVI. PETER KEEPS KNOCKING

Acts 12:16

“But Peter kept knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.”

Prayer was being answered outside while debate continued inside.

Cross References

Luke 24:37

The disciples were startled and frightened by what they saw after Jesus’ resurrection.

Matthew 7:7

Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened.”

John 20:20

The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

God’s answer does not depend upon our ability to imagine exactly how He will answer.

XVII. PETER TELLS THEM WHAT GOD DID

Acts 12:17

“Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. ‘Tell James and the other brothers about this,’ he said, and then he left for another place.”

Peter gives the credit to God.

Cross References

Acts 21:18

James later appears as a major leader among the Jerusalem believers.

James 1:1

James identifies himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 15:13

James later speaks prominently during the Jerusalem Council.

Spiritual Principle

Answered prayer should become testimony.

Do not merely receive God's help.

Tell others what God has done.

XVIII. THE SOLDIERS ARE CONFUSED

Acts 12:18

“In the morning there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter.”

The soldiers wake to an impossible situation.

Peter is gone.

Cross References

Matthew 28:4

The guards at Jesus' tomb trembled with fear because of the angelic appearance.

Acts 16:27

The Philippian jailer later panicked when he saw prison doors open.

Matthew 28:11

Guards from Jesus' tomb reported what had happened.

Spiritual Principle

God's intervention can leave human systems unable to explain what occurred.

XIX. HEROD EXECUTES THE GUARDS

Acts 12:19

“After Herod searched for him and didn’t find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed. Then he went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.”

Herod’s cruelty continues.

Cross References

Matthew 28:12

Religious leaders bribed guards to give a false explanation concerning Jesus’ empty tomb.

Acts 27:42

Roman soldiers later considered killing prisoners to prevent escape.

Daniel 6:24

Under ancient royal law, those connected with false accusations against Daniel eventually faced severe judgment.

Spiritual Principle

Unchecked pride often produces cruelty because human lives become less important than preserving power.

XX. HEROD’S CONFLICT WITH TYRE AND SIDON

Acts 12:20

“Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, but they united and sought peace with him, since their region depended on the king’s country for food. They won over Blastus, the king’s personal servant, to make peace.”

Herod possessed political and economic influence.

Cross References

1 Kings 5:9

The people of Tyre supplied timber and depended upon trade arrangements with Israel.

Ezekiel 27:17

Tyre traded extensively with Judah and Israel, including agricultural products.

1 Kings 5:11

Solomon provided food supplies to Hiram's household in connection with their trade agreement.

Spiritual Principle

Political power may influence economies and nations, but it does not make a ruler divine.

XXI. HEROD APPEARS IN ROYAL SPLENDOR

Acts 12:21

“On the appointed day, Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to them.”

Everything about the scene communicates human greatness.

Royal clothing.

Throne.

Public audience.

Political authority.

Cross References

Ezekiel 28:2

The ruler of Tyre became proud and claimed godlike status even though he was only a man.

Daniel 5:20

When a king's heart became proud and hardened, he was brought down from his royal throne.

Isaiah 14:13

Pride speaks as though it can rise above rightful human limits and take a position belonging to God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The higher a person rises in human honor, the more dangerous pride becomes if he forgets who gave him life.

XXII. THE PEOPLE CALL HEROD A GOD

Acts 12:22

“The people shouted, ‘This is the voice of a god, not a man!’”

The crowd flatters Herod.

Cross References

Acts 14:11

A crowd later tried to treat Paul and Barnabas as gods after witnessing a miracle.

Ezekiel 28:2

God rebuked a ruler who claimed the place of a god.

Daniel 4:30

Nebuchadnezzar proudly credited himself for the greatness of Babylon.

Spiritual Principle

Praise becomes spiritually dangerous when a person receives what belongs to God.

XXIII. HEROD IS JUDGED

Acts 12:23

“Immediately, an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give glory to God. He was eaten by worms and died.”

The reason is explicitly stated:

“He did not give glory to God.”

Cross References

Isaiah 42:8

The Lord declares, “I am the Lord; that is My name. I will not give My glory to another.”

2 Chronicles 26:19

King Uzziah’s pride led him to violate God’s order, and judgment came upon him.

Daniel 4:33

Nebuchadnezzar experienced immediate humiliation after boasting in his own greatness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may allow human pride for a season, but no person can permanently steal the glory that belongs to Him.

XXIV. HEROD FALLS, BUT THE WORD GROWS

Acts 12:24

“But the word of God continued to grow and spread.”

This may be the most important verse in the chapter.

Notice the contrast.

Herod attacked.

Herod killed James.

Herod imprisoned Peter.

Herod accepted divine praise.

Then:

Herod died.

But:

The Word grew.

Cross References

Acts 6:7

The Word of God continued spreading, and the number of disciples increased greatly.

Acts 19:20

In a powerful way, the Word of the Lord continued growing and prevailing.

Colossians 1:6

The gospel was bearing fruit and increasing throughout the world.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Kings die. Governments change. Persecutors disappear. But God's Word continues.

XXV. BARNABAS AND SAUL RETURN

Acts 12:25

“When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission in Jerusalem, they returned, taking John Mark with them.”

The chapter closes by preparing for the next stage of mission.

Cross References

Acts 11:30

Barnabas and Saul had carried relief from Antioch to the believers in Judea.

Acts 13:5

John Mark later accompanied Barnabas and Saul during missionary work.

Colossians 4:10

Mark later became recognized as a ministry coworker associated with Barnabas.

Spiritual Principle

While one chapter of ministry ends, God is often preparing the people who will serve in the next one.

XXVI. JAMES AND PETER — TWO DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

Acts 12 presents a difficult but necessary truth.

James

Killed.

Peter

Delivered.

Both were apostles.

Both followed Jesus.

Both were loved by the church.

Both belonged to God.

Why was one delivered and one not?

The text does not give us a full explanation.

Spiritual Principle

Faith in God is not faith that He must produce the same earthly outcome for every believer.

God's sovereignty includes:

Deliverance.

And sometimes suffering.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's faithfulness cannot be measured only by whether He removes the trial.

James was not less loved because he died.

Peter was not more spiritual because he escaped.

XXVII. THE PRAYING CHURCH

Acts 12:5 should be remembered by every congregation.

“The church was earnestly praying to God for him.”

They did not possess political influence equal to Herod.

They did not command soldiers.

They could not break Peter out.

But they could pray.

Spiritual Principle

Prayer is not what the church does when nothing else works; prayer is one of the central works of the church.

XXVIII. WHAT ACTS 12 TEACHES ABOUT PRAYER

The church prayed.

God delivered Peter.

Yet the believers were shocked by the answer.

This teaches us several things.

Prayer Does Not Require Perfect Emotional Confidence

They prayed even while struggling to imagine the answer.

Prayer Is Directed to God

Their hope ultimately rested in Him.

Prayer Can Be Persistent

Many were gathered and praying through the night.

Prayer Does Not Control God

James had died.

Peter was delivered.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Prayer is trusting God enough to ask without pretending we control how He must answer.

XXIX. WHAT PETER'S SLEEP TEACHES US

Peter sleeps between soldiers the night before his expected trial.

That is remarkable.

He Could Not Control Herod

He Could Not Unlock His Chains

He Could Not Escape the Guards

But He Could Rest in God

Spiritual Principle

Peace comes when we recognize that God remains awake even when we sleep.

XXX. WHAT RHODA TEACHES US

Rhoda is sometimes remembered humorously because she forgot to open the door.

But notice something else.

She recognized Peter.

She believed it was Peter.

She kept insisting even when everyone disagreed with her.

Spiritual Principle

Do not dismiss a truthful witness merely because the report sounds astonishing.

XXXI. WHAT HEROD TEACHES ABOUT PRIDE

Herod's story develops in stages.

He attacks believers.

He kills James.

He imprisons Peter.

He seeks public approval.

He sits in royal splendor.

The crowd calls him a god.

He accepts the praise.

Then judgment comes.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Pride grows when human applause becomes more important than divine approval.

XXXII. HEROD COULD NOT STOP THE WORD

Herod had:

Authority.

Soldiers.

Prisons.

Execution power.

Political influence.

Yet verse 24 says:

“The word of God continued to grow and spread.”

Spiritual Principle

The gospel does not depend upon political permission to remain powerful.

Governments may:

Restrict.

Threaten.

Imprison.

Punish.

But God’s truth remains God’s truth.

XXXIII. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEROD AND THE CHURCH

Herod Trusted Power

The church trusted God.

Herod Used Violence

The church used prayer.

Herod Wanted Glory

The church gave glory to God.

Herod's Rule Ended

The Word continued.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Earthly power looks impressive for a moment; divine truth lasts beyond the moment.

XXXIV. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 12

1. Persecution Does Not Mean God Has Lost Control

James dies.

Peter is imprisoned.

God remains sovereign.

Principle:

Difficult circumstances never remove God from His throne.

2. The Church Must Pray Earnestly

The believers prayed for Peter.

Principle:

Prayer should be the church's immediate response to crisis.

3. God Can Deliver from Impossible Situations

Chains fell.

Guards were passed.

Gates opened.

Principle:

No earthly obstacle is beyond God's ability.

4. God Does Not Always Give the Same Outcome

James died.

Peter escaped.

Principle:

Faith trusts God in both deliverance and suffering.

5. God Can Surprise the People Who Are Praying

The believers could hardly believe Peter was at the door.

Principle:

God's answer may exceed our expectations.

6. Pride Leads Toward Destruction

Herod accepted glory belonging to God.

Principle:

Human greatness becomes dangerous when it forgets the Creator.

7. God's Word Cannot Be Stopped

Herod died.

The Word multiplied.

Principle:

Human opposition is temporary; God's mission continues.

XXXV. WHAT ACTS 12 TEACHES ABOUT ANGELS

Angels appear repeatedly in Acts.

In Acts 12 an angel:

Enters Peter's cell.

Wakes him.

Causes his chains to fall.

Leads him through the prison.

Then leaves.

Spiritual Principle

Angels are servants of God carrying out His purposes, not beings believers are instructed to worship.

The focus remains:

The Lord delivered Peter.

XXXVI. WHAT ACTS 12 TEACHES ABOUT HUMAN POWER

Herod appears powerful.

But Acts 12 systematically demonstrates the limits of his power.

He Can Kill James

But cannot kill the church.

He Can Imprison Peter

But cannot keep him imprisoned.

He Can Order Guards

But cannot stop God's angel.

He Can Receive Praise

But cannot escape God's judgment.

He Can Rule Temporarily

But cannot stop God's Word.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

All human authority is borrowed authority and remains accountable to God.

XXXVII. THE IRON GATE PRINCIPLE

Peter reached an iron gate.

He could not open it.

But as he followed God's direction:

It opened.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes believers become anxious about gates they have not even reached yet.

Peter did not need to open the prison gate while still lying in chains.

God dealt with each obstacle at the proper moment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not spend today worrying about tomorrow's gate; obey God through the step directly in front of you.

XXXVIII. THE WORD OF GOD IS THE REAL VICTOR

At the beginning of Acts 12:

Herod appears to be winning.

James is dead.

Peter is imprisoned.

The church is under attack.

At the end:

Peter is free.

Herod is dead.

Barnabas and Saul are moving forward in ministry.

John Mark is joining them.

And:

The Word of God continues growing.

Key Truth

The chapter is not ultimately about Peter defeating Herod. It is about God's mission outlasting Herod.

XXXIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who was the Herod mentioned in Acts 12?

He was the ruler who persecuted members of the early church, killed James, and imprisoned Peter.

His actions reveal political persecution driven partly by the desire for public approval.

Question 2

Which apostle was killed?

James, the brother of John, was executed with the sword.

He was one of the sons of Zebedee whom Jesus had called early in His ministry.

Question 3

Why did Herod arrest Peter?

Acts says Herod noticed that killing James pleased certain Jewish leaders or people.

Seeking further approval, he arrested Peter as well.

Question 4

What did the church do while Peter was imprisoned?

The church prayed earnestly to God for him.

Their response to humanly impossible circumstances was united prayer.

Question 5

How heavily guarded was Peter?

Peter was guarded by four squads of soldiers.

On the night of his deliverance he was chained between two soldiers while additional guards watched the entrance.

Question 6

How did Peter escape?

An angel of the Lord entered the prison.

Peter's chains fell off.

The angel led him past the guards.

The iron gate opened by itself.

Peter was then led outside before the angel departed.

Question 7

Why is Peter sleeping significant?

Peter faced serious danger and possible execution, yet he was able to sleep.

His rest demonstrates remarkable peace and trust in God.

Question 8

Why did the believers not believe Rhoda?

Peter's deliverance was so unexpected that even the people praying for him struggled to believe that he was actually standing at their door.

This shows that God can answer prayers beyond our expectations.

Question 9

What happened to Herod's guards?

Herod questioned them after Peter escaped and ordered their execution.

This further demonstrates his harshness and abuse of power.

Question 10

Why did God judge Herod?

Acts specifically says Herod was struck because:

"He did not give glory to God."

He accepted praise that treated him as divine.

Question 11

What happened to the gospel after Herod died?

The Word of God continued growing and spreading.

Political persecution failed to stop the mission.

Question 12

What is the main lesson of Acts 12?

God remains sovereign during persecution, prayer matters, He can deliver in impossible circumstances, pride eventually falls under His judgment, and His Word cannot be stopped.

XL. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 12 asks several important questions.

Do I Pray When Circumstances Look Impossible?

The church did.

Can I Trust God When He Answers Differently Than I Want?

James died.

Peter was delivered.

Can I Rest While God Is in Control?

Peter slept.

Do I Give God the Glory for Deliverance?

Peter did.

Am I Surprised When God Answers Prayer?

The believers were.

Am I Seeking Human Praise?

Herod did.

Do I Remember That All Human Power Is Temporary?

Herod's was.

Do I Believe God's Word Will Continue?

Acts 12 says it will.

XLI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Church’s Greatest Weapon in a Locked-Room Crisis May Be Prayer”

The church could not enter Peter’s prison.

They could not overpower Herod.

They could not command the guards.

They could not remove the chains.

But they could pray.

And they did.

Principle

Never confuse inability to control the situation with inability to do anything spiritually meaningful.

Prayer places the impossible situation before the God of the impossible.

XLII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Measure God’s Faithfulness Only by Deliverance”

James died.

Peter lived.

Both events occur in the same chapter.

That keeps us from reducing faith to a formula.

Principle

Sometimes God is glorified by delivering His servant from suffering; sometimes He is glorified by sustaining His servant through suffering.

His faithfulness remains.

XLIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Human Glory Fades, But God’s Word Multiplies”

Herod sat on a throne.

Wore royal robes.

Received public applause.

Was called a god.

Then he died.

The next verse says:

“But the word of God continued to grow and spread.”

Principle

Never envy temporary greatness when you belong to an eternal kingdom.

XLIV. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 12 begins with:

Violence.

Death.

Arrest.

Chains.

Guards.

Fear.

It ends with:

Deliverance.

Judgment.

Mission.

The Word spreading.

At first glance, Herod appears to control the chapter.

He kills James.

He arrests Peter.

He commands soldiers.

He determines trial dates.

He exercises political power.

But as the chapter unfolds, the illusion disappears.

Herod could imprison Peter.

He could not imprison God.

Herod could order chains.

He could not stop an angel.

Herod could command guards.

He could not keep an iron gate closed.

Herod could kill one servant.

He could not kill the gospel.

Herod could receive applause.

He could not keep his breath when God called him to account.

That is the great contrast of Acts 12.

Human power appears large when viewed from the prison cell.

But human power becomes very small when viewed from the throne of God.

The church therefore does what believers should always do:

It prays.

The believers may not have understood what God would do.

They may not have expected Peter to appear at the door.

But they prayed.

And God answered.

Acts 12 also gives us a necessary warning against simplistic thinking.

James was not delivered.

Peter was.

Faithfulness cannot be measured merely by earthly survival.

Sometimes God opens the prison.

Sometimes He opens heaven.

Either way:

He remains God.

Acts 12 therefore calls us to:

Pray earnestly.

Trust deeply.

Walk obediently.

Rest peacefully.

Reject pride.

Give God glory.

And remain confident that no human authority can stop His ultimate purposes.

Kings rise.

Kings fall.

Empires change.

Governments disappear.

Persecutors die.

But:

The Word of God continues to grow and spread.

That is the victory of Acts 12.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that You remain sovereign even when Your people face persecution.

Thank You that no prison is beyond Your power.

No chain is too strong.

No guard can prevent Your will.

No gate can remain closed when You determine to open it.

Teach us to pray like the early church.

When circumstances look impossible, keep us from despair.

Help us pray earnestly.

Give us peace like Peter.

When we cannot control what tomorrow holds, remind us that You already hold tomorrow.

Help us trust You even when Your answers are different from what we expect.

We remember James.

We remember Peter.

Teach us that Your faithfulness is not determined merely by whether You deliver us from suffering.

Keep us faithful whether You deliver us from the trial or carry us through it.

Guard us from Herod's pride.

Keep us from seeking praise that belongs to You.

When people honor us, help us immediately return the glory to You.

Remind us that every gift, opportunity, position, ministry, ability, and breath comes from You.

Thank You that Your Word cannot be stopped.

When rulers oppose it:

Let it spread.

When persecution rises:

Let it spread.

When believers suffer:

Let it spread.

When circumstances change:

Let it spread.

Use our lives for Your mission.

Make us people of prayer.

Make us people of courage.

Make us people of humility.

And may our confidence rest in this truth:

Your Word will continue to grow and spread.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But the word of God continued to grow and spread.” — Acts 12:24

Central Truth

Human rulers may persecute, imprison, and even kill God’s servants, but prayer remains powerful, God remains sovereign, pride ultimately falls under His judgment, and His Word continues advancing beyond every earthly attempt to stop it.

Acts 12 in One Sentence

Herod kills James and imprisons Peter, but while the church prays God miraculously delivers Peter through an angel, later judges Herod for accepting divine glory, and demonstrates that earthly power cannot stop the Word of God from continuing to grow and spread.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 13 — Sent Out to the Nations

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 13 marks another major turning point in the book of Acts.

Until this chapter, much of the missionary activity has developed through circumstances such as:

Persecution.

Scattering.

Individual divine direction.

Unexpected gospel opportunities.

Now something new happens.

A local church deliberately sends missionaries.

The church at Antioch has become a spiritually mature, diverse, teaching-centered, prayerful church.

While its leaders are:

Worshipping.

Fasting.

Seeking the Lord.

The Holy Spirit says:

“Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

The church responds with:

Prayer.

Fasting.

The laying on of hands.

And sending.

Acts 13 therefore becomes the beginning of the great missionary journeys associated with Paul.

The chapter also marks a transition in terminology.

Saul begins increasingly to be called:

Paul.

The mission begins in Cyprus.

There Paul and Barnabas confront a sorcerer named Elymas who tries to prevent the Roman governor Sergius Paulus from hearing the gospel.

Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, confronts Elymas directly.

The sorcerer is temporarily blinded.

The governor sees what happens and believes.

Paul and his companions then travel to Antioch in Pisidia.

There Paul delivers one of his great recorded sermons.

He traces God’s redemptive work through Israel’s history:

Egypt.

The wilderness.

Canaan.

The judges.

Saul.

David.

Then Paul reaches the center:

Jesus Christ.

He declares that Jesus is the promised Savior from David's line.

Jesus was rejected.

Jesus was crucified.

Jesus was buried.

But:

God raised Him from the dead.

Then Paul proclaims one of the clearest gospel statements in Acts:

“Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.”

And:

“Through Him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you could not obtain under the law of Moses.”

The gospel creates two very different reactions.

Some hearers want more.

Many follow Paul and Barnabas.

Almost the whole city gathers.

But others become jealous and oppose the message.

Paul and Barnabas then declare that they will turn openly toward the Gentiles, fulfilling God's promise that His salvation would reach:

“The ends of the earth.”

The Gentiles rejoice.

The Word spreads.

Persecution rises.

Paul and Barnabas are expelled.

Yet the chapter does not end in defeat.

It ends with:

“The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 13 teaches us:

Mission begins with God.

The Holy Spirit calls and sends.

The gospel must remain centered upon Jesus Christ.

Forgiveness and justification come through faith in Christ rather than through works of the law.

Opposition cannot stop God's Word.

And:

When some reject the gospel, God continues opening doors elsewhere.

The central truth of Acts 13 is:

The Holy Spirit sends God's servants into the world to proclaim the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, through whom everyone who believes receives forgiveness and justification, and no opposition can stop God's mission from advancing among the nations.

I. A DIVERSE LEADERSHIP IN ANTIOCH

Acts 13:1

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, who had been raised with Herod the ruler, and Saul.”

Antioch had become an important center of Christian ministry.

Its leadership was remarkably diverse.

Barnabas

The encourager.

Simeon Called Niger

A leader whose name or nickname may indicate a darker complexion or African association.

Lucius of Cyrene

Connected with North Africa.

Manaen

A man raised in close association with Herod's household.

Saul

The former persecutor who had been transformed by Jesus Christ.

Cross References

Acts 11:19

Believers scattered by persecution traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, carrying the gospel with them.

Romans 12:6

God gives different gifts according to His grace, and believers should faithfully use the gifts He has given them.

1 Corinthians 12:28

God appointed different ministries in the church, including apostles, prophets, teachers, and other forms of service.

Spiritual Principle

A healthy church can unite people from very different backgrounds around one Lord and one gospel.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel does not erase human differences; it brings different people into one spiritual family under Jesus Christ.

II. WORSHIP, FASTING, AND THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 13:2

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”

Mission begins in worship.

Before missionaries are sent:

The church worships.

The church fasts.

The church listens.

Then:

The Spirit speaks.

Cross References

Acts 9:15

The Lord said concerning Saul, “He is My chosen instrument to carry My name before Gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel.”

Galatians 1:15

Paul said that God had set him apart from birth and called him by grace for His purpose.

Romans 1:1

Paul described himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.

Important Truth

The Holy Spirit says:

“Set apart for Me.”

Mission belongs to God before it belongs to the missionary.

Spiritual Principle

True missionary calling begins with God’s initiative rather than human ambition.

III. THE CHURCH SENDS BARNABAS AND SAUL

Acts 13:3

“So after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them out.”

The church responds seriously.

They do not rush.

They:

Fast.

Pray.

Lay hands upon Barnabas and Saul.

Send them.

Cross References

Acts 6:6

The church presented the seven servants to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands upon them.

1 Timothy 4:14

Timothy was reminded not to neglect the gift associated with the laying on of hands by the elders.

Acts 9:17

Ananias placed his hands on Saul and prayed for him to regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

The missionary is called by God and recognized and supported by the church.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A sending church does not merely say, “Go.” It surrounds mission with prayer.

IV. SENT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 13:4

“Sent by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and sailed to Cyprus.”

Verse 3 says the church sent them.

Verse 4 says:

The Holy Spirit sent them.

There is no contradiction.

God works through His church.

Cross References

Acts 4:36

Barnabas was from Cyprus, the island where this missionary journey now begins.

Acts 15:39

Barnabas later returned to Cyprus during another missionary journey.

Acts 8:29

The Holy Spirit had previously directed Philip toward the Ethiopian official.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical mission combines divine calling with human obedience.

V. THE WORD IS PREACHED IN CYPRUS

Acts 13:5

“When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed God’s word in the Jewish synagogues, with John Mark as their helper.”

The central activity is clear:

They proclaimed God’s Word.

John Mark accompanies them.

Cross References

Acts 12:25

Barnabas and Saul had brought John Mark with them after completing their ministry in Jerusalem.

Colossians 4:10

Mark later became known as a coworker associated with Barnabas.

Acts 13:13

John Mark would soon leave the missionary team and return to Jerusalem.

Spiritual Principle

Missionary ministry must remain centered upon the proclamation of God’s Word.

VI. A FALSE PROPHET IN PAPHOS

Acts 13:6

“They traveled across the island until they came to Paphos, where they met a sorcerer and false prophet, a Jew named Bar-Jesus.”

The missionaries encounter spiritual opposition.

Cross References

Acts 8:9

Simon had previously practiced sorcery in Samaria and amazed the people.

Deuteronomy 18:10

God forbade His people from practicing divination, sorcery, witchcraft, or occult practices.

Exodus 7:11

Pharaoh's magicians and sorcerers attempted to imitate God's signs through secret arts.

Spiritual Principle

Not every person claiming spiritual power speaks for God.

Key Truth

Biblical discernment must test spiritual claims by truth.

VII. SERGIUS PAULUS WANTS TO HEAR GOD'S WORD

Acts 13:7

“He was with the Roman governor, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man who wanted to hear God's word from Barnabas and Saul.”

Sergius Paulus demonstrates spiritual curiosity.

He wants to hear:

God's Word.

Cross References

Acts 10:2

Cornelius was another Gentile official who feared God and sincerely sought Him.

Acts 17:11

The Bereans later received the Word eagerly and examined Scripture carefully.

Acts 10:22

Cornelius was described as a God-fearing man who was ready to hear a message from God.

Spiritual Principle

God can create spiritual hunger in people holding positions of great responsibility.

VIII. ELYMAS OPPOSES THE GOSPEL

Acts 13:8

“But Elymas the sorcerer opposed them and tried to turn the governor from the faith.”

This reveals the real issue.

Elymas does not merely disagree.

He attempts to stop someone else from believing.

Cross References

2 Timothy 3:8

Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, certain people oppose the truth through corrupted thinking.

Galatians 5:7

Paul asked the Galatians, “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?”

Acts 8:18

Simon the sorcerer previously displayed a corrupted understanding of spiritual power.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The person who rejects truth for himself is in danger; the person who actively tries to keep others from truth carries even greater responsibility.

IX. SAUL IS ALSO CALLED PAUL

Acts 13:9

“Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at him.”

From this point forward Luke primarily uses:

Paul.

Paul does not confront Elymas in mere human anger.

Luke emphasizes:

“Filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Cross References

Acts 9:17

Saul had been filled with the Holy Spirit after his conversion.

Acts 4:8

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly spoke before the religious leaders.

Ephesians 5:18

Believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit rather than controlled by other influences.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical boldness should arise from the Holy Spirit, not uncontrolled temper.

X. PAUL EXPOSES ELYMAS

Acts 13:10

“You are full of deceit and evil. You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right. Will you not stop twisting the ways of the Lord?”

Paul speaks directly.

Elymas was:

Deceptive.

Opposed to righteousness.

Twisting God’s truth.

Cross References

John 8:44

Jesus said the devil is a liar and the father of lies, and those who reject truth reflect his character.

Matthew 13:38

Jesus described those under the influence of evil as belonging to the evil one.

Hosea 14:9

The ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous walk in them while rebels stumble over them.

Spiritual Principle

Love does not require pretending destructive spiritual deception is harmless.

XI. ELYMAS BECOMES BLIND

Acts 13:11

“Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You will be blind for a time, unable to see the sun. Immediately, mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about for someone to lead him.”

There is striking irony here.

Elymas tried to spiritually blind Sergius Paulus.

Now Elymas becomes physically blind.

Cross References

Acts 9:8

Saul himself had once risen from the Damascus road unable to see and had to be led by the hand.

Exodus 9:3

God’s hand came in judgment upon Egypt when Pharaoh continually resisted Him.

Deuteronomy 28:28

Moses warned that rebellion could bring confusion and blindness as judgment.

Important Truth

The blindness is described as:

“For a time.”

Even the judgment contains limitation.

Spiritual Principle

God has authority to stop those who aggressively obstruct His truth.

XII. THE GOVERNOR BELIEVES

Acts 13:12

“When the governor saw what had happened, he believed, amazed at the teaching about the Lord.”

Notice what ultimately amazes him.

Not merely the miracle.

He is amazed at:

“The teaching about the Lord.”

Cross References

Matthew 7:28

The crowds were amazed at Jesus’ teaching because of its authority.

Mark 1:22

People were astonished because Jesus taught with authority rather than like ordinary teachers.

Acts 8:13

Simon had been amazed by signs and miracles, though his later conduct exposed problems in his heart.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Miracles may gain attention, but truth about the Lord must remain the center.

XIII. JOHN MARK LEAVES THE TEAM

Acts 13:13

“From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem.”

Luke gives no detailed reason here for Mark's departure.

But later Paul considered it serious enough to oppose taking Mark on another journey.

Cross References

Acts 15:38

Paul later did not think it wise to take Mark because Mark had left them during the earlier work.

Acts 13:5

Mark had originally accompanied Barnabas and Saul as their helper.

2 Timothy 4:11

Years later Paul said, "Bring Mark with you, because he is useful to me for ministry."

Spiritual Principle

Failure in one season does not have to become permanent failure.

Mark's story continues.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A setback may become part of a restoration story rather than the final chapter of someone's usefulness.

XIV. PAUL ENTERS THE SYNAGOGUE IN PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

Acts 13:14

"From Perga they traveled to Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down."

Paul consistently begins where people already possess Scripture.

Cross References

Acts 17:2

Paul later entered the synagogue according to his custom and reasoned from Scripture.

Luke 4:16

Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath according to His regular practice.

Acts 9:20

Soon after his conversion, Saul had begun preaching Jesus in the synagogues.

Spiritual Principle

Wise evangelism begins where people are and moves them toward Jesus.

XV. PAUL IS INVITED TO SPEAK

Acts 13:15

“After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue leaders said, ‘Brothers, if you have a word of encouragement for the people, please speak.’”

God opens the door.

Cross References

Luke 4:17

Jesus was handed the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue and read from it.

Nehemiah 8:8

God’s Word was read clearly and explained so the people could understand.

Romans 15:4

Everything written in earlier Scripture was written to teach us and give endurance and hope.

Spiritual Principle

A prepared servant should be ready when God unexpectedly opens an opportunity to speak.

XVI. “LISTEN”

Acts 13:16

“Paul stood up, motioned with his hand, and said: ‘Men of Israel, and all who fear God, listen.’”

Paul addresses both:

Jews.

And God-fearing Gentiles.

Cross References

Acts 2:14

Peter stood at Pentecost and called the people to listen carefully to his words.

Acts 10:34

Peter began speaking to Cornelius' household after realizing that God does not show favoritism.

Acts 17:22

Paul later stood in Athens and addressed another religious audience.

Spiritual Principle

Gospel preaching calls people to serious attention because eternal truth is being proclaimed.

XVII. GOD CHOSE AND DELIVERED ISRAEL

Acts 13:17

“The God of Israel chose our ancestors. He made the people prosper while they were in Egypt, and with mighty power He brought them out.”

Paul begins with God.

God chose.

God multiplied.

God delivered.

Cross References

Exodus 1:7

The Israelites became fruitful, increased greatly, and multiplied in Egypt.

Deuteronomy 26:5

Israel was commanded to remember that its ancestors became a great nation while living in Egypt.

Genesis 15:13

God had foretold that Abraham's descendants would live as strangers in another land before He delivered them.

Spiritual Principle

Redemptive history is fundamentally the story of what God has done.

XVIII. GOD ENDURES ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS

Acts 13:18

“For about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness.”

Israel repeatedly complained and rebelled.

Yet God remained faithful to His purpose.

Cross References

Numbers 14:33

Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years because of unbelief and rebellion.

Deuteronomy 8:2

Moses told Israel to remember how God led them through the wilderness to test and humble them.

Psalms 95:10

God said He was grieved with that generation for forty years because their hearts wandered.

Spiritual Principle

God's patience should lead us toward repentance rather than presumption.

XIX. GOD GIVES ISRAEL THE LAND

Acts 13:19

“He destroyed seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to His people.”

Cross References

Deuteronomy 7:1

Moses identified seven nations in Canaan that Israel would confront as God brought them into the land.

Joshua 14:1

Israel received inheritance in Canaan according to God's direction.

Joshua 21:43

The Lord gave Israel the land He had sworn to give their ancestors.

Spiritual Principle

God fulfills His covenant purposes according to His Word.

XX. GOD GIVES JUDGES

Acts 13:20

“He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until the prophet Samuel.”

Paul summarizes a long period of Israel's history.

Cross References

Judges 2:16

The Lord raised up judges who delivered Israel from those who oppressed them.

1 Samuel 3:20

All Israel recognized that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord.

Judges 3:9

When Israel cried to the Lord, He raised up a deliverer for them.

Spiritual Principle

Again and again God raised servants to help His people despite their repeated failures.

XXI. ISRAEL ASKS FOR A KING

Acts 13:21

“Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled for forty years.”

Cross References

1 Samuel 8:5

Israel asked Samuel to appoint a king over them like the surrounding nations.

1 Samuel 9:2

Saul son of Kish was described as physically impressive among the people.

1 Samuel 10:1

Samuel anointed Saul and declared that God had appointed him ruler over Israel.

Spiritual Principle

God sometimes allows people to experience the consequences of what they insist upon.

XXII. GOD RAISES UP DAVID

Acts 13:22

“After removing him, He raised up David as king, about whom He said, ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after My own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’”

David was not sinless.

But his life was fundamentally oriented toward God’s purposes.

Cross References

1 Samuel 13:14

Samuel told Saul that God had sought a man after His own heart to lead His people.

1 Samuel 16:13

Samuel anointed David, and the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him.

Psalms 89:20

God said, “I have found David My servant and anointed him with My holy oil.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God is looking for hearts willing to obey His purposes, not merely outward impressiveness.

XXIII. JESUS COMES FROM DAVID'S LINE

Acts 13:23

“From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as He promised.”

Paul reaches the central point.

All the history has been moving toward:

Jesus.

Cross References

2 Samuel 7:12

God promised David that one of his descendants would be raised up after him and that God would establish his kingdom.

Matthew 1:1

Jesus Christ is identified as the Son of David and the Son of Abraham.

Isaiah 11:1

Isaiah foretold that a shoot would come from Jesse’s family line and bear righteous fruit.

Key Truth

Jesus is not an interruption in biblical history; He is the promised fulfillment toward which biblical history moves.

XXIV. JOHN PREPARES THE WAY

Acts 13:24

“Before His coming, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.”

John’s ministry prepared people for Jesus.

Cross References

Mark 1:4

John appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism connected with repentance and forgiveness.

Luke 3:3

John traveled throughout the Jordan region calling people to repentance.

Malachi 3:1

God promised to send a messenger who would prepare the way before the coming Lord.

Spiritual Principle

Preparation for Christ includes recognizing sin and the need for repentance.

XXV. JOHN POINTS AWAY FROM HIMSELF

Acts 13:25

“As John was finishing his work, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not the one. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’”

John understood his role.

Cross References

John 1:20

John openly confessed that he was not the Christ.

Matthew 3:11

John said the One coming after him was far greater than he was.

John 3:28

John reminded his followers that he had said, “I am not the Christ; I was sent ahead of Him.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful ministry does not make the messenger the center; it points beyond the messenger to Jesus.

XXVI. THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

Acts 13:26

“Fellow Israelites, and you who fear God, this message of salvation has been sent to us.”

Paul identifies the gospel as:

“The message of salvation.”

Cross References

Acts 13:16

Paul had addressed both Israelites and God-fearing Gentiles.

Acts 28:28

Paul later declared that God’s salvation had been sent to the Gentiles and that they would listen.

Psalms 67:2

The psalm prays that God’s saving way would become known throughout the earth and among all nations.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel is not merely advice for improving life; it is God’s message of salvation.

XXVII. JESUS WAS NOT RECOGNIZED

Acts 13:27

“The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus. In condemning Him, they fulfilled the words of the prophets read every Sabbath.”

There is tragic irony.

They heard the prophets.

But failed to recognize the One the prophets foretold.

Cross References

John 1:11

Jesus came to His own people, but His own did not receive Him.

Luke 23:34

Jesus prayed for His persecutors, recognizing their ignorance concerning the full significance of their actions.

Acts 3:17

Peter said that the people and their rulers acted in ignorance when they rejected Jesus.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A person can hear Scripture regularly and still miss its central message if the heart is resistant to Christ.

XXVIII. JESUS IS CONDEMNED WITHOUT JUST CAUSE

Acts 13:28

“Though they found no basis for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have Him executed.”

Jesus was innocent.

Yet He was condemned.

Cross References

Luke 23:22

Pilate repeatedly stated that he found no crime in Jesus deserving death.

John 19:6

Pilate said, “Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, because I find no basis for a charge against Him.”

Matthew 27:22

The crowd demanded that Jesus be crucified.

Spiritual Principle

The cross reveals both the injustice of human sin and the redemptive purpose of God.

XXIX. JESUS IS BURIED

Acts 13:29

“When they had carried out all that was written about Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.”

The burial confirms the reality of Jesus’ death.

Cross References

Luke 23:53

Joseph took Jesus’ body down, wrapped it in linen, and placed it in a tomb.

John 19:40

Jesus’ body was wrapped according to Jewish burial customs.

Isaiah 53:9

Isaiah foretold that the suffering Servant would be associated with a rich man in His death.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel is rooted in real historical events: Jesus truly died and was truly buried.

XXX. “BUT GOD RAISED HIM”

Acts 13:30

“But God raised Him from the dead.”

These words overturn everything.

People condemned Him.

People killed Him.

People buried Him.

But God raised Him.

Cross References

Acts 2:24

God raised Jesus from the dead, freeing Him from death because death could not hold Him.

Romans 1:4

Jesus was powerfully declared to be the Son of God through resurrection from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:4

Christ was buried and raised on the third day according to Scripture.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Humanity's verdict was death; God's verdict was resurrection.

XXXI. THE RISEN CHRIST APPEARS TO WITNESSES

Acts 13:31

“For many days He was seen by those who traveled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now His witnesses.”

The resurrection was witnessed.

Cross References

Acts 1:3

Jesus presented Himself alive through many convincing proofs over forty days.

1 Corinthians 15:5

The risen Christ appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve.

Acts 10:41

Peter said Jesus appeared to witnesses chosen by God who ate and drank with Him after His resurrection.

Spiritual Principle

The resurrection message rests upon apostolic testimony to the risen Christ.

XXXII. GOD FULFILLED HIS PROMISE

Acts 13:32

“We bring you the Good News: what God promised to our fathers.”

Christianity is fulfillment.

Cross References

Romans 1:2

God promised the gospel beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

Galatians 3:16

God’s promises ultimately find their fulfillment in the promised offspring, Christ.

Genesis 12:3

God promised Abraham that all families of the earth would be blessed through him.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel is the fulfillment of God’s long-established redemptive promise.

XXXIII. JESUS IS GOD’S SON

Acts 13:33

Paul quotes Psalm 2.

“You are My Son; today I have become Your Father.”

Cross References

Psalm 2:7

God declares concerning His anointed King, “You are My Son.”

Hebrews 1:5

Hebrews applies this royal Sonship language uniquely to Christ.

Hebrews 5:5

Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest; the Father appointed Him and declared Him His Son.

Important Truth

Paul is not teaching that Jesus first became the Son of God at the resurrection.

The New Testament presents Jesus as the eternal Son.

The resurrection publicly vindicated and enthroned the Son in fulfillment of royal messianic promise.

Spiritual Principle

The resurrection confirms Jesus as God's victorious Messiah and Son.

XXXIV. THE SURE PROMISES TO DAVID

Acts 13:34

“God raised Him never to decay, as He said: ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’”

Cross References

Isaiah 55:3

God promised the faithful covenant blessings associated with David.

2 Samuel 7:16

God promised David that his house, kingdom, and throne would ultimately be established.

Ezekiel 37:25

God promised an enduring Davidic ruler connected with the future restoration of His people.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus' resurrection guarantees the permanence of God's messianic promises.

XXXV. THE HOLY ONE WOULD NOT SEE DECAY

Acts 13:35

“In another Psalm it says: ‘You will not let Your Holy One see decay.’”

Cross References

Psalm 16:10

God's Holy One would not be abandoned to the grave or allowed to experience corruption.

Acts 2:27

Peter had already applied this promise to Jesus' resurrection.

Acts 2:31

Peter explained that David prophetically foresaw the resurrection of the Messiah.

Key Truth

Psalm 16 reaches beyond David to Christ.

XXXVI. DAVID DIED AFTER SERVING HIS GENERATION

Acts 13:36

“David served God's purpose in his own generation and then died and was buried, and his body decayed.”

This is one of the great summaries of a faithful life.

David:

Served God's purpose.

In his generation.

Cross References

1 Kings 2:10

David died and was buried in the city of David.

Acts 2:29

Peter said David both died and was buried, and his tomb remained known.

2 Samuel 7:12

God had promised that after David's death He would raise up one of David's descendants.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A successful life is one that serves God's purpose in the generation God gives it.

XXXVII. JESUS DID NOT SEE DECAY

Acts 13:37

“But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.”

David died.

Jesus rose.

Cross References

Acts 2:31

The Messiah was not abandoned to the grave, and His body did not experience decay.

Romans 6:9

Christ, having been raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer rules over Him.

Acts 13:35

Scripture had promised that God's Holy One would not see decay.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus is greater than David because death could not hold Him.

XXXVIII. FORGIVENESS IS PROCLAIMED THROUGH JESUS

Acts 13:38

“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.”

Paul reaches the invitation.

Cross References

Luke 24:47

Jesus said repentance and forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all nations.

Ephesians 1:7

In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to God's grace.

Colossians 1:14

In Christ we have redemption and forgiveness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel does not merely expose sin; it announces forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

XXXIX. JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

Acts 13:39

“Through Him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you could not obtain under the law of Moses.”

This is one of Paul's great statements on justification.

Everyone Who Believes

The invitation is broad.

Through Him

Jesus is the basis.

Justified

Declared righteous before God.

Not Through the Law

The law reveals sin but cannot provide the final righteousness sinners need.

Cross References

Romans 3:28

A person is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Galatians 2:16

A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:3

What the law could not accomplish because of human sinful weakness, God accomplished through His Son.

Key Truth

What law-keeping cannot accomplish, Christ provides to the believer.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

We are not justified because we performed well enough; we are justified because Christ is sufficient and we trust Him.

XL. A WARNING AGAINST UNBELIEF

Acts 13:40

“Take care that what the prophets said does not happen to you.”

The gospel includes invitation.

It also includes warning.

Cross References

Hebrews 2:1

We must pay very careful attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away.

Habakkuk 1:5

God warned that He would accomplish a work people would struggle to believe even when told about it.

2 Peter 3:3

Scripture warns that scoffers will arise who reject God’s truth.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel must not be treated casually.

XLI. “LOOK, YOU SCOFFERS”

Acts 13:41

“Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.”

Paul applies Habakkuk’s warning to his hearers.

Cross References

Habakkuk 1:5

God warned people to look and be astonished because He was doing something they would hardly believe.

2 Peter 3:4

Scoffers later questioned God’s promises because they judged truth by their own expectations.

Isaiah 29:14

God said He would again perform an astonishing work that would overturn merely human wisdom.

Spiritual Principle

Refusing to believe simply because God’s work exceeds our expectations is spiritually dangerous.

XLII. THE PEOPLE WANT TO HEAR MORE

Acts 13:42

“As Paul and Barnabas were leaving, the people invited them to speak more about these things on the next Sabbath.”

The sermon creates hunger.

Cross References

Acts 13:44

On the next Sabbath almost the entire city gathered to hear the Word of the Lord.

Acts 17:32

In Athens some hearers later said they wanted to hear Paul again concerning resurrection.

Acts 13:16

Paul had originally called the congregation to listen carefully.

Spiritual Principle

A healthy response to biblical truth is a desire to hear more.

XLIII. CONTINUE IN GOD'S GRACE

Acts 13:43

“When the congregation was dismissed, many Jews and devout converts followed Paul and Barnabas, who urged them to continue in God’s grace.”

Beginning well is not enough.

They must continue.

Cross References

Acts 11:23

Barnabas had encouraged the Antioch believers to remain faithful to the Lord with all their hearts.

Acts 14:22

Paul and Barnabas later strengthened disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith.

John 8:31

Jesus said that true disciples continue in His Word.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Grace is not merely how the Christian life begins; believers must continue living in dependence upon grace.

XLIV. ALMOST THE WHOLE CITY GATHERS

Acts 13:44

“On the next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.”

The gospel has captured public attention.

Cross References

Acts 13:42

The people had specifically asked to hear more on the following Sabbath.

Mark 6:33

Large crowds once gathered rapidly to hear and see Jesus.

Acts 17:5

Large public response to the gospel later provoked jealousy and opposition elsewhere.

Spiritual Principle

When people hunger for God’s Word, the church should be prepared to proclaim it clearly.

XLV. JEALOUSY PRODUCES OPPOSITION

Acts 13:45

“But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting Paul and insulting him.”

Their opposition is connected explicitly with:

Jealousy.

Cross References

Acts 5:17

The high priest and his associates had previously been filled with jealousy toward the apostles.

Acts 17:5

Certain opponents later became jealous when crowds responded to Paul’s preaching.

Romans 10:19

Scripture had foretold that Gentile inclusion would provoke Israel to jealousy.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Jealousy can cause religious people to oppose something they should be celebrating.

XLVI. PAUL AND BARNABAS TURN TOWARD THE GENTILES

Acts 13:46

“Paul and Barnabas answered boldly: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. But since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.’”

Paul does not say the gospel was wrong.

He says the hearers rejected it.

Cross References

Romans 1:16

The gospel is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Acts 18:6

When certain hearers rejected the message, Paul declared that he would turn toward the Gentiles.

Acts 28:28

Paul later announced that God’s salvation had been sent to the Gentiles and that they would hear it.

Important Truth

Their rejection was morally significant.

Paul says they:

“Judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.”

Spiritual Principle

Rejecting the gospel is not a neutral decision.

XLVII. A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES

Acts 13:47

“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

Paul applies Isaiah’s mission language to the gospel mission flowing from Christ through His servants.

Cross References

Isaiah 49:6

God declares that His Servant will be a light to the nations so His salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

Luke 2:32

Simeon described Jesus as a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for Israel.

Isaiah 42:6

God promised that His Servant would become a covenant for the people and a light for the nations.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A church that belongs to the Light must carry the light beyond its own walls.

XLVIII. THE GENTILES REJOICE

Acts 13:48

“When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord, and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”

Their response contrasts sharply with rejection.

They:

Were glad.

Honored the Word.

Believed.

Cross References

Acts 11:18

The Jerusalem church praised God for granting repentance leading to life to the Gentiles.

Ephesians 1:4

God chose believers in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy before Him.

John 6:37

Jesus said that everyone the Father gives Him will come to Him, and He will never reject the one who comes.

Important Doctrinal Note

Acts 13:48 has long been discussed in relation to divine election and human faith.

The verse clearly emphasizes God's sovereign work in salvation.

The same chapter also emphasizes genuine human responsibility:

Some reject the Word.

Others believe.

The safest biblical conclusion is to affirm both truths Scripture presents:

God sovereignly works in salvation.

And:

People are genuinely commanded and responsible to believe the gospel.

Spiritual Principle

Salvation is never a reason for human boasting; it is ultimately a work of God's grace received through faith.

XLIX. THE WORD SPREADS THROUGH THE REGION

Acts 13:49

"The word of the Lord spread through the whole region."

Opposition has not stopped the mission.

Cross References

Acts 19:20

The Word of the Lord later continued growing and prevailing powerfully.

Colossians 1:6

The gospel was bearing fruit and growing throughout the world.

Acts 6:7

The Word of God spread, and the number of disciples greatly increased.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Word spreads because no human opposition can cancel God's truth.

L. PERSECUTION IS STIRRED UP

Acts 13:50

“But the Jewish leaders stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, driving them out of their region.”

Successful ministry produces opposition.

Cross References

Acts 14:2

Opponents later stirred up Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the believers.

Acts 14:19

Paul would later be attacked severely by hostile opponents.

2 Timothy 3:11

Paul later reminded Timothy of the persecutions he endured in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra.

Spiritual Principle

Opposition does not automatically mean ministry has failed.

Sometimes opposition rises precisely because the message is having an effect.

LI. THEY SHAKE THE DUST FROM THEIR FEET

Acts 13:51

“So they shook the dust off their feet in protest and went to Iconium.”

They do not remain endlessly where the gospel is deliberately rejected.

They move.

Cross References

Matthew 10:14

Jesus told His disciples that when a town refused the message, they could shake the dust from their feet and move on.

Luke 9:5

Jesus gave the same instruction concerning places that rejected His messengers.

Mark 6:11

Shaking the dust from the feet served as a testimony concerning rejection of the message.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithfulness sometimes means staying and preaching; at other times it means moving to the next open door.

LII. FILLED WITH JOY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 13:52

“The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Notice when the joy appears.

After opposition.

After persecution.

After Paul and Barnabas are expelled.

Yet:

The disciples are joyful.

Cross References

Acts 2:4

The believers at Pentecost were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22

The fruit produced by the Spirit includes joy.

John 16:22

Jesus promised His disciples a joy that no one could ultimately take away from them.

Spiritual Principle

Christian joy does not depend upon an opposition-free environment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The world may remove the preacher from the city without removing the Holy Spirit from the disciples.

LIII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 13

1. Mission Begins with God

The Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul.

Principle:

The church does not invent the mission; it joins God's mission.

2. Prayer and Worship Should Surround Mission

The Antioch church worshiped, fasted, and prayed.

Principle:

Mission without prayer quickly becomes human activity instead of spiritual ministry.

3. The Gospel Is Centered on Jesus

Paul's sermon moves through Israel's history until it reaches Christ.

Principle:

Biblical preaching must ultimately point people toward Jesus Christ.

4. Jesus Died and Rose Again

The cross and resurrection stand at the heart of Paul's message.

Principle:

A gospel without the resurrection is not the apostolic gospel.

5. Forgiveness and Justification Come Through Christ

Paul declares that believers receive what the law could never provide.

Principle:

Salvation rests upon Christ's sufficiency rather than human performance.

6. Opposition Cannot Stop the Word

Elymas resisted.

Others contradicted.

Persecution arose.

Still:

The Word spread.

Principle:

God's mission is larger than its opponents.

7. Spirit-Filled Believers Can Have Joy During Opposition

The chapter ends with joy.

Principle:

Christian joy comes from the Holy Spirit, not merely favorable circumstances.

LIV. WHAT ACTS 13 TEACHES ABOUT THE MISSIONARY CHURCH

The Antioch church becomes a model.

It Had Biblical Leadership

Prophets and teachers.

It Worshiped

Mission arose within devotion to God.

It Fasted

The believers sought God seriously.

It Listened

They recognized the Spirit's direction.

It Released Its Best Leaders

Barnabas and Saul were important people in Antioch.

The church did not keep them for itself.

It Prayed

The mission was covered in prayer.

It Sent

The church became outward-looking.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A mature church does not merely gather people; it sends people.

LV. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MISSION

The Holy Spirit is central throughout Acts 13.

He Calls

“Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul.”

He Sends

They are:

“Sent by the Holy Spirit.”

He Fills

Paul confronts Elymas:

“Filled with the Holy Spirit.”

He Sustains

The disciples end the chapter:

“Filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Spiritual Principle

The mission of the church is impossible to accomplish properly without dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

LVI. SAUL BECOMES PAUL

Acts 13:9 introduces:

“Saul, who was also called Paul.”

This is not necessarily describing a dramatic name change at conversion.

It was common in the Roman world for people to use more than one name in different linguistic or social settings.

As Paul’s ministry increasingly moves among Gentiles, Luke primarily uses his Roman name:

Paul.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel messenger may adapt culturally without changing the gospel itself.

LVII. PAUL’S SERMON — THE GREAT STORY OF GOD

Paul’s sermon demonstrates how to understand biblical history.

He does not treat the Old Testament as disconnected stories.

He sees one redemptive movement.

God chose Israel.

God delivered Israel.

God gave the land.

God raised judges.

God raised David.

God promised a Savior.

John prepared the way.

Jesus came.

Jesus was rejected.

Jesus died.

Jesus was buried.

Jesus rose.

Forgiveness is now proclaimed.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Bible tells one unfolding redemptive story centered in Jesus Christ.

LVIII. “BUT GOD RAISED HIM”

Acts 13:30 is one of the great turning points in Paul’s sermon.

Human beings did their worst.

They rejected Jesus.

Condemned Jesus.

Crucified Jesus.

Buried Jesus.

Then:

“But God raised Him from the dead.”

Principle

Never evaluate God’s final purpose while you are still standing at the tomb.

The grave looked final.

It was not.

LIX. DAVID SERVED HIS GENERATION

Acts 13:36 deserves special attention.

“David served God’s purpose in his own generation.”

We cannot serve every generation.

But we can serve ours.

We cannot control the world after we die.

But we can faithfully obey God now.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Serve God’s Purpose in Your Generation”

Ask:

What has God called me to do?

Who has God placed around me?

What truth must I proclaim?

What ministry has He put in front of me?

What opportunities do I have now?

Principle

Faithfulness is serving God where He placed you during the time He gave you.

LX. FORGIVENESS AND JUSTIFICATION

Acts 13:38–39 gives a beautiful description of salvation.

Forgiveness

Our sins are pardoned.

Justification

The believer is declared righteous before God through Christ.

Through Jesus

Christ is the basis.

Through Believing

Faith receives the gift.

Not Through the Law

The law cannot justify the sinner.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Religion says, “Do enough and perhaps you can become acceptable.” The gospel says, “Christ has done what you could never do; believe in Him.”

LXI. WHAT THE LAW CAN AND CANNOT DO

Paul does not insult the law.

The law was God’s revelation.

But the law could not justify sinners because human beings failed to keep it perfectly.

The Law Reveals God's Standard

The Law Exposes Sin

The Law Points Toward the Need for Christ

But Christ Provides Justification

Spiritual Principle

The problem is not weakness in God's law but weakness in sinful humanity.

LXII. JEALOUSY IN RELIGIOUS MINISTRY

Acts 13:45 is sobering.

The opponents saw crowds.

Then:

They were filled with jealousy.

They were more disturbed that people listened to Paul than delighted that people were hearing God's Word.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When another person's fruitfulness makes us angry rather than thankful, jealousy has begun corrupting ministry.

LXIII. WHEN SOME REJECT, OTHERS RECEIVE

The same gospel produces different responses.

Some Want More

Some Follow

Some Believe

Some Rejoice

Some Become Jealous

Some Contradict

Some Persecute

The message does not change.

Spiritual Principle

Our responsibility is faithful proclamation; God alone knows every heart's final response.

LXIV. WHAT ACTS 13:48 TEACHES ABOUT SALVATION

Acts 13:48 says:

“All who were appointed for eternal life believed.”

This should humble believers.

Salvation is never something we can boast about as though we made ourselves spiritually superior.

Yet this same chapter says unbelievers:

“Reject” the Word.

The Bible therefore places two truths side by side.

God Is Sovereign in Salvation

And:

Human Beings Are Responsible to Respond to the Gospel

We should not use one truth to erase the other.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical theology must be willing to affirm every truth Scripture affirms even when our minds cannot fully explain how those truths fit together.

LXV. THE GOSPEL TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Paul quotes Isaiah:

“I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

This echoes Acts 1:8.

Jerusalem.

Judea.

Samaria.

The ends of the earth.

Spiritual Principle

The missionary heart of God reaches beyond every local boundary.

LXVI. WHAT ACTS 13 TEACHES ABOUT OPPOSITION

Opposition takes several forms.

Spiritual Deception

Elymas.

Intellectual Contradiction

Opponents challenge Paul.

Personal Insult

Paul is verbally attacked.

Organized Persecution

Influential leaders stir up opposition.

Expulsion

Paul and Barnabas are driven away.

Yet:

The Word spreads.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Opposition may alter the route of mission, but it cannot cancel the mission.

LXVII. JOHN MARK — FAILURE IS NOT FINAL

John Mark leaves.

Later Paul refuses to take him.

But years afterward Paul writes:

“Bring Mark with you, because he is useful to me for ministry.”

That is restoration.

Spiritual Principle

One failure does not have to define the remainder of your service to Christ.

Do not romanticize failure.

But do not make failure permanent when grace allows restoration.

LXVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What was the church at Antioch doing when the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul?

They were worshiping the Lord and fasting.

Their missionary calling arose in an atmosphere of worship, prayer, and spiritual devotion.

Question 2

Who called Barnabas and Saul to missionary work?

The Holy Spirit.

The church recognized that calling, prayed, laid hands upon them, and sent them.

Question 3

Why is the Antioch church important?

It became a major missionary-sending church.

It demonstrated worship, teaching, diversity, prayer, Spirit-led leadership, and willingness to send gifted servants outward.

Question 4

Who was Elymas?

Elymas, also known as Bar-Jesus, was a sorcerer and false prophet who tried to prevent Sergius Paulus from believing the gospel.

Question 5

Why was Elymas judged with blindness?

Paul said Elymas was deliberately twisting God's ways and trying to turn the governor from faith.

The temporary blindness became a visible judgment corresponding to Elymas' spiritual opposition.

Question 6

What happened to John Mark?

John Mark left Paul and Barnabas in Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem.

Later this created disagreement between Paul and Barnabas.

Yet Mark was eventually restored and became useful to Paul in ministry.

Question 7

What was the main point of Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch?

God's promises and Israel's history find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who was crucified, buried, raised from the dead, and through whom forgiveness and justification are offered to believers.

Question 8

What did Paul teach about forgiveness?

He declared that forgiveness of sins is proclaimed through Jesus.

Christ is the One through whom sinners can receive pardon.

Question 9

What did Paul teach about justification?

Everyone who believes in Christ is justified from what the law of Moses could not justify them from.

Justification is received through faith in Christ rather than earned through works of law.

Question 10

Why did Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles?

After certain Jewish hearers persistently rejected the Word, Paul and Barnabas declared that they would carry the message openly to Gentiles, fulfilling God's purpose that salvation reach the nations.

Question 11

How did the Gentiles respond?

They rejoiced.

They honored the Word of the Lord.

Those appointed for eternal life believed.

The Word then spread throughout the region.

Question 12

What is the main lesson of Acts 13?

The Holy Spirit sends believers to proclaim Jesus Christ to the nations, forgiveness and justification come through faith in Him, and opposition cannot stop God's Word from spreading.

LXIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 13 asks several important questions.

Am I Worshiping Before I Ask God for Direction?

The Antioch church was.

Am I Available for God to Send Me?

Barnabas and Saul were.

Am I Willing to Release Others for God's Work?

The church released important leaders.

Do I Know the Gospel Well Enough to Explain It?

Paul did.

Is Jesus the Center of My Bible Teaching?

Paul moved all biblical history toward Christ.

Am I Depending on Law-Keeping or Christ for Justification?

Paul says justification comes through Jesus.

How Do I Respond When Others Are More Successful Than I Am?

With jealousy?

Or gratitude?

Can I Continue in Joy when Opposition Comes?

The disciples did.

Am I Serving God's Purpose in My Generation?

David did.

LXX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Mission Begins in Worship Before It Moves Into the World”

Acts 13 does not begin with a strategy meeting.

It begins with believers worshiping God.

Then the Spirit speaks.

Then the church prays.

Then the missionaries go.

Principle

We should not be so eager to work for God that we stop spending time with God.

Mission should flow from worship.

LXXI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Let Opposition Make You Forget the Open Door”

Elymas opposed.

Paul continued.

Some Jews opposed.

Paul continued.

Persecution drove them out.

They moved to Iconium.

Principle

When one door closes through rejection, remain alert for the next door God opens.

The mission does not belong to one city.

LXXII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Gospel Gives What the Law Could Never Produce in Us”

Paul’s great announcement is:

Forgiveness.

Justification.

Through:

Jesus Christ.

The law can say:

You have sinned.

The gospel says:

Christ can forgive.

The law can expose guilt.

Christ provides righteousness.

Principle

Our hope before God is not that we finally became good enough, but that Jesus Christ is enough.

LXXIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Serve God’s Purpose Before Your Generation Is Gone”

David served God’s purpose:

“In his own generation.”

Every generation passes.

Every life is temporary.

Every opportunity eventually closes.

Principle

Do not spend your entire life preparing to serve God someday while ignoring the people and opportunities God has given you today.

LXXIV. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 13 begins inside a worshiping church.

It ends with a joyful, Spirit-filled group of disciples in another region.

Between those two scenes:

Missionaries are called.

Missionaries are sent.

The gospel crosses the sea.

A sorcerer opposes.

A governor believes.

A helper leaves.

A synagogue opens.

Paul preaches.

Jesus is proclaimed.

The resurrection is announced.

Forgiveness is offered.

Justification is explained.

Some believe.

Some reject.

The Gentiles rejoice.

Persecution rises.

The Word spreads.

That is the story of mission.

Mission does not mean:

No opposition.

No disappointment.

No conflict.

No rejection.

No hardship.

Mission means:

God sends.

Servants obey.

Christ is proclaimed.

People respond.

The Word keeps moving.

Acts 13 also reminds us that the heart of missionary preaching must remain Jesus Christ.

Paul does not merely preach:

Morality.

Tradition.

Politics.

Self-improvement.

Religious culture.

He preaches:

Jesus.

Jesus is the promised Savior.

Jesus was crucified.

Jesus was buried.

Jesus was raised.

Jesus fulfills Scripture.

Jesus forgives sins.

Jesus justifies believers.

That is the gospel.

And when some reject it:

Paul does not change the gospel to make rejection disappear.

He takes the same gospel to people ready to hear.

Acts 13 therefore challenges the church:

Worship deeply.

Pray seriously.

Listen carefully.

Send willingly.

Preach clearly.

Point to Jesus.

Trust the Holy Spirit.

Do not become jealous of gospel fruit.

Do not allow rejection to create despair.

Do not allow persecution to silence witness.

And remember:

The Word of the Lord can spread even when the servants carrying it are driven out.

The chapter begins with the Holy Spirit saying:

“Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul.”

It ends with disciples:

“Filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

The same Spirit who sends the missionary is the Spirit who sustains the believer.

And the same gospel that faced opposition in Acts 13 still carries God’s saving message:

Through Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed.

And:

Everyone who believes is justified through Him.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the missionary testimony of Acts Chapter 13.

Thank You for the church at Antioch.

Teach our churches to worship You deeply.

Teach us to pray.

Teach us to fast when we need focused spiritual dependence.

Teach us to listen to Your direction.

Give us courage to release people for ministry rather than keeping every gifted servant for ourselves.

Thank You for Barnabas.

Thank You for Paul.

Thank You for every believer willing to carry the gospel beyond familiar places.

Fill us with Your Holy Spirit.

Give us discernment when false teaching appears.

Give us courage to speak truth without fear.

Protect us from jealousy when You use others powerfully.

Help us rejoice whenever Jesus Christ is faithfully proclaimed.

Thank You that Your promises find their fulfillment in Jesus.

Thank You that He is the promised Savior.

Thank You that He died.

Thank You that He was buried.

Thank You that You raised Him from the dead.

Thank You that He lives forever.

Thank You that forgiveness of sins is proclaimed through His name.

Thank You that justification is available through faith in Him.

Keep us from trusting our own works.

Keep us from trying to earn what Christ alone can provide.

Help us trust completely in Jesus.

Give us hearts like David that desire to serve Your purpose in our generation.

Show us what You have called us to do now.

Give us courage to do it while we have opportunity.

When people reject the gospel, keep us faithful.

When persecution comes, give us strength.

When doors close, show us the next open door.

When ministry becomes difficult, remind us that Your Word cannot be chained.

Let Your Word spread.

Let Jesus be preached.

Let sinners believe.

Let believers grow.

Let churches send.

Let the nations hear.

And fill Your people with:

Joy and the Holy Spirit.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through Him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you could not obtain under the law of Moses.” — Acts 13:38–39

Central Truth

The Holy Spirit calls and sends God's servants to proclaim the crucified and risen Jesus Christ to the nations, and through Him everyone who believes receives forgiveness and justification that human works and law-keeping can never provide.

Acts 13 in One Sentence

The Holy Spirit sends Barnabas and Paul from Antioch into missionary service, Paul confronts spiritual opposition and proclaims Israel's history as fulfilled in the crucified and risen Jesus, forgiveness and justification are offered through faith in Christ, and despite jealousy and persecution the Word of the Lord spreads among the Gentiles while believers remain filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 14 — Through Tribulation Into the Kingdom

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 14 continues Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey.

Acts 13 ended with persecution in Pisidian Antioch.

Paul and Barnabas were driven from the region.

But they were not defeated.

They moved to Iconium.

Then to Lystra.

Then to Derbe.

And everywhere they went:

They preached the Good News.

Acts 14 gives us a realistic picture of Christian ministry.

There is:

Powerful preaching.

Conversion.

Miracles.

Opposition.

Jealousy.

Violence.

Misunderstanding.

Idolatry.

Persecution.

Church growth.

Leadership development.

Encouragement.

Missionary reporting.

The chapter begins with many people believing.

Then enemies poison the minds of others.

Paul and Barnabas continue speaking boldly.

A plot develops to stone them.

They move to another city.

A man lame from birth is healed.

The crowd responds incorrectly and tries to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods.

The missionaries immediately reject the praise.

They tell the people:

“We are only human like you!”

They call them away from worthless idols and toward:

“The living God.”

Then the crowd that wanted to worship Paul is persuaded by hostile opponents to stone him.

Paul is dragged outside the city and left for dead.

But he gets up.

He goes back into the city.

The next day:

He continues missionary work.

Then Paul and Barnabas do something especially significant.

They return to the very cities where they had suffered persecution.

Why?

To strengthen the believers.

To encourage them.

To establish leadership.

And to teach them:

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

Acts 14 therefore destroys the idea that following Christ guarantees a trouble-free life.

The gospel does not promise believers exemption from hardship.

It promises:

God's presence.

God's grace.

God's kingdom.

God's sustaining power.

Paul and Barnabas eventually return to Antioch, the church that had sent them.

They gather the church and report:

“Everything God had done through them.”

Notice their emphasis.

Not:

Everything we accomplished.

But:

Everything God did.

Acts 14 teaches us:

Bold preaching may produce both belief and opposition.

Miracles must point people toward God rather than human messengers.

Persecution does not cancel the mission.

Believers need strengthening after conversion.

Churches need godly leadership.

Christian mission should be covered by prayer.

And:

The road into the kingdom may include many hardships, but the grace of God is sufficient for the journey.

I. POWERFUL PREACHING IN ICONIUM

Acts 14:1

“In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went together into the Jewish synagogue. They spoke so powerfully that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed.”

Paul and Barnabas continue the pattern established in Acts 13.

They enter the synagogue.

They preach.

People believe.

Cross References

Acts 13:14

Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch on the Sabbath and began proclaiming God’s message.

Acts 17:1

Paul later traveled through other cities and entered the synagogue to reason with people from the Scriptures.

Acts 18:4

Paul regularly reasoned in the synagogue, seeking to persuade both Jews and Greeks concerning the truth.

Spiritual Principle

Clear gospel preaching can reach people from very different backgrounds.

Jews believed.

Greeks believed.

The message was the same:

Jesus Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The power of gospel preaching is not in making the message complicated, but in proclaiming Christ clearly and faithfully.

II. UNBELIEF BECOMES ACTIVE OPPOSITION

Acts 14:2

“But some Jews refused to believe, and they stirred up the Gentiles, poisoning their minds against the believers.”

The unbelief does not remain private.

It becomes active opposition.

Cross References

Acts 13:45

When some saw the crowds listening to Paul, jealousy filled them and they began contradicting and insulting him.

Acts 13:50

Opponents stirred up influential people and created persecution against Paul and Barnabas.

1 Thessalonians 2:16

Paul later described opponents who tried to stop gospel preaching from reaching others.

Spiritual Principle

Rejecting truth can eventually become hostility toward those who accept truth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A poisoned mind often begins with a heart unwilling to receive the truth.

III. THEY STAY AND SPEAK BOLDLY

Acts 14:3

“Paul and Barnabas stayed there a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed their message of grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.”

Opposition does not immediately drive them away.

They remain.

They continue preaching.

The Message

Luke calls it:

“The message of grace.”

The Lord’s Confirmation

Signs and wonders accompanied the preaching.

Cross References

Mark 16:20

The disciples went out preaching, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message through signs.

Hebrews 2:4

God bore witness to the gospel through signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His will.

Acts 4:29

The believers prayed for boldness to continue speaking God’s Word even while facing threats.

Spiritual Principle

Opposition is not always a signal to leave immediately. Sometimes faithfulness means remaining and speaking boldly.

IV. THE CITY BECOMES DIVIDED

Acts 14:4

“The city became divided—some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.”

The gospel produces a decision.

Cross References

Acts 23:7

Paul’s message later produced division between opposing groups in Jerusalem.

John 7:43

The people became divided because of differing responses to Jesus.

John 9:16

Some rejected Jesus while others questioned how a sinner could perform such signs.

Spiritual Principle

Truth can bring division because people respond differently to Christ.

This does not mean Christians should seek unnecessary conflict.

But genuine gospel truth cannot always be received without forcing a decision.

V. A PLOT TO STONE THE MISSIONARIES

Acts 14:5

“Finally, both Gentiles and Jews, with their leaders, plotted to mistreat and stone them.”

Opposition escalates.

Words become plans for violence.

Cross References

Acts 14:19

Paul was later actually stoned in Lystra and dragged outside the city.

John 10:31

Jesus’ opponents picked up stones intending to kill Him.

Acts 7:58

Stephen was dragged outside the city and stoned.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful ministry may eventually encounter hostility that goes far beyond verbal disagreement.

VI. PAUL AND BARNABAS FLEE

Acts 14:6

“They found out about it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and the surrounding countryside.”

They leave.

This is not cowardice.

It is wisdom.

Cross References

Matthew 10:23

Jesus told His disciples that when persecution came in one town, they could flee to another.

Acts 9:25

Saul himself once escaped Damascus by being lowered through the city wall in a basket.

Acts 8:1

Persecution had previously scattered believers from Jerusalem into other regions.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Courage does not require staying where God has opened another door of escape and ministry.

VII. THEY KEEP PREACHING

Acts 14:7

“There they preached the Good News.”

This sentence summarizes their response to persecution.

They move.

But they do not become silent.

Cross References

Acts 14:21

Paul and Barnabas later preached the gospel in Derbe and made many disciples.

Acts 8:4

Believers scattered by persecution went everywhere preaching the Word.

Mark 16:15

Jesus commanded His followers to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel.

Spiritual Principle

Opposition may change the location of ministry without changing the mission.

VIII. A MAN LAME FROM BIRTH

Acts 14:8

“In Lystra there was a man who had been lame from birth; he had never walked.”

The man’s condition was lifelong.

Cross References

Acts 3:2

A man lame from birth was regularly carried to the temple gate in Jerusalem.

John 5:5

Jesus met a man who had suffered from a disabling condition for many years.

Isaiah 35:6

Isaiah foretold a day when the lame would leap like a deer as God’s saving power was revealed.

Spiritual Principle

A lifelong problem is not beyond God’s authority.

IX. THE MAN LISTENS

Acts 14:9

“He listened as Paul was speaking. Paul looked straight at him and saw he had faith to be healed.”

Notice where the miracle begins.

The man is:

Listening.

Cross References

Mark 5:34

Jesus told the healed woman that her faith had been connected with receiving healing.

Matthew 9:22

Jesus told the woman who touched His garment to take courage because her faith had brought healing.

Acts 3:16

Peter explained that faith in Jesus' name had brought healing to the lame man.

Spiritual Principle

Faith responds to what it hears about God and His power.

X. “STAND ON YOUR FEET!”

Acts 14:10

“Paul called out in a loud voice, ‘Stand on your feet!’ At once the man jumped up and began to walk.”

The healing is immediate.

Cross References

Acts 3:7

Peter took the lame man by the hand, and immediately his feet and ankles became strong.

John 5:8

Jesus told the disabled man, “Get up, pick up your mat, and walk.”

Isaiah 35:6

Isaiah foretold that the lame would leap when God's salvation appeared.

Spiritual Principle

When God genuinely heals, the power belongs to Him rather than to the servant speaking.

XI. THE CROWD MISUNDERSTANDS THE MIRACLE

Acts 14:11

“When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in their own language, ‘The gods have come down to us in human form!’”

The miracle is real.

Their interpretation is wrong.

Cross References

Acts 28:6

People later wrongly concluded that Paul was a god after he survived a snakebite.

Acts 8:10

The Samaritans had once wrongly regarded Simon as “the great power of God.”

John 10:33

Jesus’ opponents argued over claims concerning divine identity.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A genuine supernatural event can still be interpreted through a false worldview.

Experience must be corrected by truth.

XII. PAUL AND BARNABAS ARE CALLED GODS

Acts 14:12

“They called Barnabas ‘Zeus,’ and Paul ‘Hermes,’ because he was the chief speaker.”

The crowd interprets the missionaries through Greek mythology.

Cross References

Acts 10:25

Cornelius once fell at Peter’s feet, but Peter refused inappropriate reverence.

Revelation 22:8

John fell before an angel, but the angel immediately refused worship.

Acts 14:11

The crowd had concluded that the gods had come down in human form.

Spiritual Principle

People often interpret new truth through the categories they already possess.

That is why biblical explanation matters.

XIII. THE CROWD PREPARES SACRIFICES

Acts 14:13

“The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the gates, and he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.”

Their misunderstanding becomes worship.

Cross References**Acts 14:18**

Paul and Barnabas barely succeeded in stopping the people from sacrificing to them.

Exodus 32:6

Israel once brought offerings before the golden calf and celebrated idolatrous worship.

Judges 2:19

Israel repeatedly turned toward false gods and corrupted worship.

Spiritual Principle

Religious enthusiasm is not enough. Worship must be directed toward the true God.

XIV. PAUL AND BARNABAS REJECT THE WORSHIP

Acts 14:14

“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and rushed into the crowd, shouting.”

They are horrified.

Cross References

Acts 10:26

Peter told Cornelius to stand because Peter was only a man.

Matthew 26:65

Tearing one’s garments could express horror or deep distress over perceived blasphemy.

Numbers 14:6

Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes in grief when Israel rebelled against God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The true servant of God becomes alarmed when people give him glory that belongs to God.

XV. “WE ARE ONLY HUMAN LIKE YOU”

Acts 14:15

“Friends, why are you doing this? We are only human like you! We are bringing you Good News, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.”

This is Paul’s message to a pagan audience.

He does not begin with Abraham or Moses.

He begins with:

Creation.

Turn From Worthless Things

Idols cannot save.

Turn To the Living God

Biblical repentance has direction.

Away from idols.

Toward God.

Cross References

1 Thessalonians 1:9

The Thessalonian believers turned away from idols to serve the living and true God.

Jeremiah 10:3

The practices of the nations concerning idols are worthless because idols are made by human hands.

Acts 17:24

Paul later told the Athenians that the God who made the world and everything in it is Lord of heaven and earth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Repentance is not merely turning away from something false; it is turning toward the living God.

XVI. GOD ALLOWED THE NATIONS TO GO THEIR OWN WAY

Acts 14:16

“In the past, He allowed all nations to go their own way.”

Paul acknowledges a period of divine patience.

Cross References

Acts 17:30

Paul later said that God had overlooked times of ignorance but now commands all people everywhere to repent.

Romans 1:24

Because people rejected God, He gave them over to follow sinful desires.

Psalms 81:12

God said that He gave rebellious people over to their stubborn hearts so they followed their own plans.

Spiritual Principle

God's patience toward human rebellion should never be mistaken for approval of human rebellion.

XVII. CREATION TESTIFIES TO GOD

Acts 14:17

“Yet He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven, crops in their seasons, and filling your hearts with food and joy.”

Paul appeals to what theologians often call:

General revelation.

Creation and providence testify to God's goodness.

Cross References

Romans 1:19

What can be known about God has been made evident because God has revealed enough through creation to leave humanity responsible.

Psalms 147:8

God covers the sky with clouds, provides rain for the earth, and causes grass to grow.

Matthew 5:45

God causes the sun to rise and sends rain upon both the righteous and the unrighteous.

Spiritual Principle

Ordinary blessings are daily witnesses to the kindness of the Creator.

Rain.

Food.

Harvest.

Joy.

All point beyond themselves.

XVIII. THE CROWD CAN BARELY BE RESTRAINED

Acts 14:18

“Even with these words, they could hardly keep the crowd from sacrificing to them.”

False beliefs can be difficult to correct.

Cross References

Acts 14:13

The priest and crowd had already prepared animals for sacrifice.

Acts 10:26

Peter similarly rejected worship and insisted that he was only human.

Acts 14:14

Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes in distress when they realized what the crowd intended.

Spiritual Principle

Correcting false worship may require persistence because deeply held spiritual error does not disappear immediately.

XIX. THE CROWD TURNS AGAINST PAUL

Acts 14:19

“Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.”

The emotional reversal is dramatic.

Earlier:

They wanted to worship Paul.

Now:

They stone Paul.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:25

Paul later testified that he had been stoned once during his ministry.

2 Timothy 3:11

Paul later reminded Timothy about the persecutions he endured in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra.

Acts 7:58

Stephen had also been dragged outside a city and stoned.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Crowd approval is unstable; the servant of God must not build identity upon public praise.

The same crowd that applauds today may condemn tomorrow.

XX. PAUL GETS UP

Acts 14:20

“But as the disciples gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.”

Paul survives.

Then he does something remarkable:

He goes back into the city.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 12:9

Christ told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, because My power is made perfect in weakness.”

Acts 9:19

After Saul’s conversion and physical weakness, he regained strength and began serving Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:10

Paul later said that God had delivered him from deadly danger and that his hope remained in God.

Spiritual Principle

God can give strength after an experience that should have ended the mission.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You may be knocked down in ministry without being finished in ministry.

XXI. THEY PREACH IN DERBE AND RETURN

Acts 14:21

“They preached the gospel in Derbe and won many disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.”

This is extraordinary.

They return to cities where opposition had been severe.

Cross References

Acts 14:6

Paul and Barnabas had previously fled into the region around Lystra and Derbe.

Acts 16:1

Paul later returned to this area again and met Timothy.

Matthew 28:19

Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples among all nations.

Spiritual Principle

Mission does not end when people believe; new believers must be strengthened.

XXII. “THROUGH MANY HARDSHIPS”

Acts 14:22

“Strengthening the believers and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. They said, ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.’”

This verse gives the chapter its title.

Paul does not tell new believers:

“Now that you follow Jesus, life will become easy.”

He says:

“We must go through many hardships.”

Cross References

2 Timothy 3:12

Everyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus should expect persecution.

John 16:33

Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Romans 8:17

Believers who share Christ’s inheritance may also share in suffering before sharing in glory.

Important Truth

Hardship does not earn entrance into God’s kingdom.

Salvation is by grace through faith.

The point is:

The path of faithful discipleship in a hostile world includes suffering.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The road to the kingdom is not always comfortable, but the kingdom is worth every hardship along the way.

XXIII. ELDERS ARE APPOINTED

Acts 14:23

“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church, with prayer and fasting, committing them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

Paul and Barnabas understand that churches need leadership.

Cross References

Titus 1:5

Paul later told Titus to appoint elders in every town according to proper qualifications.

Acts 6:6

Church servants were presented before spiritual leaders, who prayed and laid hands upon them.

1 Timothy 4:14

Timothy's ministry calling was recognized through prayer and the laying on of hands.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy churches need spiritually qualified leadership.

Prayer and Fasting

Leadership decisions were treated seriously.

Committing Them to the Lord

Ultimately the churches belonged to Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Church leaders are entrusted with people who still belong to the Lord, not to the leaders.

XXIV. THEY TRAVEL THROUGH PISIDIA

Acts 14:24

“After traveling through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.”

The missionary journey begins turning homeward.

Cross References

Acts 13:13

Paul and his companions had earlier arrived in Pamphylia.

Acts 13:14

They had traveled from Perga into Pisidian Antioch.

Acts 15:38

Pamphylia would later be remembered as the region where John Mark had left the mission.

Spiritual Principle

Missionary service includes faithful completion, not merely an enthusiastic beginning.

XXV. THEY PREACH IN PERGA

Acts 14:25

“They preached in Perga, then went down to Attalia.”

Even while returning home:

They preach.

Cross References

Acts 13:13

Paul’s missionary team had earlier passed through Perga.

Acts 14:24

They had returned through Pamphylia on the homeward journey.

Acts 13:14

Their earlier route had taken them from Perga toward Pisidian Antioch.

Spiritual Principle

The missionary assignment continues until the journey itself is finished.

XXVI. THEY RETURN TO THE SENDING CHURCH

Acts 14:26

“From there they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been entrusted to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.”

They return to the church that sent them.

Cross References

Acts 13:3

The Antioch church had prayed, fasted, laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, and sent them out.

Acts 15:40

Paul would later begin another missionary journey after being commended to God's grace.

Acts 13:1

Antioch was the church where Barnabas and Saul had served as teachers and leaders.

Key Phrase

“Entrusted to the grace of God.”

Their survival depended upon grace.

Their ministry depended upon grace.

Their fruit depended upon grace.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The grace that sends us is the grace that sustains us and the grace that brings us through the work.

XXVII. THEY REPORT WHAT GOD DID

Acts 14:27

“When they arrived, they gathered the church together and reported everything God had done through them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”

This is missionary accountability.

The church sent them.

They return and report.

But notice their focus:

“Everything God had done.”

Cross References

Acts 15:4

Paul and Barnabas later reported to the church what God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Acts 11:18

The Jerusalem believers had already praised God for granting Gentiles repentance leading to life.

1 Corinthians 16:9

Paul later described a great and effective door for ministry that God had opened.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A faithful ministry report should magnify what God accomplished rather than what the servants achieved.

XXVIII. THEY REMAIN WITH THE DISCIPLES

Acts 14:28

“And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.”

After the missionary journey:

They return to Christian community.

Cross References

Acts 15:35

Paul and Barnabas later remained in Antioch teaching and preaching the Word.

Acts 11:26

Barnabas and Saul had previously spent an entire year teaching the believers at Antioch.

Acts 13:1

Antioch remained a major center of teaching, ministry, and missionary activity.

Spiritual Principle

Missionaries need the fellowship, stability, and encouragement of the local church too.

XXIX. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 14

1. Bold Preaching Produces Different Responses

Many believed.

Others opposed.

Principle:

The success of gospel preaching cannot be measured only by universal acceptance.

2. Opposition Must Not Silence the Messenger

Paul and Barnabas stayed and spoke boldly.

Principle:

Faithful ministry requires courage under pressure.

3. Worship Belongs to God Alone

Paul and Barnabas immediately rejected divine honors.

Principle:

God's servant must never accept glory that belongs to the Creator.

4. Public Opinion Is Unstable

The crowd wanted to worship Paul.

Then they stoned him.

Principle:

Build your identity upon God's approval rather than the crowd's applause.

5. Hardship Is Part of Christian Discipleship

Paul taught:

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

Principle:

Suffering does not prove God has abandoned us.

6. Churches Need Strengthening and Leadership

Paul and Barnabas returned to encourage believers and appoint elders.

Principle:

Evangelism must lead into discipleship and healthy church life.

7. God Deserves the Credit

The missionaries reported:

“Everything God had done through them.”

Principle:

God uses servants, but God receives the glory.

XXX. THE TWO RESPONSES TO THE GOSPEL

Iconium shows two responses.

Some Believed

Some Refused to Believe

Then opposition intensified.

This pattern appears repeatedly in Acts.

Spiritual Principle

The same gospel can soften one heart and expose the hardness of another.

The difference is not in the message.

The difference is in the response.

XXXI. THE MESSAGE OF GRACE

Acts 14:3 calls the gospel:

“The message of grace.”

Grace means salvation is rooted in God’s kindness rather than our merit.

Grace Forgives

Grace Saves

Grace Sustains

Grace Sends

Grace Strengthens

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel is not a message about how worthy sinners become; it is a message about how gracious God is toward unworthy sinners through Jesus Christ.

XXXII. MIRACLES AND THE WORD

Acts 14 carefully keeps the proper order.

The apostles:

Speak the message of grace.

Then the Lord confirms:

The Word.

Spiritual Principle

Miracles should never become more important than the truth they are meant to confirm.

A miracle without biblical truth can be misunderstood.

Lystra proves this.

The man was truly healed.

But the crowd concluded:

“The gods have come down.”

Therefore signs alone do not guarantee correct theology.

XXXIII. WHEN MIRACLES ARE MISUNDERSTOOD

The Lystra crowd witnesses undeniable power.

But because their worldview is pagan, they interpret it incorrectly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Experience needs Scripture because powerful experiences do not interpret themselves.

A person can:

See something real.

Experience something powerful.

And still reach a false conclusion.

Truth must interpret experience.

XXXIV. “WE ARE ONLY HUMAN”

Paul and Barnabas could have enjoyed the attention.

Instead:

They tore their clothes.

They rushed into the crowd.

They shouted for the people to stop.

Spiritual Principle

The closer a servant walks with God, the less comfortable he should become with receiving glory that belongs to God.

This is a lesson for:

Pastors.

Teachers.

Evangelists.

Authors.

Musicians.

Leaders.

Anyone with influence.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A ministry becomes spiritually dangerous when the audience begins worshiping the messenger more than honoring the Master.

XXXV. TURN FROM WORTHLESS THINGS

Paul describes idols as:

“Worthless things.”

They cannot:

Create.

Save.

Hear.

Forgive.

Give eternal life.

The living God can.

Spiritual Principle

Idolatry exchanges the Creator for something created.

Modern idols may not always look like statues.

They may include:

Money.

Influence.

Success.

Pleasure.

Power.

Identity.

Approval.

Anything taking God's rightful place can become idolatrous.

XXXVI. THE LIVING GOD

Paul's message to pagans centers on:

The living God.

This distinguishes biblical faith from idolatry.

Idols are dead.

God lives.

Idols are made.

God made everything.

Idols depend upon worshipers.

All creation depends upon God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never worship something God created when you can worship the God who created it.

XXXVII. GENERAL REVELATION

Acts 14:17 teaches that God:

"Has not left Himself without testimony."

Rain.

Harvest.

Food.

Joy.

Creation itself bears witness.

Important Doctrinal Truth

General revelation reveals enough about God's existence, power, and goodness to make humanity accountable.

But salvation still requires the gospel of Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Creation can tell us that there is a Creator, but the gospel tells us how sinners are reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ.

XXXVIII. FROM WORSHIP TO STONING

Acts 14 contains one of Scripture's strongest lessons about public approval.

Verse 13:

People want to sacrifice to Paul.

Verse 19:

People stone Paul.

The change happens quickly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Never Build Your Ministry on the Applause of a Crowd”

Crowds are unstable.

God is faithful.

Human approval changes.

God's truth remains.

Principle

If applause becomes your fuel, criticism will become your destruction.

Serve Christ.

XXXIX. PAUL GOES BACK INTO THE CITY

Paul was:

Stoned.

Dragged out.

Left for dead.

Then he:

Got up.

And:

Went back into the city.

That is extraordinary courage.

Spiritual Principle

Courage is sometimes going back toward the place associated with your pain because your mission is greater than your fear.

XL. “WE MUST GO THROUGH MANY HARDSHIPS”

This statement deserves careful attention.

Paul himself had just demonstrated it.

He did not teach hardship theoretically.

He had lived it.

Beaten

Opposed

Threatened

Stoned

Driven Away

Yet he still said:

Remain true to the faith.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A gospel that prepares believers only for blessing and never for suffering leaves them unprepared for biblical Christianity.

XLI. WHAT SUFFERING DOES NOT MEAN

Hardship does not automatically mean:

God has abandoned you.

You are outside God's will.

Your faith has failed.

Your ministry has failed.

The gospel is powerless.

Paul experienced hardship while doing exactly what God called him to do.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes suffering appears because you are faithfully walking in God's mission, not because you have left it.

XLII. STRENGTHENING NEW BELIEVERS

Paul and Barnabas do not merely count converts.

They return to:

Strengthen believers.

Why?

Because new believers need:

Teaching.

Encouragement.

Doctrine.

Community.

Leadership.

Preparation for hardship.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Great Commission is not fulfilled by making decisions alone; Jesus commanded us to make disciples.

XLIII. ENCOURAGING THEM TO REMAIN TRUE

Acts 14:22 says:

“Encouraging them to remain true to the faith.”

Christian perseverance matters.

Spiritual Principle

The church should not merely help people begin with Christ; it should help them continue with Christ.

XLIV. THE IMPORTANCE OF ELDERS

Paul and Barnabas appoint elders:

“In every church.”

This reveals an early pattern of organized local church leadership.

Elders Were Local

They served particular congregations.

Elders Were Appointed Carefully

Prayer and fasting accompanied the process.

Elders Were Not the Owners of the Church

The believers were committed:

“To the Lord.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Church leadership is stewardship under Christ, never ownership over Christ’s people.

XLV. PRAYER AND FASTING IN LEADERSHIP

Acts 13 begins missionary sending with prayer and fasting.

Acts 14 includes appointment of elders with:

Prayer.

Fasting.

This reveals seriousness.

Spiritual Principle

Major spiritual decisions should be approached with dependence upon God rather than casual human preference.

XLVI. OPENING THE DOOR OF FAITH

Acts 14:27 says God:

“Opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”

Paul and Barnabas preached.

But God opened.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The evangelist can preach the gospel, but God must open the heart and the door for saving response.

This protects us from:

Pride when people believe.

Despair when people reject.

The mission ultimately belongs to God.

XLVII. MISSIONARY ACCOUNTABILITY

Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch and report to the church.

They do not function as isolated spiritual celebrities.

They remain connected to the sending church.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical mission includes accountability, fellowship, and reporting back to the believers who prayed and sent.

XLVIII. WHAT DID THEY REPORT?

Not:

How brave we were.

How many miles we traveled.

How much we suffered.

How impressive our ministry was.

Luke says they reported:

“Everything God had done through them.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The best ministry report leaves listeners impressed with God rather than impressed with the minister.

XLIX. WHAT ACTS 14 TEACHES ABOUT COURAGE

Courage appears throughout the chapter.

They Speak Boldly

They Stay Under Opposition

They Flee Wisely

They Reject False Worship Publicly

Paul Survives Stoning

Paul Returns to the City

They Return to Dangerous Regions

Spiritual Principle

Biblical courage is not reckless behavior; it is persistent faithfulness to God's mission regardless of fear.

L. WHAT ACTS 14 TEACHES ABOUT PERSEVERANCE

Paul and Barnabas repeatedly continue.

Opposed?

Continue.

Threatened?

Move and continue.

Misunderstood?

Correct and continue.

Stoned?

Get up and continue.

Persecuted?

Return and strengthen believers.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Perseverance means the mission continues after the emotion that began it has faded.

LI. WHAT ACTS 14 TEACHES ABOUT SUCCESS

Modern people may define successful ministry by:

Crowds.

Applause.

Numbers.

Recognition.

Comfort.

Acts 14 gives a different picture.

Successful ministry includes:

Faithful preaching.

People believing.

Opposition.

Suffering.

Discipleship.

Leadership development.

Church strengthening.

Faithfulness under persecution.

Giving God glory.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical success is faithfulness to God, not freedom from difficulty.

LII. FIVE GREAT CHARACTERISTICS OF PAUL AND BARNABAS

1. They Were Bold

They spoke despite opposition.

2. They Were Humble

They refused worship.

3. They Were Resilient

They continued after persecution.

4. They Were Shepherd-Hearted

They returned to strengthen believers.

5. They Were Accountable

They reported back to Antioch.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Effective ministry requires both courage before opponents and humility before God.

LIIL. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What happened when Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium?

A large number of Jews and Greeks believed.

However, others rejected the gospel and stirred up opposition against the believers.

Question 2

Why did Paul and Barnabas stay in Iconium despite opposition?

They continued speaking boldly because the gospel still had an open opportunity there.

The Lord confirmed the message of grace through signs and wonders.

Question 3

Why did they eventually leave Iconium?

They discovered a serious plot to mistreat and stone them.

They then moved to Lystra and Derbe and continued preaching.

Question 4

Who was healed at Lystra?

A man who had been lame from birth and had never walked.

After listening to Paul, he was healed and immediately stood and walked.

Question 5

How did the crowd misunderstand the healing?

They interpreted it through pagan beliefs and concluded that Barnabas and Paul were gods who had appeared in human form.

They attempted to sacrifice to them.

Question 6

How did Paul and Barnabas respond to being worshiped?

They strongly rejected it.

They tore their clothes, rushed into the crowd, declared themselves ordinary humans, and directed the people toward the living Creator God.

Question 7

What happened to Paul later in Lystra?

Opponents persuaded the crowd to turn against him.

Paul was stoned, dragged outside the city, and left for dead.

But he got up and continued ministry.

Question 8

What did Paul teach new believers about hardship?

He taught:

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

Christian discipleship should therefore not be presented as a promise of an easy life.

Question 9

Why did Paul and Barnabas return to places where they had been persecuted?

They wanted to strengthen the believers, encourage them to remain faithful, and establish elders in the churches.

Question 10

How were elders appointed?

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders with prayer and fasting, committing the believers and leaders to the Lord.

Question 11

What did Paul and Barnabas do when they returned to Antioch?

They gathered the church and reported everything God had done through them, especially how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Question 12

What is the main lesson of Acts 14?

The gospel advances through bold proclamation, humble dependence upon God, perseverance through suffering, careful discipleship, godly leadership, and confidence that God Himself opens the door of faith.

LIV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 14 asks several serious questions.

Am I Willing to Speak Boldly When People Disagree?

Paul and Barnabas were.

Do I Know When to Stay and When to Move On?

Both responses can be faithful.

Do I Give God the Glory When He Uses Me?

Paul and Barnabas refused worship.

Am I Too Dependent on Public Approval?

The crowd changed quickly.

Can I Keep Serving After Being Hurt?

Paul did.

Am I Prepared for Hardship?

Paul taught believers to expect it.

Am I Strengthening Others?

Conversion must lead to discipleship.

Do I Take Church Leadership Seriously?

Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted.

When Ministry Succeeds, Do I Say “Look what I did” or “Look what God did”?

The missionaries gave God the credit.

LV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Let Yesterday’s Stones Stop Tomorrow’s Ministry”

Paul had been stoned.

He had been dragged outside the city.

His enemies thought he was dead.

Yet he got up.

The next day:

He went to Derbe.

Later:

He returned to Lystra.

Principle

Pain may become part of your testimony, but it does not have to become the end of your calling.

LVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Accept Worship for What God Did Through You”

The miracle came through Paul.

But Paul was not the source.

The crowd confused:

The instrument.

With:

The God using the instrument.

Paul immediately corrected them.

Principle

The more powerfully God uses someone, the more carefully that person must protect God's glory.

LVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Road Into the Kingdom May Pass Through Tribulation”

Acts 14:22 is not pessimism.

It is preparation.

Jesus Himself said:

“In this world you will have trouble.”

But He also said:

“Take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Principle

The Christian hope is not that suffering never comes; it is that suffering never has the final word.

The kingdom does.

LVIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“A Church Is Not Finished When People Believe”

Paul and Barnabas returned because believers needed:

Strength.

Encouragement.

Leadership.

Teaching.

Principle

Evangelism without discipleship leaves newborn believers without the nourishment they need to mature.

LIX. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 14 begins with powerful preaching.

It moves into opposition.

Then miracles.

Then idolatrous misunderstanding.

Then persecution.

Then stoning.

Then strengthening.

Then leadership.

Then missionary reporting.

In other words:

Acts 14 is ministry as it really is.

There are moments of great joy.

A large number believe.

A lame man walks.

Many disciples are made.

But there are also moments of severe pain.

Minds are poisoned.

Cities divide.

Plots develop.

Crowds become confused.

Paul is stoned.

Yet throughout the entire chapter:

The mission continues.

That is one of the great lessons.

Paul and Barnabas do not judge God's faithfulness by the absence of hardship.

They judge their responsibility by the clarity of their calling.

God called them to preach.

So they preach.

God opened doors.

They walked through them.

Opposition came.

They remained bold.

Danger became overwhelming.

They moved.

A miracle occurred.

They refused glory.

Paul was stoned.

He got up.

Believers were formed.

They returned to strengthen them.

Churches were established.

They appointed elders.

Then they returned to Antioch and said:

Look what God has done.

Acts 14 also gives us one of the most necessary messages for modern Christianity:

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

This does not mean suffering saves us.

Jesus saves us.

But it does mean that following Jesus in a fallen world will not always be comfortable.

There may be:

Opposition.

Loss.

Pain.

Misunderstanding.

Rejection.

Persecution.

Yet the kingdom remains ahead.

Therefore:

Do not quit because ministry becomes difficult.

Do not assume opposition means you missed God’s will.

Do not worship human leaders.

Do not seek human worship.

Do not measure ministry only by applause.

Do not let wounds determine your future obedience.

Do not merely make converts.

Make disciples.

Strengthen churches.

Develop leaders.

Pray.

Fast.

Depend upon grace.

And when the journey is complete:

Give God all the glory.

The testimony of Acts 14 is not:

Paul and Barnabas were amazing.

It is:

God did great things through willing servants.

And:

God opened the door of faith.

That same God remains worthy of our trust.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the testimony of Paul and Barnabas.

Thank You for showing us that faithful ministry is not always easy.

Give us courage to speak Your Word boldly.

When people believe, keep us humble.

When people oppose, keep us faithful.

When people misunderstand Your work, give us wisdom to explain the truth.

Protect us from accepting praise that belongs only to You.

Keep our hearts from becoming dependent upon crowds, popularity, or human recognition.

Remind us that we are only servants.

You are the living God.

You made heaven and earth.

You give rain.

You give harvest.

You give life.

You give grace.

Thank You for sustaining Paul when he was stoned.

When we are wounded in ministry, help us rise again by Your grace.

When we feel discouraged, remind us that hardship does not mean You have abandoned us.

Strengthen us to remain true to the faith.

Prepare us for tribulation without allowing fear to control us.

Help our churches make disciples, not merely count decisions.

Give us godly elders.

Give us leaders who pray.

Give us leaders who fast.

Give us leaders who understand that Your church belongs to You.

Open doors of faith.

Bring people to Jesus.

Strengthen new believers.

Build healthy churches.

And when You use us:

Keep us from taking the credit.

May we always say:

Look what God has done.

Give us grace to serve faithfully until the work You have given us is complete.

And when hardships come, keep our eyes on Your kingdom.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Strengthening the believers and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. They said, ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.’” — Acts 14:22

Central Truth

God advances the gospel through bold, humble, and persevering servants who refuse human glory, endure hardship, strengthen believers, establish godly leadership, and recognize that every open door of faith is ultimately the work of God's grace.

Acts 14 in One Sentence

Paul and Barnabas boldly preach through opposition, refuse worship after God heals a lame man, survive violent persecution, return to strengthen new believers and appoint elders, and finally report to Antioch that God Himself had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, demonstrating that many hardships cannot stop His kingdom mission.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 15 — The Council at Jerusalem

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 15 records one of the most important doctrinal disputes in the history of the early church.

The issue was simple to state but enormous in its consequences:

Must Gentile believers become Jewish in order to be saved?

More specifically:

Must Gentile believers be circumcised?

Must they place themselves under the law of Moses?

Must faith in Jesus Christ be supplemented by ceremonial obedience?

Some teachers answered:

Yes.

They said:

“Unless you are circumcised according to the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Paul and Barnabas strongly disagreed.

Why?

Because this was not merely a disagreement about customs.

It concerned:

The gospel itself.

If salvation required:

Faith in Christ

plus circumcision,

plus law-keeping,

plus ceremonial identity,

then salvation would no longer rest upon:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The controversy became serious enough that Paul, Barnabas, and others traveled to Jerusalem to meet with:

The apostles.

The elders.

The church.

Peter testified about what God had already done among the Gentiles.

He reminded the assembly that God:

Gave them the Holy Spirit.

Made no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Purified their hearts:

“By faith.”

Then Peter asked a powerful question:

“Why are you testing God by putting on the disciples a burden that neither we nor our ancestors could bear?”

Then comes one of the most important statements in Acts:

“We believe it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

Barnabas and Paul then report the signs and wonders God had performed among the Gentiles.

James speaks next.

He points to Scripture.

The inclusion of Gentiles was not an accident.

It agreed with the prophets.

God had always intended to call:

A people for His name from among the Gentiles.

The council therefore decides:

Do not burden Gentile believers with circumcision and the Mosaic law as conditions of salvation.

Instead, they are given several practical instructions intended to preserve:

Holiness.

Separation from idolatry.

Sexual purity.

And fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers.

A letter is sent to Antioch.

When the believers read it:

They rejoice.

Acts 15 therefore gives us one of Scripture's clearest declarations that:

Salvation is by the grace of Jesus Christ through faith, not through works of the law.

But the chapter does not end with the council.

Paul and Barnabas later disagree sharply over whether John Mark should accompany them on another missionary journey.

Barnabas wants Mark.

Paul does not.

The disagreement becomes so strong that they separate.

Barnabas takes Mark.

Paul takes Silas.

It is a painful moment.

Yet God continues working.

Two missionary teams emerge instead of one.

Acts 15 therefore teaches both:

Doctrinal truth must be defended carefully.

And:

Even faithful Christian leaders may sometimes disagree personally.

The chapter begins with a dispute that threatened the gospel.

It ends with churches still being:

Strengthened.

The central truth of Acts 15 is:

Salvation comes entirely through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and is received by faith, not by circumcision or works of the Mosaic law, and the church must defend that gospel while pursuing holiness, unity, wisdom, and continued mission.

I. A FALSE REQUIREMENT FOR SALVATION

Acts 15:1

“Some men came down from Judea and taught the believers: ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.’”

This is the central controversy.

Notice what they did not merely say.

They did not say:

Circumcision is a good Jewish tradition.

They said:

“You cannot be saved.”

That changes everything.

Cross References

Galatians 2:4

Paul described false believers who secretly entered Christian fellowship in order to spy on the freedom believers have in Christ and bring them back into religious bondage.

Galatians 5:2

Paul warned that if Gentile believers accepted circumcision as a requirement for justification, they would be abandoning dependence upon Christ alone.

Titus 1:10

Paul warned that there were rebellious people and deceptive teachers, especially among those promoting circumcision.

Spiritual Principle

Anything added to Jesus Christ as a necessary condition for justification corrupts the gospel of grace.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Jesus plus anything as the basis of salvation becomes a different message from salvation by grace through faith.

II. PAUL AND BARNABAS RESIST THE TEACHING

Acts 15:2

“This caused sharp disagreement and debate with Paul and Barnabas. So the church appointed Paul, Barnabas, and others to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.”

Paul and Barnabas do not treat this as a minor disagreement.

Why?

Because the gospel is at stake.

Cross References

Galatians 2:1

Paul later described traveling to Jerusalem with Barnabas in connection with questions surrounding the gospel among Gentiles.

Acts 15:39

Paul and Barnabas would later have another sharp disagreement, though that one concerned Mark rather than the gospel.

Acts 21:25

The Jerusalem leaders later referred again to their earlier decision concerning Gentile believers.

Spiritual Principle

There are issues Christians may discuss with patience, but when the gospel itself is being changed, clarity becomes essential.

III. THE CONVERSION OF GENTILES BRINGS JOY

Acts 15:3

“On their way, they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, telling how the Gentiles had turned to God. This news brought great joy to all the believers.”

The genuine conversion of Gentiles produces:

Joy.

Cross References

Acts 11:19

Believers scattered through persecution had carried the gospel into Phoenicia and other regions.

Acts 8:25

Peter and John preached the gospel in many Samaritan villages while returning toward Jerusalem.

Luke 15:7

Jesus taught that heaven rejoices when sinners repent.

Spiritual Principle

A healthy church rejoices when sinners turn to God, regardless of their background.

IV. THEY REPORT WHAT GOD HAS DONE

Acts 15:4

“When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported everything God had done through them.”

Again Luke emphasizes:

What God had done.

Cross References

Acts 14:27

Paul and Barnabas had previously gathered the Antioch church and reported everything God had done through them.

Acts 21:19

Paul later gave a detailed report concerning what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Galatians 2:2

Paul explained the gospel he preached among the Gentiles when meeting with church leaders.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful ministry reporting should magnify God's work rather than human achievement.

V. SOME BELIEVERS INSIST ON CIRCUMCISION

Acts 15:5

“But some believers from the party of the Pharisees insisted, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.’”

These people are identified as believers.

That means genuine Christians may sometimes retain serious misunderstandings from their former religious framework.

Cross References

Acts 15:1

Some teachers had already declared circumcision necessary for salvation.

Galatians 2:3

Titus, though a Gentile believer, was not compelled to be circumcised.

Philippians 3:2

Paul strongly warned believers against teachers who made circumcision a requirement for spiritual standing.

Spiritual Principle

Conversion does not instantly remove every mistaken theological assumption; believers must continue learning truth.

VI. THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS MEET

Acts 15:6

“The apostles and elders met to consider this matter.”

The issue is not ignored.

It is examined.

Cross References

Acts 15:2

Paul, Barnabas, and others were sent to Jerusalem specifically to discuss the disputed question.

Acts 6:2

Earlier the apostles had gathered the church to address an important practical problem.

Acts 15:22

After discussion, the apostles, elders, and whole church agreed upon a course of action.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Serious church problems should be addressed carefully rather than allowed to grow through silence and confusion.

VII. PETER REMINDS THEM OF CORNELIUS

Acts 15:7

“After much debate, Peter stood up and said: ‘Brothers, you know that some time ago God chose me to share the gospel with the Gentiles so they could believe.’”

Peter reaches back to Acts 10.

Cornelius.

His household.

The Gentiles.

Cross References

Acts 10:1

Cornelius, a Roman centurion, became the central Gentile figure through whom God demonstrated the widening gospel mission.

Acts 10:34

Peter declared that he had learned that God does not show favoritism.

Acts 15:14

James later refers to Peter’s testimony about God taking a people for His name from among the Gentiles.

Spiritual Principle

The Jerusalem Council is not inventing Gentile inclusion; it is recognizing what God already demonstrated.

VIII. GOD KNOWS THE HEART

Acts 15:8

“God, who knows the heart, showed His approval by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us.”

Peter’s argument is powerful.

God knows the heart.

God gave the Spirit.

God approved.

Cross References

Acts 10:44

While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles who heard the gospel.

Acts 1:24

The disciples prayed to the Lord as the One who knows every human heart.

1 Samuel 16:7

Human beings look at outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Spiritual Principle

God's judgment of a person is deeper than human cultural categories or outward religious distinctions.

IX. HEARTS PURIFIED BY FAITH

Acts 15:9

“He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith.”

This verse is foundational.

No Distinction

Jew and Gentile come to God the same way.

Hearts Purified

The real problem is internal.

By Faith

Not circumcision.

Not ethnic identity.

Not ceremonial law.

Cross References

Acts 10:15

God told Peter not to call unclean what God had made clean.

Romans 10:12

There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile because the same Lord is Lord of all.

Ephesians 2:14

Christ Himself is our peace and has broken down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel does not purify people by changing their ethnicity; God purifies hearts through faith in Christ.

X. “WHY ARE YOU TESTING GOD?”

Acts 15:10

“Why are you testing God by putting on the disciples a burden that neither we nor our ancestors could bear?”

Peter describes the attempt to impose the law as:

Testing God.

Cross References

Galatians 5:1

Christ set believers free, so they should stand firm and refuse to return to a yoke of religious slavery.

Matthew 23:4

Jesus condemned religious leaders who loaded people with heavy spiritual burdens while failing to help them.

Galatians 3:10

Everyone who depends upon works of the law for righteousness comes under obligation to keep the law completely.

Important Truth

Peter is not calling God’s law evil.

The problem is trying to use the law as a means of justification.

No sinner has kept it perfectly.

Spiritual Principle

The law can reveal God's righteous standard, but it cannot turn a guilty sinner into a righteous person by human effort.

XI. SAVED THROUGH THE GRACE OF JESUS

Acts 15:11

“We believe it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

This may be the key doctrinal verse of the chapter.

Peter does not say:

Gentiles can be saved like Jews.

Notice the direction:

“We are saved, just as they are.”

Everyone is saved the same way.

Through Grace

Not merit.

Through the Lord Jesus

Not Moses.

Saved

Not merely improved.

Cross References

Ephesians 2:8

You have been saved by grace through faith, and this salvation is God's gift rather than something you earned.

Romans 3:24

Sinners are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption found in Jesus Christ.

Titus 3:5

God saved us not because of righteous deeds we had performed, but because of His mercy.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Grace Does Not Complete What Works Begin; Grace Is the Basis of Salvation From Beginning to End.”

XII. THE ASSEMBLY LISTENS

Acts 15:12

“The whole assembly became silent and listened as Barnabas and Paul told about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.”

They listen to evidence.

Cross References

Acts 15:4

Paul and Barnabas had already reported what God had done among the Gentiles.

Acts 14:27

They reported how God had opened the door of faith to Gentiles.

Romans 15:18

Paul refused to boast except about what Christ had accomplished through his ministry among the Gentiles.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy discernment listens carefully before reaching conclusions.

XIII. JAMES SPEAKS

Acts 15:13

“When they finished, James spoke up: ‘Brothers, listen to me.’”

James appears as an important leader in the Jerusalem church.

Cross References

Acts 15:7

Peter had already offered testimony after extensive discussion.

Acts 21:18

Paul later met with James and the elders in Jerusalem.

Galatians 2:9

Paul identifies James, Peter, and John as recognized pillars within the church.

Spiritual Principle

Strong leadership listens before speaking.

James waits.

Hears Peter.

Hears Paul.

Hears Barnabas.

Then addresses Scripture.

XIV. GOD TAKES A PEOPLE FROM THE GENTILES

Acts 15:14

“Simon has described how God first intervened to take a people for His name from among the Gentiles.”

Gentiles are not merely tolerated.

God is gathering:

“A people for His name.”

Cross References

Acts 10:48

Gentile believers in Cornelius’ household were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Romans 9:24

God calls His people from both Jews and Gentiles.

Titus 2:14

Christ gave Himself to redeem and purify a people belonging to Him.

Spiritual Principle

God's redeemed people are defined by belonging to Him rather than by ethnicity.

XV. SCRIPTURE AGREES

Acts 15:15

“This agrees with the words of the prophets.”

James does something essential.

He does not base doctrine merely upon experience.

He examines the experience through:

Scripture.

Cross References

Luke 24:44

Jesus explained that everything written about Him in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to be fulfilled.

Romans 3:21

The righteousness God provides is testified to by the Law and the Prophets.

1 Peter 1:10

The prophets carefully searched and spoke concerning the grace that would come through Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Experience may demonstrate God's activity, but Scripture must interpret the meaning of that activity.

XVI. DAVID'S FALLEN TENT WILL BE RESTORED

Acts 15:16

“After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it.”

James quotes Amos.

Cross References

Amos 9:11

God promised that He would restore the fallen house of David and rebuild what had been ruined.

Jeremiah 12:15

God promised restoration after judgment and displacement.

Isaiah 16:5

Isaiah foretold a throne established in faithfulness from the house of David.

Spiritual Principle

God’s kingdom purposes through David ultimately reach fulfillment in the Messiah.

XVII. THE GENTILES WILL SEEK THE LORD

Acts 15:17

“So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear My name, says the Lord, who does these things.”

This destroys the idea that Gentile salvation was an emergency adjustment.

God foretold it.

Cross References

Amos 9:12

God foretold that nations called by His name would become part of His redemptive purpose.

Isaiah 45:22

God calls people from the ends of the earth to turn to Him and be saved.

Zechariah 8:22

Many peoples and strong nations would come seeking the Lord.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The mission to the Gentiles was not Plan B; it was part of God's revealed redemptive purpose.

XVIII. GOD DECLARED THESE THINGS LONG AGO

Acts 15:18

“The Lord has made these things known from long ago.”

God was not surprised.

Cross References

Isaiah 45:21

God declares that He announced His saving purposes long beforehand and that there is no Savior besides Him.

Ephesians 1:4

God's saving purpose in Christ reaches back before the foundation of the world.

Isaiah 46:10

God declares the end from the beginning and makes known what will happen before it occurs; His purpose will stand.

Spiritual Principle

What appears sudden to us may have been part of God's purpose from the beginning.

XIX. DO NOT MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR GENTILES

Acts 15:19

“Therefore, my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

James gives his conclusion.

Do not add unnecessary barriers.

Cross References

Galatians 5:1

Christ has given believers freedom, and they should not return to bondage.

Acts 15:28

The council later states that it would impose no unnecessary burden beyond several practical requirements.

Galatians 2:3

Titus, though a Gentile, was not forced to be circumcised.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Never Make It Harder for People to Come to Christ Than God Does.”

The gospel already calls for:

Repentance.

Faith.

Submission to Christ.

Do not add human requirements for justification.

XX. PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR GENTILE BELIEVERS

Acts 15:20

“Instead, we should write to them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from meat of strangled animals, and from blood.”

These instructions require careful understanding.

They were not conditions for earning salvation.

Peter had already established salvation by grace.

Instead, these instructions addressed:

Holiness.

Idolatry.

Sexual morality.

And practical fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers.

Cross References

Leviticus 17:10

God had commanded His people to avoid consuming blood because blood had sacred significance connected with life and sacrifice.

1 Corinthians 8:1

Paul later addressed food offered to idols and explained that Christian freedom must be governed by love and concern for others.

Revelation 2:14

Jesus condemned practices connected with idolatrous food and sexual immorality.

Important Truth

Sexual immorality is a moral issue.

Food-related instructions also helped Gentile believers separate themselves from pagan worship and maintain fellowship with Jewish Christians.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Grace frees us from trying to earn salvation, but grace never gives permission to live carelessly in sin.

XXI. MOSES IS READ IN EVERY CITY

Acts 15:21

“For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from ancient times and is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

James recognizes that Jewish communities were widespread.

Gentile conduct could either help or hinder fellowship.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 3:15

Paul later said that Moses continued to be read regularly in Jewish gatherings.

Luke 4:16

Jesus regularly attended synagogue worship on the Sabbath and participated in Scripture reading.

Acts 13:15

Paul had previously preached after the reading of the Law and the Prophets.

Spiritual Principle

Christian freedom should be exercised with sensitivity toward the consciences and backgrounds of other believers.

XXII. THE CHURCH REACHES AGREEMENT

Acts 15:22

“Then the apostles, elders, and the whole church decided to send Paul and Barnabas, along with Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, two respected leaders among the believers.”

The decision is communicated responsibly.

Cross References

Acts 15:27

Judas and Silas were sent to confirm verbally what the letter stated.

Acts 16:19

Silas later became Paul's missionary companion.

Acts 15:32

Judas and Silas were prophets who encouraged the believers.

Spiritual Principle

Good church decisions should be communicated clearly through trustworthy people.

XXIII. A WRITTEN LETTER IS SENT

Acts 15:23

"They sent the following letter."

The decision is put in writing.

This protects against:

Distortion.

Rumor.

Misrepresentation.

Cross References

Acts 15:30

The messengers carried the letter to Antioch and delivered it to the believers.

Acts 15:22

The church chose respected representatives to carry the decision.

2 Corinthians 3:3

Paul described believers themselves as a letter of Christ, showing the power of communicated truth.

Spiritual Principle

Clarity is important when resolving doctrinal controversy.

XXIV. THE FALSE TEACHERS WERE NOT AUTHORIZED

Acts 15:24

“We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and troubled you, saying you must be circumcised and obey the law.”

This is significant.

The false teachers claimed association with Jerusalem.

But Jerusalem says:

We did not send them.

Cross References

Galatians 1:7

Paul warned that some people were confusing believers and attempting to distort the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 2:4

False teachers had infiltrated Christian fellowship in order to bring believers into bondage.

Titus 1:11

Paul warned that false teachers can disturb entire households through teaching things they should not teach.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Not everyone who claims religious authority actually carries biblical authority.

XXV. THE CHURCH ACTS IN UNITY

Acts 15:25

“So we agreed, being united, to send you chosen men with our beloved Barnabas and Paul.”

A major dispute has reached agreement.

Cross References

Acts 15:22

The apostles, elders, and church agreed upon representatives.

Philippians 2:2

Paul urged believers to be united in love, purpose, and mind.

Acts 15:6

The leaders had met seriously to consider the disputed matter.

Spiritual Principle

Unity does not mean avoiding difficult questions; genuine unity can emerge through careful discussion under truth.

XXVI. BARNABAS AND PAUL RISKED THEIR LIVES

Acts 15:26

“Men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is a beautiful description.

Cross References

Acts 15:40

Paul later left on another missionary journey, again entrusted to the grace of the Lord.

Acts 9:16

Jesus had said Paul would learn how much he must suffer for Christ's name.

Philippians 2:30

Epaphroditus later risked his life for the work of Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel is worth more than personal comfort and safety.

XXVII. JUDAS AND SILAS CONFIRM THE MESSAGE

Acts 15:27

“We are sending Judas and Silas to confirm what we are writing.”

Multiple witnesses strengthen confidence.

Cross References

Acts 15:22

Judas and Silas were respected leaders selected by the church.

2 Corinthians 13:1

Biblical judgment is strengthened through confirmation by more than one witness.

Acts 15:32

Judas and Silas later encouraged the believers personally.

Spiritual Principle

Important truth should be communicated in ways that minimize confusion.

XXVIII. “IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AND TO US”

Acts 15:28

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements.”

This is a remarkable statement.

The church recognizes the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

Cross References

Acts 15:22

The whole church participated in the decision after hearing testimony and Scripture.

Acts 5:32

God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him.

John 16:13

Jesus promised that the Spirit of truth would guide His followers into truth.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy church decisions should seek alignment with the Holy Spirit through Scripture, truth, wisdom, and godly counsel.

XXIX. THE REQUIREMENTS ARE REPEATED

Acts 15:29

“You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

Again:

These practices do not earn salvation.

The whole chapter has already established salvation by grace.

Cross References

Leviticus 17:10

God prohibited eating blood because of its connection with life and sacrificial significance.

1 Thessalonians 4:3

God’s will for believers includes holiness and abstaining from sexual immorality.

Revelation 2:20

Jesus condemned false teaching that encouraged sexual immorality and participation in idolatrous practices.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Salvation is free, but discipleship is not careless. Grace saves us and then teaches us to live differently.

XXX. THE LETTER REACHES ANTIOCH

Acts 15:30

“The men were sent off and went to Antioch, where they gathered the believers and delivered the letter.”

The church receives authoritative clarification.

Cross References

Acts 15:4

Paul and Barnabas had earlier been welcomed in Jerusalem.

Acts 15:35

Paul and Barnabas later continued teaching and preaching in Antioch.

Galatians 2:11

Antioch remained an important location in early Jewish-Gentile Christian relations.

Spiritual Principle

Confusion is often relieved when truth is clearly communicated.

XXXI. THE BELIEVERS REJOICE

Acts 15:31

“The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.”

Why were they glad?

Because the letter confirmed:

They did not need to become Jews before they could belong to Christ.

Cross References

Nehemiah 8:12

God’s people rejoiced after understanding the words that had been explained to them.

Philippians 4:4

Believers are commanded to rejoice in the Lord.

Acts 13:48

Gentile hearers had previously rejoiced when they understood that God's saving message reached them.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Grace produces joy because grace removes the impossible burden of trying to earn acceptance with God.

XXXII. JUDAS AND SILAS STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH

Acts 15:32

"Judas and Silas, who were prophets, encouraged and strengthened the believers with many words."

Doctrine is followed by encouragement.

Cross References

Acts 15:22

Judas and Silas were chosen because they were respected leaders.

1 Corinthians 14:3

Prophetic ministry is described as strengthening, encouraging, and comforting believers.

Acts 11:23

Barnabas had previously encouraged believers to remain true to the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy ministry combines doctrinal clarity with pastoral encouragement.

XXXIII. THEY ARE SENT OFF IN PEACE

Acts 15:33

"After spending some time there, they were sent off with the blessing of peace to those who had sent them."

The controversy produced peace.

Cross References

Acts 15:30

The men had been sent to Antioch carrying the council's letter.

Numbers 6:26

God's blessing includes His peace resting upon His people.

1 Corinthians 16:11

Faithful ministry coworkers should be sent forward in peace and honor.

Spiritual Principle

Truth handled rightly can produce peace instead of continuing confusion.

XXXIV. SILAS REMAINS

Acts 15:34

“But Silas decided to remain.”

This small detail prepares for what comes next.

Silas will soon become Paul's missionary companion.

Cross References

Acts 15:40

Paul later chose Silas for the next missionary journey.

Acts 15:22

Silas was already recognized as a respected church leader.

Acts 17:14

Silas continued serving alongside Paul during later missionary work.

Spiritual Principle

God often prepares tomorrow's ministry partnerships through today's ordinary decisions.

XXXV. PAUL AND BARNABAS CONTINUE TEACHING

Acts 15:35

“Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others.”

Antioch remains strong.

Cross References

Acts 11:26

Paul and Barnabas had previously spent a year teaching the Antioch church.

Acts 13:1

Antioch had developed a strong teaching ministry with multiple leaders.

Acts 15:36

Paul soon suggested revisiting the churches established during the first missionary journey.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A healthy church needs both preaching that reaches the lost and teaching that strengthens believers.

XXXVI. PAUL WANTS TO RETURN TO THE CHURCHES

Acts 15:36

“After some time Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us go back and visit the believers in every town where we preached the word of the Lord, to see how they are doing.’”

Paul has a shepherd’s heart.

He wants to know:

How are they doing?

Cross References

Acts 15:41

Paul later traveled through Syria and Cilicia strengthening churches.

Acts 13:4

Paul and Barnabas had originally been sent out by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 18:23

Paul later traveled again strengthening disciples in multiple regions.

Spiritual Principle

Real ministry cares about what happens to people after conversion.

XXXVII. BARNABAS WANTS JOHN MARK

Acts 15:37

“Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them.”

Barnabas remains:

The encourager.

He sees potential in Mark.

Cross References

Acts 12:25

John Mark had previously accompanied Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 13:13

Mark had left the missionary team in Pamphylia.

Colossians 4:10

Mark later became a recognized ministry coworker.

Spiritual Principle

Barnabas saw not only Mark’s failure, but also the possibility of restoration.

XXXVIII. PAUL DOES NOT AGREE

Acts 15:38

“But Paul did not think it wise, since Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.”

Paul’s concern is understandable.

Missionary work was difficult.

Reliability mattered.

Cross References

Acts 13:13

Mark had indeed left the missionary team and returned to Jerusalem.

2 Timothy 4:11

Years later Paul would say that Mark had become useful to him for ministry.

Colossians 4:10

Mark later appears as an accepted ministry coworker.

Important Truth

Scripture does not explicitly tell us:

Paul was completely right.

Or:

Barnabas was completely right.

Each saw a legitimate concern.

Paul emphasized:

Reliability.

Barnabas emphasized:

Restoration.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes two faithful believers can see different legitimate concerns within the same situation.

XXXIX. PAUL AND BARNABAS SEPARATE

Acts 15:39

“They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus.”

This is painful.

Two men who had served together through:

Mission.

Persecution.

Church planting.

Doctrinal controversy.

Now separate.

Cross References

Acts 4:36

Barnabas was originally known as the son of encouragement.

Acts 13:4

Barnabas and Paul had previously been sent together by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 9:27

Barnabas had once stood beside Saul when others were afraid to trust him.

Spiritual Principle

Even mature believers can sometimes experience painful relational disagreement.

XL. PAUL CHOOSES SILAS

Acts 15:40

“But Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.”

The mission continues.

Cross References

Acts 13:3

Paul had previously been sent out with prayer and the support of the church.

Acts 15:32

Silas had already demonstrated spiritual maturity and prophetic ministry.

Acts 16:19

Silas would become Paul's trusted companion through suffering and imprisonment.

Spiritual Principle

A painful change in partnership does not have to end the mission.

XLI. THE CHURCHES ARE STRENGTHENED

Acts 15:41

“He traveled through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

The chapter ends not with:

Division.

Bitterness.

Failure.

But:

Strengthening churches.

Cross References

Galatians 1:21

Paul had previous ministry connections in Syria and Cilicia.

Acts 15:36

Paul's stated purpose was to revisit and strengthen believers.

Acts 18:23

Strengthening disciples remained a continuing pattern in Paul's ministry.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Even after painful disagreement, faithful servants should keep strengthening Christ's church.

XLII. THE GREAT DOCTRINAL QUESTION OF ACTS 15

The question was:

Is Faith in Christ Enough for Salvation?

The false teachers said:

No.

You also need circumcision.

Peter said:

God purified their hearts by faith.

And:

“Through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are saved.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Salvation Is Jesus Plus Nothing.”

Not:

Jesus plus circumcision.

Jesus plus law-keeping.

Jesus plus religious heritage.

Jesus plus human achievement.

We are saved:

By grace.

Through faith.

In Christ.

XLIII. GRACE AND WORKS MUST NOT BE CONFUSED

Works have a place in Christianity.

But not as the basis of justification.

Works Follow Salvation

They do not purchase it.

Obedience Demonstrates Faith

It does not create saving merit.

Holiness Matters

But holiness grows from grace.

Spiritual Principle

Good works are the fruit of salvation, not the price of salvation.

XLIV. GOD MADE NO DISTINCTION

Peter said:

“He made no distinction between us and them.”

That destroys spiritual superiority based upon ethnicity.

Jew and Gentile need:

The same Savior.

The same grace.

The same faith.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The ground at the cross is level because every sinner needs the same grace.

XLV. PURIFIED BY FAITH

Acts 15:9 says:

“He purified their hearts by faith.”

Religion often concentrates on:

External regulations.

God goes deeper.

The heart.

Spiritual Principle

God does not merely reform outward behavior; He transforms inward allegiance.

XLVI. WHY THE LAW CANNOT SAVE

Peter says the burden could not be borne.

Paul says elsewhere that law cannot justify.

Why?

Because the law requires righteousness.

Sinners fail.

The Law Reveals Sin

The Law Defines Righteousness

The Law Exposes Guilt

But Jesus Provides Grace

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The law can diagnose the disease of sin, but only Christ provides the cure.

XLVII. THE COUNCIL USED THREE FORMS OF EVIDENCE

Acts 15 gives a model of discernment.

1. God's Work

Peter describes Cornelius.

Paul and Barnabas describe Gentile conversions.

2. The Holy Spirit

Gentiles received the Spirit.

3. Scripture

James quotes the prophets.

Spiritual Principle

True spiritual discernment never places experience above Scripture.

Experience confirmed what Scripture had already revealed.

XLVIII. WHAT ACTS 15 TEACHES ABOUT CHURCH CONFLICT

Conflict is not automatically evidence of spiritual failure.

Acts 15 contains:

Debate.

Discussion.

Testimony.

Scripture.

Judgment.

Agreement.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The goal of Christian disagreement should not be victory over one another but submission together to truth.

XLIX. DOCTRINE MATTERS

Why did Paul debate sharply?

Because wrong doctrine can destroy people spiritually.

If sinners believe they must earn justification:

Grace is obscured.

Christ's sufficiency is diminished.

People become trapped in either:

Pride.

Or despair.

Spiritual Principle

Doctrine matters because what we believe about salvation determines where we place our hope.

L. LIBERTY IS NOT LAWLESSNESS

Acts 15 rejects legalism.

But it also rejects immoral living.

Gentile believers are told to avoid:

Idolatry.

Sexual immorality.

Practices damaging fellowship.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian liberty means freedom from earning salvation, not freedom from obeying Christ.

LI. THE LETTER BROUGHT JOY

Why?

Because grace is encouraging.

The believers had been troubled by teachers saying:

You are not enough.

Your faith is not enough.

You need more requirements.

Then the apostolic letter says:

Do not place that burden upon them.

Spiritual Principle

The biblical gospel relieves the crushing burden of self-salvation.

LII. BARNABAS AND MARK — THE MINISTRY OF RESTORATION

Barnabas refuses to define Mark solely by his previous failure.

That decision becomes significant later.

Mark eventually becomes useful in ministry.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Do Not Confuse Someone’s Worst Moment With God’s Final Verdict on Their Life.”

Mark failed.

But Mark was not finished.

LIII. PAUL AND MARK — RESTORATION IS POSSIBLE

Years later Paul says:

“Bring Mark with you, because he is useful to me for ministry.”

The disagreement of Acts 15 was not the final chapter.

Spiritual Principle

Christian conflict does not have to become permanent hostility.

People can mature.

Trust can be rebuilt.

Usefulness can return.

LIV. WHAT PAUL TEACHES US

Paul was concerned about mission reliability.

That concern mattered.

Principle

Grace does not mean ignoring responsibility.

Ministry requires:

Commitment.

Faithfulness.

Dependability.

Endurance.

LV. WHAT BARNABAS TEACHES US

Barnabas saw restoration potential.

That mattered too.

Principle

Accountability should leave room for repentance, growth, and restored usefulness.

Healthy ministry needs:

Paul's concern for faithfulness.

And Barnabas' concern for restoration.

LVI. GOD USED BOTH PATHS

Before the disagreement:

One missionary team.

Afterward:

Barnabas and Mark.

Paul and Silas.

Scripture does not praise the sharpness of the disagreement itself.

But God sovereignly continues His mission through imperfect human relationships.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's ability to redeem a painful situation does not mean the pain was ideal; it means His mission is greater than our failures.

LVII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 15

1. Salvation Is by Grace

Principle:

We are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, not by works of law.

2. Hearts Are Purified by Faith

Principle:

God looks deeper than ceremonial identity.

3. Scripture Must Guide Church Decisions

Principle:

Experience must agree with God's revealed Word.

4. Christian Freedom Must Be Holy

Principle:

Grace rejects legalism without embracing immorality.

5. Church Conflict Can Be Resolved Through Truth

Principle:

Careful listening, biblical reasoning, and spiritual humility can restore peace.

6. Godly Leaders Can Disagree

Principle:

Spiritual maturity does not guarantee identical judgment in every practical matter.

7. God's Mission Continues

Principle:

Neither doctrinal controversy nor personal disagreement can stop God when His servants remain faithful.

LVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What false teaching created the controversy in Acts 15?

Some men taught that Gentiles had to be circumcised according to the law of Moses in order to be saved.

This added a human religious requirement to salvation through Christ.

Question 2

Why did Paul and Barnabas oppose this teaching so strongly?

Because it changed the gospel.

If salvation required circumcision and law-keeping in addition to faith in Jesus, salvation would no longer rest entirely upon grace.

Question 3

What evidence did Peter give that God accepted Gentiles?

God gave them the Holy Spirit just as He had given the Spirit to Jewish believers.

Peter said God knew their hearts and purified them by faith.

Question 4

According to Acts 15:11, how are people saved?

Peter declared:

“Through the grace of the Lord Jesus.”

Salvation is received through Christ rather than earned through works of the law.

Question 5

What did Peter mean by calling the law a burden they could not bear?

He was not saying God’s law was evil.

He was saying that sinful people could not perfectly keep the law as a means of achieving justification before God.

Question 6

How did James support Gentile inclusion?

James quoted the prophets and demonstrated that God had foretold that Gentiles would seek the Lord and become a people bearing His name.

Question 7

Why did the council give Gentile believers several practical restrictions?

These were not conditions for earning salvation.

They promoted holiness, separation from idolatry and sexual sin, and peaceful fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers.

Question 8

What happened when the Antioch believers read the council's letter?

They rejoiced because the message encouraged them and removed the false burden imposed by unauthorized teachers.

Question 9

Who were Judas and Silas?

They were respected church leaders and prophets sent from Jerusalem to confirm and explain the council's decision.

Question 10

Why did Paul and Barnabas disagree?

Barnabas wanted John Mark to accompany them.

Paul believed Mark should not go because Mark had abandoned the earlier missionary journey.

Question 11

Was John Mark permanently disqualified?

No.

Later New Testament references show Mark restored to useful ministry, and Paul eventually described him as useful.

Question 12

What is the central lesson of Acts 15?

Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not through circumcision or works of the Mosaic law, and the church must protect this gospel while maintaining holiness, unity, and continued mission.

LIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 15 asks us several important questions.

Am I Trusting Jesus Alone for Salvation?

Or am I secretly trusting:

My goodness?

My church membership?

My religious background?

My works?

Do I Add Requirements to the Gospel?

The Jerusalem Council refused to do so.

Can I Listen When Others Disagree?

The apostles and elders debated before deciding.

Do I Test Spiritual Experiences by Scripture?

James did.

Do I Confuse Grace With Permission to Sin?

The council did not.

Am I Willing to Encourage People Who Have Failed?

Barnabas was.

Am I Faithful Enough That Others Can Depend Upon Me?

Paul's concern was legitimate.

Can I Continue Serving God After Relational Disappointment?

Paul and Barnabas both did.

LX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Add a Human Requirement to What Christ Has Finished”

The false teachers said:

Jesus.

Plus circumcision.

Plus law.

Peter said:

Grace.

Principle

If Christ’s work is sufficient, human religious achievement cannot become the missing piece required for justification.

LXI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Make It Difficult for People Who Are Turning to God”

James’ statement should challenge every church.

We can create unnecessary barriers through:

Culture.

Tradition.

Personal preference.

Unbiblical expectations.

Principle

Preach everything God requires, but do not elevate human preference to divine command.

LXII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Bible Must Interpret the Experience”

Peter described what happened.

Paul and Barnabas described miracles.

Then James said:

“This agrees with the words of the prophets.”

Principle

Never build doctrine upon experience alone; bring experience under the authority of Scripture.

LXIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Even Good Men Can Have Sharp Disagreements”

Paul was a faithful apostle.

Barnabas was a faithful encourager.

They disagreed.

Strongly.

Principle

A disagreement does not automatically prove one person is ungodly, but disagreement must never become an excuse for bitterness, slander, or abandoning Christ’s mission.

LXIV. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 15 begins with a threat to the gospel.

Some teachers were saying:

Faith in Jesus is not enough.

You also need circumcision.

You also need the law.

Paul and Barnabas understood what was at stake.

The question was not:

What cultural practices should Christians prefer?

The question was:

How is a sinner saved?

Peter answers clearly:

God knows the heart.

God gave the Holy Spirit.

God made no distinction.

God purified hearts:

By faith.

And:

“Through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are saved.”

That is the heart of Acts 15.

Grace.

Not merit.

Christ.

Not ceremonial achievement.

Faith.

Not law-keeping as the basis of justification.

But Acts 15 also refuses another error.

Grace does not mean:

Sin does not matter.

The church still calls believers away from:

Idolatry.

Sexual immorality.

Practices damaging Christian fellowship.

Therefore the gospel produces both:

Freedom.

And holiness.

Then the chapter gives us another lesson.

Godly leaders may disagree.

Paul and Barnabas had served together.

They had suffered together.

They had defended grace together.

Yet they disagreed over Mark.

It became sharp.

They separated.

That part of the story should humble us.

Even strong believers remain human.

But the story should also encourage us.

God keeps working.

Barnabas takes Mark.

Paul takes Silas.

Churches are strengthened.

And years later:

Mark is restored.

So Acts 15 tells us:

Protect the gospel.

Reject legalism.

Walk in holiness.

Study Scripture.

Listen carefully.

Seek unity.

Give room for restoration.

Do not let disagreement end your usefulness.

And never forget:

The church belongs to Jesus Christ.

Our salvation depends upon:

His grace.

Our righteousness depends upon:

His work.

Our mission depends upon:

His power.

And our hope rests upon:

Him alone.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the clarity of Acts Chapter 15.

Thank You that salvation does not depend upon our ability to earn Your favor.

Thank You for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank You that Jesus accomplished what we could never accomplish.

Protect us from legalism.

Keep us from adding human requirements to the gospel.

Help us understand that we are justified through faith in Christ.

Purify our hearts.

Teach us to live in holiness without believing our holiness purchases salvation.

Give our churches wisdom when disagreement comes.

Help us listen carefully.

Help us search the Scriptures.

Help us recognize the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Keep us from elevating tradition above truth.

Help us never make it unnecessarily difficult for people who are turning to You.

Give us the courage of Paul.

Give us the encouragement of Barnabas.

Give us the faithfulness of Silas.

And give us grace for people like Mark who may fail but can become useful again.

When believers disagree, keep us from bitterness.

When relationships change, keep the mission moving.

Strengthen Your churches.

Protect the gospel.

Bring sinners to faith.

Build unity between believers from every background.

And let our confidence always rest in this truth:

We are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“We believe it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” — Acts 15:11

Central Truth

God saves both Jew and Gentile entirely through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and purifies hearts by faith, so the church must reject legalistic additions to the gospel while pursuing holiness, biblical unity, wise leadership, restoration, and continued mission.

Acts 15 in One Sentence

The Jerusalem church rejects the claim that Gentile believers must be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law to be saved, affirming that salvation comes through the grace of Jesus Christ and hearts are purified by faith, while practical instructions promote holiness and fellowship, and even after Paul and Barnabas separate over John Mark, God's mission continues as the churches are strengthened.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 16 — The Gospel Reaches Macedonia

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 16 is a chapter about:

Guidance.

Conversion.

Spiritual warfare.

Suffering.

Worship.

Salvation.

Justice.

It begins with Paul meeting a young disciple named Timothy.

It continues with the Holy Spirit closing doors.

Paul wants to preach in one region.

The Spirit says no.

He tries another direction.

Again:

No.

Then God opens a completely different door through the Macedonian vision:

“Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

Paul and his companions conclude:

God has called us there.

The gospel therefore crosses into Macedonia.

In Philippi, Paul does not begin in a synagogue.

He finds a group of women gathered for prayer by the river.

There he meets:

Lydia.

The Lord opens her heart.

She believes.

She is baptized.

Her home becomes a place of hospitality.

Then Paul encounters a slave girl oppressed by a spirit of divination.

Paul commands the spirit:

“In the name of Jesus Christ, come out of her!”

The spirit leaves.

But her owners become furious because their income disappears.

Paul and Silas are:

Seized.

Dragged before authorities.

Stripped.

Beaten.

Flogged.

Imprisoned.

Placed in stocks.

Then comes one of the most memorable scenes in Acts.

At midnight:

Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns to God.

The other prisoners listen.

Then:

The prison shakes.

The doors open.

The chains fall.

The jailer believes everyone has escaped and prepares to kill himself.

Paul cries out:

“Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

The terrified jailer asks one of the greatest questions in Scripture:

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

The answer is direct:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

Paul and Silas then explain the Word of the Lord to the jailer and his household.

They believe.

They are baptized.

The jailer washes the wounds of the men he had guarded.

Then he feeds them.

The gospel transforms an enemy into a brother.

The chapter closes with another important lesson.

Paul does not quietly accept an unlawful beating.

He reveals that he and Silas are Roman citizens.

The authorities become alarmed.

Paul insists upon public acknowledgment of the wrong.

This demonstrates that Christians may:

Forgive.

Show grace.

Preach Christ.

And still lawfully insist upon justice.

Acts 16 therefore teaches:

God directs His servants by both open and closed doors.

The Lord opens hearts.

Jesus has authority over evil spirits.

The gospel can disturb corrupt economic systems.

Worship can continue in suffering.

Salvation comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

True conversion produces visible change.

And:

Christians can pursue justice without abandoning grace.

The central truth of Acts 16 is:

God sovereignly directs the mission of His servants, opens hearts to the gospel, sets captives free through Jesus Christ, sustains believers in suffering, and brings salvation to people from every social background through faith in the Lord Jesus.

I. TIMOTHY JOINS THE MISSION

Acts 16:1

“Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where he met a disciple named Timothy. His mother was a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek.”

Timothy enters the story.

He will become one of Paul’s most trusted coworkers.

Cross References

Acts 14:6

Paul and Barnabas had previously ministered in Lystra and Derbe during their first missionary journey.

2 Timothy 1:5

Paul later reminded Timothy of the sincere faith that first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.

2 Timothy 3:15

Timothy had known the sacred Scriptures from childhood, which were able to make him wise concerning salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

God often prepares future servants long before their public ministry becomes visible.

Timothy had:

Scripture.

A godly mother.

A believing grandmother.

A good reputation.

Now:

A missionary opportunity.

II. TIMOTHY HAS A GOOD REPUTATION

Acts 16:2

“The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.”

Timothy’s character was already known.

Cross References

Acts 6:3

The early church was told to choose people of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

1 Timothy 3:7

Church leaders should have a good reputation with people outside the church.

3 John 1:12

Demetrius was spoken well of by everyone and by the truth itself.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Character should be visible before greater responsibility is given.

A ministry position should not create character.

It should recognize proven character.

III. TIMOTHY IS CIRCUMCISED

Acts 16:3

“Paul wanted Timothy to join them on their journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews in the area, since they all knew his father was a Greek.”

At first this seems surprising.

Acts 15 just declared circumcision was not necessary for salvation.

So why circumcise Timothy?

The answer is motive.

Titus Was Not Circumcised

Because false teachers were demanding circumcision as necessary for justification.

Timothy Was Circumcised

To remove an unnecessary cultural obstacle to Jewish evangelism.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 9:20

Paul said that when ministering among Jews, he adapted to Jewish customs when doing so did not compromise the gospel.

Galatians 2:3

Titus, a Gentile believer, was not forced to be circumcised because the truth of the gospel was at stake.

Acts 21:20

Many Jewish believers continued to value Jewish customs even after coming to Christ.

Important Truth

Paul did not circumcise Timothy:

To save him.

He did it:

To remove a barrier to ministry.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never compromise the gospel, but be willing to surrender personal freedom when doing so helps someone hear the gospel.

IV. THE JERUSALEM DECISION IS DELIVERED

Acts 16:4

“As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the churches to obey.”

The churches needed clarity.

Cross References

Acts 15:28

The Jerusalem Council had declared that Gentile believers should not be burdened with unnecessary legal requirements.

Acts 15:22

The apostles, elders, and church had united around the decision and sent trusted representatives to communicate it.

1 Corinthians 11:2

Paul later commended believers for holding faithfully to apostolic teaching.

Spiritual Principle

Doctrinal clarity strengthens churches.

V. THE CHURCHES GROW

Acts 16:5

“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.”

Notice both kinds of growth.

Spiritual Growth

Strengthened in faith.

Numerical Growth

Grew daily in numbers.

Cross References

Acts 9:31

The church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was strengthened, encouraged by the Holy Spirit, and continued growing.

Acts 2:47

The Lord added to the church day by day those who were being saved.

Colossians 2:7

Believers are to be rooted and built up in Christ and strengthened in faith.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Healthy church growth should be both deeper and wider.

VI. THE HOLY SPIRIT CLOSES A DOOR

Acts 16:6

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout Phrygia and Galatia, but the Holy Spirit kept them from preaching in Asia.”

This is remarkable.

Preaching the gospel is good.

Yet the Spirit says:

Not there.

Not now.

Cross References

Acts 18:23

Paul later returned through these regions strengthening disciples.

Galatians 4:13

Paul later reminded the Galatians that he had preached the gospel to them during an earlier period of weakness.

Acts 19:1

Paul eventually did minister powerfully in the province of Asia.

Spiritual Principle

A closed door does not always mean the desire was wrong; sometimes the timing or location is wrong.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's "no" may be guidance rather than rejection.

VII. ANOTHER DOOR CLOSES

Acts 16:7

"When they came to Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them."

Again:

They try.

God redirects.

Cross References

Romans 8:9

The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of Christ, showing the unity of Christ's work and the Spirit's work.

1 Peter 1:1

Bithynia later contained believers, showing the gospel eventually reached that region.

Acts 16:6

The Holy Spirit had already redirected Paul away from another area.

Spiritual Principle

God may close more than one door before revealing the right one.

VIII. THEY GO TO TROAS

Acts 16:8

"So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas."

They keep moving.

They do not become paralyzed by closed doors.

Cross References

Acts 20:6

Paul later returned to Troas during another missionary journey.

2 Corinthians 2:12

Paul later described an open door for ministry in Troas.

2 Timothy 4:13

Paul later referred to personal belongings he had left in Troas.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When God closes one direction, keep obeying what you already know until He makes the next direction clear.

IX. THE MACEDONIAN CALL

Acts 16:9

“That night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’”

Now the direction becomes clear.

Cross References

Acts 10:9

Peter had received a vision that redirected his ministry toward Gentiles.

Acts 9:10

Ananias received a vision instructing him to go to Saul.

Acts 18:9

The Lord later spoke to Paul in another vision, encouraging him to continue preaching.

Spiritual Principle

God knows where prepared hearts are and can redirect His servants toward them.

X. THEY RESPOND IMMEDIATELY

Acts 16:10

“After Paul had seen the vision, we immediately prepared to leave for Macedonia, convinced that God had called us to preach the gospel there.”

Notice:

“Immediately.”

They discern.

Then obey.

Also notice the change from:

“They”

to:

“We.”

Luke appears to join the missionary company at this point.

Cross References

Acts 16:9

Paul had just received the Macedonian vision.

2 Corinthians 2:13

Paul later spoke of traveling into Macedonia during his ministry.

Philippians 1:5

The Philippian believers later became valued partners with Paul in advancing the gospel.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Once God’s direction becomes clear, delayed obedience can become disobedience.

XI. THE JOURNEY TO MACEDONIA

Acts 16:11

“From Troas we sailed straight to Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis.”

The gospel is moving geographically.

Cross References

Acts 16:8

Troas had been the place where Paul received the Macedonian call.

Acts 20:6

Paul later traveled again between Macedonia and Troas.

Acts 16:12

From Neapolis the missionary team continued to Philippi.

Spiritual Principle

God's mission often advances through ordinary travel, planning, and obedience after extraordinary guidance.

XII. THEY ARRIVE IN PHILIPPI

Acts 16:12

"From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and leading city of Macedonia, where we stayed for several days."

Philippi becomes one of the most important churches in Paul's ministry.

Cross References

Philippians 1:1

Paul later wrote to the saints in Philippi along with their overseers and deacons.

Philippians 4:15

Paul remembered the Philippian church for its unusual generosity and partnership in gospel ministry.

Acts 16:21

Philippi's Roman identity became important when Paul and Silas were accused before the authorities.

Spiritual Principle

God may send us into places whose future significance we do not yet understand.

XIII. A PRAYER MEETING BY THE RIVER

Acts 16:13

“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there.”

There may not have been a synagogue.

But there were people praying.

Paul finds them.

Cross References

Acts 16:16

Paul later again encountered people while traveling to the place of prayer.

Luke 4:16

Jesus regularly sought opportunities to teach on the Sabbath.

Acts 17:2

Paul’s normal practice was to seek spiritually interested people and reason from Scripture.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When the usual ministry door is unavailable, look for the people God has already gathered.

XIV. THE LORD OPENS LYDIA’S HEART

Acts 16:14

“One of them was Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. She worshiped God, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”

This verse beautifully combines:

Human preaching.

Divine grace.

Paul speaks.

God opens.

Cross References

Luke 24:45

Jesus opened the disciples' minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

2 Corinthians 3:16

When a person turns to the Lord, the spiritual veil is removed.

Acts 13:48

Gentile hearers in Pisidian Antioch believed as God's saving purpose unfolded among them.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The preacher can present the truth, but only God can open the heart.

XV. LYDIA IS BAPTIZED AND OPENS HER HOME

Acts 16:15

“She and her household were baptized, and she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.”

Faith produces action.

Baptism

Lydia openly identifies with Christ.

Hospitality

Her home becomes available for ministry.

Cross References

Acts 16:33

The Philippian jailer and his household were also baptized after hearing and believing the gospel.

Acts 10:48

Cornelius and other Gentile believers were baptized after receiving the gospel.

Acts 18:8

Crispus and many Corinthians believed and were baptized.

Spiritual Principle

A heart opened by God often produces an open life, open hands, and an open home.

XVI. A SLAVE GIRL WITH A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION

Acts 16:16

“As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination. She earned a lot of money for her owners by fortune-telling.”

This girl is enslaved in two ways.

Economically

She is owned by people profiting from her.

Spiritually

She is oppressed by an evil spirit.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 18:10

God forbade divination, sorcery, and occult practices among His people.

Leviticus 19:31

God warned His people not to turn to mediums or spiritists.

1 Samuel 28:7

Saul disastrously sought guidance through a medium rather than trusting God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The occult promises hidden knowledge but produces spiritual bondage.

XVII. THE SPIRIT SPEAKS TRUE WORDS

Acts 16:17

“She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.’”

The words sound true.

But the source is evil.

Cross References

Mark 1:24

An unclean spirit correctly recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God.

Luke 4:34

Demons knew who Jesus was even while opposing Him.

Mark 5:7

A demonized man cried out and identified Jesus as Son of the Most High God.

Spiritual Principle

Truthful words do not automatically make the source trustworthy.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical discernment examines both the message and the spiritual source behind it.

XVIII. PAUL COMMANDS THE SPIRIT TO LEAVE

Acts 16:18

“She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!’ At that moment, the spirit left her.”

Paul does not use:

Magic.

Incantation.

Personal spiritual prestige.

He commands:

“In the name of Jesus Christ.”

Cross References

Mark 16:17

Jesus said authority over demons would accompany the mission carried out in His name.

Acts 19:12

God later performed extraordinary works through Paul’s ministry in Ephesus.

Luke 10:17

The disciples rejoiced that demons submitted to them through Jesus’ name.

Spiritual Principle

Authority over evil belongs to Jesus Christ.

XIX. PROFITS DISAPPEAR

Acts 16:19

“When her owners realized their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.”

The owners are not upset because the girl was harmed.

They are upset because:

Their income disappeared.

Cross References

Acts 19:24

In Ephesus, opposition later arose because the gospel threatened an industry connected to idolatry.

Matthew 6:24

Jesus taught that no one can serve both God and money.

1 Timothy 6:10

The love of money produces many kinds of evil and spiritual ruin.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

People may tolerate the gospel until the gospel threatens what they profit from.

XX. FALSE ACCUSATIONS BEFORE THE MAGISTRATES

Acts 16:20

“They brought them before the magistrates and said, ‘These men are Jews, and they are throwing our city into chaos.’”

Notice:

The real issue was money.

But the accusation becomes:

Social disruption.

Ethnic prejudice.

Public fear.

Cross References

Acts 17:6

Paul’s opponents later accused Christians of turning the world upside down.

Acts 24:5

Paul was later falsely described as a troublemaker creating disturbances.

Luke 23:2

Jesus Himself was falsely accused before political authorities.

Spiritual Principle

When dishonest motives cannot survive public scrutiny, opponents may hide them behind more respectable accusations.

XXI. THEY ARE ACCUSED OF UNROMAN CUSTOMS

Acts 16:21

“By advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

Philippi was proud of its Roman identity.

The accusation exploits that pride.

Cross References

Acts 17:7

Opponents later accused Christians of acting contrary to Caesar’s decrees.

Acts 18:13

Paul was later accused of persuading people to worship God contrary to law.

Acts 21:28

Paul faced accusations that he taught against Jewish people, law, and temple.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel is often misrepresented as a political or social threat by those who refuse to engage its actual message.

XXII. THE CROWD JOINS THE ATTACK

Acts 16:22

“The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten.”

There is no careful investigation.

Crowd pressure drives the action.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:25

Paul later said he had been beaten with rods three times.

2 Corinthians 6:5

Paul described beatings and imprisonments among the hardships he endured for Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:2

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he and Silas had suffered and been mistreated in Philippi.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Public opinion is not a reliable substitute for truth or justice.

XXIII. PAUL AND SILAS ARE FLOGGED AND IMPRISONED

Acts 16:23

“After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.”

They had done nothing deserving this treatment.

Cross References

Acts 16:37

Paul later revealed that they had been beaten unlawfully despite being Roman citizens.

2 Corinthians 11:23

Paul later described repeated imprisonments and severe beatings.

Acts 5:18

The apostles had previously been imprisoned for preaching Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Suffering does not always mean we did something wrong; sometimes suffering comes because we did something right.

XXIV. THEIR FEET ARE FASTENED IN STOCKS

Acts 16:24

“He put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.”

Their situation is physically painful and restrictive.

Cross References

Job 13:27

Job used the picture of feet being placed in stocks to describe severe restriction.

Jeremiah 20:2

The prophet Jeremiah was beaten and placed in stocks because of his message.

Psalms 105:18

Joseph’s feet were hurt with shackles while he suffered unjust imprisonment.

Spiritual Principle

God’s servants have often remained faithful while physically restrained.

XXV. MIDNIGHT WORSHIP

Acts 16:25

“Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.”

This is one of the most powerful verses in Acts.

They are not:

Complaining.

Cursing.

Planning revenge.

They are:

Praying.

Singing.

Cross References

Psalm 119:62

The psalmist said he would rise at midnight to give thanks to God.

Ephesians 5:19

Believers are told to speak and sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the Lord.

James 5:13

Those suffering should pray, and those who are cheerful should sing praise.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“You Do Not Have to Wait Until the Prison Opens Before You Worship.”

Their chains were still on when they sang.

XXVI. THE PRISON SHAKES

Acts 16:26

“Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose.”

God acts.

Cross References

Acts 12:7

Peter’s chains had previously fallen away when God delivered him from prison.

Acts 4:31

The place where believers prayed had once been shaken by God’s power.

Psalm 107:14

God brings prisoners out of darkness and breaks their chains.

Important Truth

The text does not say every time believers sing:

An earthquake will come.

The point is:

God was sovereignly intervening at this moment.

Spiritual Principle

God can shake structures that appear completely secure.

XXVII. THE JAILER PREPARES TO KILL HIMSELF

Acts 16:27

“The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword to kill himself, thinking the prisoners had escaped.”

He assumes the worst.

Roman guards could face severe punishment for escaped prisoners.

Cross References

Acts 27:42

Soldiers later considered killing prisoners rather than risk responsibility for their escape.

Acts 12:19

Herod had guards executed after Peter escaped.

1 Samuel 31:4

Saul took his own life after suffering defeat in battle.

Spiritual Principle

A person can stand seconds away from irreversible action while not knowing God has a completely different future available.

XXVIII. “DON’T HARM YOURSELF!”

Acts 16:28

“But Paul shouted, ‘Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!’”

Paul protects the life of the man who had imprisoned him.

That is grace.

Cross References

Ezekiel 33:11

God declares that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but desires that people turn and live.

Acts 27:22

Paul later urged people in danger not to lose hope because God would preserve their lives.

Acts 27:24

God assured Paul that lives around him would be spared.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel teaches us to care about the life of the person who hurt us.

XXIX. THE JAILER TREMBLES

Acts 16:29

“The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.”

The physical earthquake has exposed a spiritual crisis.

Cross References

Acts 9:6

Saul trembled when confronted by the risen Christ and asked what he should do.

Acts 24:25

Felix became afraid when Paul spoke about righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment.

Philippians 2:12

Believers are called to work out the implications of salvation with serious reverence before God.

Spiritual Principle

God can use a crisis to awaken a person to deeper spiritual need.

XXX. THE GREAT QUESTION

Acts 16:30

“He brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”

Few questions are more important.

Cross References

Luke 3:10

People who heard John’s preaching asked, “What should we do?”

Acts 2:37

Peter’s hearers at Pentecost were cut to the heart and asked what they should do.

Acts 9:6

Saul asked the Lord what he should do after encountering Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The most important question in life is not merely, “How can my circumstances improve?” but, “How can I be saved?”

XXXI. “BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS”

Acts 16:31

“They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’”

The answer is simple and profound.

Believe

Trust.

Rely.

Place faith in.

In the Lord Jesus

The object of faith matters.

You Will Be Saved

Salvation is promised to the believer.

And Your Household

This does not mean the jailer's personal faith automatically saved unbelieving family members.

Verse 32 says the Word was then preached to everyone in the house.

Verse 34 describes the household rejoicing in faith.

Cross References

John 3:16

God loved the world and gave His Son so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 10:9

If you confess Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Acts 11:14

Cornelius was told that Peter would bring a message through which he and his household could be saved.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Salvation Is Found in Trusting the Lord Jesus Christ.”

XXXII. THE WORD IS PREACHED TO THE HOUSEHOLD

Acts 16:32

“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.”

This verse explains verse 31.

Everyone hears.

Cross References

Acts 16:15

Lydia's household had also become connected with the gospel and baptism.

Acts 10:44

Cornelius' household heard the gospel before the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Acts 18:8

Crispus and his household believed in the Lord, and others who heard also believed.

Spiritual Principle

Saving faith is personal; each person needs to hear and respond to the Word of the Lord.

XXXIII. THE JAILER WASHES THEIR WOUNDS

Acts 16:33

“At that hour of the night the jailer washed their wounds; then immediately he and his entire household were baptized.”

Notice the transformation.

Earlier:

He secured them in prison.

Now:

He washes their wounds.

Cross References

Acts 16:15

Lydia and her household were baptized after receiving the gospel.

Acts 2:41

Those who received Peter's message were baptized.

Acts 22:16

Saul was urged to be baptized and publicly identify with Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

True conversion changes not only what a person believes, but how that person treats others.

XXXIV. THE JAILER REJOICES

Acts 16:34

“He brought them into his house and set a meal before them. He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.”

The jailer moves from:

Despair.

To joy.

From:

Sword.

To supper.

From:

Guarding prisoners.

To serving brothers.

Cross References

Acts 16:15

Lydia also expressed faith through hospitality.

Luke 19:6

Zacchaeus received Jesus joyfully when salvation entered his life.

Acts 8:39

The Ethiopian official went on his way rejoicing after believing and being baptized.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel can transform a house of fear into a house of joy.

XXXV. THE MAGISTRATES ORDER RELEASE

Acts 16:35

“When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: ‘Release those men.’”

The authorities now want the situation finished.

Cross References

Acts 5:19

God had previously delivered apostles from prison.

Acts 12:6

Peter had also been imprisoned under heavy guard.

Acts 12:7

God had miraculously opened Peter’s chains.

Spiritual Principle

God can change circumstances overnight.

XXXVI. “GO IN PEACE”

Acts 16:36

“The jailer told Paul, ‘The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.’”

The jailer expects Paul simply to leave.

Cross References

Mark 5:34

Jesus told a healed woman to go in peace.

Luke 7:50

Jesus told a forgiven woman that her faith had saved her and she could go in peace.

Acts 15:33

Christian messengers had earlier been sent away in peace.

Spiritual Principle

Peace does not require pretending injustice never occurred.

XXXVII. PAUL INVOKES HIS ROMAN CITIZENSHIP

Acts 16:37

“But Paul said to the officers, ‘They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. Now do they want to send us away quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.’”

Paul insists upon justice.

Cross References

Acts 22:25

Paul later asked whether it was lawful to flog a Roman citizen who had not been condemned.

Acts 22:29

Authorities became afraid when they learned Paul was a Roman citizen.

Acts 25:11

Paul later used his legal rights and appealed to Caesar.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian humility does not require surrendering every lawful right.

Paul is not seeking revenge.

He is seeking public acknowledgment of unlawful treatment.

This may also protect the young Philippian church from future mistreatment.

XXXVIII. THE MAGISTRATES BECOME AFRAID

Acts 16:38

“The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed.”

Now the authorities understand the seriousness of what they did.

Cross References

Acts 22:29

Roman officials later became alarmed when they realized they had improperly restrained Paul.

Acts 16:37

Paul had made clear that he and Silas had been beaten without proper legal process.

John 19:8

Political authorities can become afraid when they realize a situation is more serious than they first understood.

Spiritual Principle

Those who exercise authority are accountable for how they use it.

XXXIX. THE MAGISTRATES APOLOGIZE AND ESCORT THEM OUT

Acts 16:39

“They came to appease them and escorted them out of prison, requesting them to leave the city.”

The public injustice receives a public response.

Cross References

Acts 16:35

The magistrates had initially hoped to release them quietly.

Matthew 8:34

People in another setting asked Jesus to leave their region after witnessing His power.

Acts 13:50

Paul and Barnabas had previously been driven out of another region after persecution.

Spiritual Principle

God can turn a moment of humiliation into public vindication.

XL. THEY ENCOURAGE THE BELIEVERS BEFORE LEAVING

Acts 16:40

“After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the believers and encouraged them. Then they left.”

Their first concern is not themselves.

They encourage:

The church.

Cross References

Acts 16:14

Lydia had been one of the first believers in Philippi.

Acts 20:1

Paul repeatedly encouraged believers before continuing missionary travel.

Philippians 1:5

The Philippian church later became a faithful partner in Paul’s gospel ministry.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A true shepherd can suffer personally and still think about strengthening others.

XLI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 16

1. God Guides Through Closed Doors

Principle:

A closed door can be as much a part of God's guidance as an open door.

2. God Opens Hearts

Lydia heard.

The Lord opened her heart.

Principle:

Evangelism depends upon faithful proclamation and divine grace.

3. Jesus Has Authority Over Evil Spirits

Principle:

Spiritual bondage must bow before the name of Jesus Christ.

4. The Gospel May Threaten Profitable Sin

Principle:

People often resist truth when truth threatens their money, power, or control.

5. Believers Can Worship While Suffering

Principle:

Praise does not require comfortable circumstances.

6. Salvation Comes Through Faith in Jesus

Principle:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

7. Christians Can Pursue Justice

Principle:

Grace and lawful justice are not enemies.

XLII. WHAT ACTS 16 TEACHES ABOUT GOD’S GUIDANCE

Paul experiences:

A closed door.

Another closed door.

Then:

A vision.

Then:

Conviction about the next step.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Closed Doors Are Not Wasted Doors.”

Paul wanted Asia.

God wanted Macedonia.

Paul could not yet see:

Lydia.

The slave girl.

The jailer.

The future church at Philippi.

God could.

Principle

God may redirect you because He sees the people waiting beyond the door you have not considered.

XLIII. WHAT ACTS 16 TEACHES ABOUT LYDIA

Lydia was:

A businesswoman.

A worshiper of God.

Spiritually interested.

But still needed the gospel.

Then:

The Lord opened her heart.

Spiritual Principle

Religious interest is not the same as saving faith, but God can use spiritual hunger to prepare a heart for the gospel.

XLIV. THE GOSPEL REACHES DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Acts 16 presents remarkably different people.

Timothy

A young disciple.

Lydia

A successful businesswoman.

The Slave Girl

Economically and spiritually oppressed.

The Philippian Jailer

A Roman working man connected with the prison system.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel is not designed for one social class, personality, ethnicity, or economic condition.

Jesus is for all.

XLV. WHAT ACTS 16 TEACHES ABOUT SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The slave girl's words sounded religiously accurate.

But Paul discerned that an evil spirit was involved.

Principle

Spiritual warfare is not merely about spectacular manifestations; it is also about discerning sources and preserving the purity of gospel witness.

XLVI. WHEN THE GOSPEL HURTS BUSINESS

The owners profited from the girl's bondage.

When she was set free:

Their profits disappeared.

Then:

Their anger appeared.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

People who profit from bondage will often oppose the message that brings freedom.

This can apply to:

Idolatry.

Occultism.

Sexual exploitation.

Addiction industries.

Corruption.

Any system whose profit depends upon human bondage.

XLVII. MIDNIGHT FAITH

Paul and Silas had every earthly reason to complain.

They had been:

Falsely accused.

Publicly humiliated.

Beaten.

Wounded.

Imprisoned.

Restrained.

Yet at midnight:

They worshiped.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Strength of Your Worship Is Revealed When the Circumstances Stop Giving You Reasons to Sing.”

They were not singing because the prison was pleasant.

They were singing because God was worthy.

XLVIII. THE OTHER PRISONERS WERE LISTENING

Acts 16:25 quietly says:

“The other prisoners were listening.”

This matters.

People watch how Christians suffer.

Spiritual Principle

Your response in pain may preach to people who would never listen to you in comfort.

XLIX. THE EARTHQUAKE WAS NOT THE GREATEST MIRACLE

The prison shook.

Doors opened.

Chains loosened.

But the greatest change in the chapter was not geological.

It was spiritual.

A jailer went from:

Near suicide.

To:

Faith.

Baptism.

Joy.

Hospitality.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The greatest miracle is not merely a prison door opening; it is a human heart opening to Jesus Christ.

L. “DON’T HARM YOURSELF”

Paul’s cry deserves special attention.

The jailer had participated in Paul’s imprisonment.

Yet Paul’s concern is:

His life.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel does not teach us to rejoice in the destruction of our enemies; it teaches us to desire their salvation.

LI. “WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?”

The jailer finally asks the essential question.

Not:

How did you cause this earthquake?

Not:

How did the doors open?

Not:

How can I save my career?

But:

“What must I do to be saved?”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can use temporary crisis to awaken eternal questions.

LII. BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS

The gospel answer is not complicated.

Not:

Become Jewish.

Keep the Mosaic law.

Perform religious works.

Earn forgiveness.

Paul says:

Believe in the Lord Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Saving faith rests upon a Person—Jesus Christ.

LIII. WHAT “YOU AND YOUR HOUSEHOLD” MEANS

This phrase should not be misunderstood.

The jailer’s faith did not automatically save everyone in his home.

Verse 32 states:

The Word was preached to all of them.

Verse 34 says:

His household rejoiced in belief.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Salvation can spread through a household, but every person must personally hear and believe the gospel.

LIV. CONVERSION PRODUCES CHANGE

Before conversion:

The jailer guards wounded prisoners.

After conversion:

He washes their wounds.

Before

Prison.

After

Hospitality.

Before

Fear.

After

Joy.

Spiritual Principle

Saving faith produces a changed direction of life.

LV. CAN CHRISTIANS DEFEND THEIR RIGHTS?

Acts 16 answers:

Yes.

Paul invokes:

Roman citizenship.

Legal protections.

Due process.

He does not do this to escape preaching.

He does it after suffering.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian meekness is strength under control, not passive surrender to every injustice.

Believers may:

Forgive personally.

And still:

Seek lawful accountability.

LVI. PAUL'S CONCERN MAY HAVE INCLUDED THE CHURCH

Why insist upon public acknowledgment?

The text does not explicitly explain all Paul's motives.

But a public vindication could help demonstrate that Christianity was not merely a criminal movement.

That could benefit the believers remaining in Philippi.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes defending a lawful right is not merely about protecting yourself; it may protect others who come after you.

LVII. THE BIRTH OF THE PHILIPPIAN CHURCH

Look at the beginnings of this church.

A woman by a river.

A household.

A freed slave girl.

A jailer.

His family.

Paul and Silas beaten and imprisoned.

Not glamorous.

Yet later Paul writes one of the warmest letters in the New Testament:

Philippians.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never despise a small or difficult beginning when God is building something eternal.

LVIII. JOY IN PHILIPPI

Joy appears repeatedly.

The jailer rejoices.

Later Philippians becomes a letter deeply associated with:

Joy.

Yet the church was born in suffering.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical joy can grow in soil watered with tears.

LIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who was Timothy?

Timothy was a young disciple from Lystra whose mother was a Jewish believer and whose father was Greek. He had a strong reputation among believers and became one of Paul's most trusted ministry coworkers.

Question 2

Why did Paul circumcise Timothy after Acts 15 said circumcision was not necessary for salvation?

Timothy was not circumcised to obtain salvation.

Paul did it to remove a cultural barrier among Jewish audiences.

Titus had not been circumcised when circumcision was demanded as a condition of justification.

The difference was motive.

Question 3

How did God guide Paul toward Macedonia?

The Holy Spirit first prevented Paul from ministering in certain areas.

Then Paul received a vision of a Macedonian man asking him to come and help.

The missionary team concluded that God was calling them there.

Question 4

Who was Lydia?

Lydia was a businesswoman from Thyatira who sold purple cloth.

She worshiped God, listened to Paul's preaching, and the Lord opened her heart to respond.

She was baptized and opened her home to the missionaries.

Question 5

What was wrong with the slave girl's fortune-telling?

She was under the influence of a spirit of divination.

Although the spirit spoke words that sounded true about Paul and Silas, its source was evil.

Paul commanded the spirit to leave in the name of Jesus Christ.

Question 6

Why were Paul and Silas arrested?

The owners of the slave girl lost their source of income after she was delivered.

They therefore stirred up accusations against Paul and Silas and brought them before the city authorities.

Question 7

What did Paul and Silas do in prison?

Around midnight they prayed and sang hymns to God.

The other prisoners listened.

Question 8

What happened during the earthquake?

The prison foundations shook.

The doors opened.

The prisoners' chains came loose.

Yet Paul and the other prisoners remained.

Question 9

What did Paul say when the jailer prepared to kill himself?

Paul shouted:

“Don't harm yourself! We are all here!”

Paul protected the life of the man who had been responsible for guarding him.

Question 10

What must a person do to be saved according to Acts 16:31?

Paul and Silas said:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

Saving faith is placed in Jesus Christ.

Question 11

How did the jailer demonstrate changed faith?

He washed Paul and Silas’ wounds.

He and his household were baptized.

He brought them into his house.

He fed them.

He rejoiced in his new faith.

Question 12

Why did Paul insist that the magistrates personally escort them out?

Paul and Silas were Roman citizens who had been publicly beaten without proper legal process.

Paul lawfully insisted that the authorities acknowledge what they had done rather than quietly hide the injustice.

LX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 16 asks several important questions.

Can I Trust God When He Closes a Door?

Paul had to.

Am I Willing to Change Direction When God Redirects Me?

The missionary team did.

Do I Believe God Must Open Hearts?

Lydia's story teaches this.

Am I Discerning About Spiritual Claims?

Not everything supernatural comes from God.

What Happens When the Gospel Challenges My Finances?

The slave girl's owners chose money over freedom.

Can I Worship Before My Circumstances Change?

Paul and Silas did.

Do People Hear Christ in the Way I Suffer?

The prisoners listened.

Do I Care About People Who Have Hurt Me?

Paul cared about the jailer.

Am I Trusting Jesus Christ alone for salvation?

That was the jailer's answer.

Does My Faith Produce Changed Behavior?

The jailer's did.

Can I pursue justice without bitterness?

Paul did.

LXI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“A Closed Door May Be God's Way of Leading You to the Right Door”

Paul wanted one region.

Then another.

Both closed.

Macedonia opened.

Behind that door were:

Lydia.

The slave girl.

The jailer.

The Philippian church.

Principle

Do not judge God's guidance too early when He closes the path you expected to take.

LXII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God Opens Hearts Before Churches Open”

There was no great public campaign at first.

Paul found:

Women by a river.

One listened.

God opened her heart.

A church began.

Principle

Never underestimate what God can begin through one receptive heart.

LXIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Worship Before the Earthquake”

Paul and Silas did not wait until:

The chains came off.

The doors opened.

The pain stopped.

They worshiped first.

Principle

Faith says God is worthy before the answer arrives.

LXIV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Person Guarding You Today May Worship Beside You Tomorrow”

The jailer began as part of the prison system restraining Paul and Silas.

By the end of the night:

He is washing their wounds.

Feeding them.

Rejoicing with them.

Principle

Never decide too quickly who is beyond the reach of the gospel.

LXV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Grace Does Not Cancel Justice”

Paul forgave.

Paul preached.

Paul cared about the jailer.

But Paul also said:

“What they did was unlawful.”

Principle

Christian grace and lawful accountability can exist together.

LXVI. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 16 begins with movement.

Paul has plans.

Then God interrupts the plans.

Asia:

Closed.

Bithynia:

Closed.

Macedonia:

Opened.

This reminds us that God’s guidance is not always:

Go.

Sometimes it is:

No.

Sometimes:

Wait.

Sometimes:

Turn.

Paul obeys.

And on the other side of the closed doors are people he could not yet see.

A businesswoman.

A slave girl.

A jailer.

A household.

A future church.

Acts 16 also reminds us that gospel ministry can move very quickly from blessing to suffering.

Lydia believes.

Then spiritual opposition appears.

A girl is delivered.

Then money is lost.

Then anger rises.

Then Paul and Silas are beaten.

Then imprisoned.

Yet the prison does not silence them.

At midnight:

They sing.

They pray.

The prisoners listen.

Then God shakes the prison.

But the greatest shaking happens inside the jailer.

He asks:

“What must I do to be saved?”

The answer remains one of the clearest gospel statements in Scripture:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

That same message remains true.

Salvation is not:

Earned.

Purchased.

Inherited.

Achieved through religious performance.

It is received through faith in:

Jesus Christ.

And when that faith is real:

Lives begin to change.

The jailer goes from guarding wounds to washing wounds.

He goes from despair to joy.

He goes from jailer to brother.

Acts 16 therefore calls us to:

Trust closed doors.

Walk through open doors.

Preach Christ.

Discern spiritual deception.

Refuse to profit from bondage.

Worship in suffering.

Care about enemies.

Offer salvation clearly.

Expect transformed lives.

Stand for justice.

And keep strengthening the church.

The gospel reached Macedonia because Paul was willing to be redirected.

And the gospel reached a jailer because Paul was willing to worship while wounded.

We never know who may be listening when we sing in the night.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 16.

Thank You that You guide Your servants.

Teach us to trust You when doors close.

Keep us from forcing open what You have closed.

Give us discernment to recognize the doors You are opening.

And when Your direction becomes clear, help us obey quickly.

Thank You for Timothy.

Raise up young believers of strong character and good reputation.

Thank You for Lydia.

Open hearts today just as You opened hers.

Help us faithfully proclaim the truth while depending upon You to produce the response.

Protect us from spiritual deception.

Give us discernment concerning false spiritual power.

Thank You that Jesus Christ has authority over darkness.

Deliver people who are spiritually oppressed.

Expose systems that profit from human bondage.

Give us courage when obedience becomes costly.

When we are wounded:

Help us pray.

When we are confined:

Help us worship.

When circumstances are dark:

Give us a midnight song.

And let others hear our faith.

Thank You for the Philippian jailer.

Thank You that the gospel reached him at the edge of despair.

Help us remember that no one is beyond Your reach.

Give us courage to say clearly:

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.

Let our faith produce transformed lives.

Turn harsh hearts into compassionate hearts.

Turn fear into joy.

Turn enemies into brothers and sisters.

And give us wisdom concerning justice.

Help us forgive without pretending wrong is right.

Help us stand for truth without becoming bitter.

Use our lives.

Open doors.

Open hearts.

Shake what needs to be shaken.

And build churches that remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’” — Acts 16:31

Central Truth

God directs His servants through both closed and open doors, opens hearts to receive the gospel, demonstrates the authority of Jesus Christ over spiritual darkness, sustains believers in suffering, and brings salvation and transformed lives to everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus.

Acts 16 in One Sentence

The Holy Spirit redirects Paul and his companions into Macedonia, where the Lord opens Lydia's heart, delivers a slave girl from spiritual bondage, sustains Paul and Silas through unjust imprisonment and midnight worship, saves the Philippian jailer and his household through faith in Jesus Christ, and demonstrates that believers can proclaim grace while lawfully standing for justice.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 17 — The Gospel in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 17 shows the gospel entering three very different environments:

Thessalonica.

Berea.

Athens.

In Thessalonica, Paul reasons from the Scriptures and proves that Jesus is the Christ.

Some believe.

Others become jealous.

A mob forms.

Jason and other believers are dragged before the city authorities.

In Berea, the response is different.

The Bereans receive the message eagerly, but they do not accept Paul's words blindly.

They:

“Examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true.”

This becomes one of the greatest biblical models for Christian discernment.

Faithful Christians should:

Listen eagerly.

Study carefully.

Test teaching biblically.

Believe what Scripture confirms.

Then Paul arrives in Athens.

Athens was famous for:

Philosophy.

Education.

Religion.

Art.

Intellectual discussion.

Yet Paul is not impressed by the city's sophistication.

He is:

“Deeply troubled to see the city full of idols.”

He begins reasoning in the synagogue and marketplace.

Eventually he is brought before the Areopagus.

There Paul delivers one of the most important missionary sermons in the New Testament.

He begins where his hearers are.

He notices an altar:

“To the Unknown God.”

Then he declares:

“The God you worship without knowing is the One I proclaim to you.”

Paul teaches them that God is:

The Creator.

The Lord of heaven and earth.

Independent of human temples.

The giver of life and breath.

The ruler over nations.

Near to humanity.

Unlike idols made of gold, silver, or stone.

Then Paul moves from creation to repentance.

He says:

“God now commands all people everywhere to repent.”

Why?

Because God has appointed a day of judgment.

And He has appointed a Judge.

God has given proof concerning that Judge by:

Raising Jesus from the dead.

Then the reactions divide.

Some mock.

Some want to hear more.

Some believe.

Acts 17 therefore teaches:

The gospel must be explained from Scripture.

Every teacher should be tested by Scripture.

Intellectual sophistication does not remove spiritual blindness.

God is Creator and Lord over every nation.

Idolatry distorts the truth about God.

All people everywhere are commanded to repent.

Jesus Christ will judge the world.

And:

His resurrection is God's great public confirmation that He is the appointed Lord and Judge.

The central truth of Acts 17 is:

The gospel proclaims Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Messiah to every culture, and all people are called to examine God's truth, turn from idols, repent, and believe in the risen Lord whom God has appointed to judge the world in righteousness.

I. PAUL ARRIVES IN THESSALONICA

Acts 17:1

“Paul and Silas traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.”

Paul continues his missionary journey.

Thessalonica becomes an important center of gospel ministry.

Cross References

Acts 16:8

Paul had previously traveled through Troas before receiving the Macedonian call.

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Paul later wrote to the church in Thessalonica together with Silas and Timothy.

1 Thessalonians 2:2

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that although he had suffered in Philippi, God gave him courage to preach the gospel in Thessalonica.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful ministry continues even after painful experiences.

Paul had been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi.

Yet he keeps preaching.

II. PAUL REASONS FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Acts 17:2

“As was his custom, Paul went in and for three Sabbaths explained the Scriptures to them.”

Notice Paul’s method.

He does not merely share feelings.

He:

Explains.

Reasons.

Uses Scripture.

Cross References

Luke 4:16

Jesus regularly entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and read and taught from Scripture.

Acts 13:14

Paul had previously entered the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch and preached from the biblical record.

Acts 18:4

Paul later continued reasoning in synagogues, seeking to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical preaching should explain Scripture rather than merely display the preacher's opinions.

III. JESUS IS THE CHRIST

Acts 17:3

“He showed them that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am telling you about is the Christ,’ he said.”

Paul's message is unmistakably centered on Jesus.

The Messiah Had to Suffer

The cross was not an accident.

The Messiah Had to Rise

The resurrection was necessary.

Jesus Is the Christ

Paul identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Cross References

Luke 24:46

Jesus explained that Scripture foretold the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead.

Isaiah 53:5

The Servant was wounded for our rebellion and crushed because of our sins, and through His suffering peace and healing come.

1 Corinthians 15:3

Paul taught that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

Spiritual Principle

Christian preaching must proclaim both the cross and the resurrection.

IV. SOME BELIEVE

Acts 17:4

“Some of the Jews were persuaded, along with a large number of devout Greeks and many prominent women.”

The gospel reaches across social lines.

Jews

Greeks

Prominent Women

Cross References

Acts 13:43

Many Jews and devout converts had previously followed Paul and Barnabas after hearing the gospel.

Acts 17:12

In Berea many would also believe, including prominent Greek women and men.

Romans 11:5

Paul taught that even among Israel there remained a remnant chosen by grace.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel does not belong to one social group; it calls people from every background.

V. JEALOUSY PRODUCES A MOB

Acts 17:5

“But some Jews became jealous. They gathered some wicked men from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. They attacked Jason’s house, looking for Paul and Silas.”

Again:

Jealousy.

Not biblical reasoning.

Not careful investigation.

Jealousy.

Cross References

Acts 13:45

Opponents in Pisidian Antioch became jealous when they saw crowds listening to Paul.

Acts 14:19

Hostile opponents later persuaded a crowd in Lystra to stone Paul.

1 Thessalonians 2:14

Paul later reminded the Thessalonian believers that they had suffered persecution from their own countrymen.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Religious jealousy can become more dangerous than open unbelief because it disguises pride as spiritual concern.

VI. “THESE MEN HAVE TURNED THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN”

Acts 17:6

“When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting, ‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too.’”

The accusation is intended negatively.

But spiritually:

It contains an unintended compliment.

The gospel was changing lives everywhere.

Cross References

Acts 16:20

Paul and Silas had previously been accused of disturbing the city of Philippi.

Acts 24:5

Paul was later accused of being a troublemaker who stirred up unrest.

1 Thessalonians 1:8

The message of the Lord had sounded out from the Thessalonian believers into surrounding regions.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Gospel Turns an Upside-Down World Right-Side Up.”

Sin has distorted human life.

The gospel calls people back to:

God.

Truth.

Holiness.

Hope.

VII. “ANOTHER KING — JESUS”

Acts 17:7

“Jason has welcomed them. They are all acting against Caesar’s decrees, saying there is another king, Jesus.”

Again the gospel is distorted into a political charge.

But one statement is profoundly true:

There is another King.

Jesus.

Cross References

Luke 23:2

Jesus’ opponents accused Him before Pilate of claiming royal authority.

John 19:12

Political pressure was used against Pilate by suggesting that releasing Jesus would oppose Caesar.

John 19:15

Jesus' opponents cried that they had no king but Caesar.

Important Truth

Christianity does not teach political rebellion as its central message.

But it does declare:

Jesus is Lord.

Therefore every human authority is secondary and accountable to Him.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus does not compete with earthly rulers as one politician among many; He reigns above every earthly authority.

VIII. THE CITY IS TROUBLED

Acts 17:8

“This troubled the crowd and the city officials.”

The accusation creates fear.

Cross References

Acts 16:20

Similar accusations had caused disturbance in Philippi.

Acts 19:23

The gospel later produced major public controversy in Ephesus.

Luke 23:5

Jesus' opponents accused Him of stirring up the people.

Spiritual Principle

Fear can be manipulated by people who distort the message of Christ.

IX. JASON POSTS BOND

Acts 17:9

“They made Jason and the others post bond and then let them go.”

Jason suffers consequences for receiving gospel workers.

Cross References

Romans 16:21

Jason later appears among those associated with Paul’s ministry.

Acts 16:39

Authorities in Philippi had previously released Paul and Silas after becoming alarmed.

3 John 1:1

Early Christian ministry often depended upon believers who received and supported traveling gospel workers.

Spiritual Principle

Hospitality toward gospel ministry can sometimes become costly.

X. PAUL AND SILAS ARE SENT TO BEREA

Acts 17:10

“The believers immediately sent Paul and Silas to Berea by night. When they arrived, they went to the synagogue.”

Persecution changes the location.

Not the mission.

Cross References

Acts 9:25

Saul had once escaped Damascus by night when his life was threatened.

2 Corinthians 11:33

Paul later remembered being lowered in a basket through an opening in a city wall to escape danger.

Acts 17:14

Paul would soon again be sent away when opposition followed him to Berea.

Spiritual Principle

Leaving danger can be wisdom rather than cowardice when the mission continues elsewhere.

XI. THE NOBLE BEREANS

Acts 17:11

“The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the message eagerly and examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true.”

This is one of the most important verses for Bible study.

The Bereans demonstrate two qualities:

Eagerness

They wanted to hear.

Examination

They tested what they heard.

Cross References

John 5:39

Jesus told people to search the Scriptures because they testify concerning Him.

Isaiah 34:16

God’s people are called to search and examine what the Lord has spoken.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

Believers should test everything and hold firmly to what is good.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Never Reject Biblical Teaching Without Hearing It, and Never Accept Teaching Without Testing It.”

The Bereans were neither:

Cynical.

Nor gullible.

They were:

Teachable.

Biblical.

Discerning.

XII. MANY BELIEVE IN BEREIA

Acts 17:12

“As a result, many believed, including prominent Greek women and men.”

Careful examination led to faith.

Cross References

Acts 17:4

People from several social groups had also believed in Thessalonica.

Acts 13:50

Prominent women had previously appeared in the narrative during opposition to Paul’s ministry.

Acts 8:12

Men and women in Samaria believed the gospel and were baptized.

Spiritual Principle

Honest examination of Scripture can lead a sincere seeker toward confidence in Christ.

XIII. OPPOSITION FOLLOWS PAUL

Acts 17:13

“But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching in Berea, they came there and stirred up trouble.”

The opposition travels.

Cross References

Acts 14:19

Opponents had previously followed Paul from other cities to stir up violence.

Acts 17:5

The Thessalonian opposition had already organized a mob.

2 Corinthians 11:26

Paul later described constant dangers from various enemies throughout his ministry.

Spiritual Principle

Persistent opposition does not mean God’s mission is failing; sometimes it reveals how seriously the enemy treats the message.

XIV. PAUL IS SENT TO THE COAST

Acts 17:14

“The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, while Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea.”

The team temporarily separates.

Cross References

Acts 17:15

Paul’s escorts took him onward to Athens.

Acts 18:5

Silas and Timothy later rejoined Paul.

1 Thessalonians 3:2

Timothy was used to strengthen and encourage believers during this period.

Spiritual Principle

Mission teams sometimes adjust roles and locations according to changing circumstances.

XV. PAUL ARRIVES IN ATHENS

Acts 17:15

“Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him soon.”

Paul enters one of the intellectual centers of the ancient world.

Cross References

Acts 18:5

Silas and Timothy later joined Paul again.

1 Thessalonians 3:1

Paul later referred to being left alone in Athens for a time.

Acts 17:16

While waiting, Paul became deeply troubled by the city’s idolatry.

Spiritual Principle

God can place the gospel in the center of a culture’s intellectual conversation.

XVI. ATHENS IS FULL OF IDOLS

Acts 17:16

“While Paul was waiting in Athens, he was deeply troubled to see the city full of idols.”

Paul sees:

Architecture.

Culture.

Art.

Religion.

Philosophy.

But spiritually:

He sees idolatry.

Cross References

Romans 1:23

Humanity exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling created things.

Exodus 20:3

God commanded His people to have no other gods before Him.

1 Corinthians 8:4

Paul taught that idols have no true divine existence and that there is one God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Spiritual discernment sees beyond cultural beauty to the beliefs shaping a culture.

XVII. PAUL REASONS EVERY DAY

Acts 17:17

“He reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and devout Greeks, and in the marketplace every day with those who were there.”

Paul does not retreat from culture.

He enters conversation.

Synagogue

Religious audience.

Marketplace

General public.

Every Day

Persistent witness.

Cross References

Acts 17:2

Paul’s normal practice was to reason from Scripture.

Acts 18:4

He later continued reasoning with Jews and Greeks.

Acts 19:9

Paul later reasoned daily with people in Ephesus.

Spiritual Principle

Christian witness should be willing to enter both religious spaces and public spaces.

XVIII. EPICUREANS AND STOICS DEBATE PAUL

Acts 17:18

“Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some asked, ‘What is this babblers trying to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be preaching about foreign gods,’ because Paul preached about Jesus and the resurrection.”

Two philosophical traditions engage Paul.

Epicureans

Generally emphasized material reality, tranquility, and minimizing fear and pain.

Stoics

Emphasized reason, self-discipline, and living according to perceived natural order.

Paul presents something neither system anticipated:

Jesus and the resurrection.

Cross References

Acts 17:32

The resurrection would soon become the point at which some Athenians mocked Paul.

1 Corinthians 1:23

Paul said the crucified Christ was offensive to some and foolishness to others.

1 Corinthians 2:14

The natural mind does not automatically welcome the things revealed by God’s Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel must not be reshaped merely to fit the assumptions of the surrounding philosophy.

XIX. PAUL IS BROUGHT TO THE AREOPAGUS

Acts 17:19

“They took him to the Areopagus and asked, ‘May we know what this new teaching is?’”

An opportunity opens.

Cross References

Mark 1:27

People repeatedly wondered about the authority and newness of Jesus’ teaching.

Acts 25:19

Paul’s preaching about Jesus later continued to provoke questions among political authorities.

Acts 17:22

Paul would now address the Areopagus directly.

Spiritual Principle

Curiosity can become an open door for gospel explanation.

XX. “WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT THEY MEAN”

Acts 17:20

“You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.”

The Athenians do not yet understand.

But they are listening.

Cross References

Acts 10:28

Peter had also entered unfamiliar cultural territory when preaching to Gentiles.

1 Peter 4:4

Unbelievers are often surprised by beliefs and behavior different from their own worldview.

Acts 17:19

The philosophers had asked Paul to explain his teaching.

Spiritual Principle

When people do not understand Christian truth, explanation is often better than assumption.

XXI. ATHENS LOVES NEW IDEAS

Acts 17:21

“All the Athenians and foreigners there spent their time doing nothing but talking about or listening to the latest ideas.”

Luke describes a culture fascinated with novelty.

Cross References

2 Timothy 3:7

Some people are always learning yet never arriving at a knowledge of the truth.

Ecclesiastes 1:8

Human curiosity can remain restless and unsatisfied despite endless seeing and hearing.

1 Timothy 6:20

Paul warned Timothy against empty and falsely called knowledge.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A fascination with new ideas is not the same as a hunger for truth.

XXII. PAUL BEGINS WITH THEIR RELIGIOUSNESS

Acts 17:22

“Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way.’”

Paul observes before he confronts.

Cross References

Acts 14:15

Paul had previously addressed a pagan audience by calling them away from idols toward the living God.

Romans 1:19

Paul taught that God has given humanity a genuine witness concerning Himself.

Acts 17:16

Paul had already been deeply troubled by Athens’ idolatry.

Spiritual Principle

Wise evangelism understands the audience without compromising the truth.

XXIII. THE UNKNOWN GOD

Acts 17:23

“For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: ‘To the Unknown God.’ The God you worship without knowing is the one I proclaim to you.”

Paul uses something familiar as a bridge.

Cross References

John 4:22

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that people can worship without fully knowing the One they claim to worship.

Romans 1:21

Humanity knew enough about God to be responsible but exchanged truth for distorted worship.

Acts 14:15

Paul had previously called pagans to turn from worthless idols to the living God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A good evangelistic bridge begins with what people know but must lead them to the truth they do not know.

XXIV. GOD IS CREATOR AND LORD

Acts 17:24

“The God who made the world and everything in it is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not live in temples made by human hands.”

Paul begins with creation.

God Made Everything

Therefore:

God is not part of creation.

God Is Lord

He rules over creation.

God Is Not Confined

No temple contains Him.

Cross References

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Isaiah 42:5

The Lord created the heavens, spread out the earth, and gives breath and life to its people.

1 Kings 8:27

Solomon acknowledged that even the highest heavens cannot contain God.

Spiritual Principle

God is not one deity among many; He is the Creator and Lord of all.

XXV. GOD DOES NOT NEED US

Acts 17:25

“He is not served by human hands as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all people life, breath, and everything else.”

This reverses pagan religion.

Idols depend upon worshipers.

God does not.

We depend upon Him.

Cross References

Psalm 50:12

God says that if He were hungry, He would not need to tell humanity because the world and everything in it belong to Him.

Isaiah 42:5

God gives breath to people and life to those who walk upon the earth.

Genesis 2:7

God breathed life into humanity, and man became a living being.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

We do not sustain God; God sustains us.

XXVI. GOD MADE ALL NATIONS

Acts 17:26

“From one man He made all nations, and He determined their times and boundaries.”

Humanity shares common origin.

Cross References

Genesis 3:20

Eve is described as the mother of all living people.

Deuteronomy 32:8

Scripture speaks of God sovereignly ordering the nations and their boundaries.

Malachi 2:10

God's people are reminded that humanity ultimately has one Creator.

Spiritual Principle

Racial pride has no basis before the Creator because all humanity shares one origin and one dependence upon God.

XXVII. GOD WANTS PEOPLE TO SEEK HIM

Acts 17:27

“God did this so people would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any of us.”

God is not distant in the sense of being inaccessible.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 4:29

Those who seek the Lord sincerely will find Him when they seek with all their heart.

Jeremiah 29:13

God promises to be found by those who genuinely seek Him.

Psalms 145:18

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him sincerely.

Spiritual Principle

God has surrounded humanity with evidence of His existence and goodness and calls people to seek Him.

XXVIII. “IN HIM WE LIVE”

Acts 17:28

“For in Him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are His offspring.’”

Paul quotes pagan poets selectively.

He does not endorse their entire worldview.

He uses a statement containing truth.

Cross References

Colossians 1:17

Christ is before all things, and all things are held together in Him.

Genesis 1:27

Humanity was created in the image of God.

Hebrews 1:3

The Son sustains all things by His powerful word.

Spiritual Principle

All human life depends moment by moment upon God’s sustaining power.

XXIX. GOD CANNOT BE REDUCED TO AN IDOL

Acts 17:29

“Therefore, since we are God’s offspring, we should not think of God as an image of gold, silver, or stone crafted by human skill.”

Paul exposes the irrationality of idolatry.

Cross References

Isaiah 40:18

Scripture asks what created image could possibly compare with God.

Isaiah 44:9

Idol makers produce things that cannot see, know, or save.

Romans 1:23

Humanity exchanged the glory of the immortal God for created images.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A god that human beings can manufacture is not the God who manufactured human beings.

XXX. GOD COMMANDS EVERYONE TO REPENT

Acts 17:30

“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent.”

Paul’s sermon moves from explanation to command.

All People

No exception.

Everywhere

No geographical limitation.

Repent

Turn from false worship and sin toward God.

Cross References

Acts 14:16

Paul had previously said God allowed nations to go their own ways for a time.

Romans 3:25

God demonstrated His righteousness while showing patience toward sins committed previously.

2 Peter 3:9

God is patient, not wanting people to perish but calling them to repentance.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel does not merely invite intellectual curiosity; it demands a moral and spiritual response.

XXXI. A DAY OF JUDGMENT IS COMING

Acts 17:31

“For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof to everyone by raising Him from the dead.”

Paul reaches the climax.

God Has Set a Day

History is moving toward judgment.

God Will Judge the World

Judgment is universal.

With Justice

God’s judgment will be perfectly righteous.

Through the Appointed Man

Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection Is Proof

God raised Jesus from the dead.

Cross References

Acts 10:42

Peter declared that Jesus is the One appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

John 5:22

Jesus taught that the Father has entrusted judgment to the Son.

1 Corinthians 15:20

Christ has been raised from the dead as the firstfruits of those who have died.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Resurrection Is Not Only a Promise of Life; It Is Also God’s Warning That Judgment Is Coming.”

XXXII. SOME MOCK THE RESURRECTION

Acts 17:32

“When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’”

The resurrection creates division.

Cross References

Acts 17:18

The philosophers had already heard Paul preaching Jesus and resurrection.

1 Corinthians 1:23

The message of Christ crucified and risen appears foolish to those who reject God’s wisdom.

Acts 26:8

Paul later asked why anyone should consider it unbelievable that God raises the dead.

Spiritual Principle

People may reject the resurrection because it challenges their worldview, but ridicule does not disprove truth.

XXXIII. PAUL LEAVES THE MEETING

Acts 17:33

“At that, Paul left the meeting.”

Paul has delivered the message.

Cross References

Acts 18:1

Paul soon left Athens and traveled to Corinth.

Matthew 10:14

Jesus taught His disciples that there are times to move on after a message has been rejected.

Acts 13:51

Paul and Barnabas had previously moved onward after persistent rejection.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness sometimes means knowing when the message has been clearly delivered and leaving the response with God.

XXXIV. SOME BELIEVE

Acts 17:34

“Some people, however, joined him and believed. Among them were Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others.”

Not everyone mocked.

Some believed.

Cross References

Acts 17:12

Many in Berea had also believed after examining the Scriptures.

Romans 16:5

Paul frequently remembered individual believers by name as evidence of God’s work.

1 Corinthians 1:26

God often calls people from many different social and intellectual backgrounds.

Spiritual Principle

Even in environments resistant to the gospel, God can call individuals to faith.

XXXV. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 17

1. Preach Christ From the Scriptures

Principle:

Biblical evangelism explains why Jesus is the promised Christ who suffered and rose again.

2. Test Teaching by Scripture

Principle:

The Bereans listened eagerly and examined daily.

3. Jealousy Can Produce Religious Opposition

Principle:

Pride can make people resist what they should be celebrating.

4. God Is Creator, Not Creation

Principle:

He cannot be reduced to human-made images or temples.

5. All Humanity Is One Before God

Principle:

God made all nations from one human origin and rules over them all.

6. God Commands Everyone to Repent

Principle:

The gospel calls for response, not mere discussion.

7. Jesus Will Judge the World

Principle:

The resurrection confirms that history is moving toward accountability before Christ.

XXXVI. THE BEREAN MODEL OF BIBLE STUDY

Acts 17:11 gives us an extraordinary pattern.

They Received the Message Eagerly

They were teachable.

They Examined Scripture Daily

They were diligent.

They Tested Paul

They were discerning.

Notice:

Paul was an apostle.

Yet Luke praises them for checking his teaching against Scripture.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“No Preacher Is Above the Bible.”

Not:

Pastors.

Teachers.

Authors.

Denominations.

Traditions.

Popular speakers.

Every teaching must be tested by God's Word.

XXXVII. EAGERNESS AND DISCERNMENT BELONG TOGETHER

Some people are eager but undiscerning.

They believe anything spiritual.

Others are discerning but cynical.

They refuse to receive anything.

The Bereans show a better way.

Open Bible

Open Mind

Open Heart

Spiritual Principle

Biblical discernment is neither gullibility nor suspicion; it is humble testing under Scripture.

XXXVIII. WHAT PAUL PREACHED IN THESSALONICA

Paul's message had three central points.

The Messiah Had to Suffer

The cross.

The Messiah Had to Rise

The resurrection.

Jesus Is the Christ

Identification.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A sermon that never gets to Jesus has missed the center of apostolic preaching.

XXXIX. ANOTHER KING — JESUS

The enemies used this statement politically.

But spiritually it is foundational.

Jesus is:

King of kings.

Lord of lords.

Head of the church.

Judge of humanity.

Spiritual Principle

Every Christian confession that “Jesus is Lord” places every lesser loyalty under His authority.

XL. WHAT ATHENS TEACHES ABOUT IDOLATRY

Athens was highly educated.

Yet full of idols.

This teaches something important.

Education Does Not Automatically Produce Truth

Intelligence Does Not Automatically Produce Worship of God

Culture Does Not Automatically Produce Spiritual Light

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A society can become intellectually sophisticated while remaining spiritually confused.

XLI. PAUL WAS TROUBLED BY IDOLATRY

Paul does not look at Athens merely as:

An interesting tourist destination.

He sees people worshiping what cannot save them.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical compassion should be troubled when people give worship to anything other than the true God.

XLII. PAUL ENGAGES THE CULTURE

Paul does not merely condemn Athens from a distance.

He enters:

Synagogue.

Marketplace.

Areopagus.

He listens.

Observes.

Reasons.

Explains.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful cultural engagement means understanding people well enough to speak clearly without changing the gospel to please them.

XLIII. THE UNKNOWN GOD PRINCIPLE

Paul finds a point of contact.

Then he redirects it.

He does not say:

All your religions are equally valid.

He says:

You worship without knowing.

Now:

I proclaim the true God.

Spiritual Principle

A bridge is useful only if it actually leads people to biblical truth.

XLIV. GOD MADE THE WORLD

Paul's theology begins with creation.

If God created everything:

Then God owns everything.

God defines reality.

God defines morality.

God deserves worship.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If Genesis 1:1 is true, then human beings do not have final authority to redefine the Creator.

XLV. GOD DOES NOT LIVE IN MAN-MADE TEMPLES

Paul does not mean God can never manifest His presence in a place.

He means:

No building contains Him.

Spiritual Principle

God is greater than every structure built for worship.

Church buildings may serve ministry.

But God is not confined to them.

XLVI. GOD NEEDS NOTHING

Acts 17:25 destroys the idea that God depends upon us.

He Gives Life

He Gives Breath

He Gives Everything

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Worship is not supplying something God lacks; worship is responding to the God from whom everything comes.

XLVII. ONE HUMAN FAMILY

Acts 17:26 has powerful implications.

All nations come from one human origin.

Therefore:

No race is a separate creation.

No ethnicity is spiritually superior.

All humanity stands under one Creator.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel confronts racial pride at the level of creation itself.

XLVIII. GOD DETERMINES TIMES AND BOUNDARIES

Paul teaches divine sovereignty over history and nations.

Spiritual Principle

Nations rise and fall within the sovereign permission and providence of God.

This does not mean every political act reflects God's moral approval.

It means history is never outside His ultimate rule.

XLIX. GOD IS NOT FAR AWAY

Paul says:

“He is not far from any of us.”

God is not absent.

Creation points toward Him.

Life depends upon Him.

Spiritual Principle

The sinner's problem is not that God left no witness; humanity repeatedly turns from the witness God provides.

L. IN HIM WE LIVE

Every breath is evidence of dependence.

We Live Because of God

We Move Because of God

We Exist Because of God

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Human independence is ultimately an illusion; every heartbeat depends upon the Creator.

LI. GOD CANNOT BE MADE

Paul's argument is simple.

If God made us:

Then we cannot make God.

Spiritual Principle

Idolatry reverses the Creator-creature relationship.

Human hands make an object.

Then human beings bow before what they made.

Paul says:

That makes no sense.

LII. GOD COMMANDS REPENTANCE

Paul does not finish his message by saying:

“Think about these interesting ideas.”

He says:

Repent.

Repentance Means:

Recognizing error.

Turning from idols.

Turning from sin.

Turning toward God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel confronts both the mind and the will.

LIII. “ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE”

Acts 17:30 is universal.

Not:

Some people.

Not:

Religious people.

Not:

Uneducated people.

But:

All people everywhere.

Spiritual Principle

No culture, nation, philosophy, or social class is exempt from God's command to repent.

LIV. THE APPOINTED DAY

God has:

“Set a day.”

History is not endless.

It has direction.

Creation

Redemption

Judgment

Kingdom

Crawford Bible Study Principle

History is not wandering aimlessly; it is moving toward an appointment with Jesus Christ.

LV. JESUS IS THE JUDGE

Paul's sermon in Athens is sometimes presented as though he only preached a generic Creator.

He did not.

He ends with:

Jesus.

Resurrection.

Judgment.

Spiritual Principle

Christian evangelism may begin with creation, but it must eventually reach Christ.

LVI. THE RESURRECTION IS PROOF

God gave assurance by:

Raising Jesus from the dead.

The resurrection validates:

Jesus' identity.

Jesus' victory.

Jesus' authority.

Jesus' future judgment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christianity rises or falls on the reality of the resurrection.

LVII. THREE RESPONSES TO THE GOSPEL

Athens shows three responses.

1. Some Mocked

Rejection.

2. Some Wanted to Hear More

Delay or continued interest.

3. Some Believed

Faith.

Spiritual Principle

The same gospel can produce ridicule, curiosity, or conversion.

Our responsibility:

Preach faithfully.

LVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What did Paul preach in Thessalonica?

Paul reasoned from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and he declared that Jesus is the Christ.

Question 2

Why did opposition arise in Thessalonica?

Some became jealous of the response to Paul's preaching.

They gathered a mob, created a riot, and attacked Jason's house.

Question 3

What did Paul's opponents mean when they said the missionaries had turned the world upside down?

They meant Paul and his companions were producing major social and religious change.

Unintentionally, the accusation revealed how powerfully the gospel was spreading.

Question 4

Why are the Bereans called noble?

They eagerly received the message while carefully examining the Scriptures every day to determine whether Paul's teaching was true.

Question 5

What does Berea teach us about Bible teaching?

Every teaching should be tested against Scripture.

No pastor, teacher, denomination, author, or tradition is above the authority of God's Word.

Question 6

Why was Paul troubled in Athens?

He saw that the city was filled with idols.

Its cultural and philosophical sophistication had not led it to true worship of the Creator.

Question 7

How did Paul begin his message at the Areopagus?

He referred to their religious practices and specifically to an altar marked:

“To the Unknown God.”

He used this as a starting point to proclaim the true God.

Question 8

What did Paul teach about God?

God created the world.

He is Lord of heaven and earth.

He does not depend upon temples or human service.

He gives life and breath.

He made all nations.

He rules over history.

Question 9

What did Paul say about idols?

God cannot properly be represented as an image of gold, silver, or stone made by human skill.

The Creator cannot be reduced to something created.

Question 10

What does God command all people everywhere to do?

Repent.

People must turn from false worship and sin toward the true God.

Question 11

Why must people repent?

Because God has appointed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ.

Question 12

What proof did God give concerning Jesus?

God raised Jesus from the dead.

The resurrection confirms Christ's identity, authority, and future role as Judge.

LIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 17 asks several important questions.

Do I Know How to Explain Christ From Scripture?

Paul did.

Do I Test Teaching by the Bible?

The Bereans did.

Am I Eager to Learn Without Becoming Gullible?

Berea models both.

Does Jealousy Affect My Response to Another Person's Ministry?

It did in Thessalonica.

Does Idolatry Trouble Me?

It troubled Paul.

Can I Speak to People Whose Worldview Is Different From Mine?

Paul did in Athens.

Do I Understand That God Is Creator?

Paul began there.

Am I Living as Though I Depend Upon God for Every Breath?

I do.

Have I Repented?

God commands everyone to repent.

Do I believe Jesus truly rose from the dead?

The resurrection is central.

Am I ready to stand before Christ as Judge?

Acts 17 says that day is appointed.

LX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Open Your Bible Before You Open Your Trust”

The Bereans did not say:

Paul sounds educated.

Paul is famous.

Paul is an apostle.

Therefore:

Everything must be true.

They searched Scripture.

Principle

Your confidence in teaching should ultimately rest upon God’s Word, not the personality delivering it.

LXI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Confuse Intellectual Curiosity With Spiritual Conversion”

Athens loved ideas.

They discussed:

New teachings.

New philosophies.

New concepts.

But Paul did not merely add Christianity to their collection of ideas.

He commanded:

Repent.

Principle

A person can study Christianity endlessly without surrendering to Christ.

LXII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Creator Cannot Be Reduced to Something the Creature Made”

Gold.

Silver.

Stone.

Artwork.

Temples.

None can contain or define God.

Principle

The moment we create a god in our own image, we are no longer worshiping the God who created us in His image.

LXIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Resurrection Turns Philosophy Into Accountability”

Before the resurrection enters Paul’s sermon, the Athenians may treat the discussion as intellectual.

Then Paul says:

Judgment is coming.

Jesus is the Judge.

God raised Him from the dead.

Now the conversation becomes personal.

Principle

The gospel is not merely a theory to evaluate; it is truth before which every person must ultimately respond.

LXIV. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 17 takes the gospel into:

A synagogue.

A riot.

A Bible study.

A marketplace.

A philosophical council.

The setting changes.

The message remains centered upon:

Jesus Christ.

In Thessalonica:

Paul explains from Scripture that Jesus is the Christ.

In Berea:

People test Paul's message against Scripture.

In Athens:

Paul begins with creation and moves toward:

Repentance.

Judgment.

Resurrection.

Jesus.

This chapter gives the church an important missionary pattern.

Know Scripture.

Understand people.

Speak clearly.

Do not compromise truth.

Paul does not preach to the Athenians exactly as he preached in a synagogue.

His starting point changes.

But his destination does not.

He still reaches:

The true God.

Human accountability.

Repentance.

Jesus.

The resurrection.

Judgment.

Acts 17 also challenges every Christian to become more Berean.

Do not believe something merely because:

A preacher said it.

A denomination teaches it.

A book printed it.

A video claims it.

A tradition repeats it.

Ask:

What does Scripture say?

Receive truth eagerly.

Then examine it carefully.

Acts 17 also reminds us that education does not automatically cure idolatry.

Athens was intellectual.

Yet spiritually confused.

People can know:

Philosophy.

Science.

Art.

Politics.

History.

Culture.

And still not know the living God.

Paul therefore begins at the beginning:

God made everything.

God gives life.

God rules the nations.

God is near.

God cannot be reduced to idols.

Then Paul says:

Repent.

Why?

Because history has an appointed end.

There is:

A day.

There is:

A Judge.

There is:

A resurrection.

Jesus Christ will not remain merely an interesting religious figure for people to discuss.

Every person will ultimately answer to Him.

Some mocked Paul.

Some delayed.

Some believed.

The same responses remain today.

Our responsibility is not to manufacture belief.

It is to proclaim truth faithfully.

Therefore:

Explain Scripture.

Test teaching.

Reject jealousy.

Recognize idolatry.

Engage culture.

Proclaim the Creator.

Call for repentance.

Preach Jesus.

Declare the resurrection.

Warn of judgment.

And trust God to call people to faith.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 17.

Thank You for the example of Paul.

Help us know Your Word well enough to explain Jesus clearly from the Scriptures.

Give us the heart of the Bereans.

Make us eager to hear truth.

Make us disciplined enough to examine Scripture daily.

Protect us from gullibility.

Protect us from cynicism.

Teach us to test everything by Your Word.

Keep jealousy out of our hearts.

When You use another servant powerfully, help us rejoice rather than compete.

Give us spiritual eyes like Paul had in Athens.

Help us see beyond outward culture to the spiritual condition of people.

Give us wisdom to understand those we are trying to reach.

Help us speak in ways they can understand without changing Your truth.

Thank You that You are the Creator.

You made heaven.

You made earth.

You made humanity.

You give us life.

You give us breath.

Every moment we exist depends upon You.

Forgive us for the idols we create.

Anything we love above You.

Anything we trust more than You.

Anything we allow to take Your rightful place.

Call us continually back to Yourself.

Thank You for Jesus Christ.

Thank You that He suffered.

Thank You that He died.

Thank You that He rose from the dead.

Thank You that His resurrection confirms His victory.

Help us remember that a day of judgment is coming.

Give us urgency.

Give us compassion.

Give us courage.

Help us call people to repentance with truth and love.

And when some mock:

Keep us faithful.

When some ask questions:

Give us patience.

When some believe:

Give You all the glory.

May our churches become Berean churches.

May our preaching become Christ-centered preaching.

May our lives point people toward the living God.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the message eagerly and examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true.” — Acts 17:11

Central Truth

The gospel calls every person and culture to examine God's truth carefully, turn from idols, recognize the Creator, repent, and believe in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, whom God has appointed as the righteous Judge of the world.

Acts 17 in One Sentence

Paul proclaims Jesus as the suffering and risen Christ in Thessalonica, encounters noble Bereans who eagerly test his teaching by Scripture, and then confronts the idolatry and philosophy of Athens by declaring the Creator God, calling all people to repentance, and announcing that the risen Jesus will judge the world in righteousness.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 18 — The Gospel in Corinth and Beyond

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 18 follows Paul from Athens into Corinth and then onward through Ephesus, Caesarea, Antioch, Galatia, and Phrygia.

The chapter is filled with important lessons about:

Ministry partnership.

Perseverance under opposition.

God's encouragement.

Work and ministry.

Church strengthening.

Discipleship.

Humility.

Scripture-centered preaching.

Paul arrives in Corinth after preaching in Athens.

Corinth was a major commercial city, known for wealth, trade, immorality, and religious diversity.

There Paul meets:

Aquila and Priscilla.

They become important ministry partners.

They share Paul's trade as tentmakers.

Paul works with them while continuing to preach.

Every Sabbath:

He reasons in the synagogue.

When Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia, Paul gives himself more fully to gospel preaching and testifies that:

Jesus is the Messiah.

Opposition follows.

Paul is insulted and rejected.

He announces that he will increasingly turn toward the Gentiles.

Yet even as some reject the message:

Others believe.

Crispus, the synagogue leader, believes with his household.

Many Corinthians also hear, believe, and are baptized.

Then the Lord speaks to Paul in a vision:

“Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent.”

Why?

Because:

“I am with you.”

And:

“I have many people in this city.”

Paul therefore remains in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching God’s Word.

Opposition later brings him before Gallio, the Roman proconsul.

Yet Gallio refuses to treat the controversy as a criminal matter.

The accusations fail.

Paul continues his ministry.

The chapter then shifts toward travel and transition.

Paul visits Ephesus.

He promises to return:

“If God wills.”

He eventually travels through Galatia and Phrygia:

Strengthening the disciples.

Then another important servant appears:

Apollos.

Apollos is:

Eloquent.

Powerful in Scripture.

Enthusiastic.

Bold.

Accurate in much of what he teaches.

Yet his understanding is incomplete.

Priscilla and Aquila hear him.

They do not publicly humiliate him.

They invite him into their home.

They explain:

“The way of God more fully.”

Apollos receives that instruction.

Then he becomes even more useful.

He travels to Achaia and:

“Greatly helped those who believed through grace.”

Acts 18 therefore teaches us that effective ministry requires more than talent.

It requires:

Faithfulness.

Partnership.

Humility.

Teachability.

Courage.

Dependence upon God.

And continual growth in biblical understanding.

The central truth of Acts 18 is:

God strengthens His servants through faithful partners, sustains them through opposition, encourages them to keep speaking, and uses teachable believers who continue growing in Scripture to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. PAUL LEAVES ATHENS FOR CORINTH

Acts 18:1

“After leaving Athens, Paul traveled to Corinth.”

Paul moves from one major cultural center to another.

Cross References

Acts 17:16

Paul had been deeply troubled in Athens because the city was filled with idols.

1 Corinthians 2:1

Paul later reminded the Corinthians that when he came to them, he did not depend upon impressive speech or human wisdom to proclaim God’s truth.

2 Corinthians 1:19

Paul later reminded the Corinthians that Jesus Christ had been preached among them by Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Spiritual Principle

Different cities may require different ministry approaches, but the gospel message remains centered upon Christ.

II. PAUL MEETS AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

Acts 18:2

“There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Emperor Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul stayed with them.”

A political decision by Claudius brought Aquila and Priscilla to Corinth.

Yet God used that displacement to create a ministry partnership.

Cross References

Romans 16:3

Paul later called Priscilla and Aquila his coworkers in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 16:19

A church later met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla.

2 Timothy 4:19

Near the end of Paul's life, he still remembered Priscilla and Aquila with affection.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

What looks like unwanted displacement may become part of God's providential preparation.

Claudius forced them from Rome.

God brought them into Paul's life.

III. PAUL WORKS AS A TENTMAKER

Acts 18:3

"Since they were tentmakers by trade, Paul worked with them while ministering."

Paul was willing to work with his hands.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:12

Paul said that he and his coworkers labored with their own hands.

1 Thessalonians 2:9

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he worked night and day so he would not unnecessarily burden them.

2 Thessalonians 3:8

Paul said he worked hard so he would not become a financial burden to others.

Spiritual Principle

Secular work and spiritual ministry do not have to compete with each other.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

There is no shame in working with your hands while serving God with your heart.

IV. PAUL REASONS IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Acts 18:4

“Every Sabbath, he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade both Jews and Greeks.”

Again Paul uses reasoned biblical persuasion.

Cross References

Acts 17:2

Paul regularly reasoned with people from the Scriptures.

Acts 13:14

Paul had previously preached in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch.

Acts 19:8

Paul later continued reasoning persuasively about the kingdom of God in Ephesus.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful evangelism involves both proclamation and careful explanation.

V. PAUL DEVOTES HIMSELF TO PREACHING

Acts 18:5

“When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself fully to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.”

Their arrival appears to free Paul for fuller ministry.

Cross References

Acts 17:14

Silas and Timothy had remained behind temporarily while Paul traveled onward.

2 Corinthians 1:19

Jesus Christ was proclaimed in Corinth through Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

1 Thessalonians 3:6

Timothy had returned with encouraging news concerning the Thessalonian believers.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy ministry partnerships make it possible for different servants to strengthen the mission together.

VI. OPPOSITION LEADS PAUL TO THE GENTILES

Acts 18:6

“But when they opposed him and insulted him, he shook out his clothes in protest and said, ‘Your blood is on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’”

Paul has preached faithfully.

The rejection is deliberate.

Cross References

Acts 13:46

Paul and Barnabas had previously turned toward the Gentiles after persistent rejection.

Ezekiel 33:4

The watchman who gives warning is not responsible when people deliberately refuse to listen.

Matthew 10:14

Jesus told His disciples that when people reject the message, there are times to move on.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The messenger is responsible to proclaim the truth faithfully; the hearer is responsible for what he does with it.

VII. PAUL MOVES NEXT DOOR

Acts 18:7

“He then went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a Gentile worshiper of God.”

The mission shifts location.

But not very far.

Cross References

Acts 18:4

Paul had already been reasoning with Jews and Greeks in the synagogue.

Romans 16:23

A believer named Gaius later provided hospitality for Paul and the church in Corinth.

Acts 10:2

Cornelius was another Gentile who worshiped God and was spiritually receptive.

Spiritual Principle

When one door closes, the next open door may be closer than expected.

VIII. CRISPUS AND MANY CORINTHIANS BELIEVE

Acts 18:8

“Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord. Many Corinthians who heard Paul also believed and were baptized.”

The synagogue leader himself believes.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:14

Paul later specifically remembered baptizing Crispus.

Acts 16:15

Lydia and her household had also responded to the gospel and baptism.

Acts 16:33

The Philippian jailer and his household had likewise believed and been baptized.

Spiritual Principle

One person’s rejection does not determine another person’s response.

Some reject.

Crispus believes.

Many Corinthians believe.

IX. THE LORD ENCOURAGES PAUL

Acts 18:9

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent.’”

This reveals something important.

Paul needed encouragement.

Cross References

Acts 23:11

The Lord later stood near Paul and encouraged him to take courage.

Acts 27:24

During a dangerous storm, Paul received assurance not to be afraid.

Isaiah 41:10

God tells His people not to fear because He is with them and will strengthen them.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Courage does not mean never feeling fear; courage means obeying God even when fear is present.

X. “I AM WITH YOU”

Acts 18:10

“For I am with you, and no one will harm you, because I have many people in this city.”

God gives Paul three assurances.

God's Presence

"I am with you."

God's Protection

"No one will harm you."

God's Purpose

"I have many people in this city."

Cross References

Matthew 28:20

Jesus promised His followers that He would be with them always.

Isaiah 41:10

God promises strength, help, and sustaining presence.

Romans 8:31

If God is for us, no enemy can ultimately overturn His purpose.

Spiritual Principle

The greatest encouragement in ministry is not the absence of opposition but the presence of Christ.

XI. PAUL STAYS EIGHTEEN MONTHS

Acts 18:11

"So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching the word of God."

The vision changes Paul's actions.

He stays.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 3:6

Paul later said he planted while others watered, but God produced the growth.

Acts 20:31

Paul later reminded believers of another long period of persistent teaching.

1 Corinthians 2:1

Paul remembered his time preaching among the Corinthians.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes the answer to fear is not leaving—it is staying because God told you to remain.

XII. PAUL IS BROUGHT BEFORE GALLIO

Acts 18:12

“While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews united against Paul and brought him to court.”

Opposition becomes legal.

Cross References

Acts 17:5

Opponents in Thessalonica had also organized collective action against Paul.

Acts 21:27

Paul later faced another coordinated public attack.

2 Corinthians 11:24

Paul endured repeated persecution from opponents throughout his ministry.

Spiritual Principle

Organized opposition may escalate, but it still operates under God’s sovereignty.

XIII. THE ACCUSATION AGAINST PAUL

Acts 18:13

“This man is persuading people to worship God in ways that are against our law.”

The charge is religious.

Cross References

Acts 16:21

Paul and Silas had previously been accused of promoting unlawful customs.

Acts 25:8

Paul later defended himself against accusations that he violated Jewish law.

Acts 6:13

Stephen had likewise faced accusations concerning law and religious practice.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful teaching is often falsely represented by those who oppose it.

XIV. GALLIO INTERRUPTS BEFORE PAUL SPEAKS

Acts 18:14

“As Paul was about to defend himself, Gallio said, ‘If this were a matter of crime or wrongdoing, I would listen.’”

Paul is prepared to defend himself.

But he does not even have to.

Cross References

Acts 23:29

Roman authorities later recognized that accusations against Paul concerned religious disputes rather than crimes deserving punishment.

Acts 25:18

Paul’s accusers repeatedly failed to establish the serious charges expected against him.

Acts 26:31

Officials later concluded that Paul had done nothing deserving death or imprisonment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes God answers before His servant has the opportunity to defend himself.

XV. GALLIO REFUSES THE RELIGIOUS DISPUTE

Acts 18:15

“But since it is about words, names, and your own law, handle it yourselves. I will not judge such matters.”

Gallio refuses to criminalize the dispute.

Cross References

Acts 23:29

Roman officials later similarly identified religious controversy rather than criminal behavior.

Acts 25:19

Festus described disputes surrounding Jewish religion and Jesus.

John 18:31

Pilate had earlier told Jewish leaders to handle certain religious matters according to their own law.

Spiritual Principle

Civil government has limits; not every theological disagreement belongs in a criminal courtroom.

XVI. THEY ARE DRIVEN FROM THE COURT

Acts 18:16

“And he drove them out of the court.”

The case collapses.

Cross References

Matthew 27:24

Pilate attempted to distance himself from a religiously charged controversy concerning Jesus.

Acts 25:12

Roman legal procedures later again shaped Paul's ministry journey.

Luke 23:4

Pilate had declared that he found no basis for charges against Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Accusation does not equal guilt.

XVII. SOSTHENES IS BEATEN

Acts 18:17

“Then the crowd turned on Sosthenes, the synagogue leader, and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio paid no attention.”

Violence breaks out.

Gallio ignores it.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:1

A man named Sosthenes later appears with Paul as a Christian brother, possibly the same person.

Acts 18:8

Crispus had earlier been synagogue leader and had believed in Christ.

Matthew 5:11

Jesus said His followers would sometimes suffer insults and persecution because of Him.

Important Note

If the Sosthenes of 1 Corinthians 1:1 is the same man, then this chapter may hint at another remarkable transformation.

The text itself does not explicitly confirm the identification.

Spiritual Principle

Human courts may fail to protect people perfectly, but God's purposes remain larger than human injustice.

XVIII. PAUL LEAVES CORINTH

Acts 18:18

“Paul stayed in Corinth for some time, then left with Priscilla and Aquila for Syria. At Cenchrea, he had his head shaved because of a vow he had taken.”

Paul eventually moves on.

Cross References

Numbers 6:2

The Old Testament describes special vows involving periods of separation to God.

Numbers 6:18

At the completion of a Nazirite vow, the hair could be shaved.

Acts 21:23

Paul later participated in another setting involving vows among Jewish believers.

Important Truth

The exact nature of Paul’s vow is not fully explained.

It likely reflects a voluntary Jewish devotional practice.

It was not presented as a requirement for salvation.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Voluntary devotional practices may be meaningful, but they must never become conditions for justification.

XIX. PAUL REASONS IN EPHESUS

Acts 18:19

“They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue.”

Paul immediately returns to his normal pattern.

Cross References

Acts 18:4

Paul regularly reasoned in synagogues.

Acts 19:1

Paul later returned to Ephesus for extensive ministry.

Acts 17:2

Reasoned biblical explanation remained central to his evangelism.

Spiritual Principle

A faithful ministry method can remain consistent even as geography changes.

XX. THEY ASK PAUL TO STAY

Acts 18:20

“When they asked him to stay longer, he declined.”

This is different from many previous cities.

Here:

People want him to remain.

Yet Paul leaves.

Cross References

Acts 18:21

Paul promises to return if God wills.

Acts 20:16

Paul’s later travel schedule was shaped by broader ministry priorities.

1 Corinthians 16:8

Paul eventually spent significant time ministering in Ephesus.

Spiritual Principle

An open opportunity does not always mean God wants us to stay indefinitely.

XXI. “IF GOD WILLS”

Acts 18:21

“He said goodbye, telling them, ‘I must go to Jerusalem for the coming feast, but I will return if God wills.’ Then he sailed away.”

Paul submits his plans to God.

Cross References

Acts 20:16

Paul later arranged travel according to specific ministry priorities and timing.

Acts 21:4

Paul’s travels continued under serious spiritual discernment.

James 4:15

Believers are taught to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Make Plans, But Hold Them With Open Hands.”

Faith does not reject planning.

Faith submits planning to God.

XXII. PAUL RETURNS TO ANTIOCH

Acts 18:22

“He landed at Caesarea, greeted the church there, and then went down to Antioch.”

Paul returns to the missionary base.

Cross References

Acts 11:19

Antioch had become an important center of Gentile Christian ministry.

Acts 13:1

Paul had originally been sent from the Antioch church.

Acts 14:26

Paul and Barnabas had previously returned to Antioch after missionary work.

Spiritual Principle

Mission should remain connected to the local church and Christian fellowship.

XXIII. PAUL STRENGTHENS THE DISCIPLES

Acts 18:23

“After spending some time there, Paul traveled through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples.”

Paul continues his shepherding ministry.

Cross References

Acts 16:6

Paul had previously traveled through these regions.

Galatians 4:13

Paul had earlier preached the gospel among the Galatians.

Acts 15:41

Strengthening churches was already a central part of Paul’s ministry.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Evangelism reaches people; discipleship strengthens them.

XXIV. APOLLOS ARRIVES IN EPHEBUS

Acts 18:24

“Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, from Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was eloquent and powerful in the Scriptures.”

Apollos is gifted.

Eloquent

He communicates well.

Powerful in Scripture

He knows the Bible.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:12

Apollos later became so influential that some Corinthians identified strongly with his ministry.

1 Corinthians 3:6

Paul later said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

Titus 3:13

Apollos continued to be regarded as a valuable ministry worker.

Spiritual Principle

Natural ability becomes especially useful when joined with deep knowledge of Scripture.

XXV. APOLLOS IS ENTHUSIASTIC BUT INCOMPLETE

Acts 18:25

“He had been taught about the Lord and was enthusiastic, speaking accurately about Jesus, though he only knew about John’s baptism.”

Apollos knew much.

But not everything.

Cross References

Acts 19:3

Paul later encountered others whose understanding was similarly limited to John’s baptism.

Romans 12:11

Believers are encouraged to remain spiritually fervent while serving the Lord.

Luke 3:16

John himself pointed beyond his own baptism to the greater One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sincerity, passion, and knowledge are valuable, but every believer still has more to learn.

XXVI. PRISCILLA AND AQUILA DISCIPLE APOLLOS

Acts 18:26

“He began speaking boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained the way of God more fully.”

This is a beautiful model of correction.

They do not:

Embarrass him publicly.

Attack his character.

Dismiss his gifts.

Instead:

They invite him home.

Then:

They teach him more fully.

Cross References

Romans 16:3

Paul called Priscilla and Aquila his coworkers in Christ.

2 Timothy 4:19

Their ministry remained valued years later.

1 Corinthians 16:19

Their home became a gathering place for believers.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Correct What Is Incomplete Without Crushing the Person God Is Developing.”

XXVII. APOLLOS GOES TO ACHAIA

Acts 18:27

“When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote letters urging the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who believed through grace.”

Apollos becomes more useful after receiving instruction.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 3:1

Early Christians sometimes used letters of recommendation when ministry workers traveled.

1 Corinthians 3:6

Paul later described Apollos as the one who watered what Paul had planted.

Romans 16:1

Phoebe likewise received formal commendation from Paul.

Spiritual Principle

Teachability increases usefulness.

XXVIII. APOLLOS PROVES JESUS IS THE MESSIAH

Acts 18:28

“He vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.”

Now Apollos uses his gifts with fuller understanding.

Cross References

Acts 17:2

Paul similarly reasoned from Scripture concerning Jesus.

1 Corinthians 3:6

Apollos became an important teacher who strengthened believers.

Isaiah 53:5

Old Testament prophecy concerning the suffering Servant helped demonstrate the messianic identity of Jesus.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The strongest Christian argument is not merely eloquence; it is truth demonstrated from Scripture.

XXIX. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 18

1. God Provides Ministry Partners

Principle:

God often strengthens His servants through faithful people like Aquila and Priscilla.

2. Work and Ministry Can Coexist

Principle:

Ordinary employment can support extraordinary service.

3. Opposition Does Not Mean God Has Left

Principle:

Christ may tell us to keep speaking precisely when we feel tempted to stop.

4. God Has People We Cannot Yet See

Principle:

Do not judge a city only by its visible resistance.

5. Plans Must Remain Submitted to God

Principle:

“If God wills” should shape the believer’s attitude toward the future.

6. Discipleship Includes Correction

Principle:

Even gifted believers may need fuller understanding.

7. Scripture Must Remain Central

Principle:

Paul reasoned from Scripture, and Apollos proved from Scripture that Jesus is the Messiah.

XXX. WHAT AQUILA AND PRISCILLA TEACH US

They appear repeatedly as faithful servants.

They:

Work.

Host Paul.

Travel.

Open their home.

Disciple Apollos.

Host a church.

Remain faithful for years.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Some of the most influential ministries are built around faithful people whose names may never appear on a platform.

XXXI. TENTMAKING AND MINISTRY

Paul worked.

This did not make him less spiritual.

Spiritual Principle

God can use a trade, profession, or ordinary job as part of ministry provision and witness.

There is no biblical divide that says:

Paid ministry is sacred.

All other work is secular.

Faithfulness to God can shape both.

XXXII. WHEN PEOPLE REJECT THE MESSAGE

Paul reaches a point where continued argument is no longer useful.

He says:

“From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithfulness does not require spending every hour arguing with people who have deliberately decided not to listen.

There are other people who need to hear.

XXXIII. GOD HAS MANY PEOPLE IN THE CITY

The Lord says:

“I have many people in this city.”

Paul could not yet see them all.

God could.

Spiritual Principle

Never assume a difficult mission field is spiritually empty simply because resistance is visible.

XXXIV. “DO NOT BE AFRAID”

God did not shame Paul for fear.

He encouraged him.

Keep Speaking

Do Not Be Silent

I Am With You

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God’s answer to fear is often not explanation but presence.

XXXV. THE VALUE OF LONG-TERM TEACHING

Paul remained:

A year and a half.

Why?

Because converts need teaching.

Spiritual Principle

Church planting requires more than evangelistic decisions; believers need sustained instruction in God's Word.

XXXVI. WHEN GOD FIGHTS THE BATTLE DIFFERENTLY

Paul goes before Gallio.

He prepares to speak.

Gallio interrupts and dismisses the complaint.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not assume every battle requires your defense; sometimes God removes the accusation before you answer it.

XXXVII. THE LIMITS OF CIVIL AUTHORITY

Gallio refuses to decide a religious controversy.

This provides an important principle.

Spiritual Principle

Civil rulers have legitimate authority, but theological truth is not created by government decree.

The state can rule on crimes.

It cannot determine:

Who Jesus is.

What the gospel means.

What Scripture teaches.

XXXVIII. HUMAN JUSTICE CAN STILL FAIL

Gallio may correctly refuse to criminalize a theological dispute.

But when Sosthenes is beaten:

He ignores it.

Spiritual Principle

A ruler can be correct in one judgment and unjust in another.

Therefore:

Human government is never the final standard of righteousness.

God is.

XXXIX. THE “IF GOD WILLS” PRINCIPLE

Paul makes plans.

But he says:

“If God wills.”

This is not meaningless religious language.

It reflects theology.

God controls:

Time.

Travel.

Opportunity.

Life.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Planning is wise; presumption is not.

XL. STRENGTHENING THE DISCIPLES

Acts repeatedly emphasizes strengthening.

Paul is not satisfied with:

People believing once.

He wants:

Stable disciples.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy ministry asks not only, “How many responded?” but, “How are the believers growing?”

XLI. APOLLOS — GIFTED BUT STILL LEARNING

Apollos was:

Eloquent.

Powerful in Scripture.

Enthusiastic.

Accurate.

Yet incomplete.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Being Gifted Does Not Mean You Have Finished Growing.”

The most gifted teacher still needs:

Study.

Correction.

Humility.

Growth.

XLII. HOW TO CORRECT A GIFTED BELIEVER

Priscilla and Aquila give us an excellent pattern.

They Listened First

They understood what Apollos knew.

They Recognized His Strengths

They did not dismiss him.

They Corrected Privately

They invited him home.

They Explained More Fully

They filled the gap.

They Did Not Destroy His Ministry

They strengthened it.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Correction should aim at restoration and greater usefulness, not humiliation.

XLIII. APOLLOS WAS TEACHABLE

The text does not record defensiveness.

The result shows growth.

He becomes even more effective.

Spiritual Principle

A gifted person who cannot be corrected will eventually become less useful than a humble person willing to learn.

XLIV. PAUL PLANTS, APOLLOS WATERS

Later Paul says:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

This is an important ministry principle.

Different servants have different roles.

One Plants

Another Waters

God Gives Growth

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not turn different servants into competitors when God designed them to be coworkers.

XLV. JESUS REMAINS THE CENTER

Paul preached:

Jesus is the Messiah.

Apollos proved:

Jesus is the Messiah.

Different men.

Different personalities.

Same center.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy ministry does not build around personalities; it builds around Jesus Christ.

XLVI. WHAT ACTS 18 TEACHES ABOUT PARTNERSHIP

Paul had:

Aquila.

Priscilla.

Silas.

Timothy.

Titius Justus.

Crispus.

Later:

Apollos.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's work is usually bigger than one person's calling.

Ministry flourishes through:

Partnership.

Hospitality.

Teaching.

Giving.

Prayer.

Travel.

Encouragement.

XLVII. WHAT ACTS 18 TEACHES ABOUT COURAGE

Paul receives direct encouragement:

“Do not be afraid.”

Then:

“Keep speaking.”

Spiritual Principle

Fear becomes dangerous when it silences what God commanded us to speak.

XLVIII. WHAT ACTS 18 TEACHES ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP

Apollos already knew much.

Still:

He needed more.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Discipleship is not merely teaching unbelievers how to believe; it is helping believers understand God's truth more fully.

XLIX. WHAT ACTS 18 TEACHES ABOUT GRACE

Acts 18:27 says believers had:

“Believed through grace.”

Their faith itself existed within the saving work of God.

Spiritual Principle

Grace is not merely God overlooking sin; grace brings sinners into saving faith and builds them into useful disciples.

L. WHAT ACTS 18 TEACHES ABOUT SCRIPTURE

The chapter begins with Paul:

Reasoning.

It ends with Apollos:

Proving.

Both use:

Scripture.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A ministry that becomes detached from Scripture eventually becomes detached from apostolic Christianity.

LI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Where did Paul go after Athens?

Paul traveled to Corinth, where he began a significant period of ministry.

Question 2

Who were Aquila and Priscilla?

They were a Jewish Christian couple who had left Rome because of Claudius' order.

They became Paul's coworkers and later helped disciple Apollos.

Question 3

How did Paul support himself in Corinth?

He worked as a tentmaker alongside Aquila and Priscilla while continuing his ministry.

Question 4

What was Paul's main message in the synagogue?

He testified that:

Jesus is the Messiah.

Question 5

What did Paul do when some persistently rejected his message?

He declared that he had faithfully delivered the warning and would increasingly take the gospel to the Gentiles.

Question 6

Who believed in Corinth?

Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his household believed.

Many other Corinthians also heard, believed, and were baptized.

Question 7

What did the Lord tell Paul in the vision?

The Lord told him:

Do not be afraid.

Keep speaking.

Do not be silent.

I am with you.

And:

I have many people in this city.

Question 8

How long did Paul stay in Corinth?

He stayed for a year and a half teaching God's Word.

Question 9

What happened when Paul was brought before Gallio?

Gallio refused to treat the theological dispute as a criminal case and dismissed the accusers.

Question 10

What does Paul's statement "if God wills" teach?

Believers may make plans, but they should submit all future plans to God's sovereign will.

Question 11

Who was Apollos?

Apollos was an eloquent Jewish teacher from Alexandria who was powerful in Scripture and enthusiastic about Jesus, though his understanding was incomplete.

Question 12

How did Priscilla and Aquila help Apollos?

They invited him privately into their home and explained the way of God more fully.

Their correction strengthened rather than destroyed his ministry.

LII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 18 asks us several important questions.

Do I Value Godly Partnerships?

Paul did.

Am I Willing to Work Hard While Serving Christ?

Paul was.

Do I Keep Speaking When Opposition Comes?

God told Paul to.

Do I Remember That Christ Is With Me?

Paul needed that reminder.

Do I Believe God May Have People in Places That Look Resistant?

He did in Corinth.

Do I Hold My Plans Under God's Will?

Paul said:

“If God wills.”

Am I Strengthening Believers After They Come to faith?

Paul did.

Am I Teachable Like Apollos?

Gifted people still need correction.

Can I Correct Others Like Priscilla and Aquila?

Privately.

Graciously.

Biblically.

Is Scripture central in my teaching?

It was for Paul and Apollos.

LIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Be Silent Just Because You Are Afraid”

The Lord did not tell Paul:

There will be no opposition.

He said:

“I am with you.”

Principle

God’s presence gives courage when circumstances do not.

LIV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God May Already Have People in the Place You Are Ready to Leave”

Paul saw opposition.

God saw:

Crispus.

His household.

Many Corinthians.

Future believers.

Principle

Do not judge God’s harvest only by today’s resistance.

LV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Become Too Gifted to Be Taught”

Apollos was:

Eloquent.

Powerful.

Passionate.

Accurate.

Yet:

He still needed instruction.

Principle

Spiritual maturity is demonstrated not by needing no correction, but by receiving correction well.

LVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Correct Privately When Possible, Strengthen Publicly Afterwards”

Priscilla and Aquila corrected Apollos privately.

Then his public usefulness expanded.

Principle

Godly correction should build servants rather than unnecessarily embarrass them.

LVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Plant, Water, and Let God Give the Growth”

Paul planted.

Apollos watered.

God gave the growth.

Principle

The church does not need competing personalities; it needs cooperating servants.

LVIII. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 18 shows ministry from several angles.

Paul enters Corinth:

Alone at first.

Working with his hands.

Preaching every Sabbath.

Then God brings:

Aquila.

Priscilla.

Silas.

Timothy.

Titius Justus.

Crispus.

Other believers.

Paul was not meant to do everything alone.

Neither are we.

Acts 18 also shows us that faithful ministry can become discouraging.

Paul had already experienced:

Beatings.

Imprisonment.

Riots.

Rejection.

Mockery.

Constant travel.

Now in Corinth:

Opposition rises again.

Then Jesus speaks.

“Do not be afraid.”

That statement tells us Paul probably had reason to feel fear.

The Lord does not condemn him.

He strengthens him.

“Keep on speaking.”

“Do not be silent.”

“I am with you.”

That is the foundation of courage.

Not:

I am naturally brave.

But:

Christ is with me.

Then the Lord says:

“I have many people in this city.”

Paul could not see them yet.

God could.

That should encourage every servant laboring in a difficult field.

You do not know:

Whose heart God is preparing.

Who may believe next.

What family may change.

What future leader may be converted.

What church may be born.

Keep speaking.

Acts 18 also teaches us something important through Apollos.

Apollos had tremendous ability.

He was:

Eloquent.

Passionate.

Biblically knowledgeable.

Bold.

Yet incomplete.

And God sent him:

Priscilla and Aquila.

He needed instruction.

And apparently:

He received it.

That made him stronger.

There is a lesson for every believer:

Never reach a point where you think:

I already know enough.
No one can teach me.
No one can correct me.
I am too experienced to listen.
That attitude eventually destroys usefulness.
Apollos became more useful because he remained teachable.
Acts 18 therefore calls us to:
Work faithfully.
Build partnerships.
Speak boldly.
Trust God in opposition.
Remember Christ's presence.
Submit plans to God's will.
Strengthen believers.
Receive correction.
Correct others graciously.
Keep Scripture central.
And give God the growth.
The chapter begins with Paul arriving in Corinth.
It ends with Apollos proving from Scripture that:
Jesus is the Messiah.
The servants change.
The mission continues.
The message remains:
Jesus Christ.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 18.

Thank You for showing us how You provide people for Your servants.

Thank You for Aquila and Priscilla.

Give us faithful friendships and ministry partnerships.

Help us be willing to work hard.

Help us honor You in both our occupation and our ministry.

Give us courage when opposition comes.

When fear begins to silence us, remind us of Your words:

“Do not be afraid.”

“Keep on speaking.”

“Do not be silent.”

Remind us:

You are with us.

Help us trust that You are already working in hearts we cannot see.

Give us patience when ministry appears difficult.

Give us endurance to teach Your Word faithfully.

Thank You for every open door.

And when plans change, teach us to say sincerely:

“If God wills.”

Keep us from presumption.

Help us submit our future to You.

Thank You for Apollos.

Give us his enthusiasm.

Give us his love for Scripture.

Give us his courage.

But also give us his teachability.

Keep us from becoming too proud to learn.

Give us the wisdom of Priscilla and Aquila.

Teach us how to correct others graciously.

Help us strengthen rather than crush.

Help our churches produce teachers who know Scripture deeply and proclaim Jesus clearly.

Keep us from competing with other servants.

One may plant.

Another may water.

But:

You give the growth.

May Jesus remain the center of everything we preach, teach, write, and do.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will harm you, because I have many people in this city.’” — Acts 18:9–10

Central Truth

God strengthens His servants through faithful partnerships, encourages them to keep speaking in the face of opposition, remains sovereign over legal and social conflict, and uses humble, teachable, Scripture-centered believers to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Acts 18 in One Sentence

Paul establishes a fruitful ministry in Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla, receives Christ's encouragement to keep speaking despite opposition, continues strengthening believers across the region, and sees Apollos become a more effective Scripture-centered preacher after humbly receiving fuller instruction in the way of God.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 19 — Revival and Uproar in Ephesus

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 19 records one of the most powerful periods of gospel advance in the entire book of Acts.

The setting is:

Ephesus.

This city was:

Commercially important.

Religiously influential.

Deeply associated with idolatry.

Known for occult practices.

Connected with the great temple of Artemis, also known as Diana.

Into this environment comes:

The gospel of Jesus Christ.

The chapter begins with Paul meeting about twelve men whose spiritual understanding is incomplete.

They know:

John's baptism.

But they need fuller understanding concerning:

Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit.

When they hear the truth, they are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The Holy Spirit comes upon them.

They speak in tongues and prophesy.

Then Paul begins an extended ministry in Ephesus.

For three months:

He reasons boldly in the synagogue.

When opposition hardens, he moves the disciples into the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

There:

He teaches daily.

For two years.

The result is enormous:

“Everyone living in Asia—both Jews and Greeks—heard the word of the Lord.”

Then God performs:

Extraordinary miracles through Paul.

But immediately Scripture gives a warning.

Some traveling exorcists try to use Jesus’ name as though it were:

A formula.

A magical phrase.

A technique.

They say:

“I command you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.”

The evil spirit answers:

“Jesus I know, and Paul I know about—but who are you?”

The men are violently overpowered.

The result is not admiration for counterfeit spiritual power.

Instead:

The name of Jesus is held in high honor.

Believers confess their sins.

Those involved in sorcery publicly destroy their occult books.

The value is enormous.

They do not sell the material to someone else.

They destroy it.

Why?

Because genuine repentance does not look for a way to profit from the sinful life it is leaving behind.

Then Luke summarizes:

“The word of the Lord spread powerfully and prevailed.”

But revival produces economic consequences.

A silversmith named Demetrius becomes alarmed.

Why?

Because people are abandoning idols.

That threatens:

His business.

His profits.

His trade.

The worship of Diana.

Demetrius gathers the craftsmen and stirs up outrage.

The whole city becomes confused.

A mob rushes into the theater.

Some people do not even know why they are there.

For about two hours the crowd cries:

“Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

Finally the city clerk calms the crowd and warns them that the riot itself could bring legal trouble.

Acts 19 therefore shows two kingdoms colliding.

On one side:

Idolatry.

Sorcery.

Economic exploitation.

Cultural pride.

Mob emotion.

On the other:

Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit.

Repentance.

Truth.

Scripture.

The gospel.

And the conclusion is unmistakable:

The Word of the Lord prevails.

The central truth of Acts 19 is:

When the gospel of Jesus Christ enters a city with power, it exposes incomplete faith, defeats counterfeit spirituality, produces genuine repentance, threatens profitable idolatry, and continues advancing despite cultural, economic, and public opposition.

I. PAUL ARRIVES IN EPHEBUS

Acts 19:1

“While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the inland regions and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples.”

The story connects directly with Acts 18.

Apollos is in Corinth.

Paul arrives in Ephesus.

Cross References

Acts 18:24

Apollos had come to Ephesus as an eloquent man who was powerful in the Scriptures.

Acts 18:27

After receiving fuller instruction, Apollos traveled to Achaia and greatly helped the believers there.

1 Corinthians 3:6

Paul later said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

Spiritual Principle

God uses different servants in different places while remaining the One who produces spiritual growth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The mission does not depend upon one personality; God moves His servants according to His larger purpose.

II. “DID YOU RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?”

Acts 19:2

“He asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ They answered, ‘We haven’t even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’”

Their answer reveals incomplete understanding.

Cross References

Acts 8:16

The Samaritan believers had been baptized in the name of Jesus but had not yet experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit in that transitional setting.

Acts 10:44

The Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and the Gentiles while they were hearing the gospel.

Ephesians 1:13

Those who hear the gospel and believe in Christ are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

Important Truth

These men appear to be disciples of John’s preparatory message rather than Christians who fully understood the completed gospel.

Their problem is not that mature believers simply forgot a doctrine.

They are standing at an incomplete point in redemptive understanding.

Spiritual Principle

Religious sincerity is not a substitute for knowing the full truth about Jesus Christ.

III. JOHN'S BAPTISM

Acts 19:3

“Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ They replied, ‘John’s baptism.’”

Now the problem becomes clear.

They know:

John.

But not the completed message about Christ.

Cross References

Matthew 3:11

John said he baptized with water for repentance, but the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Mark 1:4

John appeared preaching a baptism of repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah.

Luke 3:3

John called people to repentance as he prepared the way for the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

John’s ministry was preparatory; it was never intended to become the final destination.

IV. JOHN POINTED TO JESUS

Acts 19:4

“Paul said, ‘John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling people to believe in the one coming after him—that is, in Jesus.’”

Paul explains John correctly.

John did not build a movement around himself.

John pointed forward.

Cross References

Matthew 3:11

John said the One coming after him was greater and would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

John 1:26

John said that someone far greater was already standing among the people.

Mark 1:7

John declared that the One coming after him was so great that John was not worthy to untie His sandals.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Every faithful messenger eventually points away from himself and toward Jesus Christ.

V. THEY ARE BAPTIZED IN JESUS' NAME

Acts 19:5

“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Their understanding changes.

Their baptism now reflects identification with:

Jesus Christ.

Cross References

Acts 2:38

Peter called hearers to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Acts 8:16

Samaritan believers had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Romans 6:3

Christian baptism identifies believers with Jesus Christ and His saving work.

Spiritual Principle

Greater understanding of Jesus should produce obedient response.

VI. THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES UPON THEM

Acts 19:6

“Paul placed his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.”

This event resembles earlier transitional moments in Acts.

Cross References

Acts 2:4

At Pentecost the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 8:17

Peter and John laid hands upon Samaritan believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:46

Gentile believers in Cornelius’ household spoke in tongues and praised God when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Important Doctrinal Note

Acts records several unusual transitional events as the gospel moves through:

Jews.

Samaritans.

Gentiles.

And now people connected primarily with John’s baptism.

We should be careful about turning every historical sequence in Acts into a rigid formula that every believer must reproduce in exactly the same order.

Spiritual Principle

The Holy Spirit confirms that those who belong to Christ belong fully to the people of God.

VII. ABOUT TWELVE MEN

Acts 19:7

“There were about twelve men in all.”

Luke provides a simple numerical detail.

Cross References

Acts 2:41

About three thousand people were added to the church at Pentecost.

Acts 4:4

The number of believing men later grew to about five thousand.

Acts 8:17

The Samaritan believers also received the Holy Spirit through apostolic ministry.

Spiritual Principle

God cares about both great crowds and small groups.

Twelve men mattered.

VIII. THREE MONTHS IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Acts 19:8

“Paul went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, arguing and persuading about the kingdom of God.”

Paul remains patient.

Three months.

Cross References

Acts 17:2

Paul regularly reasoned from Scripture in synagogues.

Acts 18:4

He reasoned every Sabbath with Jews and Greeks.

Acts 28:23

Paul later continued explaining and persuading people concerning the kingdom of God.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical evangelism may involve patient, extended reasoning rather than one brief conversation.

IX. SOME BECOME STUBBORN

Acts 19:9

“But some became stubborn, rejecting the message and publicly insulting ‘the Way.’ So Paul left them and took the disciples with him. He held daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.”

There comes a point when Paul changes strategy.

Cross References

Acts 9:2

Early Christianity was sometimes called “the Way.”

Acts 24:14

Paul later openly identified himself as a follower of “the Way.”

2 Timothy 1:15

Paul knew the pain of people turning away from his ministry.

Spiritual Principle

Persistent public hostility may require moving the teaching ministry to a more fruitful setting.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not abandon the mission just because one venue becomes hostile; change the venue and continue the mission.

X. ALL ASIA HEARS THE WORD

Acts 19:10

“This went on for two years, so that everyone living in Asia—both Jews and Greeks—heard the word of the Lord.”

This is extraordinary influence.

Paul teaches daily.

Others apparently carry the message outward.

Cross References

Acts 19:26

Demetrius later admits that Paul’s influence had spread throughout much of Asia.

1 Corinthians 16:9

Paul described Ephesus as a place where a great door of effective ministry had opened despite many opponents.

Revelation 1:11

Several churches later existed throughout the region of Asia.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Deep local teaching can produce wide regional impact.

XI. EXTRAORDINARY MIRACLES

Acts 19:11

“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul.”

Notice the subject:

God.

Cross References

Hebrews 2:4

God confirmed the gospel through signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 14:3

The Lord confirmed the message of grace through signs and wonders.

Mark 16:20

The Lord worked through the early proclamation and confirmed the Word.

Spiritual Principle

The miracle belongs to God even when He works through a human servant.

XII. HANDKERCHIEFS AND APRONS

Acts 19:12

“Even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses and evil spirits left them.”

This was unusual.

Luke already called these:

“Extraordinary miracles.”

Cross References

Acts 5:15

People once carried the sick where Peter’s shadow might pass over them.

Mark 5:27

A suffering woman touched Jesus’ garment in faith and received healing.

Matthew 9:20

The woman reached out and touched the edge of Jesus’ garment.

Important Truth

The objects themselves were not magical.

The power was not:

In cloth.

In aprons.

In Paul’s body.

Luke says:

God did the miracles.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never turn an extraordinary act of God into a commercial formula for spiritual power.

XIII. COUNTERFEIT EXORCISTS USE JESUS' NAME

Acts 19:13

“Some traveling Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those possessed by evil spirits, saying, ‘I command you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’”

They attempt borrowed authority.

Cross References

Mark 9:38

The disciples once encountered someone using Jesus' name in casting out demons.

Luke 9:49

John reported a similar situation to Jesus.

Matthew 12:27

Jesus acknowledged that exorcistic claims existed within the broader religious culture.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus' name is not a magical formula that can be detached from faith in Jesus Himself.

XIV. THE SEVEN SONS OF SCEVA

Acts 19:14

“Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.”

They appear to have built a spiritual practice around exorcism.

Cross References

Acts 19:13

These men attempted to invoke Jesus' name secondhand.

Mark 9:38

Others also attempted spiritual acts connected with Jesus' name.

Matthew 12:27

Exorcistic practices were known beyond Jesus' own disciples.

Spiritual Principle

Religious position does not automatically equal spiritual authority.

XV. “JESUS I KNOW”

Acts 19:15

“One evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know about—but who are you?’”

This is one of the most striking statements in Acts.

The demon recognizes:

Jesus.

Paul.

But not their borrowed authority.

Cross References

Mark 1:24

An unclean spirit correctly recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God.

Mark 5:7

A demonized man identified Jesus as Son of the Most High God.

James 2:19

Even demons believe that God exists and tremble.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Knowing Jesus' name is not the same as knowing Jesus.

XVI. THE EXORCISTS ARE OVERPOWERED

Acts 19:16

“Then the man with the evil spirit jumped on them, overpowered them, and beat them so badly that they ran out of the house naked and wounded.”

Their counterfeit ministry collapses.

Cross References

Mark 5:4

The demonized man among the tombs possessed extraordinary physical strength.

Luke 8:29

Demonic oppression could produce violent manifestations.

Mark 9:26

An evil spirit violently convulsed a boy before leaving him.

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual warfare is not entertainment, performance, or experimentation.

XVII. JESUS’ NAME IS HONORED

Acts 19:17

“This became known to everyone in Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. Fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.”

The counterfeit fails.

Jesus is honored.

Cross References

Acts 5:5

Fear fell upon people after God’s holiness was revealed in the early church.

Acts 5:11

Great fear came upon the church and those who heard about God’s judgment.

Luke 1:65

Awe spread throughout a region when people witnessed God's unusual activity.

Spiritual Principle

God can use the exposure of counterfeit spirituality to magnify the true authority of Jesus Christ.

XVIII. BELIEVERS CONFESS THEIR SINS

Acts 19:18

“Many who believed came and openly confessed their sins.”

Revival becomes personal.

Cross References

James 5:16

Believers are told to confess sins appropriately and pray for one another.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive and cleanse us.

Proverbs 28:13

Those who hide sin do not prosper, but those who confess and forsake it find mercy.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Revival that produces excitement without confession is incomplete revival.

XIX. THE MAGIC BOOKS ARE BURNED

Acts 19:19

“A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them in public. The value of the books totaled about fifty thousand silver coins.”

This is costly repentance.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 18:10

God strictly forbade sorcery, divination, and occult practices.

Leviticus 20:6

God warned against turning to mediums and spiritists.

Galatians 5:20

Sorcery is included among works of the sinful nature that are contrary to life in God's kingdom.

Important Truth

They do not sell the books.

They burn them.

Why?

Because selling them would:

Pass the spiritual poison to someone else.

And profit from what they now know is wrong.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“True Repentance Is Willing to Lose Money Rather Than Keep Profiting From Sin.”

XX. THE WORD PREVAILS

Acts 19:20

“In this way, the word of the Lord spread powerfully and prevailed.”

This is the theological summary.

Not:

Paul prevailed.

Not:

The miracles prevailed.

Not:

The crowd prevailed.

The Word prevailed.

Cross References

Acts 6:7

The Word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied.

Acts 12:24

The Word of God continued growing and spreading despite persecution.

Colossians 1:6

The gospel bears fruit and grows wherever it is received.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“When the Word Prevails, Idols Fall, Sin Is Confessed, and Lives Change.”

XXI. PAUL LOOKS TOWARD ROME

Acts 19:21

“After these events, Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia, then go to Jerusalem. He said, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’”

Paul’s vision expands.

Cross References

Romans 15:25

Paul later explained his intention to travel to Jerusalem.

Romans 15:28

Paul also planned to travel farther west after completing his ministry responsibilities.

Acts 23:11

The Lord later confirmed that Paul would testify in Rome.

Spiritual Principle

God often gives His servants a burden for the next mission before the present assignment is fully complete.

XXII. TIMOTHY AND ERASTUS ARE SENT AHEAD

Acts 19:22

“He sent Timothy and Erastus ahead to Macedonia, but he stayed in Asia for a while.”

Again:

Mission is teamwork.

Cross References

Romans 16:23

Erastus later appears as a city official associated with Paul’s ministry network.

2 Timothy 4:20

Paul later mentions Erastus remaining in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 4:17

Timothy frequently served as Paul’s trusted representative to churches.

Spiritual Principle

Effective ministry multiplies responsibility through trusted coworkers.

XXIII. A MAJOR DISTURBANCE OVER “THE WAY”

Acts 19:23

“About that time, there was a major disturbance concerning ‘the Way.’”

The gospel has become impossible to ignore.

Cross References

Acts 9:2

The earliest Christians were known as followers of “the Way.”

2 Corinthians 1:8

Paul later described severe hardship experienced in the province of Asia.

Acts 19:9

Opponents had already publicly spoken against “the Way.”

Spiritual Principle

When the gospel begins changing deeply established practices, social resistance may intensify.

XXIV. DEMETRIUS MAKES SILVER SHRINES

Acts 19:24

“A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of the goddess Artemis, provided much work for the craftsmen.”

Idolatry has become an industry.

Cross References

Isaiah 44:10

Scripture asks what benefit comes from making a god or casting an idol that cannot truly help.

Isaiah 46:6

People pour out silver and gold so craftsmen can manufacture an object they later worship.

Acts 19:27

Demetrius will soon admit that the reputation and economic value of his trade are threatened.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

False worship often survives not only because people believe it, but because someone profits from it.

XXV. “OUR WEALTH COMES FROM THIS BUSINESS”

Acts 19:25

“He gathered them together with others in the trade and said, ‘Men, you know our wealth comes from this business.’”

Demetrius begins with:

Money.

Cross References

Revelation 18:17

Scripture warns how quickly great wealth connected with corrupt systems can collapse.

1 Timothy 6:10

The love of money becomes a root from which many kinds of evil grow.

Acts 16:19

The owners of the slave girl in Philippi also became angry when the gospel destroyed their profitable exploitation.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When profit depends upon sin, repentance becomes an economic threat.

XXVI. THE GOSPEL IS CHANGING THE REGION

Acts 19:26

“You see and hear that Paul has persuaded and led astray a large number of people here in Ephesus and throughout Asia, saying that gods made by human hands are not gods at all.”

Demetrius unintentionally testifies to Paul’s effectiveness.

A large number of people have changed.

Cross References

Acts 17:29

Paul had already declared that God cannot be represented by gold, silver, or stone shaped by human skill.

Isaiah 44:9

Those who make idols are involved with objects that cannot truly see or save.

Psalms 115:4

Idols are made of silver and gold by human hands.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel does not merely add Jesus to a shelf of existing idols; it calls people to abandon false gods.

XXVII. MONEY, RELIGION, AND CULTURAL PRIDE

Acts 19:27

“Not only is our trade in danger of losing its good name, but the temple of the great goddess Diana will be discredited. Her majesty, worshiped all over Asia and the world, will be robbed of her glory.”

Demetrius appeals to three things.

Economic Interest

“Our trade.”

Religious Loyalty

“The temple.”

Cultural Pride

“Her majesty.”

Cross References

Acts 19:24

Demetrius himself profited from manufacturing religious objects.

1 Corinthians 8:4

Paul taught that idols have no true divine existence.

Isaiah 46:1

Isaiah mocked false gods that must themselves be carried rather than carrying their worshipers.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Error becomes especially difficult to challenge when money, religion, and cultural identity are all tied together.

XXVIII. “GREAT IS DIANA”

Acts 19:28

“When they heard this, they were furious and shouted, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians!’”

Emotion replaces reasoning.

Cross References

Acts 19:34

The crowd will continue the same chant for about two hours.

Acts 21:36

Another mob later shouted against Paul in Jerusalem.

Acts 22:22

Crowds later again responded emotionally and violently to Paul’s testimony.

Spiritual Principle

A louder voice does not make a false belief true.

XXIX. THE WHOLE CITY IS IN UPROAR

Acts 19:29

“Soon the whole city was in an uproar. They seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one into the theater.”

Paul’s coworkers become targets.

Cross References

Acts 20:4

Aristarchus later continued traveling with Paul.

Colossians 4:10

Paul later referred to Aristarchus as a fellow prisoner and ministry companion.

Philemon 1:24

Aristarchus remained counted among Paul's coworkers.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful partnership sometimes means sharing the danger as well as the ministry.

XXX. PAUL WANTS TO ADDRESS THE CROWD

Acts 19:30

“Paul wanted to go in and address the crowd, but the disciples would not let him.”

Paul is courageous.

But his friends restrain him.

Cross References

Acts 19:31

Even friendly regional officials urged Paul not to enter the theater.

2 Corinthians 1:8

Paul later described the severe pressure he endured in Asia.

Acts 14:5

Paul had previously faced violent plots requiring wise withdrawal.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Courage needs wisdom; bravery does not require unnecessary exposure to danger.

XXXI. OFFICIALS WARN PAUL

Acts 19:31

“Even some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent word urging him not to venture into the theater.”

Paul had developed relationships beyond the church.

Cross References

Acts 19:30

The disciples were already urging Paul not to enter.

Romans 16:23

Paul’s wider circle included people holding civic positions.

2 Corinthians 1:8

The danger in Asia had become severe.

Spiritual Principle

God may use believers and unbelievers alike to provide wise protection.

XXXII. THE CROWD DOES NOT KNOW WHY IT IS THERE

Acts 19:32

“The assembly was in confusion: some shouted one thing, some another. Most of the people didn’t even know why they were there.”

This may be one of Scripture’s best descriptions of mob behavior.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 14:33

God is not the author of confusion but of peace.

Acts 21:34

Another mob later shouted conflicting accusations so authorities could not determine what had happened.

Acts 17:5

Mobs had previously been assembled through manipulation.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Never Let a Crowd Do Your Thinking for You.”

Most did not even know:

Why they were angry.

Why they were shouting.

Why they were there.

XXXIII. ALEXANDER ATTEMPTS A DEFENSE

Acts 19:33

“The Jews pushed Alexander forward, and he tried to make a defense before the crowd.”

Alexander attempts to separate the Jewish community from Paul’s Christian mission.

Cross References

Acts 19:34

The crowd refuses to hear him once they recognize his Jewish identity.

1 Timothy 1:20

Paul later mentions a man named Alexander in another context.

2 Timothy 4:14

Paul later refers to Alexander the metalworker, though Scripture does not clearly establish that these are the same man.

Spiritual Principle

Crowd prejudice can prevent even reasonable explanation from being heard.

XXXIV. TWO HOURS OF CHANTING

Acts 19:34

“But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians!’”

Two hours.

One slogan.

Cross References

Acts 19:28

The chant had begun when Demetrius stirred the craftsmen.

1 Kings 18:26

The prophets of Baal once cried repeatedly to their false god for hours without receiving an answer.

Acts 21:36

Another emotionally charged crowd later shouted violently against Paul.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Repetition can intensify emotion, but it cannot create truth.

XXXV. THE CITY CLERK QUIETS THE CROWD

Acts 19:35

“Finally, the city clerk quieted the crowd and said: ‘People of Ephesus, everyone knows that this city is the guardian of the temple of the great Diana and of her image that fell from heaven.’”

The clerk does not share Paul’s theology.

But he brings order.

Cross References

Isaiah 44:9

Scripture declares that idols made by human hands are ultimately worthless.

Jeremiah 10:3

Pagan religious customs involving crafted idols are empty.

Acts 19:24

The temple and image of Diana were central to Ephesian economic and religious life.

Spiritual Principle

God can use a person who does not share Christian faith to restrain disorder.

XXXVI. “DO NOT DO ANYTHING RASH”

Acts 19:36

“Since these facts are undeniable, you must be calm and not do anything rash.”

The clerk appeals for calm.

Cross References

James 1:19

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer can turn away anger, while harsh words stir it up.

Ecclesiastes 5:2

People should not speak rashly or hastily.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom slows down when emotion demands immediate reaction.

XXXVII. THE CHRISTIANS ARE NOT TEMPLE ROBBERS

Acts 19:37

“You have brought these men here who are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess.”

This is important.

Paul preached against idols.

But his ministry was not based on:

Looting temples.

Vandalizing shrines.

Physical attacks.

Cross References

Romans 2:22

Paul condemned hypocrisy concerning idolatry and sacred objects.

Acts 18:14

Roman authorities had previously recognized that Paul was not being accused of ordinary criminal wrongdoing.

Acts 25:8

Paul later defended himself as having committed no crime against Jewish law, temple, or Caesar.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Christian response to false religion is gospel truth, not mob violence.

XXXVIII. USE THE COURTS

Acts 19:38

“If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a complaint, the courts are open and there are officials. They can press charges there.”

The clerk calls for lawful process.

Cross References

Acts 19:24

Demetrius was the craftsman who initiated the disturbance.

Acts 18:12

Paul had previously appeared in a legitimate Roman court.

Deuteronomy 19:15

Biblical justice requires proper evidence rather than accusation alone.

Spiritual Principle

Grievances should be handled through orderly justice rather than mob intimidation.

XXXIX. OTHER ISSUES REQUIRE A LEGAL ASSEMBLY

Acts 19:39

“If you want to bring up other issues, they must be settled in a legal assembly.”

Again:

Order.

Procedure.

Law.

Cross References

Acts 15:2

The church itself had previously addressed controversy through orderly discussion.

Exodus 18:22

Moses established an organized process for resolving disputes.

Deuteronomy 17:8

Difficult legal matters were to be handled through recognized judicial procedures.

Spiritual Principle

Orderly processes protect people from the injustice of raw emotion.

XL. THE CITY RISKS BEING CHARGED WITH RIOTING

Acts 19:40

“We are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today’s events. There is no reason for this uproar, and we cannot justify it.”

The crowd itself has become legally vulnerable.

Cross References

Acts 17:6

Christians had previously been accused of disturbing cities, even though their opponents often created the actual unrest.

Acts 21:31

Mob violence later again threatened public order.

Acts 24:5

Paul was repeatedly accused of creating trouble, though the evidence frequently pointed elsewhere.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Those who accuse Christians of causing disorder may themselves become the source of disorder.

XLI. THE ASSEMBLY IS DISMISSED

Acts 19:41

“After he said this, he dismissed the assembly.”

The riot ends.

The gospel remains.

Cross References

Acts 23:10

Roman intervention later rescued Paul from another violent crowd.

1 Corinthians 14:33

God values peace and order rather than confusion.

Acts 17:33

Paul had previously left another public gathering after faithfully delivering the message.

Spiritual Principle

Crowds disperse; God's Word continues.

XLII. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND COMPLETE CHRISTIAN FAITH

The opening verses deserve careful attention.

These men knew:

John's baptism.

But John himself taught that people must look beyond him toward Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A faith that stops at preparation without arriving at Jesus remains incomplete.

The Christian gospel includes:

Jesus' identity.

Jesus' death.

Jesus' resurrection.

Faith in Jesus.

The Holy Spirit.

XLIII. WHAT ACTS 19 TEACHES ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Spirit is not merely:

An influence.

An emotion.

A spiritual atmosphere.

The Holy Spirit is involved personally in:

Calling.

Empowering.

Witness.

Prophecy.

Mission.

Spiritual Principle

Christian life and mission cannot be reduced to human religious effort; believers depend upon the Holy Spirit.

XLIV. THE POWER OF DAILY TEACHING

Paul taught:

Daily.

For two years.

The result:

An entire region heard the Word.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Consistent Teaching Can Produce Influence Far Beyond the Room Where It Begins.”

Do not underestimate:

One class.

One church.

One Bible study.

One daily teaching ministry.

God can multiply truth outward.

XLV. MIRACLES MUST REMAIN GOD-CENTERED

Luke says:

“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul.”

That wording protects the truth.

Not:

Paul possessed magical power.

But:

God acted through Paul.

Spiritual Principle

A true miracle should increase confidence in God, not create a cult around the human instrument.

XLVI. JESUS' NAME IS NOT A FORMULA

The sons of Sceva tried:

“Jesus whom Paul preaches.”

Their relationship was secondhand.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“You Cannot Live on Someone Else's Relationship With Jesus.”

Not:

Your pastor's Jesus.

Your parents' Jesus.

Your church's Jesus.

Your favorite teacher's Jesus.

You must personally know Christ.

XLVII. SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY CANNOT BE IMITATED

The seven sons copied:

Words.

Technique.

Vocabulary.

But they lacked:

Relationship.

Calling.

Authority.

Spiritual Principle

External imitation cannot reproduce genuine spiritual authority.

XLVIII. FEAR AND HONOR FOLLOW

When counterfeit spirituality collapses:

People begin taking Jesus seriously.

Spiritual Principle

The holiness of God becomes clearer when people stop treating spiritual things casually.

XLIX. CONFESSION AND REVIVAL

Many believers confess their practices.

This shows revival entering hidden places.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Revival Becomes Real When Sin Stops Being Protected.”

People stop hiding.

Stop excusing.

Stop defending.

They confess.

L. BURNING THE BOOKS

The believers' repentance costs them financially.

Fifty thousand silver coins represented enormous value.

Spiritual Principle

What Christ becomes worth to us changes what we are willing to lose.

LI. WHY THEY DID NOT SELL THE OCCULT MATERIAL

Selling would have transferred the temptation.

Destroying it ended its usefulness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Repentance should not turn yesterday's sin into tomorrow's business opportunity.

LII. THE WORD PREVAILS OVER MAGIC

Ephesus was known for occult practices.

Yet Luke says:

The Word prevailed.

Spiritual Principle

Dark spiritual systems may appear deeply rooted, but they are not stronger than the truth of Jesus Christ.

LIII. WHEN REVIVAL AFFECTS THE ECONOMY

Demetrius realizes:

People changing beliefs means people changing purchases.

Fewer idol worshipers.

Fewer silver shrines.

Less money.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Real revival eventually affects how people spend money because conversion changes what they value.

LIV. THE GOSPEL THREATENS PROFITABLE SIN

This happened in Acts 16.

It happens again in Acts 19.

Philippi

A slave girl's exploitation ends.

Ephesus

The idol industry is threatened.

Spiritual Principle

When sin becomes economically profitable, gospel transformation may face organized resistance.

LV. DEMETRIUS' TRUE CONCERN

He speaks about:

Diana's glory.

But begins with:

“Our wealth.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

People sometimes disguise economic self-interest in religious language.

LVI. THE CROWD DOES NOT KNOW WHY IT IS THERE

Acts 19:32 is a timeless warning.

Most people:

Did not know why they were there.

Yet they shouted.

Spiritual Principle

Never borrow your outrage from a crowd whose facts you have not examined.

LVII. TWO HOURS DOES NOT MAKE IT TRUE

The crowd shouts:

“Great is Diana.”

For two hours.

Yet:

Diana remains an idol.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Error repeated loudly and repeatedly remains error.

LVIII. PAUL'S COURAGE NEEDED RESTRAINT

Paul wanted to enter the theater.

Others stopped him.

Spiritual Principle

Not every dangerous opportunity is a divine assignment.

Courage asks:

What does God require?

Recklessness asks:

What can I prove?

LIX. THE CITY CLERK AND COMMON GRACE

The clerk does not preach Christ.

Yet he:

Calms the mob.

Calls for legal process.

Stops violence.

Spiritual Principle

God can preserve order through civil institutions even when their leaders do not share Christian faith.

LX. WHAT ACTS 19 TEACHES ABOUT CHRISTIAN PUBLIC WITNESS

The clerk says the Christians were not:

Temple robbers.

Blasphemous criminals.

Their influence came through:

Teaching.

Persuasion.

Conversion.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The church changes culture most faithfully by changing hearts through truth rather than forcing change through violence.

LXI. THE GREAT CONTRAST OF ACTS 19

Look at the competing powers.

Magic Books

Burned.

False Exorcists

Humiliated.

Idols

Threatened.

Business Interests

Alarmed.

The Crowd

Confused.

The Word of the Lord

Prevails.

“Everything Built Against Truth Eventually Meets Something Stronger Than Itself—the Word of God.”

LXII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 19

1. Incomplete Understanding Needs Fuller Truth

Principle:

Sincerity must keep moving toward complete understanding of Jesus Christ.

2. The Holy Spirit Empowers God’s People

Principle:

Christian witness depends upon divine power rather than human ability alone.

3. God Performs Miracles

Principle:

Spiritual power belongs to God, not magical objects or human personalities.

4. Jesus’ Name Must Never Be Used Casually

Principle:

The name of Christ is authority, not superstition.

5. Genuine Repentance Produces Separation From Sin

Principle:

Believers burned what belonged to their former occult life.

6. Gospel Transformation May Threaten Profitable Systems

Principle:

When people stop worshiping idols, industries built on idolatry begin to suffer.

7. God's Word Prevails

Principle:

Neither occult power, economic opposition, cultural pride, nor public chaos can stop the Word of the Lord.

LXIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who did Paul meet when he arrived in Ephesus?

He met about twelve disciples whose understanding was incomplete because they knew only John's baptism.

Question 2

What did Paul explain to them about John's baptism?

John's baptism was connected with repentance and preparation.

John pointed people toward the One coming after him:

Jesus Christ.

Question 3

What happened after they heard the fuller message?

They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul laid hands on them.

The Holy Spirit came upon them.

They spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Question 4

How long did Paul teach in the lecture hall of Tyrannus?

He taught there daily for two years.

Through that ministry, the Word spread throughout the region of Asia.

Question 5

Who performed the extraordinary miracles?

God did.

Paul was the servant through whom God chose to work.

Question 6

What mistake did the sons of Sceva make?

They attempted to use Jesus' name as a spiritual formula without possessing genuine relationship and authority in Christ.

Question 7

What happened after the sons of Sceva were defeated?

Fear spread throughout Ephesus.

The name of Jesus was honored.

Believers confessed their sins.

People involved in sorcery destroyed their occult materials.

Question 8

Why did believers burn their sorcery books instead of selling them?

Their repentance was genuine.

They did not want to continue spreading or profiting from practices they now understood were sinful.

Question 9

What was the result of this repentance?

“The word of the Lord spread powerfully and prevailed.”

Question 10

Why did Demetrius oppose Paul?

Paul’s preaching was persuading people that handmade idols were not real gods.

This threatened Demetrius’ profitable silver-shrine business.

Question 11

What happened during the riot?

A huge confused crowd entered the theater.

Many people did not even know why they were there.

For about two hours they shouted:

“Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

Question 12

What is the central lesson of Acts 19?

The gospel of Jesus Christ has power to expose incomplete faith, overcome counterfeit spirituality, produce costly repentance, transform culture, and continue prevailing despite organized opposition.

LXIV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 19 asks several serious questions.

Is My Understanding of Christ Complete?

The twelve men needed fuller truth.

Am I Depending Upon the Holy Spirit?

Christian ministry cannot rest only on human effort.

Do I Treat Jesus' Name Reverently?

The sons of Sceva did not.

Do I Have a Personal Relationship With Christ?

Borrowed religion is insufficient.

Is There Anything From My Old Life I Need to Abandon Completely?

The Ephesian believers burned their occult books.

Am I Protecting Sin Because It Has Financial Value?

Demetrius did.

Does My Faith Affect How I Spend Money?

Real repentance does.

Do I Think for Myself Biblically When Crowds Become Emotional?

Many Ephesians did not even know why they were gathered.

Am I Courageous Without Becoming Reckless?

Paul needed others to restrain him.

Do I Believe God's Word Can Prevail Where Darkness Looks deeply established?

Acts 19 says:

Yes.

LXV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“You Cannot Borrow Someone Else’s Jesus”

The sons of Sceva said:

“Jesus whom Paul preaches.”

They knew the name.

But they did not know the Lord.

Principle

Christianity is not secondhand spirituality. Every person must personally respond to Jesus Christ.

LXVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“True Repentance Burns the Bridge Back to the Old Life”

The believers could have:

Stored the books.

Hidden the books.

Sold the books.

But they burned them.

Principle

When something belongs to a life of rebellion against God, genuine repentance stops making provision for returning to it.

LXVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“When Jesus Changes Hearts, He Changes Markets”

Demetrius understood something many churches forget.

If enough people truly follow Jesus:

Their habits change.

Their spending changes.

Their entertainment changes.

Their worship changes.

Their values change.

Principle

A transformed heart eventually produces transformed choices.

LXVIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Let the Crowd Do Your Thinking”

Most of the people in the theater:

Did not know why they were there.

Yet:

They shouted.

Principle

Biblical discernment requires facts, truth, and wisdom before outrage.

LXIX. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Word of the Lord Is Stronger Than the Culture Surrounding It”

Ephesus had:

Occultism.

Idolatry.

Economic power.

Religious tradition.

Public enthusiasm.

Yet:

The Word prevailed.

Principle

Never measure the power of the gospel by the strength of the culture opposing it.

LXX. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 19 begins with twelve men who need fuller understanding.

It ends with an entire city shaken by the impact of the gospel.

Between those two points:

The Holy Spirit comes.

Paul teaches.

The Word spreads.

Miracles occur.

Counterfeit spirituality is exposed.

Jesus' name is honored.

Sin is confessed.

Magic books burn.

Profits are threatened.

Idol makers panic.

A city riots.

And through everything:

The Word of the Lord prevails.

That is the great message of Acts 19.

The gospel does not merely produce religious feelings.

It produces:

Changed beliefs.

Changed practices.

Changed spending.

Changed loyalties.

Changed worship.

Changed lives.

The believers in Ephesus did not say:

We will follow Jesus and keep our occult practices privately.

Instead:

They confessed.

They burned the books.

They accepted the financial loss.

That is repentance.

The sons of Sceva teach the opposite lesson.

They wanted:

Jesus' authority.

Without:

Jesus Himself.

They wanted:

The power.

Without:

The relationship.

They wanted:

The name.

Without:

The Lord.

And it failed catastrophically.

Christianity cannot be reduced to:

Religious vocabulary.

Techniques.

Formulas.

Objects.

Celebrity preachers.

Borrowed spirituality.

We must know:

Jesus Christ.

Acts 19 also exposes the power of financial interest.

Demetrius does not primarily begin by saying:

We love Diana.

He says:

Our wealth comes from this business.

The gospel threatened his wallet.

Then suddenly:

Religious outrage.

Cultural outrage.

Public outrage.

A mob forms.

Many people join without knowing why.

This is a warning.

Crowds can be manipulated.

Religious language can hide financial motives.

Cultural pride can disguise personal interest.

But none of it defeats the gospel.

The chapter does not end:

Great is Diana.

It has already given the true verdict:

“The word of the Lord spread powerfully and prevailed.”

Therefore:

Know Jesus personally.

Depend upon the Holy Spirit.

Study and teach the Word consistently.

Do not imitate spiritual power.

Reject occult practices.

Confess sin.

Destroy what continually pulls you back toward rebellion.

Do not profit from what dishonors God.

Think carefully when crowds become emotional.

Use courage with wisdom.

Trust God when culture resists.

And remember:

Idols rise.

Industries change.

Crowds shout.

Riots end.

But:

The Word of the Lord prevails.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 19.

Thank You for the power of Your Word.

Give us complete understanding of Jesus Christ.

Keep us from incomplete religion that stops short of Him.

Fill us with Your Holy Spirit.

Give us courage to speak Your truth.

Give us endurance to teach Your Word faithfully.

Thank You that miracles and spiritual power belong to You.

Keep us from turning spiritual things into formulas, merchandise, superstition, or human glory.

Teach us to honor the name of Jesus.

Protect us from counterfeit spirituality.

Keep us far from occult practices.

If there is anything in our lives that belongs to darkness, give us courage to remove it completely.

Teach us genuine repentance.

Help us confess sin rather than hide it.

Help us forsake what dishonors You.

Give us willingness to accept financial loss rather than profit from sin.

Protect our hearts from loving money more than truth.

Give us discernment when public outrage rises.

Help us think biblically rather than follow crowds blindly.

Give us courage like Paul.

But also give us wisdom to know when not to step into unnecessary danger.

Thank You that no idol is stronger than You.

No false religion is stronger than You.

No occult power is stronger than You.

No business interest is stronger than You.

No crowd is stronger than You.

No city is beyond Your reach.

Let Your Word spread.

Let Your Word grow.

Let Your Word prevail.

And let the name of the Lord Jesus be honored.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“In this way, the word of the Lord spread powerfully and prevailed.” — Acts 19:20

Central Truth

The gospel of Jesus Christ exposes incomplete and counterfeit spirituality, brings the Holy Spirit's transforming work, produces genuine repentance that abandons sin, challenges profitable idolatry, and continues prevailing despite cultural, economic, and public opposition.

Acts 19 in One Sentence

Paul's extended ministry in Ephesus brings fuller understanding of Christ, the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, extraordinary miracles, the exposure of counterfeit exorcists, costly repentance from sorcery, and such widespread transformation that the idolatrous economy reacts with a riot—yet through it all the Word of the Lord spreads powerfully and prevails.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 20 — Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 20 is one of the most personal, pastoral, and emotionally powerful chapters in the book of Acts.

The chapter begins after the riot in Ephesus.

Paul continues traveling through:

Macedonia.

Greece.

Troas.

Assos.

Mitylene.

Samos.

Miletus.

Along the way, he continues doing what has marked his ministry throughout Acts:

Encouraging believers.

Teaching the Word.

Strengthening churches.

Preparing leaders.

In Troas, the believers gather on the first day of the week to break bread.

Paul speaks late into the night.

A young man named Eutychus falls asleep in a window and falls from the third floor.

Luke says:

He was picked up dead.

Paul goes down, embraces him, and announces:

“Don’t be alarmed. He’s alive!”

The young man is restored, and the church is greatly encouraged.

But the heart of Acts 20 begins when Paul reaches Miletus.

He sends for the elders of the church in Ephesus.

There he gives them a farewell address unlike anything else recorded in Acts.

Paul does not merely tell them what to believe.

He reminds them:

How he lived.

He served:

With humility.

With tears.

Through trials.

He taught:

Publicly.

From house to house.

He proclaimed:

Repentance toward God.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He tells them he is going to Jerusalem even though the Holy Spirit has warned him that:

Prison.

Hardships.

Suffering.

Await him.

Yet Paul says:

“I don’t count my life as precious to myself.”

His goal is:

“To finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus gave me.”

That task is:

“Testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”

Then Paul turns directly to the elders.

He tells them:

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock.”

This establishes a foundational truth about pastoral ministry.

A shepherd must first watch:

Himself.

Then:

The flock.

The church does not belong to the pastor.

It belongs to:

God.

And Paul says God purchased the church:

“With His own blood.”

Paul warns that:

Savage wolves will come.

False teachers will arise.

Some will even come from within the church.

They will distort truth.

They will gather followers around themselves.

Therefore:

“Be on guard!”

Then Paul does something deeply important.

He cannot remain with them forever.

So he entrusts them to:

God.

And:

The Word of His grace.

Paul finishes by reminding them that he did not serve for money.

He worked with his own hands.

He helped the weak.

Then he quotes words of Jesus preserved here by Luke:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

The chapter ends with tears.

Paul kneels.

They pray.

They embrace him.

They weep.

They accompany him to the ship.

Acts 20 therefore gives us one of Scripture’s clearest pictures of:

Faithful Christian leadership.

Pastoral responsibility.

Sacrificial ministry.

Doctrinal vigilance.

Courage under suffering.

Generosity.

And finishing well.

The central truth of Acts 20 is:

Faithful Christian ministry serves with humility, teaches the whole counsel of God, calls people to repentance and faith in Christ, guards the church against spiritual danger, values the gospel above personal safety, and finishes the God-given race with sacrificial love.

I. PAUL LEAVES EPHESUS

Acts 20:1

“When the uproar in Ephesus was over, Paul called the disciples together, encouraged them, and said goodbye. Then he left for Macedonia.”

Paul does not leave without strengthening the believers.

Cross References

Acts 19:23

A major disturbance had arisen in Ephesus concerning the Way.

2 Corinthians 1:8

Paul later described severe affliction in Asia that placed enormous pressure upon him.

2 Corinthians 2:13

Paul’s concern for fellow believers deeply affected his missionary travels.

Spiritual Principle

A faithful servant thinks about strengthening others even while personally carrying the wounds of conflict.

II. PAUL ENCOURAGES BELIEVERS THROUGHOUT THE REGION

Acts 20:2

“As he traveled through those regions, he encouraged the believers with many words and came to Greece.”

Encouragement is not incidental to Paul's ministry.

It is constant.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 2:13

Paul's travels through Macedonia were connected with concern for the churches.

2 Corinthians 7:5

Paul later described conflict on the outside and fears within during his time in Macedonia.

Romans 15:26

The believers in Macedonia and Achaia participated in helping needy believers in Jerusalem.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian encouragement is not shallow optimism; it strengthens believers to remain faithful in difficult circumstances.

III. ANOTHER PLOT AGAINST PAUL

Acts 20:3

“He stayed there three months. When the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.”

Paul again changes plans because of danger.

Cross References

Acts 20:19

Paul later reminds the Ephesian elders about the trials he endured through plots against him.

2 Corinthians 11:26

Paul described repeated dangers from enemies throughout his travels.

Acts 9:23

Even early in Paul's ministry, enemies plotted to kill him.

Spiritual Principle

Changing plans because of danger can be wisdom rather than fear.

IV. PAUL TRAVELS WITH A TEAM

Acts 20:4

“Several men traveled with him: Sopater from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius from Derbe; Timothy; and from Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.”

Again we see ministry partnership.

Cross References

Ephesians 6:21

Tychicus later became a beloved brother and faithful servant who carried ministry news.

Colossians 4:7

Paul called Tychicus a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.

2 Timothy 4:12

Paul later sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy ministry develops coworkers rather than building everything around one person.

V. THE TEAM WAITS AT TROAS

Acts 20:5

“These men went ahead and waited for us at Troas.”

Luke again uses:

“Us.”

He is traveling with Paul.

Cross References

Acts 16:10

Luke had earlier joined Paul's missionary company as indicated by the "we" language.

Acts 20:4

Paul's team represented believers from several regions.

2 Corinthians 2:13

Troas had previously been an important location in Paul's travels.

Spiritual Principle

The book of Acts repeatedly shows gospel ministry carried forward through teams, not isolated personalities.

VI. THEY ARRIVE IN TROAS

Acts 20:6

"After the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we sailed from Philippi and joined them in Troas five days later, where we stayed for a week."

Luke gives precise travel details.

Cross References

Exodus 12:15

The Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

Acts 12:3

Luke previously used the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a chronological marker.

1 Corinthians 5:8

Paul later used the imagery of unleavened bread to teach about sincerity and truth.

Spiritual Principle

God's redemptive mission unfolds within real history, geography, travel, and time.

VII. THE CHURCH GATHERS ON THE FIRST DAY

Acts 20:7

“On the first day of the week, the believers gathered to break bread. Paul spoke to them, and because he planned to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight.”

The church gathers on:

The first day of the week.

Breaking Bread

Fellowship and likely the Lord’s Supper.

Teaching

Paul speaks extensively.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 16:2

Paul instructed believers to set aside offerings on the first day of every week.

Acts 2:42

The early church devoted itself to apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer.

Luke 24:35

The risen Jesus was recognized by disciples in connection with breaking bread.

Spiritual Principle

The gathered church should center upon fellowship, remembrance of Christ, and the teaching of God’s Word.

VIII. MANY LAMPS IN THE ROOM

Acts 20:8

“There were many lamps in the upstairs room where they were meeting.”

Luke gives another eyewitness detail.

Cross References

Acts 1:13

Believers had previously gathered in an upstairs room for prayer and fellowship.

Mark 14:15

Jesus and His disciples also used an upper room for an important gathering.

Acts 12:12

Early believers often met in homes.

Spiritual Principle

God often does significant spiritual work in ordinary rooms filled with ordinary believers.

IX. EUTYCHUS FALLS FROM THE WINDOW

Acts 20:9

“A young man named Eutychus was sitting in a window. He sank into a deep sleep as Paul went on speaking, and he fell from the third floor and was picked up dead.”

The event is sudden and tragic.

Cross References

1 Kings 17:17

Elijah encountered a widow whose son died unexpectedly.

2 Kings 4:20

Elisha also faced the death of a child in the home of a faithful woman.

Luke 8:42

Jesus repeatedly entered situations where death and deep grief confronted families.

Important Truth

Luke, a physician, describes Eutychus as:

Dead.

This is not merely fainting.

Spiritual Principle

Unexpected tragedy can interrupt even a deeply spiritual gathering.

X. EUTYCHUS IS RESTORED

Acts 20:10

“Paul went down, threw himself on him, and put his arms around him. He said, ‘Don’t be alarmed. He’s alive!’”

God intervenes.

Cross References

1 Kings 17:21

Elijah stretched himself over the dead child and cried out to God for life to return.

2 Kings 4:34

Elisha similarly embraced the dead child while seeking God’s restoring power.

Mark 5:41

Jesus took Jairus’ daughter by the hand and called her back to life.

Spiritual Principle

Life belongs to God, and death itself remains under His authority.

XI. FELLOWSHIP CONTINUES UNTIL DAWN

Acts 20:11

“Then Paul went back upstairs, broke bread, ate, and talked with them until dawn. Then he left.”

The church returns to fellowship.

Cross References

Acts 2:42

Breaking bread was central to early Christian fellowship.

Acts 20:7

The believers had gathered for teaching and breaking bread.

1 Corinthians 10:16

The shared cup and bread represent fellowship in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

God's restoring grace strengthens fellowship rather than merely producing amazement.

XII. THE BELIEVERS ARE GREATLY ENCOURAGED

Acts 20:12

"The young man was taken home alive, and everyone was greatly encouraged."

Naturally:

They rejoice.

Cross References

Luke 7:15

Jesus restored a widow's son to life and returned him to his mother.

John 11:44

Lazarus came from the tomb alive after Jesus called him.

Acts 9:41

Peter presented Tabitha alive after God restored her.

Spiritual Principle

God's works should strengthen faith and encourage His people.

XIII. PAUL WALKS TO ASSOS

Acts 20:13

“We went on ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, where we planned to pick up Paul. He had arranged this, because he wanted to travel there on foot.”

Paul chooses to walk while the others sail.

Cross References

Acts 20:5

The team regularly coordinated travel arrangements.

Acts 21:1

Luke continues giving detailed travel accounts.

Acts 27:2

Paul’s later journey toward Rome would also include detailed navigation.

Spiritual Principle

Even great missionaries lived through ordinary schedules, walking, sailing, planning, and travel.

XIV. PAUL REJOINS THE TEAM

Acts 20:14

“When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene.”

The journey continues.

Cross References

Acts 20:15

The team proceeds through several coastal locations.

Acts 21:1

Their travel continues toward Jerusalem.

Acts 27:2

Luke frequently records Paul’s sea journeys carefully.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness is often built through thousands of ordinary steps between dramatic moments.

XV. THE JOURNEY CONTINUES TO MILETUS

Acts 20:15

“The next day we sailed past Chios, then to Samos, stayed at Trogyllium, and the following day reached Miletus.”

Luke documents the route carefully.

Cross References

Acts 20:16

Miletus becomes the setting for Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders.

Acts 21:1

The journey later continues toward Jerusalem.

Acts 27:3

Luke consistently preserves geographic detail.

Spiritual Principle

God’s sovereignty works through ordinary geography as well as extraordinary miracles.

XVI. PAUL HURRIES TOWARD JERUSALEM

Acts 20:16

“Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so he wouldn’t spend too much time in Asia, because he was hurrying to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by Pentecost.”

Paul has priorities.

He knows stopping in Ephesus could delay him.

Cross References

Acts 18:21

Paul's travels had previously been influenced by his desire to reach Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 16:8

Paul had earlier planned to remain in Ephesus for a particular season.

Acts 24:17

Paul later explains that he came to Jerusalem carrying aid and offerings.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful ministry sometimes requires saying no to a good opportunity in order to complete a greater responsibility.

XVII. PAUL CALLS THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

Acts 20:17

"From Miletus, Paul sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus."

Paul wants one final meeting with these leaders.

Cross References

Titus 1:5

Paul later instructed Titus to appoint elders in every town.

1 Peter 5:1

Peter addressed elders as fellow shepherds responsible for God's flock.

Acts 14:23

Paul and Barnabas had previously appointed elders in the churches.

Spiritual Principle

Local churches need recognized, spiritually responsible leadership.

XVIII. PAUL POINTS TO HIS LIFE

Acts 20:18

“When they arrived, he said: ‘You know how I lived the whole time I was with you from the first day I came to Asia.’”

Paul begins not with:

His title.

But:

His life.

Cross References

1 Thessalonians 2:10

Paul reminded believers that they had witnessed his holy, righteous, and blameless conduct.

2 Corinthians 1:12

Paul testified that he had lived with sincerity and godly integrity.

1 Thessalonians 1:5

The Thessalonians knew what kind of men Paul and his coworkers had been among them.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A leader’s life should support the message coming from his mouth.

XIX. HUMILITY, TEARS, AND TRIALS

Acts 20:19

“I served the Lord with humility, tears, and trials caused by the plots of the Jews.”

This is Paul’s description of ministry.

Not:

Celebrity.

Prestige.

Comfort.

Humility

Tears

Trials

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:23

Paul described imprisonments, beatings, dangers, and hardships.

Philippians 3:18

Paul wrote with tears concerning people living as enemies of Christ's cross.

Acts 20:31

Paul reminds the elders that he warned people night and day with tears.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

True ministry is not measured by how impressive the servant appears but by how faithfully he serves through humility, tears, and trials.

XX. PAUL HELD NOTHING HELPFUL BACK

Acts 20:20

"I did not hold back anything helpful, but taught you publicly and from house to house."

Paul's teaching was:

Public.

Personal.

Comprehensive.

Cross References

Acts 5:42

The early believers taught publicly and from house to house.

Ezekiel 3:18

A watchman is responsible to give necessary warning.

Acts 20:27

Paul soon says that he proclaimed the whole will of God.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful ministry does not hide necessary truth because that truth may be uncomfortable.

XXI. REPENTANCE AND FAITH

Acts 20:21

“I declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and believe in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is a concise gospel summary.

Repentance Toward God

A changed mind and direction concerning sin and God.

Faith in Jesus Christ

Trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation.

Cross References

Mark 1:15

Jesus proclaimed that people should repent and believe the good news.

Acts 26:20

Paul later described preaching repentance and turning to God with lives demonstrating that change.

Romans 10:9

Salvation is connected with confessing Jesus as Lord and believing in His resurrection.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Gospel Calls Us to Turn From Sin and Trust in Christ.”

XXII. PAUL IS COMPELLED TOWARD JERUSALEM

Acts 20:22

“Now I am compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.”

Paul does not know every detail.

But he knows the direction.

Cross References

Acts 19:21

Paul had already resolved in the Spirit to go toward Jerusalem.

Acts 21:4

Believers later expressed serious concern because of the suffering awaiting Paul.

Acts 21:11

Agabus would prophetically warn that Paul would be bound.

Spiritual Principle

God may reveal the direction without revealing every detail of the journey.

XXIII. PRISON AND HARDSHIP WAIT

Acts 20:23

“I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are waiting.”

Paul knows suffering is ahead.

Yet he continues.

Cross References

Acts 9:16

Jesus had said from the beginning that Paul would suffer for His name.

Acts 21:11

Agabus later gave a specific warning about Paul's coming imprisonment.

2 Corinthians 11:23

Paul had already experienced many imprisonments and hardships.

Spiritual Principle

Knowing hardship is coming does not always mean God is telling us to avoid it.

XXIV. "I MUST FINISH THE RACE"

Acts 20:24

"But I don't count my life as precious to myself. My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus gave me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

This is one of Paul's greatest statements.

The Race

His life of service.

The Task

His God-given calling.

The Message

The gospel of grace.

Cross References

2 Timothy 4:7

Near the end of his life Paul said he had fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith.

Philippians 3:14

Paul pressed toward the goal for the heavenly calling of God in Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:24

Paul compared Christian discipline to running a race with purpose.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Goal Is Not Merely to Start Well but to Finish the Race God Gave You.”

XXV. A FINAL FAREWELL

Acts 20:25

“I know that none of you among whom I have preached the kingdom will ever see me again.”

Paul understands the seriousness of this meeting.

Cross References

Acts 20:38

This statement causes the elders profound grief.

Colossians 1:28

Paul’s ministry centered on proclaiming Christ and bringing believers toward maturity.

Acts 19:8

Paul had preached the kingdom boldly in Ephesus.

Spiritual Principle

Awareness that time is limited should make ministry more faithful, not less meaningful.

XXVI. INNOCENT OF THE BLOOD OF ALL

Acts 20:26

“Therefore I declare today that I am innocent of the blood of all.”

Paul uses watchman imagery.

Cross References

Ezekiel 3:18

A watchman who refuses to warn bears responsibility for failing to speak.

Ezekiel 33:6

The watchman must sound the warning when danger approaches.

Acts 18:6

Paul had earlier declared himself innocent after faithfully warning those who rejected the gospel.

Spiritual Principle

The servant cannot force belief, but he must faithfully deliver the message.

XXVII. THE WHOLE WILL OF GOD

Acts 20:27

“I did not hesitate to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”

Paul did not preach only:

Comfort.

Encouragement.

Popular themes.

He preached:

The whole counsel.

Cross References**Ezekiel 3:17**

The watchman must faithfully deliver God’s message.

2 Timothy 4:2

Ministers are commanded to preach the Word faithfully in favorable and unfavorable circumstances.

Acts 20:20

Paul had already said he held back nothing that was spiritually helpful.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“A Faithful Pulpit Does Not Only Preach What People Want to Hear; It Preaches What God Has Said.”

XXVIII. WATCH YOURSELF AND THE FLOCK

Acts 20:28

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock the Holy Spirit has made you overseers of. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.”

This is one of the strongest pastoral verses in Scripture.

First:

Watch yourselves.

Before guarding others:

Guard your own heart.

Doctrine.

Conduct.

Then:

Watch the flock.

The congregation matters.

The Holy Spirit Made Them Overseers

Leadership is sacred stewardship.

The Church Belongs to God

Not the pastor.

Not the elders.

Not a family.

Not a denomination.

Purchased With Blood

The church is precious because Christ paid an immeasurable price.

Cross References

1 Peter 5:2

Elders are commanded to shepherd God's flock willingly and faithfully.

John 21:16

Jesus told Peter to shepherd and care for His sheep.

1 Timothy 4:16

Timothy was told to watch his own life and doctrine carefully.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Before a Shepherd Watches the Flock, He Must Watch Himself.”

XXIX. SAVAGE WOLVES WILL COME

Acts 20:29

“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come among you and will not spare the flock.”

Paul warns about false teachers from outside.

Cross References

Matthew 7:15

Jesus warned about false prophets who appear like sheep but inwardly are dangerous wolves.

2 Peter 2:1

Peter warned that false teachers would secretly introduce destructive teachings.

John 10:12

A hired worker abandons the sheep when the wolf comes.

Spiritual Principle

Church leaders must protect believers from doctrine that destroys rather than nourishes.

XXX. FALSE TEACHERS CAN ARISE FROM WITHIN

Acts 20:30

“Even from your own group, men will arise and distort the truth to draw away disciples after them.”

This warning is even more sobering.

Not all danger comes from outside.

Cross References

1 Timothy 4:1

Scripture warns that some will depart from the faith and follow deceptive teachings.

2 Timothy 4:3

A time comes when people gather teachers who tell them what they want to hear.

1 John 2:19

Some who depart from the fellowship reveal that they were never truly of it.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A false teacher is especially dangerous when he uses truth to build followers around himself instead of around Christ.

XXXI. “BE ON GUARD”

Acts 20:31

“So be on guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”

Paul’s warnings were:

Persistent.

Personal.

Emotional.

Cross References

Acts 19:10

Paul had invested years teaching extensively in the Ephesian region.

1 Thessalonians 2:11

Paul described himself as encouraging and instructing believers individually.

Colossians 1:28

Paul warned and taught everyone with the goal of maturity in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Pastoral warning should come from love, not from delight in conflict.

Paul warned:

With tears.

XXXII. COMMENDED TO GOD AND THE WORD OF GRACE

Acts 20:32

“Now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among those who are sanctified.”

Paul cannot remain.

But God can.

To God

Ultimate security.

To the Word of Grace

Spiritual nourishment.

It Can Build You Up

Truth strengthens.

It Gives an Inheritance

Grace reaches eternity.

Cross References

Ephesians 1:18

Paul prayed that believers would understand the hope and glorious inheritance God has prepared.

Colossians 3:24

Believers will receive an inheritance from the Lord as their true reward.

1 Peter 1:4

God has prepared an incorruptible inheritance kept in heaven.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Church’s Future Does Not Ultimately Depend Upon the Continued Presence of One Leader; It Depends Upon God and His Word.”

XXXIII. PAUL DID NOT COVET WEALTH

Acts 20:33

“I have not coveted anyone’s silver, gold, or clothing.”

Paul addresses ministry motives.

Cross References

1 Samuel 12:3

Samuel publicly asked whether he had taken anyone’s property dishonestly.

2 Corinthians 12:14

Paul emphasized that he did not seek the Corinthians’ possessions but their spiritual good.

1 Thessalonians 2:5

Paul denied using ministry as a disguise for greed.

Spiritual Principle

Money must never become the hidden master of ministry.

XXXIV. PAUL WORKED WITH HIS HANDS

Acts 20:34

“You yourselves know that these hands of mine supplied my own needs and the needs of those who were with me.”

Paul points to his hands.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:12

Paul said he labored with his own hands.

1 Thessalonians 2:9

He worked night and day to avoid unnecessarily burdening others.

2 Thessalonians 3:8

Paul worked hard rather than living irresponsibly at someone else's expense.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful ministry is willing to sacrifice personal comfort for the spiritual good of others.

XXXV. “MORE BLESSED TO GIVE”

Acts 20:35

“In everything I showed you that by working hard like this we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

This saying of Jesus is not recorded in the four Gospels.

Acts preserves it for us.

Cross References

Ephesians 4:28

Believers should work honestly so they have something to share with those in need.

Luke 6:38

Jesus taught generosity and giving toward others.

2 Corinthians 9:7

God loves cheerful, willing giving rather than forced generosity.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Biblical Prosperity Is Not Measured by How Much You Can Collect but by How Much Good You Can Do With What God Gives You.”

XXXVI. PAUL KNEELS AND PRAYS

Acts 20:36

“When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.”

The farewell ends with prayer.

Cross References

Acts 21:5

Paul later knelt in prayer with believers before another departure.

Ephesians 3:14

Paul described bowing his knees before the Father in prayer.

Acts 9:40

Peter knelt and prayed before God’s powerful intervention.

Spiritual Principle

The proper conclusion to serious spiritual responsibility is dependence upon God in prayer.

XXXVII. THEY WEEP AND EMBRACE PAUL

Acts 20:37

“They all wept and embraced him, kissing him.”

This is not cold institutional leadership.

They love Paul.

Cross References

Genesis 45:14

Joseph and his brother Benjamin embraced and wept together.

Genesis 33:4

Esau and Jacob embraced and wept during their reunion.

Luke 15:20

The father of the prodigal son embraced him when he returned home.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy ministry creates genuine spiritual relationships, not merely organizational connections.

XXXVIII. THE FINAL GOODBYE

Acts 20:38

“What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.”

The chapter closes with:

Tears.

Love.

Farewell.

Cross References

Acts 21:1

Paul’s journey continues after this emotional separation.

1 Thessalonians 2:17

Paul spoke elsewhere about the pain of being physically separated from believers he loved.

2 Timothy 4:9

Near the end of his life Paul again expressed longing for companionship.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes faithfulness to God requires painful goodbyes.

XXXIX. WHAT ACTS 20 TEACHES ABOUT ENCOURAGEMENT

Paul repeatedly:

Encourages.

Strengthens.

Warns.

Teaches.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian leadership does not merely point out what is wrong; it strengthens believers to continue doing what is right.

XL. WHAT EUTYCHUS TEACHES US

Eutychus' story is unusual.

But the emphasis is not:

Paul preached too long.

The emphasis is:

God restored life.

Spiritual Principle

God can turn a moment of tragedy into a testimony of encouragement.

XLI. WHAT ACTS 20 TEACHES ABOUT LEADERSHIP

Paul's farewell describes the character of spiritual leadership.

Humility

Tears

Endurance

Teaching

Warning

Hard Work

Generosity

Courage

Faithfulness

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical leadership is less about being above people and more about giving yourself for people.

XLII. THE LEADER’S LIFE MATTERS

Paul says:

“You know how I lived.”

Spiritual Principle

A ministry cannot remain healthy indefinitely when public teaching and private living contradict each other.

Character matters.

XLIII. PUBLIC AND HOUSE-TO-HOUSE MINISTRY

Paul taught:

Publicly.

Privately.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Healthy ministry needs both the pulpit and personal relationships.

Public teaching reaches many.

Personal ministry reaches specific needs.

XLIV. REPENTANCE AND FAITH BELONG TOGETHER

Paul preached:

Repentance toward God.

Faith in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical conversion turns from sin toward God and rests upon Jesus Christ for salvation.

XLV. SUFFERING DID NOT CONTROL PAUL

Paul knew:

Prison was coming.

Hardship was coming.

Yet:

He continued.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Do Not Let the Cost of Obedience Become Greater in Your Mind Than the Value of Your Calling.”

XLVI. FINISH THE RACE

Paul does not say:

I want the easiest race.

He says:

I want to finish.

Spiritual Principle

The Christian life should be evaluated at the finish line, not merely at the starting line.

Many start enthusiastically.

Faithfulness means continuing.

XLVII. THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

Paul defines his mission as:

“Testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The center of Christian ministry is not self-improvement but the announcement of God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ.

XLVIII. THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

Paul did not select only comfortable doctrines.

Grace

Repentance

Judgment

Salvation

Holiness

Church leadership

False teaching

Sacrifice

Eternal inheritance

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A balanced church needs the whole Bible, not merely a collection of favorite themes.

XLIX. WATCH YOURSELF FIRST

Paul tells the elders:

“Keep watch over yourselves.”

Before:

Your congregation.

Your critics.

Your ministry.

Your numbers.

Yourself.

Spiritual Principle

One of the greatest dangers to a ministry can be the unchecked heart of the minister himself.

L. THE FLOCK BELONGS TO GOD

Paul calls it:

“The church of God.”

Pastors are:

Shepherds.

Not owners.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Pastor Does Not Own the Sheep; He Serves the Shepherd Who Bought Them.”

LI. THE PRICE OF THE CHURCH

Paul says the church was purchased:

With blood.

That makes every believer spiritually precious.

Spiritual Principle

Pastoral care should reflect the value Christ placed upon His people at the cross.

LII. SAVAGE WOLVES

False teaching is not presented as harmless disagreement.

Paul says:

Wolves.

Why?

Because false doctrine can:

Destroy faith.

Divide churches.

Exploit believers.

Distort Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A shepherd who refuses to protect the flock from spiritual danger is neglecting part of shepherding.

LIII. FALSE TEACHERS WANT FOLLOWERS

Acts 20:30 says they draw disciples:

“After them.”

That phrase exposes motive.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy teachers point disciples toward Christ; unhealthy teachers make disciples increasingly dependent upon themselves.

LIV. WARNING WITH TEARS

Paul warned:

Night.

Day.

Three years.

With tears.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical warning should come from a broken heart, not a proud spirit.

LV. GOD AND THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

Paul leaves the church with something greater than himself.

God

And:

God's Word

Spiritual Principle

The best leader prepares people to depend increasingly upon God rather than increasingly upon the leader.

LVI. MINISTRY AND MONEY

Paul says:

“I have not coveted.”

This is crucial.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When money becomes the purpose of ministry, ministry eventually becomes a business rather than a calling.

LVII. WORKING TO HELP THE WEAK

Paul's work was not merely self-support.

He says:

Help the weak.

Spiritual Principle

Christian labor should create capacity for generosity.

LVIII. “MORE BLESSED TO GIVE”

Jesus reverses normal human thinking.

The world asks:

How much can I get?

Jesus asks:

How much good can I do?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The richest life is not necessarily the life receiving the most but the life faithfully giving the most for God's purposes.

LIX. LEADERSHIP AND TEARS

Acts 20 contains tears repeatedly.

Paul served:

With tears.

Warned:

With tears.

The elders:

Wept.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical leadership is not emotionless professionalism; it involves loving people deeply enough that ministry affects the heart.

LX. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 20

1. Encourage Believers Continually

Principle:

Strong Christians still need encouragement.

2. Finish the Race

Principle:

Faithfulness matters more than personal comfort.

3. Preach the Whole Counsel of God

Principle:

Do not hide necessary truth.

4. Shepherd the Flock Carefully

Principle:

Church leaders must guard both themselves and the congregation.

5. Watch for False Teachers

Principle:

Spiritual danger can come from outside or inside the church.

6. Serve Without Greed

Principle:

Ministry should not be driven by money.

7. Give Generously

Principle:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

LXI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What did Paul do after the riot in Ephesus ended?

He gathered the disciples, encouraged them, said goodbye, and traveled toward Macedonia.

Question 2

What happened to Eutychus?

He fell asleep while Paul was speaking, fell from a third-story window, and was picked up dead.

God restored him to life through Paul's ministry, and the believers were greatly encouraged.

Question 3

Why did Paul call the Ephesian elders to Miletus?

He wanted to give them final pastoral instruction and prepare them for the responsibilities and dangers they would face after his departure.

Question 4

How did Paul describe his ministry among them?

He served the Lord with humility, tears, and trials.

He taught publicly and from house to house.

He held back nothing spiritually helpful.

Question 5

What gospel message did Paul preach?

He preached:

Repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question 6

What did Paul mean by wanting to finish his race?

He wanted to complete the ministry assignment Jesus had given him regardless of personal cost or suffering.

Question 7

What did Paul mean when he said he proclaimed the whole will of God?

He did not selectively teach only popular or comfortable truths.

He faithfully taught everything God's people needed to hear.

Question 8

What did Paul tell church leaders to watch first?

Themselves.

Then:

The flock.

Leaders must guard their own life and doctrine before properly protecting others.

Question 9

What danger did Paul warn would come after he left?

False teachers would enter like savage wolves, and some would even arise from within the church and distort truth.

Question 10

To whom did Paul entrust the church?

He commended them:

To God and to the Word of His grace.

Question 11

What did Paul say about money?

He said he had not coveted anyone's silver, gold, or clothing.

He had worked with his own hands and helped support others.

Question 12

What words of Jesus did Paul quote?

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

LXII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 20 asks several serious questions.

Am I Encouraging Other Believers?

Paul continually did.

Does My Life Support My Christian Testimony?

Paul could say:

"You know how I lived."

Am I Willing to Hear the Whole Counsel of God?

Or only the parts I prefer?

Have I Truly Repented and Believed in Jesus Christ?

That was Paul's message.

Am I Determined to Finish My Race?

Paul was.

Do I Value obedience above comfort?

Paul did.

If I Lead Others, am I watching myself first?

That was Paul's first instruction.

Do I recognize false teaching as dangerous?

Paul called false teachers wolves.

Am I depending upon a personality or upon God and His Word?

Paul commended the church to God.

Does money control my service?

Paul rejected greed.

Am I helping the weak?

Paul said believers should.

Do I believe it is more blessed to give than receive?

Jesus said it is.

LXIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Finish the Race God Gave You”

Paul knew prison was coming.

Yet:

He did not change his definition of success.

Success was:

Finishing.

Principle

The goal of Christian service is not to avoid every hardship but to complete faithfully what Christ has assigned.

LXIV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Watch Yourself Before You Watch Everyone Else”

Leaders can become experts at seeing:

Other people's sins.

Other people's weaknesses.

Other people's doctrine.

Paul says:

Watch yourself.

Principle

Private spiritual neglect eventually becomes public ministry danger.

LXV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Preach the Whole Bible, Not a Comfortable Bible”

Paul proclaimed:

The whole will of God.

Principle

If Scripture says it, the faithful church must be willing to teach it with truth, wisdom, and love.

LXVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Shepherd What Christ Bought”

The church cost:

The blood of Christ.

That should change how leaders treat people.

Principle

Never handle casually what Jesus purchased sacrificially.

LXVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Build a Ministry Around People Needing You Forever”

Paul left.

But he said:

“I commend you to God and to the word of His grace.”

Principle

Mature ministry equips believers to stand upon God’s truth even after the teacher is gone.

LXVIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Shepherd Must Recognize Wolves”

Love does not mean:

Ignoring error.

Refusing confrontation.

Pretending dangerous teaching is harmless.

Principle

A shepherd who loves sheep must also recognize what can destroy sheep.

LXIX. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Give More Than You Take”

Paul did not exploit the church.

He worked.

He served.

He helped the weak.

Then he quoted Jesus:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Principle

Christian leadership should leave people spiritually richer, not financially or emotionally exploited.

LXX. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 20 presents Paul approaching a major turning point.

His ministry is moving toward:

Jerusalem.

Imprisonment.

Eventually:

Rome.

He knows suffering is coming.

Yet he is not obsessed with:

Protecting himself.

Preserving comfort.

Extending his reputation.

He is concerned with:

Finishing his race.

Completing his task.

Protecting the church.

Teaching truth.

Helping the weak.

Paul could look at the Ephesian elders and say:

“You know how I lived.”

That is powerful.

His life had been visible.

His ministry had been consistent.

He served:

With humility.

With tears.

Through trials.

He taught:

Publicly.

House to house.

He preached:

Repentance toward God.

Faith in Jesus Christ.

He held back:

Nothing helpful.

He declared:

The whole counsel of God.

That is a model for every pastor, teacher, preacher, elder, missionary, and Christian leader.

The goal is not merely:

To have a ministry.

The goal is:

To be faithful.

Acts 20 also gives a serious warning.

The church will face wolves.

Some come from outside.

Some arise from within.

They distort truth.

Why?

To draw disciples:

After themselves.

That is always dangerous.

The faithful teacher says:

Follow Christ.

The false teacher increasingly says:

You need me.

Paul therefore points the elders beyond himself.

He says:

I am leaving.

But:

God remains.

The Word remains.

Grace remains.

That is why the church can survive the departure of any human leader.

Then Paul speaks about money.

He had not coveted:

Silver.

Gold.

Clothing.

He worked.

He helped others.

He helped the weak.

And he remembered Jesus' words:

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Acts 20 therefore asks every Christian:

What am I living for?

Comfort?

Safety?

Money?

Recognition?

Or:

The assignment Christ has given me?

Paul's answer was clear:

“My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus gave me.”

That is finishing well.

There will be:

Hardship.

Tears.

Opposition.

Goodbyes.

False teachers.

Weakness.

But:

The race is still worth running.

The task is still worth completing.

The gospel is still worth proclaiming.

The flock is still worth shepherding.

The weak are still worth helping.

And Christ is still worth following.

Therefore:

Serve humbly.

Teach faithfully.

Repent genuinely.

Believe in Christ.

Watch yourself.

Guard the flock.

Recognize wolves.

Refuse greed.

Help the weak.

Give generously.

And:

Finish your race.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 20.

Thank You for the example of Paul.

Give us humility in service.

Give us compassion that can weep.

Give us strength to endure trials.

Help us teach truth publicly and personally.

Keep us from holding back anything Your people need to hear.

Give us courage to proclaim:

Repentance toward God.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Help us value our calling more than our comfort.

When hardship comes:

Keep us faithful.

When suffering is ahead:

Keep us obedient.

Give us Paul's determination:

To finish the race.

Help pastors and elders watch themselves carefully.

Protect their hearts.

Protect their doctrine.

Protect their families.

Protect their churches.

Give them wisdom to recognize wolves.

Give them courage to confront dangerous teaching.

But let every warning come with:

Truth.

Love.

Humility.

And tears.

Thank You that the church ultimately belongs to You.

Thank You that Christ purchased His people at an immeasurable price.

Help every shepherd remember:

The sheep are Yours.

Keep ministry free from greed.

Keep money from becoming our master.

Give us hardworking hands.

Generous hearts.

Compassion for the weak.

Teach us to live by Jesus' words:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

And when our season of service comes to an end:

May we be able to say:

We fought the good fight.

We finished the race.

We kept the faith.

May our lives point people toward:

You.

Your grace.

Your Word.

And Your Son.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But I don’t count my life as precious to myself. My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus gave me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” — Acts 20:24

Central Truth

Faithful Christian ministry serves with humility and sacrifice, proclaims repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, teaches the whole counsel of God, guards the church against false teaching, refuses greed, helps the weak, and values finishing Christ’s assignment above personal safety or comfort.

Acts 20 in One Sentence

Paul strengthens believers throughout Macedonia and Greece, witnesses God restore Eutychus at Troas, and then gives the Ephesian elders a deeply personal farewell in which he calls them to shepherd God’s blood-bought church, guard against false teachers, proclaim the whole counsel of God, serve without greed, help the weak, and faithfully finish the race entrusted to them by Jesus Christ.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 21 — Paul Arrested in Jerusalem

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 21 is a chapter about:

Obedience.

Suffering.

Prophecy.

Courage.

Christian liberty.

Religious misunderstanding.

False accusation.

Providence.

And:

Witness under pressure.

Paul is traveling toward Jerusalem.

He knows hardship awaits him.

Acts 20 already told us that the Holy Spirit had repeatedly warned Paul that:

Prison and hardships were waiting for him.

Now those warnings become increasingly specific.

Believers in Tyre urge him not to go to Jerusalem.

The prophet Agabus dramatically takes Paul's belt, binds his own hands and feet, and declares that the man who owns the belt will be bound in Jerusalem and handed over to the Gentiles.

Paul's friends begin weeping.

They beg him not to go.

But Paul answers:

“Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Eventually they say:

“The Lord's will be done.”

Paul arrives in Jerusalem and reports everything God has accomplished among the Gentiles.

The leaders rejoice.

But another problem has developed.

Thousands of Jewish believers have heard rumors that Paul teaches Jewish believers to abandon Moses completely.

The Jerusalem leaders suggest a public act that may demonstrate Paul is not hostile toward Jewish customs.

Paul agrees to participate with four men completing vows.

Yet even this attempt at peace does not prevent conflict.

Some Jews from Asia see Paul in the temple.

They make accusations.

They assume he brought a Gentile named Trophimus into the restricted temple area.

Luke specifically tells us:

They had only:

Assumed it.

The accusation spreads.

The city erupts.

Paul is dragged from the temple.

The crowd attempts to kill him.

Then something unexpected happens.

Roman soldiers arrive.

The commander arrests Paul.

Yet that arrest actually saves Paul's life.

The chains predicted by Agabus are now placed upon him.

But the Roman commander who thinks he is arresting Paul is also unknowingly preserving Paul for the next stage of God's mission.

Paul then asks for permission to speak.

The commander is surprised that he speaks Greek.

Paul identifies himself.

Then Paul stands on the steps before the hostile crowd.

The man they were trying to kill is now about to preach to them.

Acts 21 therefore teaches an extraordinary truth:

God can turn persecution into a pulpit.

The chapter begins with Paul moving toward suffering.

It ends with Paul standing before the very crowd that attacked him, ready to bear witness.

The central truth of Acts 21 is:

Faithful discipleship follows the will of God even when suffering lies ahead, seeks peace without compromising truth, remains courageous under false accusation, and trusts God to turn hostile circumstances into opportunities for witness.

I. PAUL LEAVES THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

Acts 21:1

“After saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders, we sailed straight to Cos, then to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.”

The emotional farewell of Acts 20 is over.

The journey continues.

Cross References

Acts 20:37

The Ephesian elders had wept, embraced Paul, and expressed their deep affection for him.

Acts 20:38

They were especially grieved because Paul had said they would not see his face again.

Acts 27:2

Luke later records Paul’s sea journeys in similar geographic detail.

Spiritual Principle

Painful goodbyes do not cancel God’s next assignment.

II. THEY SAIL TOWARD PHOENICIA

Acts 21:2

“We found a ship sailing to Phoenicia, so we boarded and set sail.”

Luke continues giving precise travel details.

Cross References

Acts 11:19

Believers scattered by persecution had previously carried the gospel into Phoenicia.

Acts 15:3

Paul and Barnabas had traveled through Phoenicia while reporting Gentile conversions.

Acts 27:6

Roman travel later required Paul to transfer to another ship during his journey toward Rome.

Spiritual Principle

God's providence often works through ordinary arrangements such as ships, roads, schedules, and travel plans.

III. THEY ARRIVE AT TYRE

Acts 21:3

“We passed by Cyprus, leaving it on our left, and sailed to Syria, landing at Tyre, where the ship was to unload its cargo.”

Tyre becomes another place of Christian fellowship.

Cross References

Acts 4:36

Barnabas came from Cyprus, an island connected with several stages of apostolic ministry.

Acts 11:19

The gospel had already spread into the region of Phoenicia.

Acts 15:39

Barnabas and Mark had previously sailed toward Cyprus.

Spiritual Principle

Wherever the gospel travels, it creates spiritual family in unexpected places.

IV. BELIEVERS WARN PAUL

Acts 21:4

“We found disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit, they urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem.”

This verse requires careful interpretation.

The Holy Spirit had already revealed:

Suffering awaited Paul.

The believers appear to understand the danger through the Spirit and respond by urging Paul not to continue.

Yet Paul himself remains convinced that God is leading him onward.

Cross References

Acts 20:23

Paul had already said the Holy Spirit repeatedly warned him that prison and hardships awaited him.

Acts 21:11

Agabus would soon give a specific prophetic warning that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem.

Acts 21:12

Paul's companions would also plead with him not to continue.

Important Doctrinal Note

The text clearly shows divine revelation concerning suffering.

The precise relationship between the Spirit's warning and the believers' conclusion that Paul should not go has been interpreted differently.

A careful reading allows us to distinguish:

The Spirit revealed the danger.

The believers, out of love, urged Paul to avoid it.

Paul believed his calling still required him to go.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A warning from God may prepare us for suffering without necessarily being a command to avoid suffering.

V. THE CHURCH PRAYS ON THE BEACH

Acts 21:5

“But when our time was up, we left, and all the disciples, with their wives and children, came with us to the edge of the city. There on the beach we knelt and prayed.”

What a picture.

Men.

Women.

Children.

Missionaries.

All kneeling together.

Cross References

Acts 20:36

Paul had recently knelt and prayed with the Ephesian elders.

Acts 20:38

Those believers had also accompanied Paul during their painful farewell.

Genesis 31:55

Biblical farewells often included blessing and expressions of family affection.

Spiritual Principle

Prayer should surround both departures and difficult decisions.

VI. THEY SAY GOODBYE

Acts 21:6

“After saying goodbye, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.”

The farewell is simple.

The mission continues.

Cross References

Acts 20:37

Paul had already experienced an emotional farewell with the Ephesian elders.

Acts 20:38

Christian relationships made separation painful.

Ruth 1:14

Scripture repeatedly records deep emotional farewells between people bound by love.

Spiritual Principle

Obedience sometimes requires leaving people we deeply love.

VII. PAUL GREETES BELIEVERS IN PTOLEMAIS

Acts 21:7

“From Tyre we sailed to Ptolemais, greeted the believers, and stayed one day with them.”

Even a one-day visit includes Christian fellowship.

Cross References

Acts 11:19

The gospel had already reached this broader region.

Acts 18:22

Paul regularly greeted churches during his journeys.

Acts 21:3

This stop continues the journey southward from Tyre.

Spiritual Principle

Christian fellowship does not need to be long to be meaningful.

VIII. PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

Acts 21:8

“The next day we went to Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven chosen earlier.”

Philip returns to the story.

We first saw him in Acts 6.

Then Acts 8.

Now:

Years later.

Still faithful.

Cross References

Acts 6:5

Philip had been one of the seven respected Spirit-filled servants chosen in Jerusalem.

Acts 8:40

Philip continued preaching the gospel through many towns.

Acts 8:5

Philip had powerfully proclaimed Christ in Samaria.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A strong beginning is good, but long-term faithfulness is better.

IX. PHILIP’S FOUR DAUGHTERS PROPHECY

Acts 21:9

“He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.”

Luke records their spiritual ministry without embarrassment or qualification.

Cross References

Joel 2:28

Joel foretold that in the outpouring of God's Spirit, sons and daughters would prophesy.

Acts 2:17

Peter applied Joel's prophecy to the Spirit's work beginning at Pentecost.

1 Corinthians 11:5

Paul acknowledges women praying and prophesying within the life of the early church.

Spiritual Principle

The Holy Spirit gives gifts according to His will for the strengthening of God's people.

X. AGABUS ARRIVES

Acts 21:10

"After we had been there many days, a prophet named Agabus came from Judea."

Agabus had appeared earlier in Acts.

Cross References

Acts 11:28

Agabus had previously predicted a severe famine that later occurred.

Acts 13:1

Prophets and teachers were recognized ministries in the early church.

Ephesians 4:11

Christ gave various gifted servants to equip His people.

Spiritual Principle

God may use repeated warnings to prepare His servants emotionally and spiritually for what lies ahead.

XI. AGABUS PREDICTS PAUL'S BINDING

Acts 21:11

“He took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it, and said, ‘The Holy Spirit says, “The Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and hand him over to the Gentiles.”””

Agabus uses a symbolic prophetic action.

This resembles Old Testament prophets.

Cross References

Jeremiah 13:1

Jeremiah used a belt as a prophetic symbol when God instructed him to act out a message.

Ezekiel 4:1

Ezekiel frequently communicated prophecy through symbolic actions.

Acts 20:23

The Holy Spirit had already warned Paul repeatedly of imprisonment and hardship.

Spiritual Principle

God sometimes prepares His servants for suffering before the suffering arrives.

XII. THE BELIEVERS BEG PAUL NOT TO GO

Acts 21:12

“When we heard this, we and the local believers begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem.”

Their response comes from love.

They do not want Paul hurt.

Cross References

Acts 21:4

The disciples in Tyre had expressed the same concern.

Matthew 16:22

Peter once tried to persuade Jesus away from the path of suffering.

Acts 20:37

Paul's relationships with believers were emotionally deep.

Spiritual Principle

Love naturally wants to protect people from suffering, but love must ultimately submit to God's calling.

XIII. "I AM READY TO DIE"

Acts 21:13

"But Paul answered, 'Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'"

Paul does not merely accept imprisonment.

He accepts the possibility of death.

Cross References

Acts 20:24

Paul had already said his life was not more valuable to him than finishing Christ's assignment.

2 Timothy 4:6

Near the end of his life Paul described himself as being poured out and approaching departure.

Philippians 1:21

Paul wrote that to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

"A Person Who Has Already Surrendered His Life to Christ Cannot Be Controlled by the Threat of Losing It."

XIV. “THE LORD’S WILL BE DONE”

Acts 21:14

“Since he could not be persuaded, we gave up and said, ‘The Lord’s will be done.’”

This is where faith must ultimately rest.

Cross References

Matthew 26:39

Jesus prayed in Gethsemane that the Father’s will, not His own desire for relief, would be accomplished.

Luke 22:42

Jesus submitted Himself fully to the Father’s will even in the face of suffering.

Matthew 6:10

Jesus taught His disciples to pray that God’s will be done on earth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faith is not merely asking God to bless our preferred outcome; faith is surrendering to His will even when that will is costly.

XV. PAUL GOES TO JERUSALEM

Acts 21:15

“After this, we packed up and went to Jerusalem.”

The warnings are over.

Now comes obedience.

Cross References

Luke 9:51

Jesus Himself had resolutely set His face toward Jerusalem knowing suffering awaited Him.

Acts 19:21

Paul had earlier resolved in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem.

Acts 20:22

Paul described himself as compelled toward Jerusalem despite uncertainty about what would happen.

Spiritual Principle

Eventually discernment must become action.

XVI. MNASON PROVIDES HOSPITALITY

Acts 21:16

“Some disciples from Caesarea came with us and brought us to stay with Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple.”

Mnason represents quiet faithfulness.

Cross References

Acts 4:36

Barnabas was another believer from Cyprus who became deeply involved in gospel ministry.

Acts 11:20

Believers from Cyprus helped spread the gospel among Gentiles.

Hebrews 13:2

Christians are encouraged to practice hospitality faithfully.

Spiritual Principle

Hospitality is a genuine ministry because it supports those carrying the gospel.

XVII. PAUL IS WELCOMED IN JERUSALEM

Acts 21:17

“When we arrived in Jerusalem, the believers welcomed us gladly.”

Paul enters Jerusalem surrounded by Christian welcome.

Cross References

Acts 15:4

Paul and Barnabas had previously been welcomed by the Jerusalem church.

Romans 15:31

Paul had specifically prayed that his service in Jerusalem would be acceptable to the believers.

3 John 1:8

Christians are encouraged to support faithful workers for the truth.

Spiritual Principle

Believers can rejoice together even when difficult days are approaching.

XVIII. PAUL MEETS JAMES AND THE ELDERS

Acts 21:18

“The next day, Paul went with us to see James, and all the elders were present.”

The Jerusalem leadership gathers.

Cross References

Acts 15:13

James had previously played an important leadership role at the Jerusalem Council.

Galatians 1:19

Paul identifies James as the Lord’s brother.

Acts 12:17

James had already been recognized as a significant leader in Jerusalem.

Spiritual Principle

Missionary ministry should maintain accountability and fellowship with church leadership.

XIX. PAUL REPORTS WHAT GOD DID

Acts 21:19

“Paul told them in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.”

Again:

God receives the glory.

Cross References

Acts 15:12

Paul and Barnabas had earlier reported the signs and wonders God performed among Gentiles.

Acts 14:27

They reported how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Romans 15:18

Paul refused to boast except concerning what Christ had accomplished through him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The best ministry report tells what God did through His servants rather than what His servants accomplished independently.

XX. THE LEADERS PRAISE GOD

Acts 21:20

“When they heard it, they praised God. Then they said, ‘Brother, you see how many thousands of Jews have believed, and they are all zealous for the law.’”

There is celebration.

But also complexity.

Thousands of Jewish believers remain culturally devoted to Jewish customs.

Cross References

Acts 2:41

Thousands of Jewish people had believed beginning at Pentecost.

Acts 6:7

Even many priests had become obedient to the faith.

Romans 10:2

Paul acknowledged the deep religious zeal found among many Jewish people.

Spiritual Principle

The early church contained believers from very different cultural backgrounds who needed wisdom in living together.

XXI. RUMORS ABOUT PAUL

Acts 21:21

“They have been told that you teach Jews living among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live by our customs.”

The issue is rumor.

Paul opposed circumcision as a requirement for justification.

But that is different from teaching Jewish believers that every Jewish custom is inherently sinful.

Cross References

Acts 15:1

Paul strongly opposed teachers who made circumcision necessary for salvation.

Galatians 5:2

Paul warned Gentiles against accepting circumcision as a requirement for justification.

Acts 6:13

Stephen had similarly faced distorted accusations regarding Moses and the law.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A distorted version of someone’s teaching can become more influential than what that person actually teaches.

XXII. THE PROBLEM MUST BE ADDRESSED

Acts 21:22

“What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come.”

The leaders know the rumor cannot simply be ignored.

Cross References

Acts 21:20

Thousands of Jewish believers were deeply sensitive to issues surrounding the law.

Acts 15:2

The church had previously addressed a major doctrinal controversy openly.

Acts 6:12

False or distorted accusations had previously stirred public unrest.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes misunderstanding must be addressed proactively before it grows further.

XXIII. FOUR MEN HAVE TAKEN A VOW

Acts 21:23

“Here is our advice: There are four men who have taken a vow.”

The elders propose a practical demonstration.

Cross References

Numbers 6:2

Israel’s law provided for voluntary vows involving special devotion to God.

Acts 18:18

Paul himself had previously completed a vow.

Numbers 6:13

The law described procedures for completing such vows.

Spiritual Principle

Voluntary cultural or devotional practices may be permissible when they do not become requirements for salvation.

XXIV. PAUL IS ASKED TO JOIN THEM

Acts 21:24

“Join with them in their purification rites, pay their expenses so they can shave their heads. Then everyone will know that the reports about you are false and that you yourself live in obedience to the law.”

Paul agrees to demonstrate that he is not an enemy of Jewish people or Jewish customs.

Cross References

Numbers 6:13

The completion of a vow involved prescribed ceremonial actions.

Numbers 6:18

Shaving the head formed part of the completion of certain vows.

1 Corinthians 9:20

Paul said that when ministering among Jews, he willingly adapted to Jewish customs when the gospel itself was not compromised.

Important Truth

Paul could participate in a Jewish custom.

What he could not do was teach that such customs justified sinners before God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian liberty can accommodate culture, but it must never surrender the gospel.

XXV. THE GENTILE DECISION REMAINS UNCHANGED

Acts 21:25

“As for the Gentile believers, we have written them with instructions to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality.”

The leaders reaffirm Acts 15.

Gentiles are not being placed under circumcision or the Mosaic law as conditions for salvation.

Cross References

Acts 15:20

James had recommended these practical instructions during the Jerusalem Council.

Acts 15:29

The final apostolic letter repeated the same requirements.

1 Corinthians 8:1

Paul later addressed questions about food associated with idols and Christian conscience.

Spiritual Principle

Accommodation must not become doctrinal reversal.

XXVI. PAUL PARTICIPATES IN THE PURIFICATION

Acts 21:26

“Paul agreed. The next day he purified himself along with the men and went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.”

Paul willingly participates.

Cross References

Numbers 6:13

The law prescribed procedures connected with the completion of vows.

Acts 21:24

Paul had been asked to join the men as a visible demonstration against the rumors.

Numbers 6:9

Purification regulations existed within the vow system.

Spiritual Principle

A believer may surrender personal freedom in an attempt to remove unnecessary misunderstanding.

XXVII. PAUL IS SEIZED

Acts 21:27

“When the seven days were almost over, some Jews from Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the crowd and seized him.”

Ironically:

Paul is attempting peace.

Yet conflict erupts anyway.

Cross References

Acts 21:11

Agabus had predicted that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem.

Acts 20:19

Paul had repeatedly experienced plots from hostile opponents.

Acts 24:18

Paul later explains that he had been ceremonially purified when his accusers found him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Doing everything reasonably possible to avoid unnecessary offense does not guarantee that opposition will disappear.

XXVIII. FALSE ACCUSATIONS ERUPT

Acts 21:28

“Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this temple. And now he has even brought Greeks into the temple, defiling this holy place.”

The accusations are sweeping.

Against the People

Against the Law

Against the Temple

Then:

A claim that Paul brought Gentiles into a forbidden area.

Cross References

Acts 6:13

Stephen had faced remarkably similar accusations concerning the law and temple.

Acts 24:5

Paul would later be accused of being a troublemaker throughout the world.

Acts 24:6

His enemies would repeat charges involving supposed desecration of the temple.

Spiritual Principle

False accusations often sound strongest when they combine fear, religion, and exaggeration.

XXIX. THEY ONLY ASSUMED

Acts 21:29

“They had seen Trophimus the Ephesian with Paul earlier in the city and assumed Paul had brought him into the temple.”

This verse exposes the weakness of the accusation.

They:

Saw Trophimus with Paul.

Then:

Assumed something else happened.

Cross References

Acts 20:4

Trophimus had been one of Paul's traveling companions.

2 Timothy 4:20

Paul later mentions Trophimus as a known coworker.

Ephesians 2:14

Paul's gospel emphasized Christ breaking down hostility between Jew and Gentile.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Never Turn an Assumption Into an Accusation.”

Seeing one fact does not prove another.

XXX. THE CITY ERUPTS

Acts 21:30

“The whole city was in an uproar. People came running from all directions, seized Paul, dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the gates were shut.”

Jerusalem now resembles Ephesus.

A mob takes control.

Cross References

Acts 16:19

Paul and Silas had previously been dragged before authorities in Philippi.

Acts 19:29

The Ephesian crowd had seized Paul's companions during another riot.

Luke 4:29

A hostile crowd once attempted to kill Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Religious emotion without truth can become violently destructive.

XXXI. THE MOB TRIES TO KILL PAUL

Acts 21:31

“While they were trying to kill him, news reached the Roman commander that all Jerusalem was in chaos.”

The situation has reached attempted murder.

Cross References

Acts 21:11

The prophetic warning of coming arrest is now unfolding.

Acts 23:27

The Roman commander later explains how he intervened and rescued Paul.

Acts 22:24

Paul would soon be taken into Roman custody.

Spiritual Principle

God can use an institution that does not serve Him spiritually to preserve the life of His servant.

XXXII. ROMAN SOLDIERS STOP THE BEATING

Acts 21:32

“At once he took soldiers and centurions and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.”

The arrival of Rome stops the immediate violence.

Cross References

Acts 16:22

Paul had previously suffered under civil authority in Philippi.

Acts 21:27

The mob had seized him in the temple.

2 Corinthians 11:23

Paul had endured repeated beatings and imprisonments.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The same government that may imprison a believer can also become the means God uses to protect him.

XXXIII. PAUL IS BOUND WITH TWO CHAINS

Acts 21:33

“The commander arrested Paul, ordered him bound with two chains, and asked who he was and what he had done.”

Agabus’ prophecy is visibly fulfilled.

Cross References

Acts 21:11

Agabus had symbolically shown that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem.

Acts 22:24

The Roman commander continues questioning Paul.

Acts 26:29

Paul later stands as a prisoner while continuing to proclaim Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Prophecy prepared Paul for the chains but did not prevent the chains.

XXXIV. CONFUSION PREVENTS THE TRUTH FROM BEING KNOWN

Acts 21:34

“Some shouted one thing, others another. Since the commander could not learn the truth in the uproar, he ordered Paul taken into the fortress.”

This resembles Acts 19.

Cross References

Acts 19:32

During the Ephesian riot, different people shouted different things and many did not know why they were there.

Acts 22:24

The commander later continues trying to determine why the crowd is so violently opposed to Paul.

Acts 23:10

Another violent dispute later requires Roman intervention.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Truth is often one of the first casualties when crowds are ruled by emotion.

XXXV. PAUL IS CARRIED BY SOLDIERS

Acts 21:35

“As Paul was being carried up the steps by the soldiers, the crowd kept pressing.”

The hostility is so intense that soldiers must physically carry Paul.

Cross References

Acts 21:32

Roman soldiers had intervened to stop the beating.

Acts 22:22

The crowd's hostility would continue even after Paul began his defense.

Acts 23:10

Paul would later require another military rescue from violent conflict.

Spiritual Principle

God's servant may be physically weak and surrounded yet still remain within God's purpose.

XXXVI. "AWAY WITH HIM!"

Acts 21:36

"Shouting, 'Away with him!'"

The wording echoes the rejection of Jesus.

Cross References

Luke 23:18

The crowd cried for Jesus to be taken away while demanding another prisoner's release.

John 19:15

Jesus' enemies shouted for Him to be crucified.

Acts 22:22

Paul would soon hear the same demand repeated.

Spiritual Principle

Servants of Christ should not be surprised when they experience rejection similar in spirit to what their Lord endured.

XXXVII. PAUL ASKS TO SPEAK

Acts 21:37

"As they were about to take Paul into the fortress, he asked the commander, 'May I say something to you?' The commander replied, 'Do you speak Greek?'"

Paul has just been:

Dragged.

Beaten.

Nearly killed.

Yet:

He wants to speak.

Cross References

Acts 22:1

Paul will soon begin a formal defense before the crowd.

Acts 26:1

Paul later again speaks in his own defense before political authorities.

Acts 24:10

Paul repeatedly uses legal opportunities as opportunities for testimony.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A gospel-centered believer looks for an opportunity to witness even while recovering from the attack.

XXXVIII. THE COMMANDER HAS THE WRONG MAN

Acts 21:38

“Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists into the desert some time ago?”

The commander has misidentified Paul.

Another assumption.

Cross References

Acts 5:36

Gamaliel had previously referred to political revolutionaries who gathered followers.

Acts 5:37

Judas the Galilean was another figure connected with rebellion.

Matthew 24:24

Jesus warned that false leaders and deceptive figures would arise.

Spiritual Principle

A person can be judged by an identity that was never his in the first place.

XXXIX. PAUL IDENTIFIES HIMSELF

Acts 21:39

“Paul answered, ‘I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city. Please let me speak to the people.’”

Paul calmly corrects the mistake.

Then asks:

Let me speak.

Cross References

Acts 9:11

Paul’s connection with Tarsus had been known since the beginning of his Christian story.

Acts 22:3

Paul will soon explain his Jewish background more fully.

Philippians 3:5

Paul elsewhere describes his strong Jewish heritage.

Spiritual Principle

Calm truth can be more powerful than emotional defensiveness.

XL. PAUL STANDS BEFORE THE CROWD

Acts 21:40

“The commander agreed. Paul stood on the steps and motioned for the crowd to be silent. When they grew quiet, he spoke to them in Hebrew.”

What a scene.

Minutes earlier:

They were trying to kill him.

Now:

They are listening to him.

Cross References

Acts 12:17

Speakers in Acts often motioned for silence before addressing a crowd.

Acts 13:16

Paul had previously signaled before delivering a major public message.

Acts 22:2

The crowd became even quieter when Paul addressed them in their own language.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“God Can Turn the Steps of a Fortress Into a Pulpit.”

Paul’s chains do not silence him.

They position him.

XLI. WHAT ACTS 21 TEACHES ABOUT SUFFERING

Paul knew suffering was ahead.

Yet he continued.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The presence of hardship does not automatically mean the absence of God’s will.

Sometimes:

Obedience avoids suffering.

Other times:

Obedience leads directly through it.

XLII. WARNING IS NOT ALWAYS ESCAPE INSTRUCTIONS

Paul receives repeated warnings.

But the warnings prepare him rather than redirect him.

Spiritual Principle

God may tell us what is coming so that when it comes, our faith will not collapse.

XLIII. “READY TO DIE”

Paul’s courage did not begin in Jerusalem.

It had been settled earlier.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Decision to Be Faithful Must Be Made Before the Crisis Arrives.”

If obedience is decided only after danger appears:

Fear may decide for us.

XLIV. THE LORD’S WILL ABOVE OUR FEELINGS

The believers loved Paul.

They wept.

They begged.

Finally:

“The Lord’s will be done.”

Spiritual Principle

Love must ultimately release people into God’s will rather than attempt to control them through our fear.

XLV. PHILIP'S LONG-TERM FAITHFULNESS

Years earlier Philip:

Served tables.

Preached in Samaria.

Witnessed to the Ethiopian.

Now:

He is still serving.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithfulness is not measured by one dramatic season but by continuing with Christ through many seasons.

XLVI. PAUL REPORTS GOD'S WORK, NOT HIS OWN GREATNESS

Paul arrives and tells what:

God had done.

Spiritual Principle

A ministry report should produce worship of God rather than admiration of the minister.

The Jerusalem leaders respond:

They praised God.

XLVII. UNITY AMONG DIFFERENT CHRISTIAN CULTURES

Jewish believers retained many Jewish customs.

Gentile believers did not have to become Jews.

The challenge was:

How do both live together in Christ?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian unity does not require every believer to have identical cultural practices; it requires shared loyalty to the same gospel and Lord.

XLVIII. PAUL'S PURIFICATION AND CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Paul participates in Jewish purification customs.

Why?

Not to earn salvation.

Not because Christ was insufficient.

But:

To remove unnecessary offense.

Spiritual Principle

Christian freedom includes the freedom to surrender a preference for the sake of peace when truth is not compromised.

XLIX. ACCOMMODATION HAS LIMITS

Paul could participate in a vow.

But Acts 15 had already established:

Gentiles did not need circumcision to be saved.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

We may bend on preference, culture, and personal liberty—but never on the gospel itself.

L. FALSE RUMORS CAN BE POWERFUL

Paul's actual teaching was complicated.

The rumor was simple:

He hates:

Moses.

Jews.

The law.

The temple.

Spiritual Principle

Falsehood often travels faster because it removes nuance and replaces it with accusation.

LI. ASSUMPTION BECOMES ACCUSATION

Acts 21:29 is especially important.

They:

Saw Paul with Trophimus.

Then:

Assumed Trophimus entered the temple.

Then:

Accused Paul publicly.

Then:

A mob tried to kill him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“An Unchecked Assumption Can Become a Destructive Accusation.”

Before accusing someone:

Know the facts.

LII. RELIGIOUS ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

The crowd is passionate.

But passion is not enough.

Spiritual Principle

Zeal without truth can become dangerous.

Religious people can sincerely believe they are defending God while actually attacking His servant.

LIII. GOD USES ROME TO SAVE PAUL

The Roman commander does not understand the gospel.

He does not know Paul.

Yet:

His soldiers save Paul from murder.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's providence is not limited to people who knowingly serve Him.

God can use:

Officials.

Governments.

Laws.

Circumstances.

Even enemies.

LIV. THE ARREST BECOMES PROTECTION

Paul is arrested.

At first that appears negative.

But the arrest saves his life.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes what looks like confinement is actually protection.

Paul's chains will eventually carry him toward:

Governors.

Kings.

Rome.

LV. THE PROPHECY COMES TRUE

Agabus said:

Paul would be bound.

Now:

Two chains.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When God prepares us beforehand, fulfilled warning should strengthen our confidence rather than weaken it.

LVI. PAUL'S MISSION CONTINUES IN CHAINS

Paul's freedom decreases.

His witness does not.

Spiritual Principle

God's mission is not dependent upon ideal circumstances.

A prison can become a mission field.

A courtroom can become a pulpit.

Chains can become an introduction to rulers.

LVII. PAUL WANTS TO SPEAK TO HIS ATTACKERS

This is remarkable.

Paul does not say:

Get me away from these people.

He says:

“Please let me speak to the people.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“A Gospel Heart Can Still Desire the Salvation of People Who Have Just Tried to Destroy It.”

LVIII. THE POWER OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL CONNECTION

Paul addresses the people in their own language.

That earns attention.

Spiritual Principle

The message must never change, but wise messengers communicate it in ways their audience can understand.

LIX. THE HOSTILE CROWD BECOMES AN AUDIENCE

Paul goes from:

Victim.

To prisoner.

To speaker.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never decide too quickly that a hostile circumstance cannot become a gospel opportunity.

LX. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 21

1. God May Lead Through Suffering

Principle:

Hardship does not automatically mean we missed God's will.

2. Prophecy Can Prepare Believers

Principle:

God may warn His people so they are spiritually ready for what lies ahead.

3. The Lord's Will Must Come First

Principle:

Faith ultimately says, "The Lord's will be done."

4. Christian Liberty Should Promote Peace

Principle:

Believers may surrender personal freedoms to remove unnecessary offense without compromising truth.

5. Assumptions Can Destroy

Principle:

Never convert suspicion into certainty without evidence.

6. God Rules Over Hostile Circumstances

Principle:

The Roman arrest that bound Paul also protected Paul.

7. Persecution Can Become a Platform

Principle:

Paul's attackers became his audience.

LXI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why was Paul determined to go to Jerusalem even though suffering was predicted?

Paul believed he was being led to Jerusalem and had already surrendered his personal safety to the calling of Christ.

He was prepared for imprisonment and even death.

Question 2

What did Agabus prophesy?

He used Paul's belt to demonstrate that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem and handed over to Gentile authorities.

Question 3

How did Paul respond when believers begged him not to go?

He said:

"I am ready not only to be bound, but to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Question 4

What did the believers finally say?

They submitted the matter to God and said:

“The Lord’s will be done.”

Question 5

Who was Philip?

Philip was one of the seven men chosen in Acts 6 and had become a prominent evangelist.

Years later, Acts 21 shows him still faithfully serving Christ.

Question 6

What did Paul report to the Jerusalem leaders?

He described in detail what God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Question 7

Why did Paul participate in the purification rites?

He sought to demonstrate that reports portraying him as an enemy of Jewish customs were false.

His participation was an act of accommodation, not an attempt to earn salvation through the law.

Question 8

What accusation caused Paul’s arrest?

His opponents claimed he taught against the Jewish people, law, and temple and falsely accused him of bringing Gentiles into the temple.

Question 9

What evidence did they actually have concerning Trophimus?

They had seen Trophimus with Paul earlier in Jerusalem.

They merely assumed Paul had later taken him into the temple.

Question 10

Who saved Paul from the mob?

Roman soldiers under the commander intervened and stopped the crowd from killing him.

Question 11

How was Agabus' prophecy fulfilled?

Paul was bound with two chains and placed in Roman custody.

Question 12

What did Paul do after nearly being killed?

He asked permission to speak to the crowd.

Instead of focusing only on escape, he looked for an opportunity to bear witness.

LXII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 21 asks several searching questions.

Am I Willing to Follow God When Obedience Is Costly?

Paul was.

Do I Expect God Always to Remove Suffering?

Sometimes He prepares us to endure it.

Can I Honestly Pray:

“The Lord’s will be done”?

Am I Willing to Surrender Personal Freedom for Christian unity?

Paul did.

Do I distinguish between biblical truth and cultural preference?

Acts 21 requires that wisdom.

Do I repeat rumors without knowing the facts?

Paul suffered because people did.

Do I turn assumptions into accusations?

His enemies did.

Do I follow crowds emotionally?

The Jerusalem mob did.

Can I see God's hand even in an unwanted circumstance?

Paul's arrest actually saved his life.

Do I look for opportunities to witness under pressure?

Paul did.

LXIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Confuse God's Warning With God's Absence”

God warned Paul:

Chains are coming.

That did not mean:

God had abandoned him.

Principle

The God who tells you a storm is coming is still God when you enter the storm.

LXIV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Settle Your Loyalty Before the Chains Arrive”

Paul said:

“I am ready.”

He had already made the decision.

Principle

Conviction formed in quiet moments becomes courage in dangerous moments.

LXV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Build a Verdict on an Assumption”

They saw:

Paul with Trophimus.

They assumed:

Paul brought him into the temple.

They concluded:

Paul defiled the temple.

Then:

They tried to kill him.

Principle

One careless assumption can become a chain of destructive conclusions.

LXVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Peace Is Worth Pursuing, but Truth Is Not for Sale”

Paul made a major effort to remove misunderstanding.

But he never taught:

The law saves.

Circumcision saves.

Ceremony justifies.

Principle

Biblical peacemaking bends wherever conscience allows but stands immovable wherever the gospel requires.

LXVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Your Arrest May Become Your Assignment”

Paul’s arrest looks like the end of freedom.

But it opens a new ministry stage.

He will testify before:

The Jewish crowd.

The Sanhedrin.

Felix.

Festus.

Agrippa.

Eventually:

Rome.

Principle

God can use the circumstance you would never choose to place you before the people you could never otherwise reach.

LXVIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Waste the Platform Hidden Inside the Problem”

Paul is battered.

Bound.

Misunderstood.

Yet he says:

“Let me speak.”

Principle

A gospel-centered believer asks not only, “How do I get out of this?” but also, “How can Christ be proclaimed through this?”

LXIX. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 21 begins with:

A journey.

It ends with:

Chains.

But those chains do not represent the defeat of God’s mission.

They become part of it.

Paul had already said:

“My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus gave me.”

Now that conviction is tested.

Warnings come.

Friends weep.

Agabus prophesies.

Jerusalem waits.

Paul goes anyway.

Why?

Because Paul had reached a place of surrender.

He could say:

“I am ready not only to be bound, but to die.”

That kind of courage does not come from loving pain.

It comes from loving Christ more than personal safety.

Acts 21 also teaches us about Christian unity.

Paul was willing to participate in Jewish customs to remove unnecessary offense.

He did not need those ceremonies for salvation.

He knew Gentiles did not need them.

But he could voluntarily participate when the gospel was not compromised.

That is mature liberty.

Sometimes maturity says:

I have the right.

But:

I do not need to use that right.

Then the chapter gives a serious warning about rumors.

Paul's enemies:

Saw one thing.

Assumed another.

Accused him of a third.

And nearly killed him because of it.

How much damage begins with:

“I heard.”

“I assumed.”

“Someone told me.”

“It must be true.”

Acts 21 says:

Be careful.

Truth matters.

Evidence matters.

Facts matter.

Then:

The Roman soldiers arrive.

Paul is arrested.

At first:

That sounds bad.

But without the arrest:

The mob may have killed him.

The chains become protection.

That is providence.

God can hide deliverance inside something that looks like defeat.

Finally:

Paul stands on the steps.

Bruised.

Bound.

Surrounded by soldiers.

Facing people who wanted him dead.

And he asks:

“May I speak?”

That is Acts 21.

The man in chains is still free enough to preach.

The mob has not silenced him.

The attack has given him an audience.

The prison journey is beginning.

But so is another phase of witness.

Therefore:

Follow God when the road is difficult.

Listen when He prepares you for suffering.

Surrender your future to His will.

Seek unity.

Do not compromise truth.

Refuse gossip.

Reject careless assumptions.

Trust providence.

Remain courageous.

And when trouble gives you a platform:

Speak for Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 21.

Thank You for Paul's example of courage and surrender.

Teach us to follow You even when obedience is difficult.

When You warn us about hardship, help us prepare rather than panic.

Give us faith to say:

"The Lord's will be done."

Help us love Jesus more than comfort.

More than safety.

More than reputation.

More than life itself.

Give us wisdom concerning Christian liberty.

Help us distinguish between:

Truth and tradition.

Doctrine and culture.

Command and preference.

Give us humility to surrender personal freedoms when doing so promotes peace without compromising Your Word.

Protect us from rumors.

Protect us from gossip.

Protect us from assumptions.

Help us never accuse someone without knowing the truth.

Give us courage when misunderstood.

Give us grace when falsely accused.

Help us trust Your providence.

When circumstances look like defeat:

Remind us that You may be working through them.

When one door closes:

Show us the platform hidden inside the problem.

When we feel surrounded:

Keep us faithful.

When we are rejected:

Help us still desire the salvation of those rejecting us.

Give us Paul's heart.

After pain:

Let us still speak.

After accusation:

Let us still testify.

After chains:

Let us still proclaim Christ.

Use every circumstance for Your glory.

And may our lives say:

We are ready to follow Jesus wherever His will leads.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But Paul answered, ‘Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’” — Acts 21:13

Central Truth

Faithful discipleship follows the will of God even when suffering lies ahead, seeks peace without compromising the gospel, refuses to be ruled by rumors or fear, and trusts God to transform persecution, false accusation, and even imprisonment into opportunities to witness for Jesus Christ.

Acts 21 in One Sentence

Paul continues toward Jerusalem despite prophetic warnings of suffering, willingly accommodates Jewish customs to remove unnecessary offense without compromising the gospel, is falsely accused and nearly killed by a religious mob, but is rescued through Roman custody and turns his arrest into another opportunity to testify for Jesus Christ.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 22 — Paul’s Testimony Before the People

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 22 records one of the clearest personal testimonies in the New Testament.

Paul has just been:

Seized.

Beaten.

Dragged through the streets.

Arrested.

Bound.

Surrounded by a hostile crowd.

Yet instead of asking only for protection, he asks for an opportunity to speak.

He stands on the steps before the same people who had just tried to kill him and begins:

“Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense I now make before you.”

Paul does not begin by insulting the crowd.

He does not retaliate.

He does not accuse them.

Instead:

He tells his story.

He explains:

Who he was.

What he believed.

How strongly he opposed Christianity.

How Jesus confronted him.

How his life changed.

How God called him.

And why he now preaches to the Gentiles.

Paul’s testimony has three major movements.

First:

His life before Christ.

He had been:

Religiously trained.

Zealous.

Educated under Gamaliel.

Devoted to ancestral traditions.

Violently opposed to Christians.

Second:

His encounter with Christ.

On the road to Damascus:

A light shines from heaven.

Paul falls.

Jesus speaks.

Paul discovers the shocking truth:

The Jesus he opposed is alive.

And persecuting Christians meant persecuting:

Jesus Himself.

Third:

His calling after conversion.

Through Ananias, Paul learns that God has chosen him:

To know His will.

To see the Righteous One.

To hear His voice.

To become a witness.

Then, in Jerusalem, the Lord tells him:

“Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”

That statement triggers the crowd.

They had listened through:

Paul’s Jewish background.

His education.

His persecution of Christians.

His vision.

His conversion.

But when Paul says God sent him to the Gentiles:

The crowd explodes.

They shout:

“Away with such a man from the earth! He’s not fit to live!”

The Roman commander then orders Paul examined by flogging.

But Paul calmly asks:

“Is it lawful to scourge a Roman citizen who hasn’t been tried?”

Everything stops.

Paul's Roman citizenship becomes a means of protection.

Once again:

God uses an earthly legal status as part of His providential care.

Acts 22 therefore teaches us that:

A personal testimony can become a powerful tool for proclaiming Christ.

Religious zeal without truth can oppose God.

Jesus can transform even the fiercest enemy of the church.

Conversion leads to calling and witness.

The gospel belongs to all nations.

And:

Believers may lawfully use civil rights without compromising faith.

The central truth of Acts 22 is:

Jesus Christ can transform the most determined opponent into a faithful witness, and believers should courageously testify to His grace while trusting God to use both spiritual calling and earthly circumstances to accomplish His purposes.

I. PAUL BEGINS HIS DEFENSE

Acts 22:1

“Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense I now make before you.”

Paul addresses the crowd respectfully.

Cross References

Acts 7:2

Stephen had begun his own defense with similar respectful language toward the Jewish leaders.

Acts 24:10

Paul later gives another defense before a Roman governor.

2 Timothy 4:16

Paul later remembers standing alone during one of his legal defenses.

Spiritual Principle

Respectful speech does not require surrendering truth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A Christian witness can speak firmly without speaking disrespectfully.

II. THE CROWD BECOMES QUIET

Acts 22:2

“When they heard him speak in Hebrew, they became very quiet. He said:”

Paul speaks in the language of his audience.

Cross References

Acts 21:40

Paul had already gained permission to address the crowd from the steps.

Acts 26:14

Paul later recounts that Jesus addressed him in the Hebrew language.

Acts 21:37

The Roman commander had been surprised that Paul could speak Greek.

Spiritual Principle

Wise communication considers the audience without changing the truth.

III. PAUL DESCRIBES HIS JEWISH BACKGROUND

Acts 22:3

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but raised here in Jerusalem. I was trained at the feet of Gamaliel in the strict law of our ancestors. I was as zealous for God as any of you are today.”

Paul establishes common ground.

He understands them.

Why?

Because he once thought as they did.

Cross References

Acts 5:34

Gamaliel was a respected Pharisee and teacher of the law.

Philippians 3:5

Paul later describes his strong Jewish heritage, circumcision, and Pharisaic identity.

Galatians 1:14

Paul said he had advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries because of his intense zeal for ancestral traditions.

Spiritual Principle

Religious sincerity and religious education do not automatically guarantee spiritual truth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You can be sincerely zealous for God and still be sincerely wrong about God.

IV. PAUL PERSECUTED “THE WAY”

Acts 22:4

“I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison.”

Paul does not soften his past.

He admits it.

Cross References

Acts 8:3

Saul had entered homes, dragged out men and women, and committed believers to prison.

Acts 9:1

Saul continued breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.

Galatians 1:13

Paul later openly confessed that he had persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A true testimony does not glorify the past, but it does honestly acknowledge what Christ rescued us from.

V. PAUL HAD OFFICIAL AUTHORITY TO PERSECUTE

Acts 22:5

“The high priest and the council of elders can testify to this. I even received letters from them to the brothers in Damascus, so that I could bring believers back to Jerusalem for punishment.”

Paul’s persecution was organized.

Legal authority supported it.

Cross References

Acts 9:2

Saul requested official letters allowing him to arrest followers of the Way in Damascus.

Acts 26:10

Paul later testified that he had imprisoned many believers with authority from the chief priests.

Acts 26:12

Paul traveled to Damascus with official authority to continue persecuting Christians.

Spiritual Principle

Human authorization does not make an action righteous if it opposes God.

VI. A LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

Acts 22:6

“As I approached Damascus around noon, suddenly a bright light from heaven surrounded me.”

Paul's journey is interrupted.

Cross References

Acts 9:3

A sudden light from heaven flashed around Saul near Damascus.

Acts 26:13

Paul later described the light as brighter than the sun.

2 Corinthians 4:6

Paul later used the imagery of God shining light into darkness to describe spiritual illumination.

Spiritual Principle

God can interrupt a life moving confidently in the wrong direction.

VII. “SAUL, SAUL”

Acts 22:7

“I fell to the ground and heard a voice say, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’”

Jesus identifies Himself with His people.

Cross References

Acts 9:4

Jesus asked Saul directly why he was persecuting Him.

Acts 26:14

Paul later recounts the same confrontation.

1 Samuel 3:10

God had previously called Samuel personally by name.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

What is done against Christ's people matters deeply to Christ Himself.

VIII. “I AM JESUS”

Acts 22:8

“I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ He said, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’”

Everything changes here.

Paul believed Jesus was:

Dead.

False.

Dangerous.

Now:

Jesus speaks from heaven.

Cross References

Acts 9:5

Jesus identified Himself to Saul in exactly this confrontation.

Acts 26:15

Paul later repeats Jesus’ words before King Agrippa.

Acts 26:9

Paul admitted that he had once believed he should vigorously oppose the name of Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Conversion begins when a person’s understanding of Jesus changes.

IX. THE COMPANIONS SAW THE LIGHT

Acts 22:9

“The men with me saw the light but didn’t understand the voice speaking to me.”

Paul’s companions witnessed something extraordinary.

But the revelation was directed personally to Paul.

Cross References

Acts 9:7

Paul's companions heard the sound associated with the encounter but did not see the One speaking.

Acts 26:13

The heavenly light also shone around Paul's companions.

Daniel 10:7

Daniel's companions sensed the effects of a supernatural revelation without sharing his full experience.

Important Note

Acts 9 says Paul's companions heard a voice or sound.

Acts 22 says they did not understand the voice speaking to Paul.

The accounts are complementary:

They perceived the sound.

They did not comprehend the message given to Paul.

Spiritual Principle

Two people can stand near the same spiritual event while only one understands what God is communicating.

X. "WHAT SHALL I DO, LORD?"

Acts 22:10

"I asked, 'What shall I do, Lord?' He said, 'Get up and go into Damascus. There you will be told everything you are appointed to do.'"

Paul moves quickly from:

Who are You?

To:

What shall I do?

Cross References

Acts 9:6

Saul was instructed to enter Damascus where he would receive further direction.

Acts 26:16

Jesus later explains Paul's calling as a servant and witness.

Acts 9:15

God told Ananias that Saul was a chosen instrument for carrying Christ's name.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A genuine encounter with Christ moves from recognition to surrender.

XI. THE STRONG MAN MUST BE LED

Acts 22:11

"Since the brilliance of the light blinded me, my companions led me by the hand into Damascus."

The man who entered Damascus intending to arrest Christians now enters:

Blind.

Dependent.

Led by the hand.

Cross References

Acts 9:8

Saul rose from the ground unable to see and had to be led into Damascus.

Acts 9:9

He remained blind for three days.

2 Corinthians 12:7

Paul later learned that human weakness could keep him dependent upon God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may humble the person He intends to use greatly.

XII. ANANIAS ENTERS PAUL'S STORY

Acts 22:12

“A man named Ananias, a devout follower of the law and respected by all the Jews living there.”

Paul emphasizes Ananias' respected Jewish character.

Cross References

Acts 9:10

Ananias was a disciple living in Damascus whom the Lord called in a vision.

Acts 9:17

Ananias obeyed and went to Saul despite knowing Saul's violent reputation.

Acts 9:13

Ananias initially expressed understandable fear concerning Saul.

Spiritual Principle

God often uses ordinary obedient believers at decisive moments in another person's calling.

XIII. “BROTHER SAUL”

Acts 22:13

“He came and stood beside me. He said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ At that moment, I could see again.”

The first Christian word Saul hears from Ananias is:

Brother.

Cross References

Acts 9:17

Ananias entered the house, laid hands on Saul, and called him “Brother Saul.”

Acts 9:18

Something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he regained sight.

Acts 9:12

God had already revealed to Saul that Ananias would come to him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Grace Can Call Yesterday’s Persecutor Today’s Brother.”

XIV. GOD CHOSE PAUL

Acts 22:14

“The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know His will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear His voice.”

Paul’s calling originates with God.

Cross References

Acts 9:15

Jesus told Ananias that Saul was His chosen instrument.

Acts 26:16

Jesus appointed Paul as a servant and witness.

1 Corinthians 9:1

Paul later appealed to having seen Jesus as part of his apostolic calling.

Spiritual Principle

Calling begins with God’s choice and purpose, not human ambition.

XV. PAUL WILL BECOME A WITNESS

Acts 22:15

“You will be His witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.”

The persecutor becomes:

A witness.

Cross References

Acts 1:8

Jesus commissioned His followers to become witnesses throughout the world.

Acts 26:16

Paul's calling specifically involved witnessing to what Christ had revealed.

1 John 1:3

Apostolic witness centers upon declaring what was seen and heard concerning Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Jesus does not merely save us from something; He also calls us to testify about Someone.

XVI. “GET UP AND BE BAPTIZED”

Acts 22:16

“What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

This verse connects:

Baptism.

Cleansing.

Calling upon Christ.

Cross References

Acts 9:18

Saul regained his sight and was baptized.

Acts 2:38

Peter called hearers to repent and identify themselves with Jesus through baptism.

Romans 10:13

Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Important Doctrinal Note

The New Testament consistently teaches that forgiveness is received through faith in Christ.

The phrase:

“Calling on His name”

is central here.

Baptism visibly expresses the believer’s identification with the cleansing and salvation found in Jesus.

The water itself is not presented as having magical power to remove sin.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Baptism publicly identifies the believer with the cleansing salvation received through Jesus Christ.

XVII. PAUL RETURNS TO JERUSALEM

Acts 22:17

“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance.”

Paul emphasizes that he did not return to Jerusalem as an enemy of Jewish worship.

He was:

Praying in the temple.

Cross References

Acts 9:26

Saul returned to Jerusalem after his conversion and attempted to join the disciples.

Acts 10:10

Peter had also experienced a trance during a significant divine revelation.

2 Corinthians 12:2

Paul later referred to extraordinary visions and revelations from God.

Spiritual Principle

God can redirect a person in the very place where that person expected to serve.

XVIII. JESUS TELLS PAUL TO LEAVE JERUSALEM

Acts 22:18

“I saw the Lord saying to me, ‘Hurry! Leave Jerusalem immediately, for they will not accept your testimony about me.’”

Paul wanted Jerusalem to believe.

Jesus knew:

They would reject his testimony.

Cross References

Acts 9:29

Paul’s preaching in Jerusalem had quickly produced dangerous opposition.

Acts 9:30

Believers eventually helped Paul leave because of threats against his life.

Matthew 10:14

Jesus taught that there are times when persistent rejection requires moving elsewhere.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A rejected ministry assignment does not mean the servant has failed if God redirects him elsewhere.

XIX. PAUL ARGUES FROM HIS TESTIMONY

Acts 22:19

“I said, ‘Lord, they know I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you.’”

Paul thinks his conversion should be especially convincing.

He reasons:

They know what I was.

Surely they will believe what happened.

Cross References

Acts 8:3

Saul had violently persecuted believers.

Acts 9:1

He had been committed to threatening and destroying Christians.

Galatians 1:23

Believers later heard that the former persecutor was now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.

Spiritual Principle

A dramatic testimony can be powerful, but even the strongest testimony cannot force an unwilling heart to believe.

XX. PAUL REMEMBERS STEPHEN

Acts 22:20

“When the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving approval and guarding the clothes of those who killed him.”

Paul does not hide his darkest memory.

Cross References

Acts 7:58

Those who stoned Stephen placed their outer garments at Saul’s feet.

Acts 7:60

Stephen died praying that God would not hold the sin against his killers.

Acts 8:1

Saul approved Stephen’s execution.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Grace Is Powerful Enough to Redeem a Person From a Past He Cannot Undo.”

Paul cannot resurrect Stephen.

But Christ can transform Paul.

XXI. SENT TO THE GENTILES

Acts 22:21

“But the Lord said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

This is the turning point.

Cross References

Acts 9:15

Paul had been chosen specifically to carry Jesus’ name to Gentiles, kings, and Israel.

Acts 13:2

The Holy Spirit later set Paul and Barnabas apart for missionary work.

Galatians 2:8

Paul recognized God’s particular calling to ministry among the Gentiles.

Spiritual Principle

God’s saving purpose is larger than ethnic, cultural, and national boundaries.

XXII. THE CROWD EXPLODES

Acts 22:22

“The crowd listened until he said this. Then they shouted, ‘Away with such a man from the earth! He’s not fit to live!’”

They listened until:

Gentiles.

That reveals the heart of the conflict.

Cross References

Acts 21:36

The crowd had already shouted, “Away with him!”

Luke 23:18

A hostile crowd had used similar words when rejecting Jesus.

Acts 25:24

Paul's opponents continued demanding severe punishment later.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Religious pride becomes exposed when grace is offered to people we believe do not deserve it.

XXIII. THE CROWD ERUPTS

Acts 22:23

“They shouted, threw off their cloaks, and flung dust into the air.”

Reason disappears.

Emotion takes over.

Cross References

Acts 7:58

Stephen's attackers removed their outer clothing before stoning him.

Acts 14:19

Another crowd had previously turned violently against Paul.

Job 2:12

Throwing dust was sometimes associated with intense grief or emotional expression.

Spiritual Principle

When people refuse truth emotionally, volume often replaces reasoning.

XXIV. THE COMMANDER ORDERS FLOGGING

Acts 22:24

“The Roman commander ordered Paul taken into the fortress and examined by flogging, to find out why the crowd shouted against him.”

The commander wants information.

His method:

Torture.

Cross References

Acts 22:29

The commander will soon become alarmed when he realizes Paul is a Roman citizen.

Acts 21:34

The riot had prevented the commander from discovering the truth.

John 19:1

Jesus Himself had been flogged under Roman authority.

Spiritual Principle

Government power can be misused when speed replaces justice.

XXV. PAUL ASSERTS HIS LEGAL RIGHTS

Acts 22:25

“As they stretched him out to be flogged, Paul said to the centurion, ‘Is it lawful to scourge a Roman citizen who hasn’t been tried?’”

Paul does not simply submit to illegal punishment.

He asks a legal question.

Cross References

Acts 16:37

Paul had previously invoked Roman citizenship after unlawful treatment in Philippi.

Acts 25:16

Roman legal tradition recognized the right of an accused person to answer charges.

Acts 23:27

The commander later specifically mentions Paul's Roman citizenship.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian submission to authority does not require surrendering lawful protections against injustice.

XXVI. THE CENTURION WARNS THE COMMANDER

Acts 22:26

“When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and warned him, ‘Be careful! This man is a Roman.’”

Everything changes immediately.

Cross References

Acts 16:38

Authorities in Philippi had also become alarmed when they learned Paul was Roman.

Acts 22:29

The commander himself soon becomes afraid.

Acts 23:27

Paul's citizenship becomes an important fact in his ongoing legal protection.

Spiritual Principle

God can use ordinary legal status as an instrument of providence.

XXVII. “ARE YOU A ROMAN CITIZEN?”

Acts 22:27

“The commander came and asked, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?’ Paul said, ‘Yes.’”

Paul answers simply.

Cross References

Acts 16:37

Paul had previously publicly identified himself as a Roman citizen.

Acts 21:39

Paul also identified himself as a Jew from Tarsus.

Acts 22:3

Paul possessed both a strong Jewish identity and Roman citizenship.

Spiritual Principle

A believer may possess multiple earthly identities while maintaining ultimate allegiance to Christ.

XXVIII. PAUL WAS BORN A CITIZEN

Acts 22:28

“The commander replied, ‘I had to pay a large sum for my citizenship.’ Paul answered, ‘But I was born a citizen.’”

Paul’s citizenship carried considerable legal privilege.

Cross References

Acts 16:37

Paul had already used this legal status in Philippi.

Philippians 3:20

Paul also reminded believers that their ultimate citizenship is in heaven.

Acts 21:39

Paul’s earthly background included citizenship in an important city.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Earthly citizenship may be useful, but heavenly citizenship remains the believer's highest identity.

XXIX. THE COMMANDER BECOMES ALARMED

Acts 22:29

“Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed because he had bound a Roman citizen.”

Roman citizenship changes the legal situation.

Cross References

Acts 16:38

Roman officials had previously feared the consequences of unlawfully mistreating Paul.

Acts 22:25

Paul had challenged the legality of flogging an uncondemned Roman citizen.

Acts 25:16

Paul's later proceedings also reflected Roman protections concerning accusation and defense.

Spiritual Principle

Human rulers themselves remain accountable to law.

XXX. PAUL IS BROUGHT BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 22:30

“The next day, wanting to know the exact charges against Paul, the commander released him and ordered the chief priests and the whole council to assemble. He brought Paul and set him before them.”

Paul is moving from:

Mob violence.

To legal examination.

Cross References

Acts 23:28

The commander later explains that he brought Paul before the Jewish council to discover the charges.

Acts 22:24

The commander had originally tried to learn why the crowd opposed Paul.

Acts 21:33

Paul had been arrested and bound during the riot.

Spiritual Principle

God can move His servant from an uncontrolled mob into a setting where the truth can be spoken more clearly.

XXXI. THE POWER OF PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Paul does not begin with abstract argument.

He says:

This is who I was.

This is what happened.

This is what Jesus did.

This is what He called me to do.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“A Testimony Is Powerful Because It Connects the Truth of Christ With the Evidence of a Changed Life.”

But testimony must remain centered upon:

Jesus.

Not merely:

Personal experience.

XXXII. THREE PARTS OF A STRONG CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY

Paul's testimony gives us a useful pattern.

1. My Life Before Christ

Paul:

Persecuted believers.

2. How I Encountered Christ

Jesus confronted him.

3. How Christ Changed My Direction

Paul became a witness.

Spiritual Principle

A Christian testimony should ultimately explain what Jesus did rather than merely describe what we felt.

XXXIII. ZEAL IS NOT ENOUGH

Paul tells the crowd:

"I was as zealous for God as any of you are today."

He knows their mindset.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Passion without truth can drive a person farther in the wrong direction.

Intensity is not the same as accuracy.

XXXIV. PAUL'S PAST DID NOT DISQUALIFY GOD'S FUTURE

Paul had:

Arrested Christians.

Beaten Christians.

Approved Stephen's death.

Yet Jesus called him.

Spiritual Principle

No past is greater than Christ's ability to save, forgive, and redirect a surrendered life.

XXXV. JESUS TOOK PAUL'S PERSECUTION PERSONALLY

Jesus said:

"Why are you persecuting Me?"

Not merely:

My church.

My followers.

My people.

But:

Me.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christ identifies deeply with His people, so what touches the church matters to its Lord.

XXXVI. THE QUESTION AFTER CONVERSION

Paul asks:

“What shall I do, Lord?”

That should become every believer’s posture.

Spiritual Principle

Saving faith is not merely asking Jesus to forgive the old life; it submits the new life to His direction.

XXXVII. GOD USES ANANIAS

Paul encountered Jesus directly.

Yet God still used:

Ananias.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Even extraordinary encounters with God do not eliminate the need for ordinary believers ministering faithfully to one another.

XXXVIII. “BROTHER SAUL”

Ananias knew Saul’s history.

Yet he called him:

Brother.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel creates a new family relationship stronger than a person’s former reputation.

XXXIX. CHOSEN TO BE A WITNESS

Paul was chosen:

To know.

To see.

To hear.

Then:

To testify.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Spiritual privilege carries spiritual responsibility.

If God gives us truth:

We should share truth.

XL. BAPTISM AND CALLING ON JESUS

Acts 22:16 connects baptism with:

Calling on His name.

Spiritual Principle

Christian baptism is an outward confession that a person now belongs to Jesus Christ.

It should never become:

An empty ritual.

A substitute for faith.

A magical act.

Its meaning rests in:

Christ.

Faith.

Identification with Him.

XLI. PAUL COULD NOT ERASE STEPHEN'S MEMORY

Paul carried the memory.

But Grace Did Not Leave Him There

He could not change yesterday.

He could serve Christ today.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“You Cannot Rewrite Your Past, but Christ Can Rewrite the Direction of Your Future.”

XLII. YOUR TESTIMONY MAY NOT CONVINCE EVERYONE

Paul thought Jerusalem should understand.

They did not.

Spiritual Principle

The power of a testimony does not lie in guaranteeing conversion; it lies in faithfully bearing witness to Christ.

XLIII. THE GOSPEL DESTROYS SPIRITUAL SUPERIORITY

The crowd tolerates much until:

Gentiles.

Why?

Because grace crossed a boundary they wanted preserved.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Grace becomes offensive to pride when God gives the same mercy to people we consider outsiders.

XLIV. GOD’S SALVATION IS FOR ALL PEOPLE

Paul was sent:

Far away.

To Gentiles.

Spiritual Principle

No nation has exclusive ownership of God's saving grace.

The gospel is for:

Jew.

Gentile.

Every people.

Every nation.

XLV. WHEN TRUTH TRIGGERS ANGER

The crowd's emotional reaction does not prove Paul is wrong.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

People sometimes become angriest at the part of truth that threatens their deepest pride.

XLVI. PAUL USES HIS RIGHTS WITHOUT ABANDONING HIS MISSION

Paul says:

Is this lawful?

He does not consider legal protection unspiritual.

Spiritual Principle

Trusting God and using lawful means are not contradictions.

Paul trusted God.

Paul also used:

Roman citizenship.

Legal procedure.

Appeal.

XLVII. WHAT ACTS 22 TEACHES ABOUT CIVIL RIGHTS

Paul does not worship Roman citizenship.

But he uses it.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Earthly rights are tools, not idols.

Use them wisely.

But never make them greater than:

Christ.

Truth.

Mission.

XLVIII. GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN PAUL'S CITIZENSHIP

Paul did not become Roman that day.

He had been:

Born a citizen.

Long before Acts 22:

God already knew this moment would come.

Spiritual Principle

God may prepare resources for tomorrow's trial years before we know we will need them.

XLIX. THE CHAINS KEEP LEADING TO NEW AUDIENCES

Paul has already addressed:

The crowd.

Next:

The Sanhedrin.

Later:

Felix.

Festus.

Agrippa.

Eventually:

Rome.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

What looks like restriction may actually become God's transportation system into the next assignment.

L. TESTIMONY MUST POINT BEYOND SELF

Paul's testimony contains much autobiography.

But the center is:

Jesus.

Jesus Appeared

Jesus Spoke

Jesus Called

Jesus Sent

Spiritual Principle

A Christian testimony becomes weak when the person becomes the hero instead of Christ.

LI. THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF PAUL'S TESTIMONY

Paul's story says:

I was wrong.

Jesus was alive.

Jesus confronted me.

Jesus saved me.

Jesus called me.

Jesus sent me.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The heart of testimony is not "Look what I overcame," but "Look what Jesus did."

LII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 22

1. Share Your Testimony

Principle:

Your changed life can become a doorway for proclaiming Christ.

2. Religious Zeal Needs Truth

Principle:

Being passionate does not automatically mean being right.

3. Christ Can Save His Enemies

Principle:

Saul the persecutor became Paul the witness.

4. Salvation Leads to Obedience

Principle:

Paul immediately asked, “What shall I do, Lord?”

5. The Gospel Is for All Nations

Principle:

God sent Paul to Gentiles as well as Jews.

6. Testimony Does Not Guarantee Acceptance

Principle:

Paul faithfully testified even though the crowd rejected him.

7. Lawful Rights Can Serve God’s Purpose

Principle:

Paul’s Roman citizenship protected him from illegal flogging and kept his mission moving.

LIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

How did Paul begin his defense?

He addressed the crowd respectfully as:

“Brothers and fathers.”

He asked them to listen to his testimony.

Question 2

What was Paul's religious background?

He was a Jew from Tarsus, raised in Jerusalem, educated under Gamaliel, and intensely zealous for Jewish tradition.

Question 3

What had Paul done to Christians before his conversion?

He arrested believers, placed them in prison, persecuted the Way violently, and supported actions against Christians.

Question 4

What happened on the road to Damascus?

A brilliant light from heaven surrounded Paul.

He fell to the ground and heard Jesus ask:

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Question 5

Who did Paul discover Jesus was?

Jesus identified Himself as:

“Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.”

Paul discovered that the Jesus he considered dead was alive and exalted.

Question 6

What did Paul ask Jesus?

He asked:

“What shall I do, Lord?”

This demonstrated surrender to Christ's authority.

Question 7

Who was Ananias?

Ananias was a respected, devout believer whom God used to restore Paul's sight and explain his calling.

Question 8

What was Paul called to do?

He was chosen to know God's will, see the Righteous One, hear His voice, and become His witness to all people.

Question 9

Why did the crowd become enraged?

They reacted violently when Paul said God had sent him to the Gentiles.

Their response exposed deep resistance to the idea that God's saving grace would extend freely beyond their own ethnic boundaries.

Question 10

What did Paul do when the Romans prepared to flog him?

He calmly invoked his rights as a Roman citizen and asked whether it was lawful to scourge an uncondemned citizen.

Question 11

How did the commander respond?

He became alarmed and immediately stopped the unlawful examination.

Question 12

What is the central lesson of Acts 22?

Jesus can transform even His fiercest enemies into faithful witnesses, and believers should testify boldly to His grace while using every lawful opportunity God provides to continue the mission.

LIV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 22 asks us several important questions.

Can I Clearly Explain My Testimony?

Paul could.

Am I Trusting Religious Zeal Instead of Christ?

Paul once did.

Have I Honestly Faced My Past?

Paul did.

Do I Believe Christ Can Transform Anyone?

Paul's life proves that He can.

Have I Asked:

"What shall I do, Lord?"

Am I Willing to Be a Witness?

Paul was.

Have I publicly identified with Jesus?

Paul was baptized.

Do I believe the gospel belongs to people unlike me?

Paul was sent to Gentiles.

Do I become angry when God's grace crosses my preferred boundaries?

The crowd did.

Can I use lawful rights without placing my ultimate trust in them?

Paul did.

Does my testimony make Jesus the hero?

It should.

LV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Assume Someone Is Too Far Gone for Jesus”

Saul was not merely indifferent.

He actively tried to destroy Christianity.

Then:

Jesus met him.

Principle

The person fighting Christ today may become the person preaching Christ tomorrow.

LVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Your Testimony Should Have Jesus at the Center”

Paul talks about his past.

But the turning point is:

Jesus.

Principle

A testimony is not primarily the story of how strong you became; it is the story of how gracious Christ was.

LVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Let Your Past Become Stronger Than God’s Grace”

Paul had memories he could not erase.

Stephen’s death.

Believers imprisoned.

Homes invaded.

Yet:

Grace called him.

Principle

Your past may explain where you have been, but it does not have the authority to overrule what Christ can make you become.

LVIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Grace Is Most Offensive to Pride When It Reaches the Outsider”

The crowd listened until:

Gentiles.

Principle

If we celebrate grace only when it reaches people like us, we have not fully understood grace.

LIX. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Use Every Tool God Gives You Without Making the Tool Your God”

Paul used:

His testimony.

His language.

His Jewish background.

His education.

His Roman citizenship.

Principle

Every ability, background, privilege, and legal protection can become a tool for gospel mission when surrendered to Christ.

LX. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 22 is Paul’s story.

But more importantly:

It is Christ’s story through Paul.

Paul begins:

Religious.

Educated.

Zealous.

Confident.

Wrong.

He was not searching for Christianity.

He was traveling to arrest Christians.

Then:

Jesus stopped him.

That is grace.

Paul's life reminds us that:

Sincerity is not salvation.

Religion is not salvation.

Education is not salvation.

Zeal is not salvation.

Tradition is not salvation.

A person can possess all of those things and still oppose Jesus Christ.

Paul had to encounter:

Jesus.

Then comes one of the most important questions in the chapter:

“What shall I do, Lord?”

That is the language of surrender.

Paul's old life had said:

I know what must be done.

His new life says:

Lord, tell me what to do.

Then God sends Ananias.

A man who had every human reason to fear Saul calls him:

“Brother Saul.”

That is the gospel.

A persecutor becomes family.

An enemy becomes a brother.

A destroyer of churches becomes a builder of churches.

A man who approved Stephen's death becomes a man willing to die for the same Jesus Stephen died proclaiming.

That is transforming grace.

Paul then tells the crowd:

God sent me to the Gentiles.

And that becomes too much for them.

Their anger exposes something deeper than theology.

Pride.

Prejudice.

Spiritual exclusiveness.

They could not tolerate the thought that God might offer His grace freely to outsiders.

Acts 22 therefore warns us:

Never try to place fences around grace that God did not build.

Then:

Paul is taken into Roman custody.

The commander prepares to flog him.

Paul asks one question:

“Is it lawful?”

Immediately everything changes.

His Roman citizenship becomes protection.

This teaches us that spiritual dependence upon God does not require passivity toward injustice.

Paul could:

Trust God.

And:

Use lawful rights.

Both were true.

Acts 22 therefore calls us to:

Tell the truth about our past.

Tell the truth about Jesus.

Tell the truth about grace.

Tell the truth about our calling.

Never trust zeal without Scripture.

Never write off someone Christ can save.

Never make ourselves the hero of our testimony.

Never limit God's grace to our own group.

Use every lawful opportunity wisely.

And above all:

When Jesus confronts us:

Respond.

When Jesus calls us:

Obey.

When Jesus sends us:

Go.

And when people ask what happened to us:

Tell them about:

Jesus Christ.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 22.

Thank You for the testimony of Paul.

Thank You that Your grace can reach people who seem completely opposed to You.

Help us never decide that someone is beyond salvation.

Thank You that Jesus can turn enemies into servants.

Persecutors into witnesses.

Rebels into disciples.

Help us examine our own lives.

Keep us from trusting:

Religion.

Tradition.

Education.

Zeal.

Human goodness.

Help us trust:

Jesus Christ.

Give us hearts that ask:

“What shall I do, Lord?”

Teach us obedience.

Give us courage to tell our testimony.

Help us speak honestly about where we were.

But never let us glorify sin.

Let Jesus remain the center.

Thank You for faithful servants like Ananias.

Help us welcome those You have transformed.

Help us believe that people can change by Your grace.

Thank You for baptism and the public confession that we belong to Christ.

Help us live consistently with that confession.

Remove prejudice from our hearts.

Keep us from resenting Your grace when it reaches people unlike us.

Give us a gospel vision for:

Every nation.

Every race.

Every people.

Every person.

Thank You for the earthly tools You provide.

Give us wisdom to use them.

Legal rights.

Education.

Language.

Citizenship.

Experience.

Resources.

Let every advantage become a servant of the gospel.

And when opposition comes:

Keep us faithful.

When people reject our testimony:

Keep us loving.

When doors open:

Help us speak.

May our lives always declare:

Jesus Christ saved me, changed me, called me, and sent me.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“He said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know His will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear His voice. You will be His witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.’” — Acts 22:14–15

Central Truth

Jesus Christ can transform the most zealous opponent into a faithful witness, calling sinners from religious blindness into saving faith, obedience, public testimony, and worldwide mission while sovereignly using even earthly circumstances and legal rights to preserve His servants.

Acts 22 in One Sentence

Paul stands before the hostile Jerusalem crowd and recounts his former zeal in persecuting Christians, his dramatic encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus road, his calling through Ananias to become Christ's witness to all people, his commission to the Gentiles, and his providential protection from unlawful flogging through his Roman citizenship.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 23 — Paul Before the Council and Protected by God

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 23 is a chapter about:

Conscience.

Courage.

Conflict.

Resurrection hope.

Divine encouragement.

Conspiracy.

Providence.

Protection.

And:

God's unstoppable purpose.

Paul is now a prisoner.

He has been:

Attacked by a mob.

Bound by Roman soldiers.

Questioned by the commander.

Brought before the Jewish council.

Yet the chapter repeatedly demonstrates an important truth:

Paul may be in chains, but God's purpose is not chained.

The chapter begins with Paul standing before the Sanhedrin.

He looks directly at them and says:

“Brothers, I have lived before God with a clear conscience up to this day.”

Immediately the high priest Ananias orders Paul struck on the mouth.

Paul responds strongly:

“God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!”

Then, when informed that the man is the high priest, Paul acknowledges the biblical command not to speak evil of a ruler.

Paul soon recognizes that the council is divided between:

Pharisees.

And:

Sadducees.

The Pharisees believe in:

Resurrection.

Angels.

Spirits.

The Sadducees reject these things.

Paul therefore declares:

“I am on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead!”

The council erupts.

The Pharisees and Sadducees begin fighting with each other.

The argument becomes so violent that the Roman commander fears Paul will literally be torn apart.

Once again:

Roman soldiers rescue him.

Then comes one of the most encouraging verses in Acts.

That night:

The Lord stands near Paul.

Jesus says:

“Take courage!”

Paul had testified in Jerusalem.

And Jesus promises:

“You must also testify in Rome.”

That promise becomes the controlling truth for everything that follows.

The next morning:

More than forty men make an oath.

They promise not to eat or drink until:

Paul is dead.

They organize an ambush.

They involve religious leaders.

They prepare deception.

But:

God already said Paul was going to Rome.

The assassins say:

Paul must die.

Jesus says:

Paul must testify in Rome.

Only one plan can ultimately succeed.

Then God uses someone almost completely unexpected:

Paul’s nephew.

Paul’s young relative hears about the plot.

He tells Paul.

Paul sends him to the commander.

The commander listens.

Then the same Roman military system that had bound Paul now becomes an enormous protection detail around him.

Two hundred soldiers.

Seventy horsemen.

Two hundred spearmen.

Hundreds of armed men are mobilized to protect:

One apostle.

Paul leaves Jerusalem under guard.

The assassins never get their opportunity.

He arrives safely in Caesarea.

Governor Felix agrees to hear his case when his accusers arrive.

Acts 23 therefore demonstrates:

God's promises are stronger than human plots.

God protects Paul through:

A divided council.

A Roman commander.

A young nephew.

Military intelligence.

Hundreds of soldiers.

Legal procedure.

And Roman citizenship.

Sometimes God's protection looks miraculous.

Sometimes it looks completely ordinary.

Acts 23 teaches us:

Both are providence.

The central truth of Acts 23 is:

God remains sovereign over His servants even when they are surrounded by injustice, violence, conspiracy, and uncertainty, and no human plan can stop the mission Christ has determined to accomplish.

I. PAUL STANDS WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Acts 23:1

“Paul looked straight at the council and said, ‘Brothers, I have lived before God with a clear conscience up to this day.’”

Paul stands before his accusers with confidence.

Not because he claims:

Sinlessness.

Perfection.

Flawlessness.

But because:

He has sought to live faithfully before God.

Cross References

Acts 24:16

Paul later said that he continually worked to maintain a clear conscience before both God and people.

2 Timothy 1:3

Paul served God with a clear conscience as he remembered Timothy constantly in prayer.

Acts 20:26

Paul had declared himself innocent concerning the responsibility of faithfully warning those who heard him.

Important Truth

A clear conscience does not mean:

“I have never sinned.”

It means:

“I am not knowingly living in rebellion while pretending innocence.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“A Clear Conscience Gives Courage When False Accusations Come.”

II. THE HIGH PRIEST ORDERS PAUL STRUCK

Acts 23:2

“At this, the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth.”

Paul has barely begun speaking.

Yet violence interrupts.

Cross References

John 18:22

An official struck Jesus during His hearing after objecting to His answer.

1 Kings 22:24

The prophet Micaiah was struck in the face after faithfully speaking God's message.

Matthew 26:67

Jesus was struck and abused during His unjust trial.

Spiritual Principle

Religious authority can become corrupt when it uses force instead of truth.

III. “YOU WHITEWASHED WALL”

Acts 23:3

“Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you order me struck against the law?’”

Paul exposes hypocrisy.

The man responsible for upholding law:

Breaks the law.

Cross References

Matthew 23:27

Jesus compared hypocritical religious leaders to whitewashed tombs that looked clean outwardly while containing corruption within.

Ezekiel 13:10

False spiritual leaders were compared to weak walls covered with whitewash.

Leviticus 19:15

God commanded judges to administer justice fairly rather than act unjustly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Authority that demands respect for law while violating law exposes its own hypocrisy.

IV. PAUL IS CHALLENGED

Acts 23:4

“Those standing nearby said, ‘Do you dare insult God’s high priest?’”

The bystanders focus on:

Paul’s words.

Not:

The unlawful blow.

Cross References

Exodus 22:28

God commanded His people not to curse rulers or speak contemptuously of legitimate authority.

Acts 23:5

Paul immediately acknowledges this biblical command.

John 18:22

Jesus was likewise challenged after being struck during questioning.

Spiritual Principle

Even when authority acts wrongly, believers must still consider how God commands them to respond.

V. PAUL ACKNOWLEDGES SCRIPTURE

Acts 23:5

“Paul replied, ‘I didn’t realize he was the high priest, brothers. For it is written: You must not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’”

Paul submits himself to Scripture.

Cross References

Exodus 22:28

God instructed Israel not to curse its rulers.

Ecclesiastes 10:20

Scripture warns against careless contempt toward rulers.

1 Peter 2:17

Believers are told to honor people properly and show appropriate respect toward governing authority.

Important Note

Why Paul did not recognize Ananias is not explained.

Possibilities have been suggested:

Poor eyesight.

Unusual circumstances.

Failure to recognize who gave the order.

But Scripture does not specify.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A person who confronts others with Scripture must also allow Scripture to correct himself.

VI. PAUL IDENTIFIES THE DIVISION IN THE COUNCIL

Acts 23:6

“Paul realized that some were Sadducees and others Pharisees. He shouted, ‘Brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I am on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead!’”

Paul recognizes:

The council is already divided.

He brings the real theological issue forward:

Resurrection.

Cross References

Philippians 3:5

Paul described himself as a Pharisee regarding his former religious background.

Acts 26:5

Paul later explained that he had lived according to the strict Pharisaic tradition.

Acts 24:15

Paul openly affirmed his hope in the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.

Spiritual Principle

The resurrection remained central to Paul's gospel hope.

VII. THE COUNCIL DIVIDES

Acts 23:7

“When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.”

Paul does not create the theological division.

It already exists.

His statement exposes it.

Cross References

Matthew 22:23

The Sadducees approached Jesus while denying resurrection.

Acts 23:8

Luke immediately explains the theological differences between the groups.

Acts 15:5

Pharisees had previously appeared among those engaged in important church controversy.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Truth can expose divisions that were already present beneath outward unity.

VIII. PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES DISAGREE

Acts 23:8

“The Sadducees say there is no resurrection, no angels, and no spirits. But the Pharisees believe in all of these.”

Luke explains the disagreement.

Cross References

Matthew 22:23

The Sadducees explicitly denied resurrection when questioning Jesus.

Mark 12:18

Mark also identifies the Sadducees by their rejection of resurrection.

Luke 20:27

Luke records the same theological position among the Sadducees.

Spiritual Principle

Religious groups may share outward traditions while differing profoundly on foundational doctrines.

IX. SOME PHARISEES DEFEND PAUL

Acts 23:9

“A loud uproar followed. Some teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued strongly, saying, ‘We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?’”

Paul’s opponents begin defending him against other opponents.

Cross References

Acts 22:6

Paul had testified that heavenly light surrounded him during his conversion.

Acts 26:13

He later described the same divine encounter before Agrippa.

Luke 23:4

Pilate similarly declared that he found no basis for a criminal charge against Jesus.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can use division among opponents to restrain their ability to harm His servant.

X. THE COMMANDER RESCUES PAUL AGAIN

Acts 23:10

“The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul might be torn to pieces. He ordered the soldiers to go down, seize Paul by force, and take him into the fortress.”

Again:

Paul is rescued by soldiers.

Cross References

Acts 21:32

Roman soldiers had previously stopped a mob from beating Paul.

Acts 21:34

The commander had already dealt with violent confusion surrounding Paul.

Acts 22:24

Paul had previously been taken into the fortress for his protection and questioning.

Spiritual Principle

God can repeatedly use secular authorities as instruments of preservation.

XI. THE LORD STANDS NEAR PAUL

Acts 23:11

“That night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! Just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, you must also testify in Rome.’”

This is the spiritual center of Acts 23.

Paul is:

Alone.

Surrounded by danger.

Facing uncertainty.

Then:

Jesus stands near.

“Take Courage”

Paul needed encouragement.

“You Have Testified”

Jesus recognizes Paul’s faithfulness.

“You Must Also Testify in Rome”

God’s purpose is not finished.

Cross References

Acts 18:9

The Lord had previously appeared to Paul and told him not to fear but to keep speaking.

Acts 27:24

Paul would later receive another assurance that he must stand before Caesar.

Romans 1:15

Paul had long desired to preach the gospel in Rome.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Presence of Christ Is Greater Than the Threats Surrounding You.”

XII. A CONSPIRACY FORMS

Acts 23:12

“The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and took an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.”

Jesus said:

Paul will go to Rome.

The conspirators say:

Paul will die first.

Cross References

Acts 9:23

Early in Paul’s ministry, enemies had already plotted to kill him.

Psalms 27:12

The psalmist prayed for protection against false witnesses and violent enemies.

Acts 25:3

Another later plot would seek an opportunity to ambush Paul.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Human conspiracy cannot cancel divine appointment.

XIII. MORE THAN FORTY MEN JOIN THE PLOT

Acts 23:13

“More than forty men were part of this plot.”

This is organized opposition.

Cross References

Acts 23:21

Paul's nephew later reports that more than forty men are waiting to ambush him.

Psalms 64:2

David prayed for protection from secret conspiracies of evildoers.

Acts 23:12

The plot involved a solemn oath to kill Paul.

Spiritual Principle

Numbers do not determine which plan will succeed when God has spoken.

Forty men cannot overturn one promise from Christ.

XIV. THE CONSPIRATORS APPROACH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Acts 23:14

“They went to the chief priests and elders and said, ‘We have bound ourselves with an oath to eat nothing until we have killed Paul.’”

Religious leaders are asked to cooperate with murder.

Cross References

Acts 23:12

The conspirators had already taken their oath.

Matthew 26:4

Religious leaders had previously plotted secretly to arrest and kill Jesus.

John 11:53

The leaders had formally planned Jesus' death.

Spiritual Principle

Religious position does not guarantee righteous motives.

XV. THE PLAN REQUIRES DECEPTION

Acts 23:15

“You and the council must ask the commander to bring him down to you, as if you wanted more details about his case. We will be ready to kill him before he gets here.”

Notice:

“As if.”

The plan depends upon lying.

Cross References

Acts 25:3

Paul’s enemies later sought another opportunity to ambush him during transfer.

Psalms 37:32

The wicked watch for opportunities to destroy the righteous.

Acts 23:20

Paul’s nephew later explains the deceptive request to the commander.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A cause that requires deception and murder to succeed has already revealed its moral character.

XVI. PAUL’S NEPHEW HEARS THE PLOT

Acts 23:16

“But Paul’s nephew heard about the plot. He went into the fortress and told Paul.”

One of the most important words here is:

“But.”

Forty men make a plan.

But Paul’s nephew heard.

Cross References

Esther 2:22

Mordecai learned of a conspiracy and reported it, preventing an assassination.

Acts 9:24

Saul had previously learned of another plot against his life.

Proverbs 11:14

Wise counsel and timely information can provide safety.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“God Can Defeat a Large Conspiracy Through One Person Who Happens to Hear the Truth.”

XVII. PAUL SENDS HIS NEPHEW TO THE COMMANDER

Acts 23:17

“Paul called one of the centurions and said, ‘Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.’”

Paul does not say:

God promised I will reach Rome, so I will do nothing.

He takes reasonable action.

Cross References

Acts 21:32

Roman military officers had already become part of God’s providential protection.

Acts 22:26

A centurion had previously carried information concerning Paul’s Roman citizenship.

Acts 23:23

The commander will soon organize an extensive military escort.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Trusting God’s promise does not mean refusing practical means of protection.

XVIII. “PAUL THE PRISONER”

Acts 23:18

“The centurion took him to the commander and said, ‘Paul the prisoner asked me to bring this young man to you; he has something to say.’”

Paul is called:

“The prisoner.”

But his imprisonment has not ended his influence.

Cross References

Acts 23:17

Paul had personally arranged for the young man to speak with the commander.

Ephesians 3:1

Paul later described himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles.

Philemon 1:1

Paul also identified himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ in his letters.

Spiritual Principle

Earthly imprisonment does not determine spiritual usefulness.

XIX. THE COMMANDER LISTENS PRIVATELY

Acts 23:19

“The commander took the young man by the hand, led him aside, and asked privately, ‘What is it you want to tell me?’”

The commander takes the warning seriously.

Cross References

Acts 23:16

Paul's nephew possessed critical information concerning the conspiracy.

Acts 21:33

The commander had been responsible for Paul's custody since his arrest.

Proverbs 25:9

Wisdom recognizes that sensitive matters sometimes require private communication.

Spiritual Principle

Wise leadership knows when important information should be heard carefully and privately.

XX. THE NEPHEW EXPLAINS THE DECEPTION

Acts 23:20

"The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul to the council tomorrow as though they wanted more details."

The young man explains the plot clearly.

Cross References

Acts 23:15

The conspirators had planned to disguise their murderous intention as a request for further investigation.

Acts 23:12

Their actual purpose was to kill Paul.

Psalms 37:12

The wicked plot against the righteous and look for opportunities to destroy them.

Spiritual Principle

Truth exposes what deception attempts to hide.

XXI. FORTY MEN ARE WAITING

Acts 23:21

“But do not give in to them, for more than forty men are waiting to ambush him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent.”

Paul’s nephew understands the urgency.

Cross References

Acts 23:13

More than forty conspirators had joined the oath.

Acts 23:12

They had pledged not to eat or drink until Paul was dead.

Psalms 31:13

The psalmist described enemies conspiring together and plotting to take his life.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may answer prayer for protection by giving someone the courage to speak necessary truth at the right time.

XXII. THE COMMANDER ORDERS SECRECY

Acts 23:22

“The commander dismissed the young man and instructed him, ‘Don’t tell anyone that you reported this to me.’”

Operational secrecy protects the plan.

Cross References

Acts 23:16

The nephew’s information had already reached Paul safely.

2 Kings 6:12

Scripture records occasions when secret plans were unexpectedly exposed.

Proverbs 25:9

Wisdom recognizes the importance of handling confidential information responsibly.

Spiritual Principle

Not every truth must be broadcast publicly before the proper time.

XXIII. HUNDREDS OF SOLDIERS ARE PREPARED

Acts 23:23

“The commander called two of his centurions and ordered, ‘Get 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen ready by 9:00 tonight to go to Caesarea.’”

More than forty assassins wait for Paul.

The commander mobilizes:

200 soldiers.

70 horsemen.

200 spearmen.

Cross References

Acts 10:1

Centurions regularly commanded Roman military units and appear several times in Acts.

Acts 21:31

Roman military power had already prevented Paul’s death at the hands of a mob.

Acts 23:31

These soldiers soon carry out the commander’s orders.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“When God Decides to Protect One Servant, Forty Enemies Are Not Too Many.”

XXIV. PAUL IS GIVEN SAFE TRANSPORT

Acts 23:24

“Provide horses for Paul so he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.”

Paul is not simply transported.

The commander specifically orders:

Safe transport.

Cross References

Acts 24:2

Paul will soon stand before Governor Felix.

Acts 24:27

Felix will keep Paul in custody for an extended period.

Acts 23:33

The military escort eventually delivers Paul safely to Caesarea.

Spiritual Principle

God’s protection may come through ordinary logistical decisions.

XXV. THE COMMANDER WRITES A LETTER

Acts 23:25

“He wrote a letter as follows:”

The military transfer includes formal documentation.

Cross References

Acts 15:23

Earlier church leaders had also communicated important decisions through written letters.

Acts 23:26

Luke preserves the contents of the commander’s letter.

Nehemiah 2:7

Official letters had long been used to provide authorization and safe travel.

Spiritual Principle

God can work through administrative processes as surely as through dramatic miracles.

XXVI. CLAUDIUS LYSIAS ADDRESSES FELIX

Acts 23:26

“From Claudius Lysias, to His Excellency Governor Felix: Greetings.”

Here we learn the Roman commander’s name:

Claudius Lysias.

Cross References

Luke 1:3

Formal address was commonly used when writing to officials of high standing.

Acts 15:23

Formal written communication also appears elsewhere in Acts.

Acts 24:3

Felix is later addressed respectfully in court.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel story unfolds through actual people, institutions, governments, and legal systems.

XXVII. LYSIAS DESCRIBES PAUL’S RESCUE

Acts 23:27

“This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. I came with soldiers and rescued him, for I learned he is a Roman citizen.”

Lysias summarizes what happened.

Cross References

Acts 21:33

Lysias had intervened when the mob attacked Paul.

Acts 22:25

Paul revealed his citizenship before the Romans could unlawfully flog him.

Acts 22:27

The commander personally confirmed that Paul was a Roman citizen.

Important Note

Acts indicates Lysias actually learned about Paul's citizenship after initially arresting and binding him.

His letter presents events somewhat favorably toward his own conduct.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Official reports may describe events accurately in broad outline while still presenting the writer in the best possible light.

XXVIII. PAUL WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE COUNCIL

Acts 23:28

"I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him before their council."

The commander had tried to determine the facts.

Cross References

Acts 22:30

Lysias ordered the Sanhedrin to assemble so he could learn the exact charge.

Acts 23:1

Paul then appeared before the council.

Acts 24:20

Paul later challenged his opponents to identify any legitimate wrongdoing discovered at that hearing.

Spiritual Principle

Investigation is better than assumption when charges are serious.

XXIX. NO CHARGE DESERVING DEATH OR PRISON

Acts 23:29

“I found that the accusations had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him deserving death or imprisonment.”

This is important legal testimony.

A Roman commander concludes:

Paul has committed no capital crime.

Cross References

Acts 18:14

Gallio had also refused to treat theological disputes as criminal wrongdoing.

Acts 25:25

Festus later concludes that Paul had done nothing deserving death.

Acts 26:31

Agrippa and others later agree that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The repeated legal record in Acts shows that the gospel itself was not a criminal movement.

XXX. PAUL IS SENT AWAY IMMEDIATELY

Acts 23:30

“When I was informed of a plot against him, I sent him to you at once. I have also ordered his accusers to present their case before you. Farewell.”

The commander acts quickly.

Cross References

Acts 23:20

Paul’s nephew had exposed the planned ambush.

Acts 23:16

The information reached Paul through his nephew.

Acts 24:8

Paul’s accusers would soon appear before Felix.

Spiritual Principle

Timely action can prevent violence when danger becomes known.

XXXI. THE SOLDIERS TAKE PAUL TO ANTIPATRIS

Acts 23:31

“The soldiers carried out their orders. During the night they took Paul as far as Antipatris.”

Paul leaves Jerusalem under heavy protection.

Cross References

Acts 23:23

The commander had assembled a large military escort.

Acts 23:24

The soldiers were commanded to bring Paul safely to Felix.

Acts 27:1

Paul's later journeys under Roman custody would eventually carry him toward Rome.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The prisoner is actually being escorted toward the promise Christ gave him.

XXXII. THE FOOT SOLDIERS RETURN

Acts 23:32

“The next day, the foot soldiers returned to the fortress, leaving the horsemen to go on with Paul.”

Once the immediate danger has passed:

The escort is reduced.

Cross References

Acts 23:23

The journey began with a massive protective force.

Acts 23:31

The troops had successfully carried Paul beyond the most dangerous area.

Acts 23:33

The horsemen complete the journey to Caesarea.

Spiritual Principle

God provides what is necessary for each stage of the journey.

XXXIII. PAUL ARRIVES IN CAESAREA

Acts 23:33

“When the horsemen arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him.”

Paul arrives safely.

The assassination plot has failed.

Cross References

Acts 23:26

The letter was addressed to Governor Felix.

Acts 24:1

Paul's accusers later travel to Caesarea to present their case.

Acts 10:1

Caesarea had already been an important setting in the expansion of the gospel.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God does not have to remove the chains in order to fulfill the promise.

Paul is still a prisoner.

But:

He is alive.

Protected.

Moving toward Rome.

XXXIV. FELIX ASKS PAUL'S PROVINCE

Acts 23:34

“The governor read the letter and asked what province Paul was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia,”

Felix begins the legal process.

Cross References

Acts 21:39

Paul had already identified himself as a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia.

Acts 22:3

His testimony also emphasized his birth in Tarsus.

Acts 6:9

Cilicia had connections with Jewish communities known in the book of Acts.

Spiritual Principle

Even details of birthplace and legal jurisdiction can become part of God's providential path.

XXXV. PAUL IS KEPT UNDER GUARD

Acts 23:35

“He said, ‘I will hear your case when your accusers arrive.’ Then he ordered Paul to be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.”

Paul remains confined.

But the legal process continues.

Cross References

Acts 24:1

Paul’s accusers soon arrive before Felix.

Acts 25:16

Roman legal custom required that an accused person have opportunity to face charges.

Acts 12:4

Imprisonment had repeatedly become part of the church’s story in Acts.

Spiritual Principle

Delay does not mean God has abandoned the mission.

XXXVI. THE CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Paul’s opening statement deserves careful attention.

He says:

“I have lived before God with a clear conscience.”

Before God

Not merely before people.

A Clear Conscience

Not self-deception.

Not perfection.

But sincere obedience.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The most important courtroom is ultimately the presence of God.

XXXVII. CONSCIENCE MUST BE INFORMED BY TRUTH

Paul had previously persecuted Christians:

With a sincere religious conscience.

So sincerity alone is insufficient.

Spiritual Principle

A conscience must be educated by God's truth or it can sincerely approve what is wrong.

A clear conscience matters.

A biblically informed conscience matters even more.

XXXVIII. PAUL CORRECTS HIS RESPONSE

Paul rebukes Ananias.

Then learns he is high priest.

Immediately:

He cites Scripture.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Spiritual maturity includes being willing to correct yourself when Scripture corrects you.”

XXXIX. THE RESURRECTION IS STILL CENTRAL

Paul says:

“I am on trial because of my hope in the resurrection.”

This has been central throughout Acts.

Jesus Rose

Therefore:

Death is defeated.

Believers Will Rise

Therefore:

Hope remains.

Judgment Comes

Therefore:

Life matters eternally.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian hope is not vague optimism; it is anchored in resurrection.

XL. GOD CAN DIVIDE OPPOSITION

Paul’s enemies are not truly united.

One theological issue:

Resurrection.

And the coalition fractures.

Spiritual Principle

God does not always have to remove every enemy; sometimes He prevents enemies from remaining united.

XLI. JESUS STANDS NEAR

Acts 23:11 says:

“The Lord stood near Paul.”

Notice what Jesus does not first give:

A detailed escape plan.

Instead He gives:

His presence.

His encouragement.

His promise.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Before God Changes the Circumstances, He May Strengthen the Servant Inside the Circumstances.”

XLII. “TAKE COURAGE”

Paul had been:

Beaten.

Nearly killed.

Rejected.

Dragged before authorities.

Now another violent hearing.

Jesus says:

“Take courage.”

Spiritual Principle

Even courageous servants sometimes need courage given to them again.

XLIII. ROME IS GUARANTEED

Jesus says:

“You must also testify in Rome.”

That word:

Must

expresses divine purpose.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If God has appointed the destination, no conspiracy can terminate the journey early.

XLIV. FORTY MEN VERSUS ONE PROMISE

Forty men say:

Paul dies.

Jesus says:

Paul reaches Rome.

Spiritual Principle

The strength of God’s promise is not measured by the number of people opposing it.

XLV. RELIGIOUS OATHS CAN BE SINFUL

The conspirators take an oath.

But:

The content of the oath is murder.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Religious seriousness cannot turn a sinful purpose into a righteous one.

An oath does not sanctify evil.

XLVI. GOD USES PAUL'S FAMILY

We know little about Paul's nephew.

Yet:

He becomes essential to the story.

Spiritual Principle

A person does not need a famous ministry title to become an instrument of God's providence.

One young man's courage:

Exposes the plot.

Saves Paul.

Keeps the mission moving.

XLVII. THE NEPHEW HAD TO SPEAK

Hearing the plot was not enough.

He had to report it.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Knowing danger exists creates responsibility when speaking can protect someone from harm.

XLVIII. TRUSTING GOD AND TAKING ACTION

Paul received Jesus' promise.

Then:

He uses his nephew.

A centurion.

The commander.

Roman security.

Spiritual Principle

Faith does not demand that God act without means when He has already provided wise means.

XLIX. GOD USES THE ROMAN COMMANDER

Claudius Lysias is not presented as a Christian.

Yet:

He repeatedly protects Paul.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's providence is not limited to people who consciously know they are serving His purpose.

L. THE MASSIVE ESCORT

Hundreds of soldiers escort Paul.

This provides an almost ironic picture.

Paul is supposedly:

A dangerous prisoner.

Yet:

Rome itself protects him from assassination.

Spiritual Principle

God can turn the machinery of an empire into a protective wall around His servant.

LI. PROTECTION DOES NOT ALWAYS LOOK LIKE FREEDOM

Paul is:

Protected.

But still:

Bound.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Do Not Define God’s Protection Only as the Removal of Every Restriction.”

Sometimes protection is:

A locked door.

A guard.

A changed route.

A delay.

A legal process.

LII. THE PLOT FAILS BEFORE IT BEGINS

The assassins wait.

Paul leaves at night under heavy guard.

Spiritual Principle

God can dismantle a plan without confronting the plotters directly.

He simply moves His servant beyond their reach.

LIII. GOD USES INFORMATION

There is no earthquake.

No angel opens doors.

No miraculous blindness.

Instead:

Someone hears.

Someone reports.

Someone listens.

Someone acts.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Providence can look completely ordinary while still being completely directed by God.

LIV. HUMAN AUTHORITIES REPEATEDLY FIND PAUL INNOCENT

Claudius Lysias says:

“There was no charge against him deserving death or imprisonment.”

This pattern will continue.

Spiritual Principle

Acts repeatedly separates Christian faithfulness from genuine criminal wrongdoing.

LV. PAUL MOVES CLOSER TO ROME WHILE IN CHAINS

Paul probably would not have chosen this travel method.

Yet:

Every legal transfer takes him toward:

Higher officials.

Wider audiences.

Eventually:

Rome.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“God Can Use the Chain as Part of the Road.”

LVI. THE PROMISE COMES BEFORE THE PROCESS

Jesus promises Rome in verse 11.

Then the assassination plot appears in verse 12.

That order matters.

Spiritual Principle

God often gives His promise before revealing the problem that will test our confidence in it.

LVII. DARKNESS DOES NOT MEAN GOD IS ABSENT

The Lord speaks:

At night.

Paul's situation is uncertain.

Yet Jesus stands near.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Some of God's strongest encouragement comes in the darkest part of the story.

LVIII. WHAT ACTS 23 TEACHES ABOUT DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

God does not appear panicked by:

The council.

The mob.

The assassins.

The Roman government.

The legal system.

Spiritual Principle

Nothing in Acts 23 happens outside the sovereign reach of God.

LIX. WHAT ACTS 23 TEACHES ABOUT COURAGE

Courage does not mean ignoring danger.

Paul:

Receives encouragement.

Uses protection.

Reports the threat.

Travels under guard.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical courage trusts God without pretending danger is unreal.

LX. WHAT ACTS 23 TEACHES ABOUT PROVIDENCE

God uses:

Paul's conscience.

A doctrinal dispute.

A Roman commander.

Paul's nephew.

A centurion.

A private conversation.

Military planning.

Horses.

A government letter.

A governor.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's providence often works through ordinary details that only become obvious when the whole story is seen.

LXI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 23

1. Maintain a Clear Conscience

Principle:

Integrity gives strength when accusations arise.

2. Remain Submitted to Scripture

Principle:

Even while confronting injustice, allow God's Word to govern your response.

3. Hold Firmly to Resurrection Hope

Principle:

The resurrection remains central to Christian confidence.

4. Receive Christ's Encouragement

Principle:

Jesus stands near His servants in dark moments.

5. Human Plots Cannot Cancel God's Purpose

Principle:

Forty conspirators cannot defeat one divine promise.

6. God Uses Ordinary People and Means

Principle:

Paul's nephew and Roman soldiers became instruments of protection.

7. God's Mission Continues Through Chains

Principle:

Paul's imprisonment moves him closer to the witness Christ promised in Rome.

LXII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What did Paul say about his conscience before the Sanhedrin?

He said he had lived before God with a clear conscience up to that day.

This did not mean sinless perfection, but sincere faithfulness before God.

Question 2

Why was Paul struck?

The high priest Ananias ordered him struck on the mouth immediately after Paul began his defense.

The action itself violated the justice the council claimed to uphold.

Question 3

How did Paul respond when told he had spoken against the high priest?

He acknowledged the scriptural command not to speak evil of a ruler.

Paul allowed Scripture to govern his own conduct.

Question 4

Why did Paul mention the resurrection?

He recognized that resurrection was central to his gospel hope and that the Sanhedrin was divided over the doctrine.

His statement exposed the theological division between Pharisees and Sadducees.

Question 5

What did Jesus tell Paul that night?

Jesus said:

“Take courage!”

He assured Paul that just as he had testified in Jerusalem, he would also testify in Rome.

Question 6

What plot was made against Paul?

More than forty men vowed not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.

They planned to ambush him during a supposed transfer to the council.

Question 7

Who discovered the plot?

Paul’s nephew heard about it and courageously reported it.

Question 8

What did Paul do after learning of the plot?

He sent his nephew to the Roman commander so the information could be acted upon.

Question 9

How did the commander protect Paul?

He organized a massive military escort consisting of soldiers, horsemen, and spearmen and sent Paul toward Caesarea at night.

Question 10

What did Claudius Lysias conclude about Paul's charges?

He concluded that the accusations involved disputes about Jewish law and that Paul had done nothing deserving death or imprisonment.

Question 11

Where was Paul taken?

He was safely transported to Caesarea and placed under Governor Felix's authority.

Question 12

What is the central lesson of Acts 23?

God's purpose cannot be defeated by human opposition, and He can use both extraordinary encouragement and ordinary providential means to protect His servant and move His mission forward.

LXIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 23 asks several important questions.

Am I Living With a Clear Conscience Before God?

Paul sought to.

Do I Allow Scripture to Correct Me?

Paul did.

Is My Hope Anchored in the Resurrection?

Paul's was.

Do I Remember Christ's Presence When Circumstances Become Dark?

Jesus stood near Paul.

Can I Trust God When People Plot Against Me?

Paul had to.

Do I Recognize That God May Use Ordinary People to Protect Me?

Paul's nephew mattered greatly.

Am I Willing to Take Wise Action Instead of Calling Passivity "Faith"?

Paul acted.

Do I believe God's promise is stronger than human opposition?

Acts 23 demonstrates that it is.

Can I recognize protection even when circumstances still feel restrictive?

Paul remained in custody.

Am I looking for God's purpose even in delay?

Paul's journey toward Rome continued.

LXIV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

"One Promise From Jesus Is Stronger Than Forty Threats From Men"

The assassins had:

Numbers.

Planning.

Commitment.

Secrecy.

But Paul had:

A promise.

Principle

When God has determined His purpose, opposition may complicate the journey but cannot cancel the destination.

LXV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Christ May Not Remove the Night Before He Stands Beside You in It”

Paul was still:

A prisoner.

Still threatened.

Still uncertain.

Yet:

Jesus stood near.

Principle

God’s presence is itself a form of deliverance before the circumstances change.

LXVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Providence Often Looks Ordinary”

No angel appears to Paul’s nephew.

No voice tells Lysias what to do.

No earthquake opens the fortress.

Instead:

Someone hears.

Someone speaks.

Someone listens.

Someone acts.

Principle

Never overlook ordinary events as possible instruments of God's extraordinary providence.

LXVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Faith Uses the Means God Provides”

Paul knew Christ had promised Rome.

Yet:

He still reported the plot.

Principle

Trusting God does not mean refusing wisdom, law, medicine, protection, counsel, or practical action when God has provided them.

LXVIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Chain May Be Moving You Toward the Calling”

Paul is now:

A Roman prisoner.

But that condition opens future access to:

Governors.

Kings.

Caesar's legal system.

Rome.

Principle

What appears to restrict your freedom may still advance God's purpose for your witness.

LXIX. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Maintain Integrity When Others Lose Theirs”

Paul faces:

An unlawful blow.

A chaotic council.

A murder conspiracy.

Deception.

Yet:

He continues appealing to truth.

Law.

Conscience.

God.

Principle

The misconduct of others never gives the believer permission to abandon personal integrity.

LXX. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 23 looks dangerous from beginning to end.

Paul stands before a hostile council.

He is struck.

The council erupts.

Violence threatens.

Jesus encourages him.

Then:

Forty men decide he must die.

They make an oath.

They organize an ambush.

They recruit cooperation.

Humanly speaking:

Paul appears surrounded.

But Acts 23 is not primarily a story about how powerful Paul's enemies were.

It is a story about:

How sovereign Paul's God was.

Jesus had already spoken:

"You must also testify in Rome."

That sentence becomes the foundation of the chapter.

Forty men can plot.

Religious leaders can cooperate.

Crowds can riot.

Political officials can misunderstand.

But:

Paul must reach Rome.

God then begins moving ordinary pieces.

A nephew overhears something.

A centurion agrees to carry a message.

A commander listens.

Military orders are issued.

Hundreds of soldiers prepare.

Horses are provided.

A letter is written.

A route is chosen.

A governor receives the prisoner.

None of these things look as spectacular as:

An angel opening a prison.

An earthquake shaking chains loose.

A miracle raising the dead.

Yet:

The result is still divine protection.

That is providence.

Acts 23 teaches us not to limit God's work to the supernatural event we immediately recognize as miraculous.

God can work through:

An overheard conversation.

A relative.

A legal right.

A military officer.

A transportation plan.

A bureaucratic letter.

A government institution.

He is Lord over all of it.

The chapter also teaches:

A clear conscience matters.

Scripture matters.

Resurrection matters.

Courage matters.

Wisdom matters.

Paul did not say:

Jesus promised Rome, therefore I will ignore the assassination plot.

He used:

The information.

The centurion.

The commander.

The protection offered.

That is not unbelief.

That is wisdom under providence.

And most importantly:

Jesus stood near.

Paul may have felt alone.

But he was not alone.

Jesus said:

“Take courage.”

Those words remain powerful.

When the future feels uncertain:

Take courage.

When opposition becomes intense:

Take courage.

When you do not understand the path:

Take courage.

When people plot:

Take courage.

When the road toward God’s promise looks completely different than expected:

Take courage.

Why?

Because:

The Lord stands near His people.

And His purposes remain stronger than every opposition against them.

Therefore:

Live with a clear conscience.

Submit yourself to Scripture.

Stand upon resurrection hope.

Receive Christ’s encouragement.

Use wisdom.

Take threats seriously without surrendering to fear.

Recognize providence.

Use lawful means.

Trust God's promises.

And remember:

If God has determined the destination:

No enemy can cancel the journey.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 23.

Thank You that You remain sovereign when life becomes confusing.

Help us live before You with clear consciences.

Give us integrity when falsely accused.

Give us humility when Your Word corrects us.

Keep our hope anchored in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thank You that Jesus stood near Paul in the darkness.

Stand near us in our difficult nights.

When we are afraid:

Tell our hearts again:

“Take courage.”

When people oppose us:

Help us trust You.

When plans are made against us:

Remind us that no human plan is greater than Your purpose.

Thank You for Paul's nephew.

Thank You for showing that ordinary people can become important instruments of Your protection.

Help us speak when someone is in danger.

Give us wisdom to act responsibly.

Protect us from confusing faith with passivity.

Teach us to use the means You provide.

Thank You for every person, institution, law, opportunity, and circumstance You can use for Your purposes.

Help us recognize Your providence in ordinary things.

When our circumstances feel restrictive:

Help us see that You may still be moving us toward the next assignment.

When doors close:

Guide us.

When chains remain:

Use us.

When opposition increases:

Strengthen us.

And above everything:

Help us remember that Your promises are stronger than human threats.

May our lives testify:

The Lord stood near me.

The Lord gave me courage.

The Lord protected me.

The Lord completed His purpose.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“That night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! Just as you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, you must also testify in Rome.’” — Acts 23:11

Central Truth

God stands near His servants in times of danger, strengthens them with His promises, and sovereignly uses people, circumstances, governments, legal protections, and ordinary providence to defeat human conspiracies and move His gospel mission toward its appointed destination.

Acts 23 in One Sentence

Paul faces violence and division before the Sanhedrin, receives Christ's assurance that he will testify in Rome, survives a conspiracy of more than forty assassins when his nephew exposes the plot, and is safely escorted by Roman forces to Caesarea, demonstrating that no human plan can overturn the sovereign purpose of God.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 24 — Paul Before Felix

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 24 brings Paul before:

Governor Felix.

The setting has changed.

Paul is no longer standing before:

A mob.

The Sanhedrin.

Roman soldiers in Jerusalem.

He is now in Caesarea facing a formal accusation before a Roman governor.

His opponents arrive with:

The high priest Ananias.

Several elders.

A professional lawyer named Tertullus.

Their case against Paul contains serious accusations.

They call him:

A troublemaker.

They accuse him of:

Stirring riots.

Leading the Nazarene sect.

Attempting to desecrate the temple.

These are not minor charges.

They are designed to make Paul appear:

Politically dangerous.

Religiously disruptive.

Criminally irresponsible.

But when Paul answers:

He does not rely on flattery.

He does not become angry.

He does not attack his accusers personally.

Instead:

He presents facts.

He says:

The accusations cannot be proved.

He had gone to Jerusalem:

To worship.

He had not been:

Arguing in the temple.

Stirring crowds.

Organizing riots.

Instead:

He openly confesses that he follows:

“The Way.”

He says:

“I believe everything that is in the Law and the Prophets.”

Then Paul returns to one of the central doctrines of Acts:

Resurrection.

He declares that there will be a resurrection of:

The righteous.

And:

The wicked.

Because of this future accountability, Paul says:

“I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”

Paul then explains why he had really come to Jerusalem.

Not:

To cause trouble.

But:

To bring gifts for the poor.

And:

To present offerings.

He challenges his accusers to produce actual evidence.

Felix postpones the case.

Paul remains in custody, but he receives some freedom.

Then something remarkable happens.

Felix and his wife Drusilla personally summon Paul.

Paul is now given an opportunity to explain:

Faith in Christ Jesus.

Paul does not soften his message because he is speaking to a governor.

He speaks about:

Righteousness.

Self-control.

Coming judgment.

Felix becomes afraid.

His conscience is disturbed.

But instead of repenting:

He postpones.

He tells Paul:

“That’s enough for now!”

Then comes one of the saddest statements in the chapter:

“When I find it convenient, I will send for you.”

Felix wants:

A more convenient time.

But Scripture never records that such a time came.

At the same time:

Felix hopes Paul will offer him money.

So the governor is:

Convicted.

Curious.

Corrupt.

He hears Paul repeatedly.

But he does not respond in saving faith.

Two years pass.

Paul remains in custody.

Felix eventually leaves office and is replaced by Porcius Festus.

Yet before leaving:

Felix leaves Paul imprisoned to gain favor with the Jewish leaders.

Acts 24 therefore contrasts:

Paul and Felix.

Paul has:

A clear conscience.

Felix has:

A troubled conscience.

Paul values:

Truth.

Felix values:

Convenience.

Paul refuses:

Corruption.

Felix hopes for:

A bribe.

Paul speaks of:

Coming judgment.

Felix postpones his response.

The chapter therefore warns us:

Conviction is not conversion.

Hearing the gospel repeatedly is not the same as obeying it.

A convenient time to repent may never come.

And:

A clear conscience before God is more valuable than political power without righteousness.

The central truth of Acts 24 is:

Paul faithfully defends the truth, proclaims resurrection and judgment, maintains a clear conscience before God and people, and boldly presents faith in Jesus Christ to Felix, while Felix tragically demonstrates the danger of delaying repentance for a more convenient time.

I. PAUL'S ACCUSERS ARRIVE

Acts 24:1

“Five days later, the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. They presented their case against Paul before the governor.”

Paul's opponents organize carefully.

They bring:

Religious authority.

Political influence.

Professional legal representation.

Cross References

Acts 23:2

Ananias had previously ordered Paul to be struck while Paul stood before the council.

Acts 23:30

Claudius Lysias had ordered Paul's accusers to present their case before Governor Felix.

Acts 25:2

Jewish leaders would later continue pressing serious charges against Paul before Festus.

Spiritual Principle

Organized opposition can appear powerful, but accusation still requires evidence.

II. TERTULLUS FLATTERS FELIX

Acts 24:2

“When Paul was called in, Tertullus began his accusation: ‘Most excellent Felix, under your leadership we have enjoyed much peace, and your reforms have benefited this nation.’”

Tertullus begins with praise.

His opening is designed to gain Felix's favor.

Cross References

Luke 1:3

Formal honorific language could be used when addressing officials of high position.

Acts 23:26

Claudius Lysias had formally addressed Felix as “His Excellency.”

Acts 26:25

Paul later respectfully addressed another Roman official while still speaking truth.

Spiritual Principle

Respect is appropriate, but flattery becomes dangerous when it is used to manipulate judgment.

III. “WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL”

Acts 24:3

“Everywhere and always, we are deeply grateful.”

Tertullus continues the flattering introduction.

Cross References

Acts 24:2

His praise of Felix forms part of the opening legal strategy.

1 Timothy 2:1

Christians are called to pray appropriately for rulers and authorities.

Acts 26:3

Paul later acknowledged Agrippa's familiarity with Jewish matters without resorting to exaggerated flattery.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Respect speaks truthfully; flattery exaggerates praise in order to gain advantage.

IV. TERTULLUS ASKS FOR A HEARING

Acts 24:4

“But, not to take too much of your time, I beg you to listen briefly.”

The formal accusation now begins.

Cross References

Acts 26:3

Paul later asked Agrippa to listen patiently to his defense.

Acts 24:2

Tertullus has already prepared the governor with flattering language.

Acts 2:14

Speakers throughout Acts frequently asked audiences to listen carefully before presenting important testimony.

Spiritual Principle

Important claims should be heard carefully before judgment is made.

V. PAUL IS CALLED A TROUBLEMAKER

Acts 24:5

“We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect.”

Three accusations appear.

A Trouble-Maker

Paul is portrayed as socially dangerous.

A Riot-Starter

He is portrayed as politically dangerous.

A Sect Leader

He is portrayed as religiously dangerous.

Cross References

Acts 17:6

Paul and his companions had previously been accused of turning the world upside down.

Acts 6:13

Stephen had also faced distorted accusations concerning Judaism and the temple.

Acts 28:22

Christianity was still spoken of by opponents as a sect.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When opponents cannot defeat the message, they may attempt to discredit the messenger.

VI. ACCUSED OF DESECRATING THE TEMPLE

Acts 24:6

“He even tried to desecrate the temple, so we seized him.”

This repeats the accusation from Acts 21.

Cross References

Acts 21:28

Paul had been accused of bringing Gentiles into the temple and defiling the holy place.

Acts 21:29

Luke clarified that the accusation was based on an assumption concerning Trophimus.

Acts 21:30

The accusation quickly resulted in mob violence.

Spiritual Principle

A serious accusation does not become true merely because it is repeated.

VII. LYSIAS INTERVENED

Acts 24:7

“But Lysias the commander intervened and took him from us by force.”

Tertullus describes Roman intervention negatively.

Yet Lysias had actually rescued Paul from being killed.

Cross References

Acts 21:32

Roman soldiers stopped the crowd from beating Paul.

Acts 21:33

The commander took Paul into custody.

Acts 23:27

Lysias later wrote that Paul had been seized and was about to be killed before Roman intervention.

Spiritual Principle

People may describe the same event differently depending upon their interests and motives.

VIII. FELIX IS ASKED TO INVESTIGATE

Acts 24:8

“And ordered his accusers to come before you. By examining him yourself, you will be able to learn the truth of these charges.”

Tertullus invites Felix to determine the matter.

Cross References

Acts 23:30

Lysias had indeed instructed Paul’s accusers to appear before Felix.

Acts 25:6

Paul would later again appear before Roman authority to answer accusations.

Acts 22:30

The Roman commander had previously attempted to discover the exact charge against Paul.

Spiritual Principle

Claims should be tested rather than automatically accepted.

IX. THE ACCUSERS AGREE

Acts 24:9

“The Jews joined in the accusation, confirming that these things were true.”

A group agrees.

But agreement does not equal proof.

Cross References

Acts 24:1

The Jewish leadership had come together specifically to prosecute Paul.

Matthew 26:59

Religious leaders had once sought testimony against Jesus in order to put Him to death.

Psalms 27:12

David prayed for protection against false witnesses who breathed out violence.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Many voices repeating the same accusation do not make an unsupported accusation true.

X. PAUL BEGINS HIS DEFENSE

Acts 24:10

“When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied, ‘I know that you have been a judge over this nation for many years, so I gladly make my defense.’”

Notice the difference between Paul and Tertullus.

Paul is respectful.

But restrained.

He does not manipulate Felix through extravagant praise.

Cross References

Acts 26:1

Paul later calmly gave another defense before Agrippa.

Acts 25:16

Roman procedure recognized a defendant’s right to answer charges.

1 Peter 3:15

Believers are called to be ready to give an answer with gentleness and respect.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Truth does not require flattery to defend itself.

XI. PAUL HAD COME TO WORSHIP

Acts 24:11

“You can easily verify that it was no more than twelve days ago that I went up to Jerusalem to worship.”

Paul begins presenting verifiable facts.

Cross References

Acts 21:17

Paul had arrived in Jerusalem and been welcomed by believers.

Acts 21:26

Paul had participated in purification rites connected with worship.

Acts 20:16

He had intentionally traveled toward Jerusalem.

Spiritual Principle

A good defense distinguishes verifiable facts from emotional accusation.

XII. PAUL DID NOT START A RIOT

Acts 24:12

“My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere in the city.”

Paul directly denies the political accusation.

Cross References

Acts 21:27

It was Paul’s opponents who stirred up the crowd in Jerusalem.

Acts 24:18

Paul later explains that he was ceremonially clean and not surrounded by a crowd.

Acts 25:8

Paul repeatedly denied committing crimes against law, temple, or Caesar.

Spiritual Principle

The believer should be willing to distinguish boldly between accusation and fact.

XIII. THE CHARGES CANNOT BE PROVED

Acts 24:13

“They cannot prove the charges they now bring against me.”

Paul challenges the evidence.

Cross References

Acts 25:7

Paul’s accusers later brought serious charges they could not prove.

Acts 24:19

Paul points out that the original accusers were not even present.

Matthew 26:60

Even those seeking false testimony against Jesus struggled to establish a consistent case.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“An Accusation Without Evidence Is Still Only an Accusation.”

XIV. PAUL OPENLY CONFESSES “THE WAY”

Acts 24:14

“However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in the Law and the Prophets.”

Paul denies the crimes.

But he does not deny Christ.

Cross References

Acts 24:5

His opponents had labeled Christianity a sect.

Acts 28:22

Christianity continued to be described negatively by some Jewish opponents.

Luke 24:44

Jesus taught that the Law, Prophets, and Psalms ultimately pointed toward God's redemptive purpose fulfilled in Him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A Christian defense should deny what is false without denying what is true.

Paul does not say:

I am not one of them.

He says:

I follow:

The Way.

XV. THE RESURRECTION OF RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED

Acts 24:15

"I have the same hope in God as these men themselves, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked."

Paul again returns to resurrection.

Cross References

Daniel 12:2

Daniel foretold that those sleeping in the dust would awaken, some to everlasting life and others to shame and everlasting contempt.

John 5:29

Jesus taught that the dead will rise, some to life and others to judgment.

Acts 23:6

Paul had already declared that he was on trial because of resurrection hope.

Spiritual Principle

Resurrection means every human life is moving toward eternal accountability.

XVI. A CLEAR CONSCIENCE BEFORE GOD AND PEOPLE

Acts 24:16

“Because of this, I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”

Why?

Because:

Resurrection is coming.

Judgment is coming.

God sees.

Cross References

Acts 23:1

Paul had already testified that he lived before God with a clear conscience.

1 Timothy 1:19

Believers are commanded to hold faith together with a good conscience.

Hebrews 13:18

Christian servants desired to live honorably with clear consciences.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“A Belief in Future Judgment Should Produce Present Integrity.”

XVII. PAUL CAME TO HELP THE POOR

Acts 24:17

“After several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring gifts for the poor and to present offerings.”

This destroys the picture of Paul as a troublemaker.

He came:

To help.

Cross References

Romans 15:25

Paul traveled toward Jerusalem to serve needy believers there.

1 Corinthians 16:1

Paul organized a collection for God's people.

2 Corinthians 8:4

Gentile believers eagerly participated in helping suffering Christians.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel that changes doctrine also produces practical generosity.

XVIII. PAUL WAS CEREMONIALLY CLEAN

Acts 24:18

“While I was doing this, some Jews from Asia found me in the temple, ceremonially clean, without any crowd or disturbance.”

Paul again gives the actual circumstances.

Cross References

Acts 21:27

Jews from Asia were the ones who initiated the accusation.

Acts 21:26

Paul had entered the temple while participating in purification.

Numbers 6:13

The Mosaic law included ceremonial procedures connected with vows.

Spiritual Principle

Facts may reveal that the accused person was doing almost the opposite of what the accusation claimed.

XIX. THE ORIGINAL ACCUSERS ARE ABSENT

Acts 24:19

“They ought to be here before you to bring charges if they have anything against me.”

This is a powerful legal point.

The people who started the trouble are not present.

Cross References

Acts 25:16

Roman procedure recognized that an accused person should face his accusers.

Deuteronomy 19:15

Biblical justice required adequate testimony and proper witnesses.

Acts 23:30

Paul’s accusers had been instructed to present their case formally.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical justice requires witnesses, evidence, and accountability—not rumor.

XX. PAUL CHALLENGES THOSE PRESENT

Acts 24:20

“Or let these men here state what wrongdoing they found in me when I stood before the council.”

Paul puts the burden of proof where it belongs.

Cross References

Acts 23:1

Paul had stood directly before the Sanhedrin.

Acts 23:9

Some council members had even declared that they found nothing wrong with him.

Acts 22:30

Paul's appearance before the council had been arranged to establish the real charges.

Spiritual Principle

Truth does not fear legitimate examination.

XXI. THE REAL ISSUE IS RESURRECTION

Acts 24:21

“Except for this one thing I shouted: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’”

Again:

Resurrection.

Cross References

Acts 23:6

Paul had openly declared his hope in the resurrection before the council.

Acts 26:6

Paul later explained that his trial concerned the hope promised by God.

Acts 28:20

He would later say he was bound because of the hope of Israel.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Paul was willing to stand accused for resurrection truth because Christianity without resurrection is Christianity without its victory.

XXII. FELIX POSTPONES THE CASE

Acts 24:22

“Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. He said, ‘When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.’”

Felix knows enough to understand that the situation is more complicated than Tertullus claimed.

Cross References

Acts 9:2

Christianity had long been known as “the Way.”

Acts 24:14

Paul openly identifies himself with the Way.

Acts 23:26

Lysias had provided Felix with a written summary of the case.

Spiritual Principle

Knowledge of Christianity does not automatically produce commitment to Christ.

Felix knew about:

The Way.

But knowing about the Way is not the same as walking in it.

XXIII. PAUL RECEIVES SOME FREEDOM

Acts 24:23

“He ordered the centurion to guard Paul but to give him some freedom, allowing his friends to care for his needs.”

Paul remains a prisoner.

Yet:

His circumstances are eased.

Cross References

Acts 27:3

Roman officials later permitted Paul’s friends to care for him during travel.

Acts 28:16

Paul later received a form of guarded freedom in Rome.

Philippians 4:10

Believers often supported Paul practically during his ministry.

Spiritual Principle

God can provide relief even before He provides release.

XXIV. PAUL PREACHES CHRIST TO FELIX

Acts 24:24

“Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus.”

What an opportunity.

The prisoner becomes:

The preacher.

The governor becomes:

The audience.

Cross References

Acts 25:13

Paul would later receive another opportunity to speak before political royalty and authority.

Acts 26:3

His defense before Agrippa would similarly become a gospel opportunity.

Romans 3:22

God’s righteousness is received through faith in Jesus Christ by all who believe.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Never Assume the Person Holding the Keys Is the One With the Greatest Freedom.”

Felix controls Paul’s cell.

But Paul possesses:

The gospel.

XXV. RIGHTEOUSNESS, SELF-CONTROL, AND JUDGMENT

Acts 24:25

“As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became afraid and said, ‘That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.’”

Paul does not give Felix a comfortable sermon.

He talks about:

Righteousness

God’s righteous standard.

Self-Control

Human responsibility regarding desire and behavior.

Coming Judgment

Future accountability before God.

Cross References

2 Timothy 4:2

Preachers are commanded to proclaim the Word faithfully whether the timing seems convenient or not.

Galatians 5:23

Self-control is part of the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 17:31

Paul had already proclaimed that God has appointed a day to judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ.

Felix Became Afraid

His conscience responds.

But:

Fear is not repentance.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Conviction Is Not Conversion Until Conviction Leads to Repentance and Faith.”

XXVI. FELIX HOPES FOR A BRIBE

Acts 24:26

“At the same time, Felix was hoping Paul would offer him money, so he sent for him often and talked with him.”

This reveals Felix’s heart.

He hears:

Righteousness.

Yet hopes for:

A bribe.

He hears:

Self-control.

Yet remains controlled by:

Greed.

He hears:

Judgment.

Yet delays response.

Cross References

Exodus 23:8

God condemned bribes because they blind judgment and corrupt justice.

Acts 8:20

Peter strongly condemned the attempt to connect money with spiritual privilege.

Acts 25:9

Political leaders in Acts sometimes shaped decisions around personal advantage.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A person can repeatedly hear truth while secretly hoping to profit from the preacher.

XXVII. TWO YEARS PASS

Acts 24:27

“After two years, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. But because Felix wanted to do the Jews a favor, he left Paul in prison.”

Two years.

Paul waits.

Felix leaves.

Paul remains.

Cross References

Acts 25:1

Festus soon takes office and inherits Paul’s unresolved case.

Acts 25:14

Paul’s imprisonment becomes an important matter discussed under the new governor.

Acts 26:32

Later officials acknowledge Paul could have been released had he not appealed to Caesar.

Spiritual Principle

Delayed justice does not mean abandoned purpose.

Paul remains imprisoned.

But:

Christ had already said:

Rome.

XXVIII. PAUL AND TERTULLUS — TWO WAYS OF SPEAKING

Tertullus relies heavily on:

Flattery.

Accusation.

Exaggeration.

Paul relies upon:

Facts.

Evidence.

Truth.

Conscience.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Truth does not need manipulation to make its case.

XXIX. PAUL DENIES THE CRIME BUT CONFESSES THE FAITH

Paul says:

I did not start riots.

I did not desecrate the temple.

But:

“I admit that I worship... as a follower of the Way.”

Spiritual Principle

Never escape a false accusation by becoming ashamed of a true Christian identity.

XXX. CHRISTIANITY AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Paul says:

“I believe everything that is in the Law and the Prophets.”

Paul does not see Christianity as the rejection of biblical revelation.

He sees Christ as:

Its fulfillment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel does not discard the biblical story; it reveals where that story was always pointing.

XXXI. RESURRECTION OF BOTH RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED

Acts 24:15 must not be reduced to resurrection only for believers.

Paul says:

Both.

Righteous

Raised to life.

Wicked

Raised for judgment.

Spiritual Principle

Death does not erase accountability.

XXXII. WHY CONSCIENCE MATTERS

Paul connects resurrection with conscience.

Because:

He knows he will stand before God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Live Today in Light of the Day You Will Stand Before God.”

XXXIII. A CLEAR CONSCIENCE IS NOT SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul does not claim he never sinned.

His own testimony proves otherwise.

He persecuted Christians.

But now:

He seeks to live openly before God.

Spiritual Principle

A clear conscience rests not on pretending we never fail but on walking honestly before God in repentance, faith, and obedience.

XXXIV. THE GOSPEL PRODUCES GENEROSITY

Paul had come:

To bring gifts to the poor.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A gospel that changes the heart should eventually change the hand.

True faith gives.

Serves.

Helps.

XXXV. THE MISSING WITNESSES

Paul identifies a basic problem.

The people who supposedly caught him in wrongdoing:

Are absent.

Spiritual Principle

Fair judgment requires more than secondhand accusation.

XXXVI. FELIX KNEW ABOUT “THE WAY”

Knowledge did not save Felix.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“You Can Know About Christianity Without Knowing Christ.”

A person can know:

Doctrine.

Church language.

Christian history.

Preachers.

Bible terminology.

And still not repent.

XXXVII. THE PRISONER PREACHES TO THE GOVERNOR

Felix summons Paul.

But spiritually:

Paul has something Felix needs.

Spiritual Principle

Circumstances do not determine who has the most important message.

The prisoner can speak truth to the ruler.

XXXVIII. PAUL PREACHES RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul does not merely say:

God loves you.

He speaks about:

Righteousness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel cannot be understood correctly without understanding God's righteous standard.

Grace matters because:

Sin is real.

Guilt is real.

Judgment is real.

XXXIX. PAUL PREACHES SELF-CONTROL

This would have been personal.

Paul does not keep the gospel abstract.

Spiritual Principle

Genuine Christian truth confronts how we actually live.

XL. PAUL PREACHES COMING JUDGMENT

The governor judges Paul.

But Paul reminds the governor:

One day:

God will judge Felix.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Every Earthly Judge Will One Day Stand Before the Heavenly Judge.”

XLI. FELIX TREMBLES

Truth reaches his conscience.

But Felix Does Not Repent

Fear is present.

Submission is absent.

Spiritual Principle

Emotional reaction to a sermon is not proof of spiritual conversion.

A person can:

Tremble.

Cry.

Feel guilty.

Feel convicted.

And still refuse to repent.

XLII. “THAT’S ENOUGH FOR NOW”

Felix ends the conversation.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A person can silence the preacher without silencing the truth.

The truth remains.

Judgment remains.

God remains.

XLIII. THE DANGER OF A CONVENIENT TIME

Felix says:

“When I find it convenient...”

That is one of the most dangerous sentences in Scripture.

Spiritual Principle

Repentance postponed can become repentance never made.

XLIV. THERE MAY NEVER BE A BETTER TIME

Felix apparently expected:

A more convenient moment.

But Scripture does not record that it came.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Best Time to Obey God Is When God Is Speaking to Your Heart.”

XLV. FELIX HEARD PAUL OFTEN

Felix repeatedly talked with Paul.

This means:

Repeated exposure.

Repeated opportunity.

Repeated truth.

Yet:

No recorded conversion.

Spiritual Principle

Frequent exposure to the gospel can harden rather than help if truth is repeatedly resisted.

XLVI. CONVICTION CAN FADE

The first time:

Felix became afraid.

Later:

He keeps talking with Paul.

But his motive includes:

Money.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The truth that terrifies you today may become familiar tomorrow if you continually refuse to obey it.

XLVII. GREED AND SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

Felix listens to a prisoner preach against unrighteousness while secretly hoping for:

A bribe.

Spiritual Principle

Sin can remain active even while a person is listening to a sermon condemning that very sin.

XLVIII. POLITICAL CONVENIENCE OVER JUSTICE

Felix leaves Paul imprisoned:

To please others.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When pleasing people becomes more important than doing what is right, justice becomes negotiable.

XLIX. TWO YEARS OF WAITING

Paul waits for:

Two years.

Was the mission over?

No.

Was God absent?

No.

Spiritual Principle

Waiting is sometimes part of the assignment.

L. GOD'S PROMISE STILL STANDS

Jesus had already said:

Paul would testify in Rome.

Felix cannot cancel that.

Festus cannot cancel that.

The Jewish leaders cannot cancel that.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Delay changes the schedule we expected, not the sovereignty of God.

LI. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN PAUL AND FELIX

Paul

Clear conscience.

Truth.

Faith.

Courage.

Integrity.

Felix

Fear.

Delay.

Greed.

Political convenience.

Spiritual Principle

A prisoner with Christ is spiritually freer than a governor enslaved to sin.

LII. THE GOSPEL BEFORE POWER

Paul does not alter the gospel for powerful people.

He Preaches:

Faith in Christ.

Righteousness.

Self-control.

Judgment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The powerful need the same gospel as everyone else.

LIII. THE THREE GREAT SUBJECTS FELIX NEEDED

Paul's sermon was perfectly aimed.

Righteousness

What is right before God?

Self-Control

Who rules your desires?

Judgment

What will happen when you answer to God?

Spiritual Principle

Faithful preaching addresses the truth people need, not merely the message they would prefer.

LIV. WHAT ACTS 24 TEACHES ABOUT EVANGELISM

Evangelism is not merely:

Inviting people to happiness.

It involves:

Christ.

Faith.

Righteousness.

Repentance.

Judgment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The good news is most clearly understood when people understand what Christ saves them from and what He calls them to.

LV. WHAT ACTS 24 TEACHES ABOUT LEGAL DEFENSE

Paul uses:

Dates.

Facts.

Witnesses.

Evidence.

Procedure.

Spiritual Principle

Christians can defend themselves carefully and factually without hatred or revenge.

LVI. WHAT ACTS 24 TEACHES ABOUT PATIENCE

Paul's case does not end quickly.

Two Years

Yet:

He remains faithful.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not measure God's faithfulness by how quickly He resolves the situation.

LVII. WHAT ACTS 24 TEACHES ABOUT JUSTICE

Justice requires:

Evidence.

Witnesses.

Truth.

Impartiality.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical justice cannot be built on rumor, pressure, or political convenience.

LVIII. WHAT ACTS 24 TEACHES ABOUT CONSCIENCE

Two consciences appear.

Paul

Clear.

Felix

Afraid.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Political authority cannot give peace to a guilty conscience.

Only reconciliation with God can address guilt at its deepest level.

LIX. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 24

1. Truth Does Not Need Flattery

Principle:

Speak respectfully but honestly.

2. Accusations Require Evidence

Principle:

Claims should be proved rather than merely repeated.

3. Christians Should Maintain Clear Consciences

Principle:

Live before both God and people with integrity.

4. Resurrection Means Accountability

Principle:

Both righteous and wicked will be raised.

5. Powerful People Need the Gospel

Principle:

Felix needed faith in Christ just as surely as anyone else.

6. Conviction Must Lead to Response

Principle:

Fear without repentance does not save.

7. Do Not Delay Obedience

Principle:

The convenient time may never come.

LX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who came to accuse Paul before Felix?

The high priest Ananias, several elders, and a lawyer named Tertullus came to Caesarea to present the case.

Question 2

What accusations were made against Paul?

He was accused of being a troublemaker, stirring riots, leading the Nazarene sect, and attempting to desecrate the temple.

Question 3

How did Paul defend himself?

Paul presented verifiable facts and challenged his accusers to prove their allegations.

Question 4

What did Paul openly admit?

He admitted that he followed the Way and worshiped the God of his ancestors, believing what was written in the Law and the Prophets.

Question 5

What did Paul believe about resurrection?

He believed there would be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

Question 6

Why did Paul strive to maintain a clear conscience?

Because he lived in the expectation of resurrection and accountability before God.

Question 7

Why had Paul originally gone to Jerusalem?

He went to bring financial help for the poor and to present offerings.

Question 8

What happened after Felix heard Paul's defense?

Felix postponed the decision and kept Paul under guard with some personal freedom.

Question 9

What did Paul preach to Felix and Drusilla?

He spoke about faith in Christ Jesus, righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment.

Question 10

How did Felix respond?

Felix became afraid but postponed further consideration, saying he would call Paul when he found a convenient time.

Question 11

What corrupt motive did Felix have?

He hoped Paul would offer him money, so he continued summoning Paul for conversations.

Question 12

How long did Paul remain imprisoned under Felix?

Two years passed before Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus, and Felix left Paul imprisoned to gain favor with the Jewish leaders.

LXI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 24 asks serious questions.

Am I Living With a Clear Conscience?

Paul was.

Do I Judge People by Evidence or Accusation?

Felix had to determine the difference.

Am I Ashamed to Be Identified With Christ?

Paul openly confessed the Way.

Do I Believe in Resurrection and Judgment?

Paul did.

Does Future Judgment Affect How I Live Today?

It should.

Am I Willing to Speak Truth to Powerful People?

Paul was.

Does the subject of righteousness make me uncomfortable?

Felix was confronted by it.

Who Controls My Desires?

Self-control matters.

Am I Delaying obedience to God?

Felix did.

Am I waiting for a more convenient time to repent?

That is spiritually dangerous.

Has repeated exposure to truth made me responsive or merely familiar?

Felix heard Paul often.

Can I trust God through long delays?

Paul waited two years.

LXII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“A Clear Conscience Is Worth More Than a Comfortable Reputation”

Paul could not control:

What Tertullus said.

What the elders believed.

What Felix decided.

But:

He could control how he lived before God.

Principle

You cannot always stop false accusations, but you can live so that your conscience does not agree with them.

LXIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Gospel Must Be Preached Even When the Audience Is Powerful”

Felix was:

Governor.

Paul was:

Prisoner.

Yet spiritually:

Felix was the one who needed rescue.

Principle

Never confuse earthly rank with spiritual security.

LXIV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Conviction Is a Door, Not the Destination”

Felix trembled.

That was significant.

But:

He stopped there.

Principle

Godly conviction should lead to repentance and faith, not merely emotional discomfort.

LXV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Wait for a Convenient Time to Obey God”

Felix wanted:

Later.

But Scripture Gives No Record of Later Repentance

Principle

When God confronts the heart with truth, delay is not neutrality—it is another decision.

LXVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Repeated Hearing Does Not Equal Saving Faith”

Felix heard Paul:

Often.

Yet:

His greed remained.

His political compromise remained.

Principle

Exposure to truth cannot substitute for surrender to truth.

LXVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Delay Is Not Defeat”

Paul remains in prison:

Two years.

But:

Rome remains ahead.

Principle

God’s promises do not expire because circumstances move more slowly than we expected.

LXVIII. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 24 places two men before us.

One is:

A prisoner.

The other:

A governor.

Humanly speaking:

Felix has the advantage.

He has:

Position.

Authority.

Freedom.

Influence.

Paul has:

Chains.

Restrictions.

Accusations.

Delay.

Yet spiritually:

Paul is the free man.

Paul has:

A clear conscience.

Faith in Christ.

Resurrection hope.

Purpose.

Truth.

Felix has:

Fear.

Greed.

Political pressure.

Spiritual hesitation.

The prisoner speaks about:

Freedom from guilt.

The governor responds:

“That’s enough for now.”

That may be one of the saddest responses in Acts.

Not:

I reject everything.

Not:

I do not believe you.

But:

Not now.

Later.

When convenient.

That is dangerous.

There may always be:

Another meeting.

Another sermon.

Another Sunday.

Another opportunity.

Another conversation.

But:

There may not.

The call of God demands response.

Felix trembled.

Yet trembling did not save him.

Conviction must become:

Repentance.

Faith.

Submission.

Acts 24 also teaches us how to respond to false accusations.

Paul does not:

Panic.

Lie.

Retaliate.

Flatter.

Instead:

He calmly states facts.

He identifies missing witnesses.

He asks for evidence.

He confesses his Christian faith.

He maintains:

A clear conscience.

That is a powerful model.

When falsely accused:

Tell the truth.

When misunderstood:

Tell the truth.

When questioned:

Tell the truth.

When brought before authority:

Tell the truth.

And never hide:

Jesus Christ.

Then:

Two years pass.

Paul waits.

This may have felt like lost time.

But it was not outside God's purpose.

Christ had already said:

Rome.

The delay could not erase the destination.

Acts 24 therefore calls us to:

Live with integrity.

Believe in resurrection.

Remember judgment.

Help the needy.

Speak truth respectfully.

Reject flattery.

Reject bribery.

Reject political compromise.

Preach Christ clearly.

Respond when God convicts.

And never assume that tomorrow is guaranteed.

The words of Felix remain a warning:

“When I find it convenient...”

The gospel calls us instead to say:

Today.

Today I will listen.

Today I will repent.

Today I will believe.

Today I will obey.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 24.

Thank You for Paul’s example of integrity and courage.

Help us live with clear consciences before You and before people.

Protect us from false accusation.

But even more:

Protect us from giving truthful reason for accusation through sinful living.

Help us speak honestly.

Keep us from manipulation.

Keep us from flattery.

Keep us from greed.

Keep us from political compromise.

Thank You for the hope of resurrection.

Help us remember that every life moves toward accountability before You.

Let that truth shape:

Our thoughts.

Our words.

Our decisions.

Our relationships.

Our priorities.

Give us courage to speak about:

Righteousness.

Self-control.

Coming judgment.

And faith in Jesus Christ.

Thank You that the gospel is not only a warning.

It is good news.

Jesus died.

Jesus rose.

Jesus saves.

Help us respond when You convict our hearts.

Keep us from becoming like Felix.

Do not let us say:

Later.

Not now.

When convenient.

Give us hearts ready to obey You today.

When Your Word exposes sin:

Help us repent.

When Your Spirit convicts:

Help us listen.

When Christ calls:

Help us follow.

Give us patience during seasons of delay.

When answers take years rather than days:

Keep us faithful.

Remind us that Your promises remain sure.

May we live in such a way that when we stand before people or before You:

Our conscience is clear.

Our faith is strong.

Our hope is in Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

**“As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became afraid and said, ‘That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.’”
— Acts 24:25**

Central Truth

Paul faithfully defends the truth with a clear conscience and boldly proclaims faith in Christ, resurrection, righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment, while Felix demonstrates the tragic danger of experiencing conviction yet postponing repentance for a more convenient time.

Acts 24 in One Sentence

Paul answers serious but unproven accusations before Governor Felix by affirming his faith in the Scriptures, resurrection hope, and clear conscience, then boldly preaches faith in Christ, righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment to Felix, whose fearful but delayed response shows that repeated conviction without repentance can leave a person unchanged even while the purposes of God continue through Paul’s imprisonment.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 25 — Paul Appeals to Caesar

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 25 continues Paul's long legal struggle.

Felix is gone.

Porcius Festus is now governor.

But Paul is still:

A prisoner.

The accusations remain.

The hostility remains.

The assassination plans remain.

Yet something else also remains:

The promise of Jesus.

The Lord had already told Paul:

“You must also testify in Rome.”

Acts 25 shows another major step toward the fulfillment of that promise.

The Jewish leaders once again attempt to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem.

Their request sounds procedural.

But secretly:

They are planning another ambush.

Their intention is:

To kill Paul along the way.

Festus refuses their immediate request and requires the accusations to be presented in Caesarea.

When Paul stands before the court:

The charges are serious.

But once again:

They cannot be proved.

Paul states plainly:

“I have not done anything wrong against the law of the Jews, the temple, or Caesar.”

Then Festus asks whether Paul is willing to return to Jerusalem for trial.

Paul understands the danger.

He knows he belongs before a Roman court.

So he exercises his right as a Roman citizen and declares:

“I appeal to Caesar!”

Festus answers:

“You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”

Humanly speaking:

Paul made a legal appeal.

Spiritually:

That appeal becomes another part of God’s providential route toward Rome.

Soon:

King Agrippa and Bernice arrive.

Festus explains Paul’s case.

His description is remarkable.

He expected serious criminal charges.

Instead:

The controversy concerned religion and:

“A man named Jesus, who had died, but Paul claimed was alive.”

That statement reaches the heart of Christianity.

The real issue is:

Is Jesus alive?

Paul’s entire ministry rests upon the answer:

Yes.

If Jesus is dead:

The gospel collapses.

If Jesus is risen:

Everything changes.

Then Agrippa says:

“I would like to hear this man myself.”

The next day:

Agrippa.

Bernice.

Military officers.

Prominent citizens.

Festus.

All gather with:

Great pomp and ceremony.

Then:

Paul the prisoner enters.

Humanly:

The powerful people are seated.

Paul is in chains.

But spiritually:

Paul possesses the message everyone in the room needs.

Once again:

God turns a courtroom into a pulpit.

The central truth of Acts 25 is:

God sovereignly uses courts, rulers, legal rights, delays, and even hostile accusations to protect Paul, advance the gospel, and move His servant toward Rome, while the resurrection of Jesus remains the central issue that earthly authorities cannot ignore.

I. FESTUS ARRIVES IN THE PROVINCE

Acts 25:1

“Three days after Festus arrived in the province, he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.”

Festus wastes little time beginning his responsibilities.

Cross References

Acts 24:27

Felix had been replaced by Porcius Festus after leaving Paul imprisoned for two years.

Acts 23:23

Paul had originally been transferred from Jerusalem to Caesarea under heavy military protection.

Luke 3:1

Luke regularly places gospel events within the framework of actual rulers and governmental history.

Spiritual Principle

Political leaders change, but God’s purpose continues.

Felix leaves.

Festus arrives.

Paul remains in God’s hands.

II. THE JEWISH LEADERS RENEW THEIR CHARGES

Acts 25:2

“There the high priest and Jewish leaders presented their charges against Paul.”

Two years have passed.

But the hostility has not disappeared.

Cross References

Acts 24:1

The high priest and elders had previously presented accusations against Paul before Felix.

Acts 21:28

Paul had originally been falsely accused of teaching against the Jewish people, law, and temple.

Matthew 26:59

Religious leaders had once similarly sought accusations against Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Time does not always weaken hostility when hearts remain unchanged.

III. ANOTHER MURDER PLOT

Acts 25:3

“They urgently asked Festus to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, planning an ambush to kill him along the way.”

Their stated request and actual motive are completely different.

Publicly:

Bring Paul to Jerusalem.

Privately:

Kill him.

Cross References

Acts 23:12

More than forty men had previously taken an oath to kill Paul.

Acts 9:23

Enemies had plotted Paul’s death even early in his Christian ministry.

Psalms 37:32

The wicked watch for opportunities to destroy the righteous.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“A Respectable Request Can Hide a Wicked Motive.”

Always distinguish:

What people say.

From:

What they actually intend.

IV. FESTUS REFUSES THE TRANSFER

Acts 25:4

“But Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would return there soon.”

The assassination plan fails immediately.

Festus may not know the secret motive.

But his decision protects Paul.

Cross References

Acts 23:35

Paul had already been placed under Roman guard in Caesarea.

Acts 24:27

He remained imprisoned there when Festus took office.

John 18:38

Roman officials repeatedly found themselves dealing with religious accusations they did not fully understand.

Spiritual Principle

God can block a danger through the ordinary decision of someone who does not even know the danger exists.

V. “LET THEM COME AND PRESS CHARGES”

Acts 25:5

“He said, ‘Let your leaders come with me and press charges if the man has done anything wrong.’”

Festus requires:

Formal accusation.

Public hearing.

Legal process.

Cross References

Acts 25:16

Festus later explains that Roman procedure required an accused person to face accusers and answer charges.

Acts 23:30

Paul’s accusers had already been told to present their case formally.

Deuteronomy 19:15

Biblical justice required adequate testimony before guilt could be established.

Spiritual Principle

Justice requires evidence, not secret plots.

VI. PAUL IS BROUGHT BEFORE FESTUS

Acts 25:6

“After staying in Jerusalem for more than ten days, Festus went down to Caesarea. The next day, he convened the court and ordered Paul to be brought in.”

Paul is once again before a judge.

Cross References

Acts 24:1

Paul had previously appeared in Caesarea before Felix.

Acts 23:35

He had remained there awaiting formal proceedings.

Matthew 27:11

Jesus Himself had stood before a Roman governor while false accusations surrounded Him.

Spiritual Principle

Repeated trials do not mean God has forgotten His servant.

VII. SERIOUS ACCUSATIONS WITHOUT PROOF

Acts 25:7

“When Paul appeared, the Jews from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious accusations that they could not prove.”

The accusations are:

Many.

Serious.

Unproven.

Cross References

Acts 24:13

Paul had already said his accusers could not prove their charges.

Acts 6:13

Stephen also faced distorted religious accusations.

Matthew 26:60

False witnesses against Jesus likewise failed to establish a consistent case.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Seriousness of an Accusation Does Not Determine Its Truthfulness.”

Evidence matters.

VIII. PAUL DENIES WRONGDOING

Acts 25:8

“Paul defended himself: ‘I have not done anything wrong against the law of the Jews, the temple, or Caesar.’”

Paul answers three categories.

Jewish Law

The Temple

Caesar

He denies criminal wrongdoing in each.

Cross References

Acts 24:12

Paul had previously denied stirring crowds or creating disorder in Jerusalem.

Acts 21:28

His opponents had falsely accused him of defiling the temple.

Acts 23:1

Paul had maintained that he lived with a clear conscience before God.

Spiritual Principle

A Christian should be able to distinguish persecution for faith from punishment for actual wrongdoing.

IX. FESTUS WANTS TO PLEASE THE JEWS

Acts 25:9

“Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked Paul, ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?’”

Here political pressure enters justice.

Festus wants:

Favor.

Cross References

Acts 24:27

Felix had also left Paul imprisoned because he wanted to please the Jews.

Mark 15:15

Pilate released Barabbas because he wanted to satisfy the crowd.

John 19:12

Political pressure was used against Pilate during Jesus’ trial.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Justice becomes dangerous when pleasing people becomes more important than doing what is right.

X. PAUL INSISTS ON THE PROPER COURT

Acts 25:10

“Paul answered, ‘I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I should be tried. I have not wronged the Jews, as you know very well.’”

Paul does not agree to an unsafe transfer.

Cross References

Acts 18:14

Gallio had previously recognized that Paul was not guilty of ordinary criminal wrongdoing.

Acts 23:29

Claudius Lysias had found no charge against Paul deserving death or imprisonment.

Romans 13:1

Paul recognized civil authority as legitimate under God.

Spiritual Principle

Respecting government does not require surrendering proper legal process.

XI. “I APPEAL TO CAESAR!”

Acts 25:11

“If I am guilty and have done anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if their charges are false, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!”

Paul’s reasoning is remarkable.

He is not afraid of justice.

He says:

If I deserve death:

I accept justice.

But:

If the charges are false:

I will not willingly submit to injustice.

Cross References

Acts 26:32

Agrippa later explains that Paul could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar.

Acts 22:25

Paul had previously invoked legal protection against unlawful flogging.

Acts 16:37

In Philippi, Paul had also insisted that Roman law be properly respected.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Christian Courage Does Not Mean Refusing Every Legal Protection.”

XII. “TO CAESAR YOU WILL GO”

Acts 25:12

“After conferring with his council, Festus declared, ‘You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!’”

This is more than legal procedure.

Remember Jesus’ earlier words:

“You must also testify in Rome.”

Now Rome becomes legally inevitable.

Cross References

Acts 25:21

Festus later explains that Paul is being held for the emperor’s decision.

Acts 27:24

God will again assure Paul that he must stand before Caesar.

Philippians 1:13

Paul’s imprisonment later becomes known even among the imperial guard.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“God Can Use a Legal Appeal to Fulfill a Divine Appointment.”

XIII. AGRIPPA AND BERNICE ARRIVE

Acts 25:13

“A few days later, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice came to Caesarea to pay respects to Festus.”

New rulers enter Paul's story.

Cross References

Acts 12:1

The Herodian family had already played a significant role in opposition to the early church.

Acts 26:30

Agrippa and Bernice later hear Paul's testimony directly.

Luke 23:8

Herod Antipas had once eagerly desired to see Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

God can place His servant before powerful people who would otherwise never hear him.

XIV. FESTUS EXPLAINS PAUL'S CASE

Acts 25:14

“While they were there, Festus explained Paul's case to the king: ‘There is a man left as a prisoner by Felix.’”

Paul's case becomes a subject of political discussion.

Cross References

Acts 24:27

Felix had left Paul imprisoned when Festus replaced him.

Acts 23:33

Paul had originally been delivered to the governor in Caesarea.

Luke 23:6

Roman officials sometimes referred difficult cases to rulers thought better qualified to understand them.

Spiritual Principle

Even when Paul is not present, his case—and therefore the issue of Christ—keeps reaching new people.

XV. THE LEADERS WANTED PAUL CONDEMNED

Acts 25:15

“When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for his condemnation.”

Their desired outcome precedes proof.

Cross References

Acts 24:1

The same leadership had previously prosecuted Paul before Felix.

Matthew 27:1

Religious leaders had similarly planned how to have Jesus executed.

Luke 23:1

Jesus was also brought before Roman authority through organized accusation.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Justice is corrupted when the desired verdict is chosen before the evidence is heard.

XVI. FESTUS EXPLAINS ROMAN PROCEDURE

Acts 25:16

“I told them that it is not the Roman way to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and had a chance to defend themselves.”

This is a strong statement of legal fairness.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 19:18

Judges were instructed to investigate charges carefully.

John 7:51

Nicodemus asked whether the law judged anyone before first hearing and investigating the matter.

Proverbs 18:13

Answering before hearing the matter is foolish and shameful.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Hear the Evidence Before Reaching the Verdict.”

XVII. FESTUS HOLDS COURT QUICKLY

Acts 25:17

“So when they came here, I wasted no time. The next day I held court and ordered the man brought in.”

Festus emphasizes procedural action.

Cross References

Acts 25:6

He convened court shortly after returning to Caesarea.

Acts 24:1

Paul had already endured a previous formal hearing under Felix.

John 18:33

Roman judicial procedure also surrounded Jesus’ appearance before Pilate.

Spiritual Principle

Speed in justice can be useful only when paired with fairness and truth.

XVIII. THE EXPECTED CRIMES ARE MISSING

Acts 25:18

“But when his accusers stood up, they did not charge him with the crimes I expected.”

Festus expected:

Serious criminal behavior.

But he encountered:

A religious controversy.

Cross References

Acts 25:7

The charges were serious but unprovable.

Acts 23:29

Lysias had already concluded that the controversy concerned Jewish law.

Acts 24:5

Paul's enemies had attempted to portray him as politically dangerous.

Spiritual Principle

The rhetoric surrounding an accusation can sound more dangerous than the actual evidence.

XIX. THE ISSUE IS JESUS—DEAD OR ALIVE?

Acts 25:19

“Instead, they had disputes about their own religion and about a man named Jesus, who had died, but Paul claimed was alive.”

Festus unintentionally summarizes the central issue of Christianity.

Jesus Died

Historically real death.

Paul Claimed He Is Alive

Resurrection.

Cross References

Acts 23:6

Paul had repeatedly insisted that resurrection was at the heart of his case.

Acts 17:32

The resurrection had already divided Paul's audience in Athens.

1 Corinthians 15:14

Paul taught that if Christ has not been raised, Christian preaching and faith are empty.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Christianity Ultimately Stands or Falls on the Question: Is Jesus Alive?”

XX. FESTUS DOES NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO

Acts 25:20

“I was at a loss about how to handle such matters, so I asked if Paul would be willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried there.”

Festus does not understand the theological issue.

Cross References

Acts 25:9

Festus had asked Paul whether he would return to Jerusalem.

John 18:38

Pilate likewise struggled with a case involving truth claims he did not fully understand.

Luke 23:7

Roman officials sometimes transferred difficult matters between jurisdictions.

Spiritual Principle

Human authority can possess political power while lacking spiritual understanding.

XXI. PAUL REQUESTS THE EMPEROR'S DECISION

Acts 25:21

“But Paul appealed to be held for the Emperor’s decision, so I ordered him to be kept until I could send him to Caesar.”

The legal path is now fixed.

Cross References

Acts 25:11

Paul had clearly appealed to Caesar.

Acts 25:12

Festus formally accepted the appeal.

Acts 28:19

Paul later explains that his appeal to Caesar was forced by circumstances, not hostility toward his own people.

Spiritual Principle

God can use a decision made in one courtroom to open the door to another continent and another audience.

XXII. AGRIPPA WANTS TO HEAR PAUL

Acts 25:22

“Agrippa said to Festus, ‘I would like to hear this man myself.’ ‘Tomorrow you will hear him,’ Festus replied.”

Another door opens.

Paul did not request this audience.

Agrippa does.

Cross References

Luke 23:8

Herod once eagerly wanted to see Jesus because he had heard much about Him.

Acts 9:15

God had told Ananias that Paul would carry Christ's name before kings.

Matthew 10:18

Jesus warned that His followers would be brought before governors and kings as witnesses.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Trial You Did Not Want May Put You Before the Audience You Could Never Reach.”

XXIII. AGRIPPA ENTERS WITH GREAT POMP

Acts 25:23

“The next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and ceremony. They entered the audience hall with the high-ranking officers and prominent men of the city. At Festus' command, Paul was brought in.”

The contrast is striking.

Agrippa:

Royal ceremony.

Bernice:

Prominence.

Military officers:

Authority.

City leaders:

Prestige.

Paul:

A prisoner.

Cross References

Acts 25:13

Agrippa and Bernice had come to visit Festus.

Acts 12:21

Herod had previously appeared publicly in royal clothing and ceremony.

Esther 1:4

Earthly rulers often displayed wealth and royal glory publicly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Heaven does not measure greatness by who enters the room with the most ceremony.

XXIV. THE CROWD DEMANDS PAUL'S DEATH

Acts 25:24

“Festus said, ‘King Agrippa, and all who are here with us, you see this man. The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he must not live any longer.’”

The demand is severe.

Cross References

Acts 22:22

The Jerusalem crowd had shouted that Paul was not fit to live.

Luke 23:18

A crowd had similarly cried out against Jesus.

John 19:15

Jesus also faced a public demand for death.

Spiritual Principle

Public pressure does not determine guilt.

XXV. FESTUS FINDS NOTHING DESERVING DEATH

Acts 25:25

“But I found he had done nothing deserving death. Since he has appealed to the Emperor, I have decided to send him.”

Again:

Official examination finds no capital offense.

Cross References

Acts 23:29

Claudius Lysias had already concluded that Paul deserved neither death nor imprisonment.

Acts 26:31

Agrippa and others will later reach the same conclusion.

Luke 23:4

Pilate likewise repeatedly found no criminal basis for condemning Jesus.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Repetition of innocence by multiple authorities exposes the weakness of the accusations.

XXVI. FESTUS HAS NOTHING DEFINITE TO WRITE

Acts 25:26

“But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore, I have brought him before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after this hearing I may have something to write.”

Festus has a procedural problem.

Paul is going to Caesar.

But:

What exactly is the criminal charge?

Cross References

Acts 9:15

God had already appointed Paul to testify before kings.

Acts 26:32

Agrippa will ultimately recognize Paul's innocence.

1 Peter 3:15

Believers are called to be prepared to give a reasoned answer concerning their hope.

Spiritual Principle

God can use an official's uncertainty to create another opportunity for gospel witness.

XXVII. SENDING A PRISONER WITHOUT CHARGES IS UNREASONABLE

Acts 25:27

"For it seems unreasonable to send a prisoner to Rome without specifying the charges against him."

Festus recognizes the obvious legal problem.

Cross References

Proverbs 18:13

Giving judgment before hearing the matter is foolish.

Deuteronomy 19:15

Serious accusations require proper evidence.

John 18:29

Pilate himself asked Jesus' accusers what formal charge they were bringing.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

"Justice Requires a Charge That Can Be Stated and Evidence That Can Be Examined."

XXVIII. PAUL'S APPEAL AND GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Paul says:

“I appeal to Caesar.”

Festus says:

“To Caesar you will go.”

Jesus had already said:

“You must also testify in Rome.”

Spiritual Principle

Human decisions can become the means through which divine purposes are fulfilled.

XXIX. PAUL DID NOT FEAR A JUST VERDICT

Paul says:

If I deserve death:

I do not refuse it.

This is not recklessness.

It is confidence in justice.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A clear conscience does not fear honest examination.

XXX. PAUL REFUSES AN UNJUST TRANSFER

He will not voluntarily return to Jerusalem.

Why?

There have already been:

Murder plots.

Ambush plans.

False accusations.

Spiritual Principle

Faith does not require placing yourself unnecessarily into the hands of people openly committed to destroying you.

XXXI. APPEALING TO CAESAR WAS NOT LACK OF FAITH

Paul had Christ's promise.

Still:

He appealed legally.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Trusting God and Using Lawful Means Belong Together.”

God's sovereignty does not make wisdom unnecessary.

XXXII. GOD USES ROMAN LAW

Roman citizenship had already protected Paul from:

Illegal flogging.

Improper transfer.

Mob violence.

Now:

It provides appeal to Caesar.

Spiritual Principle

God may use earthly rights as temporary instruments for eternal purposes.

XXXIII. PEOPLE-PLEASING THREATENS JUSTICE

Felix wanted to please the Jews.

Now Festus feels the same pressure.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Leaders lose moral clarity when popularity becomes more important than truth.

XXXIV. THE SAME MURDEROUS SPIRIT RETURNS

Acts 23:

More than forty men planned an ambush.

Acts 25:

Another ambush is planned.

Spiritual Principle

Unrepented hatred tends to repeat itself.

XXXV. GOD BLOCKS ANOTHER AMBUSH

Paul never walks into the trap.

Why?

Festus refuses the transfer.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Some dangers God delivers us from are dangers we never even see.

XXXVI. CHRISTIANITY IS NOT PRESENTED AS CRIMINAL

Again:

Roman officials struggle to identify any genuine crime.

Spiritual Principle

The controversy surrounding Paul centers ultimately on theology, especially Jesus and resurrection, not ordinary criminal wrongdoing.

XXXVII. FESTUS ACCIDENTALLY SUMMARIZES THE GOSPEL ISSUE

He says:

Jesus died.

Paul says:

He is alive.

That is the dividing line.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Everything Changes If Jesus Christ Is Truly Alive.”

If He is alive:

His claims matter.

His cross matters.

His kingdom matters.

His judgment matters.

His salvation matters.

XXXVIII. THE RESURRECTION CANNOT REMAIN A SIDE ISSUE

Festus may see resurrection as:

A strange religious dispute.

Paul sees it as:

The foundation of Christian hope.

Spiritual Principle

The resurrection is not an optional doctrine attached to Christianity; it is central to Christianity itself.

XXXIX. CHRIST'S PROMISE TO PAUL CONTINUES UNFOLDING

Acts 9 said Paul would testify before:

Kings.

Acts 23 said:

Rome.

Acts 25 brings:

Agrippa.

And:

Caesar's court.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God often fulfills large promises through a sequence of smaller providential steps.

XL. AGRIPPA'S CURIOSITY OPENS A DOOR

Agrippa says:

"I would like to hear this man myself."

Paul now gains a royal audience.

Spiritual Principle

Curiosity may not equal faith, but it can still become an opportunity for gospel proclamation.

XLI. POMP VERSUS TRUTH

The room is filled with:

Status.

Uniforms.

Royal display.

Social importance.

But the central spiritual issue is carried by:

The prisoner.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Most Important Person in the Room May Be the One Carrying the Truth, Not the One Wearing the Crown.”

XLII. PAUL’S CHAINS HAVE BECOME ACCESS

Without imprisonment:

Would Paul have stood before:

Felix?

Festus?

Agrippa?

Eventually Caesar?

Spiritual Principle

What restricts one kind of freedom may open another kind of opportunity.

XLIII. PAUL'S CASE KEEPS EXPANDING HIS AUDIENCE

First:

The crowd.

Then:

The Sanhedrin.

Then:

Felix.

Then:

Festus.

Now:

Agrippa.

Soon:

Rome.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel can travel farther through opposition than its enemies ever intended.

XLIV. ACCUSATION KEEPS CREATING PULPITS

Paul's enemies want:

Condemnation.

God keeps producing:

Audiences.

Spiritual Principle

God can turn the very process designed to silence a witness into the means of multiplying the witness.

XLV. THE COURTROOM AND THE GOSPEL

Acts 25 shows believers may engage:

Law.

Government.

Procedure.

Appeals.

Evidence.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian faith does not require withdrawal from legitimate legal processes.

XLVI. GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER GOVERNMENTS

Festus does not intend to fulfill Jesus' prophecy.

Agrippa does not intend to advance Paul's mission.

Yet:

Both become part of it.

Spiritual Principle

God can accomplish His purposes through rulers who do not know they are participating in them.

XLVII. ROME IS NOW CLOSER THAN EVER

Paul has spent years waiting.

But suddenly:

The route is legally established.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A long delay can be followed by a decisive door opening very quickly.

XLVIII. THE PRISONER IS NOT DEFEATED

Paul remains:

Bound.

But he is not:

Silenced.

Spiritual Principle

A Christian's usefulness is not determined by whether circumstances are comfortable.

XLIX. THE WORLD'S POWER IS TEMPORARY

Agrippa has:

A title.

Paul has:

A testimony.

Festus has:

Authority.

Paul has:

The gospel.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Political power controls circumstances temporarily; gospel truth deals with eternity.

L. WHAT ACTS 25 TEACHES ABOUT JUSTICE

Justice requires:

Accusation.

Evidence.

Hearing.

Defense.

Impartiality.

Spiritual Principle

Neither religion nor politics should bypass truth and due process.

LI. WHAT ACTS 25 TEACHES ABOUT RIGHTS

Paul uses his legal rights.

But:

Rights are tools.

Not gods.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Use every lawful right wisely, but keep your ultimate trust in God rather than the system.

LII. WHAT ACTS 25 TEACHES ABOUT PROVIDENCE

God uses:

Festus' decision.

Paul's citizenship.

Roman law.

An appeal.

Agrippa's visit.

Agrippa's curiosity.

Spiritual Principle

Providence often appears ordinary until we see how perfectly the pieces fit together.

LIII. WHAT ACTS 25 TEACHES ABOUT THE RESURRECTION

Festus reduces the dispute to:

A dead man.

Paul says:

He is alive.

That is actually profound.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel is not merely advice from a dead teacher; it is the announcement that the crucified Jesus is alive and reigning.

LIV. WHAT ACTS 25 TEACHES ABOUT WITNESS

Paul's imprisonment continually produces:

New audiences.

Spiritual Principle

Your circumstances may determine where you speak, but they do not have to determine whether you speak.

LV. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 25

1. God Protects Through Providence

Principle:

The planned ambush fails because Festus refuses the transfer.

2. Charges Require Proof

Principle:

Serious accusations remain unproven despite repetition.

3. Christians May Use Lawful Rights

Principle:

Paul appeals to Caesar rather than surrender to injustice.

4. Human Courts Can Serve Divine Purposes

Principle:

Paul's appeal becomes the road toward Rome.

5. The Resurrection Remains Central

Principle:

The controversy ultimately concerns Jesus, who died but whom Paul proclaims as alive.

6. God Opens Doors Before Powerful People

Principle:

Agrippa wants to hear Paul personally.

7. The Gospel Cannot Be Silenced

Principle:

Every attempt to suppress Paul gives him another audience.

LVI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What did the Jewish leaders ask Festus to do?

They asked him to transfer Paul from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Secretly, they planned to ambush and kill Paul on the journey.

Question 2

How was the assassination plot prevented?

Festus refused to transfer Paul and required his accusers to come to Caesarea.

Without realizing it, his decision protected Paul.

Question 3

What happened when Paul's accusers appeared?

They presented many serious accusations, but they could not prove them.

Question 4

What did Paul say about the charges?

Paul said he had committed no wrongdoing against:

The Jewish law.

The temple.

Or Caesar.

Question 5

Why did Festus ask Paul to return to Jerusalem?

Festus wanted to please the Jewish leaders and suggested holding the trial there.

Question 6

How did Paul respond?

He insisted that Caesar's court was the proper place for his case and formally appealed to Caesar.

Question 7

What did Festus say after Paul appealed?

He said:

“You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”

Question 8

How does Paul's appeal relate to God's earlier promise?

Jesus had already told Paul that he must testify in Rome.

The appeal to Caesar becomes part of the providential route toward fulfilling that promise.

Question 9

How did Festus describe the central religious dispute?

He said the controversy involved Jesus, who had died, but whom Paul claimed was alive.

Question 10

Why did Agrippa want to hear Paul?

After hearing Festus explain the unusual case, Agrippa became interested and requested to hear Paul personally.

Question 11

What did Festus conclude about Paul?

He repeatedly acknowledged that Paul had done nothing deserving death.

Question 12

What is the central lesson of Acts 25?

God sovereignly uses legal rights, government officials, delays, and trials to protect His servant, keep the gospel moving, and bring Paul closer to Rome.

LVII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 25 asks several important questions.

Do I Trust God When Opposition Repeats Itself?

Paul faced another murder plot.

Do I Judge Accusations by Evidence?

Festus eventually had to.

Am I Willing to defend myself truthfully?

Paul did.

Do I confuse submission with surrendering every right?

Paul did not.

Can I use lawful protections without placing my trust in them?

Paul did.

Do I believe God can use government for His purposes?

Acts 25 shows that He can.

Is the resurrection central to my faith?

It was central to Paul's.

Do I believe Jesus is truly alive?

That is the great issue.

Can I recognize opportunities hidden inside opposition?

Paul's trial brought him before Agrippa.

Do I trust God through delay?

Paul had already spent years waiting.

Am I willing to speak when God puts powerful people before me?

Paul was preparing to do exactly that.

LVIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God Can Block a Trap You Never Saw”

Paul may not have known the full ambush plan when Festus refused the transfer.

But:

God knew.

Principle

Some of God's greatest protections may be dangers we never realize He prevented.

LIX. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Appealing to Law Is Not the Same as Trusting in Law”

Paul appeals to Caesar.

But Paul’s ultimate confidence remains:

God.

Principle

Use legitimate means without turning legitimate means into ultimate security.

LX. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Gospel Eventually Forces the Jesus Question”

Festus tries to summarize everything.

He arrives at:

Jesus died.

Paul says He is alive.

Principle

Every serious consideration of Christianity eventually comes to the identity, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

LXI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Chain May Open the Door”

Paul’s chains appear restrictive.

Yet:

They give access to rulers.

Principle

God can use what limits your movement to expand your influence.

LXII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Be Impressed by Pomp More Than Truth”

Agrippa enters with great ceremony.

Paul enters as a prisoner.

But:

Paul carries eternal truth.

Principle

Heaven evaluates greatness differently than society does.

LXIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“What Men Call a Trial, God May Use as a Testimony”

The officials think:

Legal hearing.

Paul sees:

Gospel opportunity.

Principle

A Christian should always ask how Christ can be made known in the circumstance at hand.

LXIV. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 25 begins with another plot to kill Paul.

It ends with Paul standing before:

A king.

A governor.

Military officers.

Prominent citizens.

That progression is remarkable.

Paul's enemies want to:

Silence him.

Kill him.

Remove him.

But every attempt seems to expand:

His protection.

His audience.

His influence.

The leaders ask Festus:

Send Paul to Jerusalem.

They secretly plan murder.

Festus says:

No.

Come to Caesarea.

Providence.

They make charges.

They cannot prove them.

Paul says:

I have done nothing wrong.

Festus considers sending him back to Jerusalem.

Paul says:

“I appeal to Caesar.”

Then:

Rome becomes legally unavoidable.

Jesus had already said:

“You must also testify in Rome.”

Now Paul’s Roman citizenship and legal rights become part of the route.

Acts 25 therefore gives us a powerful picture of the relationship between:

Divine sovereignty.

And:

Human action.

Paul trusts God.

But Paul also:

Speaks.

Defends himself.

Uses his rights.

Appeals.

Acts wisely.

There is no contradiction.

God’s sovereignty does not turn believers into passive spectators.

Instead:

We act responsibly while trusting Him with the outcome.

Then Festus gives one of the most important summaries in the chapter.

The controversy is about:

“A man named Jesus, who had died, but Paul claimed was alive.”

Festus may not understand the significance.

But Luke’s readers do.

That is the gospel issue.

Jesus:

Was crucified.

Was buried.

Was raised.

Is alive.

Acts itself exists because:

Jesus is alive.

Paul preaches because:

Jesus is alive.

The church exists because:

Jesus is alive.

The gospel offers hope because:

Jesus is alive.

Then Agrippa enters.

With pomp.

Ceremony.

Power.

Prestige.

And Paul enters:

A prisoner.

Yet Paul is not the one spiritually impoverished.

Paul possesses:

The truth.

The promise.

The gospel.

Christ.

This teaches us:

Never judge spiritual importance by outward appearance.

The person in chains may possess greater freedom than the ruler on the throne.

Acts 25 therefore calls us to:

Trust providence.

Demand truth.

Reject false accusations.

Use lawful rights.
Refuse manipulation.
Stand upon resurrection.
Recognize open doors.
Witness before powerful people.
And remember:
God can turn:
A courtroom into a pulpit.
An appeal into a missionary route.
A prison chain into access.
An accusation into an audience.
Paul's enemies tried to stop him.
Instead:
He moved closer to Rome.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 25.

Thank You that Your plans cannot be defeated by hidden schemes.

Thank You for the ways You protect Your servants from dangers they may never even see.

Give us wisdom when accusations come.

Help us distinguish:

Truth from rumor.

Evidence from assumption.

Justice from pressure.

Give us courage to defend ourselves honestly.

Teach us that trusting You does not require refusing the lawful protections You provide.

Help us use:

Rights.

Government.

Law.

Opportunity.

Wisely.

But keep our deepest trust in You.

Protect leaders from the temptation to please people instead of doing what is right.

Give rulers courage to judge fairly.

Thank You for Paul's boldness.

Thank You for his appeal to Caesar.

Thank You that what looked like a legal procedure became part of Your path toward Rome.

Help us trust Your providence when we cannot see where circumstances are leading.

Thank You above all for Jesus Christ.

Thank You that He:

Died.

Was buried.

Rose again.

And:

Is alive.

Keep the resurrection at the center of our faith.

Give us courage when You place us before people of influence.

Help us remember that worldly titles, ceremony, wealth, and power are temporary.

Your truth is eternal.

When trials come:

Make them testimony.

When doors close:

Show us the next one.

When we feel restricted:

Use us anyway.

And when opposition tries to silence Your Word:

Let the gospel travel even farther.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“After conferring with his council, Festus declared, ‘You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!’” — Acts 25:12

Central Truth

God sovereignly uses legal rights, political authorities, delays, opposition, and even imprisonment to protect His servants and advance His purposes, while the central truth of the gospel remains that Jesus Christ, who died, is alive and must be proclaimed before all people—including rulers and kings.

Acts 25 in One Sentence

Paul survives another assassination plot, answers serious but unproven accusations before Festus, lawfully appeals his case to Caesar, and is brought before King Agrippa, showing that God can use courts, rulers, legal rights, and imprisonment to move His servant steadily toward Rome while keeping the resurrection of Jesus at the center of the gospel witness.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 26 — Paul’s Testimony Before King Agrippa

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 26 records one of Paul’s clearest and most powerful defenses of the gospel.

Paul now stands before:

King Agrippa.

Bernice.

Governor Festus.

Military leaders.

Prominent citizens.

Once again:

The prisoner becomes the preacher.

The man in chains becomes the man carrying the most important message in the room.

Paul does not merely defend himself legally.

He gives:

His testimony.

He explains:

His Jewish background.

His life as a Pharisee.

His hope in God's promises.

His persecution of Christians.

His encounter with Jesus.

His commission from Christ.

His obedience to the heavenly vision.

His preaching of repentance.

His belief in the suffering and resurrection of the Messiah.

Then he turns directly to Agrippa.

Acts 26 therefore contains:

Defense.

Testimony.

Doctrine.

Evangelism.

Appeal.

Paul begins respectfully.

He knows Agrippa understands Jewish customs and controversies.

Then Paul says the real issue is:

Hope in the promise God made to Israel.

He asks:

“Why should any of you think it impossible that God raises the dead?”

That question reaches the heart of the controversy.

If God is truly God:

Resurrection is not impossible.

Then Paul tells the truth about his past.

He once believed:

He should oppose Jesus.

He imprisoned Christians.

He approved their deaths.

He tried to force believers to blaspheme.

He hunted them into foreign cities.

Paul does not make himself look better than he was.

Then comes the turning point:

Jesus appeared.

A light brighter than the sun surrounded Paul and his companions.

Jesus said:

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Paul asks:

“Who are You, Lord?”

Jesus answers:

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

The enemy of Christ is confronted by:

The risen Christ.

Then Jesus commissions him.

Paul is sent to:

Open eyes.

Turn people:

From darkness to light.

From Satan’s power to God.

So they may receive:

Forgiveness.

And:

An inheritance among those sanctified by faith in Christ.

Paul then says something every Christian should desire to say:

“I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.”

He preached:

Repentance.

Turning to God.

And lives demonstrating repentance.

Because of this:

He was attacked.

But Paul says:

“God has helped me to this very day.”

Then he explains that his message is not a rejection of Moses and the prophets.

It is the fulfillment of what they said would happen:

The Messiah would suffer.

The Messiah would rise.

Light would go to:

Israel.

And:

The Gentiles.

Festus interrupts:

“You are out of your mind, Paul!”

Paul calmly responds:

“I am not insane, most excellent Festus. What I am saying is true and reasonable.”

Then Paul turns directly toward Agrippa:

“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

Agrippa answers:

“You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

That is one of the most sobering statements in Acts.

Almost.

Near.

Moved.

Challenged.

Persuaded.

But:

Not surrendered.

Paul's response reveals his evangelistic heart.

He does not say:

I only want freedom.

Instead:

"I pray to God that not only you, but all who are listening to me today, may become as I am—except for these chains."

Paul wants:

Their salvation.

More than:

His release.

The chapter ends with the rulers agreeing:

Paul has done nothing deserving:

Death.

Or:

Imprisonment.

Agrippa even says:

"This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

But Paul's appeal will carry him toward:

Rome.

The central truth of Acts 26 is:

The risen Jesus transforms enemies into witnesses, sends His servants to proclaim repentance, forgiveness, and light to all people, and calls every hearer to move beyond being almost persuaded into genuine faith and obedience.

I. AGRIPPA ALLOWS PAUL TO SPEAK

Acts 26:1

“Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You may speak for yourself.’ Paul stretched out his hand and began his defense.”

Paul finally receives the floor.

Cross References

Acts 21:40

Paul had previously stood before another hostile audience and motioned with his hand before speaking.

Acts 13:16

Paul had used a similar gesture when addressing people in a synagogue.

Acts 24:10

He had also calmly presented his defense before Felix.

Spiritual Principle

God can give His servant a voice in rooms where humanly he appears to have no power.

II. PAUL IS GLAD TO SPEAK BEFORE AGRIPPA

Acts 26:2

“King Agrippa, I am glad to stand before you today and answer the charges made by the Jews.”

Paul sees opportunity.

Cross References

Philippians 1:7

Paul understood the defense and confirmation of the gospel as part of his calling.

1 Peter 3:15

Believers are told to be ready to give an answer for the hope within them.

Acts 22:1

Paul had already given another public defense before his Jewish countrymen.

Spiritual Principle

A difficult hearing can still be a gospel opportunity.

III. AGRIPPA UNDERSTANDS JEWISH MATTERS

Acts 26:3

“I know that you are familiar with Jewish customs and controversies, so I ask you to listen patiently.”

Paul appeals to Agrippa’s knowledge.

Cross References

Acts 22:3

Paul himself had been deeply educated in Jewish law and tradition.

James 1:19

Scripture teaches people to be quick to hear and slow to speak.

Job 33:31

Careful listening is necessary when serious matters are being discussed.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Wise communication begins by understanding what the audience already knows.

IV. PAUL’S LIFE WAS WELL KNOWN

Acts 26:4

“The Jewish people all know the way I have lived since my youth, from the beginning in my own country and later in Jerusalem.”

Paul’s background was public.

Cross References

Galatians 1:14

Paul had advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries.

Philippians 3:5

He possessed an impressive Jewish pedigree and Pharisaic background.

Acts 22:3

He had been raised in Jerusalem and educated under Gamaliel.

Spiritual Principle

A testimony becomes especially powerful when people know the former life from which Christ brought someone.

V. PAUL HAD BEEN A STRICT PHARISEE

Acts 26:5

“They have known me for a long time and can testify that I lived as a Pharisee, following the strictest rules of our religion.”

Paul had not been:

Careless.

Irreligious.

Spiritually indifferent.

He had been:

Extremely religious.

Cross References

Acts 22:3

Paul had been trained strictly in the ancestral law.

Philippians 3:5

He identified himself as a Pharisee concerning the law.

Acts 23:6

Paul had already referred to his Pharisaic background before the Sanhedrin.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Strict religion cannot replace saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

VI. PAUL IS ON TRIAL BECAUSE OF HOPE

Acts 26:6

“And now I am on trial because of my hope in the promise God made to our ancestors.”

Paul presents Christianity as fulfillment.

Not destruction.

Cross References

Acts 23:6

Paul had said he was on trial because of resurrection hope.

Acts 28:20

He would later describe himself as bound because of the hope of Israel.

Galatians 3:16

Paul taught that God’s covenant promises ultimately find fulfillment in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel fulfills God’s redemptive promises rather than abandoning them.

VII. ISRAEL HOPED FOR THE PROMISE

Acts 26:7

“This is the same promise our twelve tribes hope to see fulfilled as they serve God day and night. For this hope, O king, I am accused by the Jews.”

Paul sees continuity in the biblical story.

Cross References

Acts 24:15

Paul had confessed hope in the resurrection.

James 1:1

James addressed believers from the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.

Luke 2:37

Faithful Israelites such as Anna served God continually while awaiting His redemption.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical hope looks forward to God keeping every promise He has made.

VIII. “WHY SHOULD RESURRECTION SEEM IMPOSSIBLE?”

Acts 26:8

“Why should any of you think it impossible that God raises the dead?”

This question exposes the real issue.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 15:13

Paul argued that denying resurrection undermines the resurrection of Christ.

Romans 4:17

God gives life to the dead and calls into existence what does not yet exist.

Acts 17:32

Some Athenians mocked Paul specifically when they heard about resurrection.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“If God Is Truly God, Resurrection Is Not Too Difficult for Him.”

IX. PAUL ONCE OPPOSED JESUS

Acts 26:9

“I once thought I should do everything I could to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”

Notice:

“I thought.”

Paul was convinced.

But wrong.

Cross References

Acts 8:3

Saul attempted to destroy the church.

Galatians 1:13

Paul later confessed his violent persecution of believers.

1 Timothy 1:13

Paul remembered that he had once been a blasphemer and persecutor.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A sincere conviction can still be false if it contradicts the truth about Christ.

X. PAUL IMPRISONED THE SAINTS

Acts 26:10

“That is exactly what I did in Jerusalem. With authority from the chief priests, I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I gave my approval.”

Paul does not minimize his guilt.

Cross References

Acts 7:58

Those who stoned Stephen placed their clothing at Saul’s feet.

Acts 8:1

Saul approved Stephen's death.

Acts 9:1

Saul continued threatening and persecuting the disciples.

Spiritual Principle

Grace shines brightest when we honestly understand the guilt from which Christ saved us.

XI. PAUL TRIED TO FORCE BELIEVERS TO BLASPHEME

Acts 26:11

"In every synagogue I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities."

Paul's persecution was intense.

Cross References

Acts 9:2

Saul sought authority to arrest believers even in Damascus.

Acts 22:19

Paul later remembered imprisoning and beating believers.

Galatians 1:13

He described his former persecution as violent and destructive.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christ did not merely save Paul from indifference; He saved a determined enemy.

XII. PAUL TRAVELS TOWARD DAMASCUS

Acts 26:12

"On one of those journeys, I was going to Damascus with the authority of the chief priests."

Paul had:

Authority.

Documents.

A mission.

Confidence.

But:

He was moving directly against God.

Cross References

Acts 9:2

Saul carried letters authorizing the arrest of Christians in Damascus.

Acts 22:5

Paul had previously described receiving official authority for the mission.

Galatians 1:17

Damascus later became a major location in Paul's early Christian story.

Spiritual Principle

Human authority cannot protect a person from being wrong before God.

XIII. LIGHT BRIGHTER THAN THE SUN

Acts 26:13

“About noon, O king, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me.”

At noon:

The sun was already bright.

Yet:

The heavenly light was brighter.

Cross References

Acts 9:3

A sudden heavenly light surrounded Saul.

Acts 22:6

Paul described the same event occurring near midday.

2 Corinthians 4:6

Paul later used light imagery to describe God revealing the glory of Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The glory of Christ can break into the darkest spiritual blindness.

XIV. JESUS CONFRONTS SAUL

Acts 26:14

“We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice speaking in the Hebrew language: ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to fight against the goads.’”

Jesus confronts Paul personally.

Cross References

Acts 9:4

Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting Him.

Acts 22:7

Paul had already testified to the same words before the Jerusalem crowd.

Exodus 3:4

God called Moses personally by name when commissioning him.

“Fighting Against the Goads”

The imagery describes:

Resistance against painful correction.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Fighting against God does not injure God; it injures the person resisting Him.

XV. “I AM JESUS”

Acts 26:15

“I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The Lord replied, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’”

The turning point is:

Jesus.

Cross References

Acts 9:5

Jesus directly identified Himself to Saul.

Acts 22:8

Paul repeated this same revelation before the Jerusalem crowd.

1 Corinthians 15:8

Paul later included himself among those who had seen the risen Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Conversion Begins When We See Jesus for Who He Truly Is.”

XVI. PAUL IS APPOINTED AS SERVANT AND WITNESS

Acts 26:16

“Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me.”

Jesus saves Paul and immediately gives him purpose.

Cross References

Acts 9:6

Saul was told to rise and wait for further instruction.

Acts 22:10

Paul had asked what the Lord wanted him to do.

Ezekiel 2:1

God told Ezekiel to stand before receiving his prophetic commission.

Spiritual Principle

Salvation creates servants and witnesses.

XVII. JESUS PROMISES PROTECTION AND MISSION

Acts 26:17

“I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them.”

Paul’s calling includes:

Danger.

Protection.

Mission.

Cross References

Acts 9:15

Paul was chosen to carry Christ’s name before Gentiles, kings, and Israel.

Jeremiah 1:8

God told Jeremiah not to fear because He would be with him to rescue him.

Galatians 1:16

Paul understood his calling as a mission to proclaim Christ among the Gentiles.

Spiritual Principle

God’s protection serves God’s mission.

XVIII. FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Acts 26:18

“To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

This verse gives one of the clearest descriptions of salvation in Acts.

Open Their Eyes

Spiritual understanding.

Darkness to Light

Transformation.

Satan to God

Change of spiritual allegiance.

Forgiveness of Sins

Guilt removed.

An Inheritance

A place among God’s sanctified people.

By Faith in Christ

The means of receiving salvation.

Cross References

Isaiah 42:7

The Servant of the Lord would open blind eyes and bring prisoners out of darkness.

Ephesians 5:8

Believers were once darkness but are now light in the Lord.

Colossians 1:13

God rescues believers from the authority of darkness and transfers them into the kingdom of His Son.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Gospel Does Not Merely Improve People; It Transfers Them From Darkness to Light and From Satan’s Power to God.”

XIX. PAUL OBEYS THE VISION

Acts 26:19

“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.”

This summarizes Paul’s ministry.

Cross References

Acts 9:20

Paul quickly began proclaiming Jesus after his conversion.

Galatians 1:16

Paul responded to God’s call to preach Christ among the Gentiles.

Acts 22:10

His first response to Jesus had been to ask what he should do.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“A Calling From God Is Proven by Obedience, Not Merely by an Experience.”

XX. PAUL PREACHES REPENTANCE

Acts 26:20

“First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent, turn to God, and prove their repentance by their deeds.”

This is practical conversion.

Repent

Change of mind and direction.

Turn to God

Positive movement toward Him.

Deeds Appropriate to Repentance

Visible fruit.

Cross References

Acts 9:20

Paul immediately proclaimed Jesus in Damascus.

Acts 9:29

He later preached boldly in Jerusalem.

Matthew 3:8

John the Baptist called people to produce fruit consistent with repentance.

Important Truth

Good works do not purchase salvation.

But:

Real repentance should produce changed conduct.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Works do not create repentance, but genuine repentance creates new works.

XXI. PAUL IS ATTACKED FOR PREACHING

Acts 26:21

“That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.”

Paul explains the real cause of the conflict.

Cross References

Acts 21:31

The mob had attempted to kill Paul in Jerusalem.

Acts 21:27

Jews from Asia had seized him at the temple.

2 Corinthians 11:26

Paul repeatedly faced dangers from many different sources.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness may provoke hostility, but hostility does not prove the message is wrong.

XXII. “GOD HAS HELPED ME”

Acts 26:22

“But God has helped me to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen.”

Paul knows why he is still standing.

Not:

Luck.

Skill.

Roman politics.

But:

God helped me.

Cross References

Acts 24:14

Paul had already affirmed his belief in the Law and the Prophets.

Luke 24:27

Jesus explained from Moses and the prophets the things concerning Himself.

1 Peter 1:11

The prophets testified beforehand about Christ’s sufferings and subsequent glory.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“If You Are Still Standing After Everything Meant to Stop You, Remember Who Helped You Stand.”

XXIII. THE MESSIAH WOULD SUFFER AND RISE

Acts 26:23

“That the Christ would suffer, and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

Paul summarizes the prophetic gospel.

The Messiah Would Suffer

The cross.

The Messiah Would Rise

Resurrection.

Light Would Reach Israel and Gentiles

Mission.

Cross References

Isaiah 42:6

God’s Servant would become a light extending God’s salvation beyond Israel.

Isaiah 49:6

The Servant would bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

1 Corinthians 15:20

Christ is called the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The cross, resurrection, and worldwide proclamation of Christ belong together in the gospel.

XXIV. FESTUS CALLS PAUL INSANE

Acts 26:24

“At this point Festus interrupted Paul: ‘You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane.’”

Festus cannot accept Paul’s conclusion.

Cross References

Mark 3:21

People once said similar things about Jesus.

John 10:20

Some accused Jesus of madness and demonic influence.

1 Corinthians 1:23

The message of Christ crucified appears foolish to those who reject God’s wisdom.

Spiritual Principle

Truth may sound foolish to someone whose worldview has no place for God’s supernatural action.

XXV. PAUL RESPONDS CALMLY

Acts 26:25

“Paul replied, ‘I am not insane, most excellent Festus. What I am saying is true and reasonable.’”

Paul does not retaliate.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:18

The message of the cross appears foolish to those who are perishing but is God’s power to those being saved.

2 Corinthians 5:13

Paul was willing to be misunderstood if his life and ministry served God.

2 Timothy 1:7

God gives His people a spirit of power, love, and sound judgment rather than cowardice.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Being mocked does not require becoming mocking.

XXVI. “THIS WAS NOT DONE IN A CORNER”

Acts 26:26

“The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.”

Christianity rests on public claims.

Cross References

John 18:20

Jesus said He had spoken openly rather than secretly.

Acts 4:20

The apostles insisted they could not stop speaking about what they had seen and heard.

Acts 2:22

Peter appealed to publicly known events concerning Jesus.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel is rooted in public historical claims, not secret spiritual speculation.

XXVII. PAUL DIRECTLY CHALLENGES AGRIPPA

Acts 26:27

“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

Paul moves from:

Defense.

To:

Evangelistic appeal.

Cross References

Luke 24:25

Jesus rebuked disciples for being slow to believe what the prophets had spoken.

John 5:39

Jesus said the Scriptures testify about Him.

2 Peter 1:19

Prophetic Scripture provides reliable light pointing toward God's truth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Faithful Evangelism Eventually Moves From Information to Personal Decision.”

XXVIII. “ALMOST PERSUADED”

Acts 26:28

“Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian.’”

These words are deeply sobering.

Almost

Near.

Affected.

Confronted.

But:

Not surrendered.

Cross References

Mark 12:34

Jesus once told a man that he was not far from the kingdom of God.

Acts 24:25

Felix trembled under conviction but postponed response.

Ezekiel 33:31

People can listen eagerly to God's words while refusing to obey them.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Almost Saved Is Still Lost.”

Being:

Almost persuaded.

Almost surrendered.

Almost obedient.

Is not:

Faith.

XXIX. PAUL DESIRES THEIR SALVATION

Acts 26:29

“Paul answered, ‘I pray to God that not only you, but all who are listening to me today, may become as I am—except for these chains.’”

Paul does not ask primarily:

Release me.

He desires:

Save them.

Cross References

Ephesians 6:20

Paul called himself an ambassador in chains.

Philippians 1:13

His imprisonment became known throughout the imperial guard.

2 Timothy 2:9

Paul later said he was chained like a criminal, but God's Word was not chained.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Prisoner Wanted the Freedom of His Audience More Than His Own.”

XXX. THE HEARING ENDS

Acts 26:30

“The king, the governor, Bernice, and all who were sitting with them got up.”

The formal proceeding concludes.

Cross References

Acts 25:23

These rulers and officials had entered the hearing with great ceremony.

Luke 23:13

Political rulers had similarly gathered during Jesus' trial.

Matthew 27:19

Important decisions surrounding innocent prisoners often drew multiple officials into the process.

Spiritual Principle

Every gospel opportunity eventually reaches a moment when the hearing ends and the hearer must live with what was heard.

XXXI. PAUL IS DECLARED INNOCENT

Acts 26:31

“They left the room and talked together, saying, ‘This man has done nothing that deserves death or imprisonment.’”

Again:

Paul's innocence is recognized.

Cross References

Luke 23:4

Pilate repeatedly declared that he found no criminal basis for condemning Jesus.

Acts 25:25

Festus had already said Paul had done nothing deserving death.

Acts 23:29

Claudius Lysias had reached the same conclusion.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Repeated official verdicts of innocence reveal that Paul suffered not as a criminal but because of the gospel controversy surrounding Jesus.

XXXII. AGRIPPA SAYS PAUL COULD HAVE BEEN FREE

Acts 26:32

“Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.’”

Humanly:

The appeal appears to prolong imprisonment.

But spiritually:

It becomes the route to Rome.

Cross References

Acts 25:11

Paul had formally appealed to Caesar.

Acts 28:19

Paul later explains why he made the appeal.

Acts 25:12

Festus had already ruled that Paul would go to Caesar.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

What looks like a lost opportunity for freedom may still be part of God's larger mission.

XXXIII. PAUL'S TESTIMONY AS A MODEL

Acts 26 gives us a powerful testimony structure.

1. Who I Was

A Pharisee.

A persecutor.

An enemy.

2. How Jesus Confronted Me

Damascus road.

3. What Jesus Called Me to Become

Servant.

Witness.

Missionary.

4. How I Responded

"I was not disobedient."

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A strong testimony explains the old life, the encounter with Christ, the changed life, and the mission that followed.

XXXIV. ZEAL WITHOUT CHRIST CAN OPPOSE GOD

Paul believed he was defending God.

Instead:

He was persecuting Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Religious zeal must be submitted to revealed truth.

XXXV. GOD’S GRACE TRANSFORMS ENEMIES

Paul moves from:

Persecutor.

To:

Preacher.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Never Decide That Someone Is Too Hostile for Christ to Save.”

XXXVI. “WHY THINK RESURRECTION IMPOSSIBLE?”

This question still matters.

If God:

Created life.

Then:

Raising the dead is not beyond His power.

Spiritual Principle

The real barrier to resurrection is not God’s ability but human unbelief.

XXXVII. THE RISEN JESUS IS THE HEART OF PAUL'S TESTIMONY

Paul's life changed because:

Jesus is alive.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christianity cannot be reduced to ethical advice from a dead teacher; it rests upon the living Christ.

XXXVIII. "I AM JESUS"

This answer destroyed Paul's old worldview.

The One Paul rejected:

Was Lord.

Spiritual Principle

Every person must eventually answer the question: Who is Jesus?

XXXIX. FROM PERSECUTOR TO SERVANT

Jesus does not merely stop Saul.

He commissions him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Grace does more than cancel guilt; it redirects the life once controlled by sin.

XL. FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Acts 26:18 gives a powerful salvation picture.

Darkness

Ignorance.

Sin.

Spiritual bondage.

Light

Truth.

Life.

Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Salvation is a transfer from one spiritual realm and allegiance to another.

XLI. FROM SATAN TO GOD

Paul does not present unbelief as spiritually neutral.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel liberates people from the dominion of darkness and brings them under the gracious rule of God.

XLII. FORGIVENESS OF SINS

The mission leads to:

Forgiveness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel does not merely expose guilt; it announces that guilt can be forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ.

XLIII. SANCTIFIED BY FAITH IN CHRIST

Jesus says people receive:

An inheritance among those sanctified:

By faith in Me.

Spiritual Principle

Salvation and belonging to God's people are grounded in faith in Christ.

XLIV. OBEDIENCE TO THE HEAVENLY VISION

Paul says:

"I was not disobedient."

Crawford Bible Study Principle

"A Testimony Becomes Credible When the Life After the Encounter Matches the Claim About the Encounter."

XLV. REPENTANCE PRODUCES FRUIT

Paul preached that people should:

Repent.

Turn.

Demonstrate repentance.

Spiritual Principle

Saving repentance is inward, but its effects should eventually become outwardly visible.

XLVI. GOD HELPED PAUL

Acts 26:22 may summarize Paul's entire ministry:

"God has helped me."

Through:

Danger.

Beatings.

Prisons.

Plots.

Trials.

Ship journeys.

Accusations.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

**“Your Survival Is Not Always Evidence of Your Strength;
Sometimes It Is Evidence of God’s Help.”**

XLVII. SMALL AND GREAT ALIKE

Paul says he witnesses to:

Small.

Great.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel does not change according to the social status of the audience.

XLVIII. MOSES AND THE PROPHETS POINT TO CHRIST

Paul says:

His message is nothing beyond what Scripture predicted.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A faithful gospel message is rooted in the whole biblical story.

XLIX. THE SUFFERING MESSIAH

Paul preached:

The Christ must suffer.

Spiritual Principle

The cross was not an interruption of God's plan; it was part of God's plan.

L. THE RISEN MESSIAH

The Messiah would rise.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The resurrection is God's declaration that death did not defeat Jesus.

LI. LIGHT TO JEWS AND GENTILES

The gospel reaches:

Israel.

Nations.

Spiritual Principle

Christ is not a tribal Savior; He is proclaimed to the world.

LII. FESTUS THINKS PAUL IS CRAZY

Paul speaks of:

Resurrection.

Vision.

Prophecy.

Mission.

Festus says:

Madness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Unbelief may label as irrational what it has already decided the supernatural cannot be.

LIII. TRUE AND REASONABLE

Paul says:

“What I am saying is true and reasonable.”

Spiritual Principle

Christian faith involves supernatural claims, but it is not presented as irrational nonsense.

LIV. CHRISTIANITY WAS NOT DONE IN A CORNER

The events surrounding Jesus were public.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian faith invites historical consideration because its central claims concern events presented as occurring in public history.

LV. PAUL PUTS AGRIPPA ON THE SPOT

“Do you believe the prophets?”

Now:

Agrippa must respond.

Spiritual Principle

Eventually every theological discussion becomes personal.

LVI. ALMOST PERSUADED

Agrippa stands dangerously close.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Nearness to Faith Is Not the Same as Faith.”

A person can:

Understand.

Agree partially.

Feel moved.

Be impressed.

And remain:

Unconverted.

LVII. FELIX AND AGRIPPA — TWO WARNINGS

Felix:

“When I find it convenient.”

Agrippa:

“Almost persuade me.”

Spiritual Principle

One delayed; the other nearly responded. Neither statement records surrender.

LVIII. PAUL’S HEART FOR LOST PEOPLE

Paul wants:

Everyone listening.

To become:

A Christian.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

True evangelism does not merely win arguments; it longs for people to be saved.

LIX. THE CHAINS DO NOT DEFINE PAUL

Paul says:

Become as I am:

Except for these chains.

What does Paul possess?

Faith.

Forgiveness.

Hope.

Christ.

Calling.

Spiritual Principle

A believer in chains may possess greater freedom than an unbelieving king on a throne.

LX. THE REAL PRISONERS IN THE ROOM

Paul is physically bound.

But:

Festus is bound by unbelief.

Agrippa may be bound by hesitation.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Physical Chains Are Visible; Spiritual Chains Are Often Harder to See.”

LXI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS

26

1. Share Your Testimony Clearly

Principle:

Tell who you were, how Christ confronted you, and what He changed.

2. Resurrection Is Central

Principle:

Do not treat the resurrection as a secondary Christian belief.

3. No Enemy Is Beyond Grace

Principle:

Paul the persecutor became Paul the apostle.

4. Conversion Produces Mission

Principle:

Jesus saved Paul and sent Paul.

5. Repentance Should Produce Fruit

Principle:

Changed allegiance should eventually produce changed conduct.

6. The Gospel Demands a Response

Principle:

“Almost persuaded” is not enough.

7. Witness Faithfully Everywhere

Principle:

Paul preached to small and great alike.

LXII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why was Paul glad to speak before Agrippa?

Agrippa understood Jewish customs and controversies, giving Paul an opportunity to explain clearly that the gospel fulfilled Israel’s biblical hope.

Question 2

What was Paul’s religious background?

He had lived as a Pharisee according to one of the strictest expressions of Jewish religion.

Question 3

What did Paul say was the real reason for his trial?

He said he was on trial because of hope in God’s promise, especially resurrection.

Question 4

What had Paul done before becoming a Christian?

He fiercely opposed Jesus, imprisoned believers, approved their deaths, tried to force them to blaspheme, and pursued them into foreign cities.

Question 5

What happened on the road to Damascus?

A heavenly light brighter than the sun surrounded Paul, and the risen Jesus confronted him personally.

Question 6

What did Jesus call Paul to become?

A servant and witness.

Question 7

What mission did Jesus give Paul?

He was sent to open spiritually blind eyes, turn people from darkness to light and from Satan's power to God, so they could receive forgiveness and an inheritance through faith in Christ.

Question 8

How did Paul respond to Christ's call?

He said:

"I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven."

He began preaching Christ.

Question 9

What did Paul preach people should do?

Repent.

Turn to God.

And demonstrate genuine repentance through changed lives.

Question 10

How did Festus respond to Paul's message?

Festus accused Paul of being insane.

Paul calmly answered that his words were true and reasonable.

Question 11

What did Agrippa say?

He said:

“You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

Question 12

What did Paul desire for Agrippa and everyone listening?

Paul prayed that all of them would become believers like himself, except without his chains.

LXIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 26 asks us serious questions.

Can I clearly tell what Christ has done in my life?

Paul could.

Am I trusting religion instead of Christ?

Paul once did.

Do I believe God can raise the dead?

Paul did.

Have I honestly faced my past?

Paul did.

Do I believe Christ can save a hostile sinner?

Paul is proof.

Am I resisting God's conviction?

Saul once fought against the goads.

Have I moved from darkness to light?

That is the gospel's transforming call.

Have I genuinely repented?

Paul preached repentance.

Does my life demonstrate fruit consistent with repentance?

It should.

Can I say:

"I was not disobedient"?

Am I merely almost persuaded?

Agrippa's words are a warning.

Do I desire the salvation of others more than winning arguments?

Paul did.

LXIV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

"Do Not Be Satisfied With Almost"

Agrippa says:

"Almost."

Almost Repenting

Still unrepentant.

Almost Believing

Still unbelieving.

Almost Surrendered

Still unsundered.

Principle

The gospel calls for faith, not nearness to faith.

LXV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Your Past Does Not Have the Final Word”

Paul’s past included:

Violence.

Hatred.

Persecution.

Approval of death.

Yet:

Jesus changed him.

Principle

Christ’s grace can write a new future without pretending the old past never happened.

LXVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Obedience Is the Proper Response to Revelation”

Paul did not merely tell people:

I saw something amazing.

He said:

“I was not disobedient.”

Principle

Spiritual experiences should produce faithful obedience rather than spiritual pride.

LXVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God’s Help Explains Why You Are Still Standing”

Paul says:

“God has helped me to this very day.”

Principle

Never confuse divine preservation with personal invincibility.

LXVIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Gospel Moves People From One Kingdom to Another”

From:

Darkness.

To:

Light.

From:

Satan.

To:

God.

From:

Guilt.

To:

Forgiveness.

From:

Exclusion.

To:

Inheritance.

Principle

Salvation is a complete change of spiritual position through faith in Jesus Christ.

LXIX. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Gospel Should Reach the King and the Common Man”

Paul says:

“Small and great alike.”

Principle

No one is too important to need Jesus and no one is too insignificant to hear about Him.

LXX. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 26 gives us one of the clearest pictures of Christian testimony in Scripture.

Paul stands before:

A king.

A governor.

Royal guests.

Military officers.

Prominent citizens.

He could have focused only on:

His innocence.

His legal defense.

His desire for freedom.

Instead:

He talks about:

Jesus.

That is the heart of the chapter.

Paul tells them:

I was religious.

But wrong.

I was sincere.

But blind.

I was zealous.

But fighting against God.

Then:

Jesus appeared.

Paul's testimony is therefore not:

I discovered a better philosophy.

It is:

The risen Jesus confronted me.

That encounter changes everything.

The persecutor becomes:

A servant.

The enemy becomes:

A witness.

The destroyer becomes:

A preacher.

Then Jesus explains the gospel mission.

Eyes must be opened.

People must turn:

From darkness to light.

From Satan to God.

Why?

So they may receive:

Forgiveness.

And:

An inheritance.

How?

By faith in Christ.

Then Paul says:

“I was not disobedient.”

That may be one of the most important statements in the entire chapter.

Many people want:

Calling.

Vision.

Purpose.

Direction.

But:

The real question is obedience.

Has God shown you truth?

Obey.

Has Christ called you?

Follow.

Has Scripture spoken?

Respond.

Paul then preaches:

Repentance.

Turning to God.

Fruit that demonstrates repentance.

Genuine Christianity is not:

Words without life.

Profession without transformation.

Emotion without obedience.

Then:

Festus calls Paul crazy.

Paul remains calm.

He says:

“I am not insane.”

Truth does not require panic.

Then Paul turns directly to Agrippa.

“Do you believe the prophets?”

Agrippa now must face the message personally.

He says:

“You almost persuade me.”

Almost.

That word should disturb every person who has heard the gospel repeatedly but has never surrendered to Christ.

Almost is not enough.

Felix said:

Later.

Agrippa says:

Almost.

The gospel says:

Believe.

Repent.

Come to Christ.

Paul's response is beautiful.

He does not become offended by Agrippa.

He says:

I pray:

You.

And everyone listening.

Will become like me:

Except for the chains.

Paul sees himself as blessed despite imprisonment.

Why?

He has:

Christ.

Forgiveness.

Hope.

Purpose.

Eternal life.

That is freedom.

The rulers eventually leave the room.

They conclude:

Paul is innocent.

But the greater question remains:

What will they do with:

Jesus?

That is ultimately the question Acts 26 places before every reader.

Not merely:

What do you think about Paul?

But:

What will you do with Jesus Christ?

Will you:

Reject Him?

Delay?

Almost believe?

Or:

Repent.

Turn to God.

Believe.

Obey.

And follow?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 26.

Thank You for the testimony of Paul.

Thank You that Your grace can reach even determined enemies.

Help us never write anyone off as beyond salvation.

Thank You that Jesus is alive.

Thank You that resurrection is real.

Thank You that death does not have the final word.

Open blinded eyes.

Turn hearts:

From darkness to light.

From Satan's power to You.

Bring forgiveness of sins.

Bring people into the inheritance You give through faith in Christ.

Help us examine our own obedience.

May we be able to say:

"I was not disobedient."

Give us courage to repent.

Give us courage to turn fully toward You.

Give us lives that demonstrate genuine repentance.

When people misunderstand us:

Help us remain calm.

When they ridicule our faith:

Help us answer with truth and reason.

Give us courage to speak to:

Small and great alike.

Help us never become impressed by earthly titles.

Kings need Jesus.

Governors need Jesus.

Workers need Jesus.

Families need Jesus.

Everyone needs Jesus.

Protect us from becoming:

Almost persuaded.

Keep us from postponing surrender.

Help us respond fully to Christ.

Thank You for every day You have helped us.

When we look back over trials, dangers, failures, hardships, and opposition:

Help us say:

“God has helped me to this very day.”

Let our testimony always make:

Jesus the center.

Jesus the Savior.

Jesus the risen Lord.

Jesus the One who changes lives.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Key Verse

“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.” — Acts 26:19

Central Truth

The risen Jesus Christ transforms enemies into servants, sends His people to turn others from darkness to light and from Satan’s power to God, grants forgiveness and inheritance through faith, calls for repentance that produces visible fruit, and demands more than being almost persuaded—He calls for obedient faith.

Acts 26 in One Sentence

Paul stands before King Agrippa and boldly recounts his former persecution of Christians, his encounter with the risen Jesus, his commission to turn people from darkness to light, his obedience in preaching repentance and resurrection, and his desire that Agrippa and everyone listening move beyond being almost persuaded and become genuine followers of Jesus Christ.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 27 — Paul's Voyage and Shipwreck

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 27 is one of the most dramatic chapters in the book of Acts.

Paul is finally traveling toward:

Rome.

Jesus had already promised him:

“You must also testify in Rome.”

Paul appealed to Caesar.

Now the journey begins.

But the road to God's promise is not easy.

Paul travels:

As a prisoner.

Under Roman guard.

Across dangerous seas.

Into violent winds.

Through a storm so severe that everyone eventually gives up hope of survival.

The chapter contains:

Professional sailors.

Roman soldiers.

Prisoners.

A centurion.

A violent storm.

A damaged ship.

A desperate crew.

A failed escape attempt.

And:

One man whose confidence rests upon the Word of God.

Paul begins the chapter as:

A prisoner under authority.

But during the crisis:

He increasingly becomes the spiritual leader of the entire ship.

The experienced sailors initially ignore Paul's warning.

They listen instead to:

The ship's pilot.

The owner.

The majority.

Then a gentle south wind begins to blow.

It appears that their decision was correct.

But suddenly:

A violent wind called **Euroclydon** strikes.

The ship loses control.

Cargo is thrown overboard.

Equipment is discarded.

Neither sun nor stars appear for many days.

Eventually Luke writes:

“We finally gave up all hope of being saved.”

Human hope disappears.

Then Paul stands.

He does not merely say:

I told you so.

Instead:

He gives hope.

He says:

“Keep up your courage.”

Why?

Because an angel of God had stood beside him.

The message was:

“Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar.”

Then comes an extraordinary promise:

God has graciously given Paul:

The lives of everyone sailing with him.

Paul therefore says:

“I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.”

That statement is one of the great declarations of faith in Acts.

The storm is still raging.

The ship is still endangered.

Land has not yet appeared.

Nothing visible has changed.

But Paul has:

God’s Word.

That is enough for confidence.

Yet Acts 27 also teaches something important about how faith works.

God promises:

Everyone will survive.

But Paul later tells the soldiers:

“Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.”

God’s promise does not eliminate:

Wise action.

Human responsibility.

Practical obedience.

The sailors must remain.

The people must eat.

The ship must be handled properly.

When the ship finally runs aground:

The vessel breaks apart.

The soldiers plan to kill the prisoners.

But the centurion wants to spare Paul.

He prevents the killings.

Some swim.

Others float on pieces of wreckage.

And:

Every person reaches land safely.

God did exactly what He promised.

The ship was lost.

The cargo was lost.

The equipment was lost.

But:

Not one life was lost.

Acts 27 teaches that sometimes:

God does not save the ship.

He saves:

You through the shipwreck.

The central truth of Acts 27 is:

God's promise remains trustworthy in the darkest storm, and faithful believers can bring courage, wisdom, hope, and leadership to others by trusting God's Word while taking the practical steps He provides.

I. PAUL SETS SAIL FOR ROME

Acts 27:1

“When it was decided that we should sail to Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, of the Imperial Regiment.”

The journey toward Rome begins.

Paul is still:

A prisoner.

But he is moving toward the destination Christ promised.

Cross References

Acts 25:12

Festus had declared that because Paul appealed to Caesar, he would go to Caesar.

Acts 25:25

Festus had concluded that Paul had done nothing deserving death but sent him onward because of his appeal.

Acts 23:23

Roman military authority had already been used to protect and transport Paul.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God’s promise can be advancing even when circumstances make you feel restricted.

Paul is chained.

Yet:

He is moving toward Rome.

II. ARISTARCHUS TRAVELS WITH PAUL

Acts 27:2

“We boarded a ship from Adramyttium that was about to sail to ports along the coast of Asia, and we set out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.”

Paul is not completely alone.

Luke is present.

Aristarchus is present.

Cross References

Acts 19:29

Aristarchus had previously shared danger with Paul during the riot in Ephesus.

Acts 20:4

He had continued traveling with Paul as a faithful coworker.

Colossians 4:10

Paul later referred to Aristarchus as his fellow prisoner.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful friends become especially precious during difficult journeys.

III. JULIUS TREATS PAUL KINDLY

Acts 27:3

“The next day we landed at Sidon. Julius kindly allowed Paul to go to his friends so they could provide for his needs.”

The centurion shows Paul favor.

Cross References

Acts 24:23

Felix had previously allowed Paul’s friends to care for his needs while he remained under guard.

Acts 28:16

Paul would later receive guarded freedom after reaching Rome.

Genesis 39:21

Joseph likewise experienced providential favor while under confinement.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can give His servants favor even within circumstances they would never have chosen.

IV. THE WINDS ARE AGAINST THEM

Acts 27:4

“From there we put out to sea again and sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us.”

The journey immediately becomes difficult.

Cross References

Acts 21:3

Cyprus had been part of Paul’s earlier sea travels.

Acts 11:19

The region surrounding Cyprus had played an important role in the spread of the gospel.

Acts 13:4

Paul’s first missionary journey had also involved sailing near Cyprus.

Spiritual Principle

Opposing winds do not necessarily mean you are traveling in the wrong direction.

Paul is going exactly where God said he would go.

Yet:

The winds oppose him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Difficulty Is Not Always Evidence That You Missed God’s Will.”

V. THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

Acts 27:5

“We sailed across the open sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia and landed at Myra in Lycia.”

The journey continues slowly.

Cross References

Acts 21:1

Luke repeatedly preserves detailed information regarding Paul's sea journeys.

Acts 6:9

Cilicia had connections with Jewish communities familiar with Paul's background.

Acts 15:41

Paul had previously strengthened churches through Cilicia.

Spiritual Principle

Progress may be slow while still being progress.

VI. THEY TRANSFER TO AN ALEXANDRIAN SHIP

Acts 27:6

“There the centurion found a ship from Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board.”

Transportation changes.

The destination remains:

Italy.

Cross References

Acts 28:11

Paul would later board another Alexandrian ship after surviving the shipwreck.

Acts 6:9

The Roman world was connected by extensive travel and commercial routes.

Acts 27:1

The original decision had been made to sail toward Italy.

Spiritual Principle

God's destination can remain unchanged even when the method of getting there changes.

VII. PROGRESS BECOMES DIFFICULT

Acts 27:7

“We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone.”

The ship cannot follow its preferred route.

Cross References

Titus 1:5

Crete later became an important location for Christian churches.

Acts 2:11

Cretans had been represented among those who heard the Pentecost proclamation.

Acts 27:12

Crete will soon become central to the decision about whether to continue sailing.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes faithfulness requires adjusting the route without abandoning the destination.

VIII. THEY REACH FAIR HAVENS

Acts 27:8

“We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.”

They finally reach a temporary harbor.

Cross References

Psalms 107:23

Scripture describes those who go down to the sea in ships and experience God’s works upon the waters.

Psalms 107:30

God can bring storm-tossed sailors to the haven they desire.

Acts 27:12

The crew will soon decide that Fair Havens is not desirable for wintering.

Spiritual Principle

A place that is safe may not always feel comfortable, but comfort should not be confused with wisdom.

IX. SAILING HAS BECOME DANGEROUS

Acts 27:9

“Much time had been lost, and sailing had become dangerous because it was after the Day of Atonement fast. Paul warned them.”

Paul recognizes the danger.

Cross References

Leviticus 23:27

Israel observed the Day of Atonement as a solemn day of fasting and humility.

2 Corinthians 11:25

Paul himself had already experienced shipwreck and severe dangers at sea.

Acts 27:21

Paul later reminds them that his warning should have been taken seriously.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom pays attention to changing conditions rather than blindly continuing because a plan has already been made.

X. PAUL WARNS OF DISASTER

Acts 27:10

“Men, I can see that our voyage will end in disaster, with great loss to the ship, cargo, and even our lives.”

Paul warns them.

At this stage:

His assessment is grave.

Cross References

Proverbs 27:12

A wise person recognizes danger and takes precautions, while the inexperienced continue forward and suffer.

Acts 27:21

Paul later reminds them that they ignored his warning.

Acts 27:31

Paul later gives another warning that must be obeyed for survival.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Wisdom Recognizes Danger Before Disaster Makes the Danger Obvious.”

XI. THE CENTURION LISTENS TO THE EXPERTS

Acts 27:11

“But the centurion listened instead to the pilot and the owner of the ship rather than to Paul.”

Humanly:

This makes sense.

The pilot:

Knows ships.

The owner:

Knows commercial sailing.

Paul:

Is a prisoner.

Yet:

The experts are wrong.

Cross References

Proverbs 12:15

A foolish person trusts only his own judgment, while wisdom listens carefully to sound counsel.

1 Kings 22:13

King Ahab once preferred messages that agreed with what he wanted rather than the truthful warning of God's prophet.

Acts 27:10

Paul had clearly warned about the danger ahead.

Spiritual Principle

Expertise is valuable, but experts remain human and can be wrong.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never confuse professional expertise with infallibility.

XII. THE MAJORITY VOTES TO SAIL

Acts 27:12

“Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix, a harbor in Crete, and spend the winter there.”

Now another voice enters:

The majority.

The pilot favors sailing.

The owner favors sailing.

The majority favors sailing.

Paul says:

Do not sail.

Cross References

Exodus 23:2

God warned His people not to follow a crowd into wrongdoing.

Proverbs 14:12

A way can appear right to a person while its end leads to destruction.

Acts 27:9

Paul's warning had come because sailing conditions had become dangerous.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Majority Can Agree and Still Be Wrong.”

Truth is not determined by:

Votes.

Popularity.

Consensus.

XIII. A GENTLE SOUTH WIND BLOWS

Acts 27:13

“When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted, so they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete.”

Everything appears to confirm their decision.

A gentle wind.

Favorable conditions.

Their plan seems successful.

Cross References

Psalm 107:29

God is able to calm storm winds and quiet waves.

Acts 27:7

Earlier wind conditions had already made navigation difficult.

Acts 27:8

The crew had reached Fair Havens before deciding to continue.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Favorable Circumstances Do Not Always Mean a Decision Was Wise.”

The gentle wind was temporary.

XIV. EUROCLYDON STRIKES

Acts 27:14

“But before long, a violent wind called Euroclydon swept down from the island.”

The calm ends suddenly.

Cross References

Jonah 1:4

A violent storm also struck the ship carrying Jonah.

Mark 4:37

Jesus’ disciples once experienced a sudden violent storm on the sea.

Luke 8:23

A severe storm descended upon the disciples while they crossed the lake.

Spiritual Principle

Circumstances can change faster than human confidence.

XV. THE SHIP LOSES CONTROL

Acts 27:15

“The ship was caught by the storm and could not face the wind, so we gave way to it and were driven along.”

Control disappears.

Cross References

Jonah 1:4

Jonah's ship was also threatened by a violent storm.

Psalm 107:25

God can raise stormy winds that lift the waves.

Mark 4:37

Storms can overwhelm even experienced sailors.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

There are seasons when human control disappears completely, but God's sovereignty does not.

XVI. THEY SECURE THE LIFEBOAT

Acts 27:16

"As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to secure the lifeboat."

The crew begins emergency procedures.

Cross References

Psalm 107:26

Sailors in violent storms rise and fall with the waves until courage melts.

Psalm 107:27

Severe storms can make even skilled sailors lose their normal confidence.

Acts 27:30

The lifeboat later becomes part of a failed escape attempt.

Spiritual Principle

Faith does not prohibit practical emergency measures.

XVII. THEY STRENGTHEN THE SHIP

Acts 27:17

“The men hoisted it aboard, then passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along.”

They do everything they can.

Cross References

Hebrews 6:19

Christian hope is described as a secure anchor for the soul.

Psalms 107:26

Storms expose human weakness upon the sea.

2 Corinthians 11:25

Paul understood personally the danger of shipwreck.

Spiritual Principle

Trusting God does not mean refusing to strengthen what is breaking.

XVIII. CARGO IS THROWN OVERBOARD

Acts 27:18

“We were violently battered by the storm, so the next day they began to throw cargo overboard.”

What once seemed valuable now becomes disposable.

Cross References

Jonah 1:5

Sailors on Jonah’s ship threw cargo overboard in an attempt to survive.

Psalms 107:27

Severe storms can reduce human confidence to desperation.

Matthew 8:24

A violent storm once threatened to overwhelm the disciples’ boat.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A crisis often reveals what is truly essential and what can be released.

XIX. THE SHIP'S EQUIPMENT IS THROWN OVERBOARD

Acts 27:19

“On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands.”

The crisis intensifies.

Now they discard:

Equipment needed for normal operation.

Cross References

Jonah 1:5

Desperate sailors previously threw valuable cargo into the sea.

Matthew 8:24

Violent storms can place even experienced people beyond normal control.

Mark 4:37

Waves can threaten the survival of a vessel itself.

Spiritual Principle

When survival becomes the priority, possessions lose their former importance.

XX. ALL HUMAN HOPE DISAPPEARS

Acts 27:20

“When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.”

This is one of the darkest moments in Acts.

Navigation depended heavily upon:

Sun.

Stars.

Both disappear.

Cross References

Jonah 2:4

Jonah remembered a moment when he believed himself cast away.

Psalms 107:27

Storm-tossed sailors can reach the end of their own wisdom.

2 Corinthians 1:8

Paul once described suffering so severe that he despaired even of life.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Human Hope May Reach Zero While God’s Promise Remains at Full Strength.”

XXI. PAUL STANDS UP

Acts 27:21

“After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said, ‘Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete. Then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.’”

Paul reminds them:

The disaster was avoidable.

Cross References

Proverbs 19:20

Listening to instruction can produce wisdom for the future.

Acts 27:10

Paul had warned them before they sailed.

Proverbs 12:15

Wisdom listens to sound counsel instead of trusting only personal judgment.

Important Truth

Paul does not mention the warning merely to humiliate them.

He is establishing credibility for:

The encouragement that follows.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Learn from the warning you ignored instead of wasting the disaster by refusing the lesson.

XXII. “KEEP UP YOUR COURAGE”

Acts 27:22

“But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.”

The message changes.

Earlier:

Paul warned of possible loss of life.

Now:

God has revealed that every life will be spared.

Cross References

Matthew 14:27

Jesus told frightened disciples to take courage and not be afraid.

Acts 27:34

Paul later assures them that not even a hair from their heads will be lost.

Acts 23:11

Jesus had already told Paul to take courage because he must testify in Rome.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“God Can Give Courage Before He Gives Calm.”

The storm continues.

But:

Hope returns.

XXIII. “THE GOD TO WHOM I BELONG”

Acts 27:23

“Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said.”

Paul makes two declarations.

“To Whom I Belong”

Identity.

“Whom I Serve”

Purpose.

Cross References

Acts 12:7

God had previously sent an angel to assist Peter during imprisonment.

Acts 5:19

An angel had opened prison doors for the apostles.

Daniel 6:22

Daniel testified that God sent His angel during danger.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“In the Storm, Remember Whose You Are and Whom You Serve.”

XXIV. “YOU MUST STAND BEFORE CAESAR”

Acts 27:24

“Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar, and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.”

God repeats His promise.

Cross References

Acts 23:11

Jesus had already told Paul that he must testify in Rome.

Acts 18:9

The Lord had previously encouraged Paul not to fear.

Luke 21:18

Jesus taught that God remains sovereign even when His people face severe persecution.

Two Great Promises

Paul will:

Stand before Caesar.

Everyone aboard will:

Survive.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The storm cannot kill the person whom God has appointed to the next assignment before that assignment is finished.

XXV. “I HAVE FAITH IN GOD”

Acts 27:25

“So take courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.”

One of the greatest statements of faith in Acts.

Cross References

Hebrews 11:1

Faith gives confidence concerning what is hoped for and conviction concerning what cannot yet be seen.

Romans 4:20

Abraham grew strong in faith because he trusted God's promise.

Mark 11:22

Jesus taught His disciples to have faith in God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Faith Is Trusting That God Will Do What He Said Even Before Circumstances Agree.”

Nothing visible has improved.

Yet Paul believes.

XXVI. THEY MUST RUN AGROUND

Acts 27:26

“Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”

God promises survival.

But:

Not comfort.

Not preservation of the ship.

Not an easy landing.

Cross References

Acts 28:1

The island will later be identified as Malta.

Acts 27:41

The ship eventually runs aground on a sandbar.

Acts 27:44

Everyone reaches land safely after the wreck.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“God’s Promise of Deliverance Does Not Mean There Will Be No Shipwreck.”

XXVII. FOURTEEN NIGHTS IN THE STORM

Acts 27:27

“On the fourteenth night, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were approaching land.”

Fourteen nights.

The trial is prolonged.

Cross References

Psalm 107:30

God eventually brings storm-tossed sailors toward their desired haven.

Job 38:11

God sets limits even for the raging sea.

Acts 27:33

Paul soon reminds them that they have endured fourteen days of constant suspense.

Spiritual Principle

A long storm is still a limited storm when God has established its boundary.

XXVIII. THE WATER BECOMES SHALLOWER

Acts 27:28

“They took soundings and found the water was 120 feet deep. A short time later they measured again and found it was 90 feet deep.”

Signs of land appear.

Cross References

Psalm 107:24

Those at sea witness the works of God in the depths.

Jonah 2:3

The depths of the sea are repeatedly used in Scripture as places of human helplessness.

Ezekiel 27:34

Scripture portrays the sea as capable of destroying great ships and cargo.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes hope returns gradually before deliverance becomes visible.

XXIX. THEY DROP FOUR ANCHORS

Acts 27:29

“Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.”

They use anchors.

And:

Wait for light.

Cross References

Hebrews 6:19

Hope in God is like an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

Psalm 130:6

The psalmist waits for the Lord more eagerly than watchmen wait for morning.

Acts 27:17

The crew had previously taken emergency measures to stabilize the ship.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“There Are Nights When Faith Means Dropping the Anchor and Waiting for Morning.”

XXX. THE SAILORS TRY TO ESCAPE

Acts 27:30

“In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower anchors from the bow.”

Fear produces selfishness.

The sailors try to save themselves.

Cross References

Proverbs 11:3

Integrity guides the upright, while crookedness destroys the unfaithful.

Jonah 1:5

Fear during a storm can drive sailors toward desperate actions.

Acts 27:16

The lifeboat had earlier been secured.

Spiritual Principle

Crisis reveals character as well as skill.

XXXI. “UNLESS THESE MEN STAY”

Acts 27:31

“But Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.’”

This verse teaches an important relationship between:

Divine sovereignty.

Human responsibility.

God had promised:

Everyone survives.

Paul says:

The sailors must stay.

Cross References

Acts 27:24

God had promised that everyone aboard would be preserved.

John 15:5

Jesus taught the necessity of abiding in Him for spiritual fruitfulness.

Acts 27:22

Paul had already assured everyone that no life would be lost.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“God’s Promise Does Not Cancel the Means God Appoints to Fulfill the Promise.”

XXXII. THE LIFEBOAT IS CUT AWAY

Acts 27:32

“So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.”

The escape plan is removed.

Now:

Everyone remains together.

Cross References

Proverbs 3:5

God's people are called to trust Him rather than rely solely upon their own understanding.

Acts 27:31

Paul had warned that the sailors must remain aboard.

Acts 27:30

The sailors had been attempting a secret escape.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes faith requires cutting away the false escape route we were tempted to trust.

XXXIII. PAUL URGES EVERYONE TO EAT

Acts 27:33

“Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. ‘For the last fourteen days,’ he said, ‘you have been in constant suspense and gone without food—you haven’t eaten anything.’”

Paul now addresses:

Physical needs.

Cross References

1 Kings 19:7

God once provided food to strengthen Elijah during emotional and physical exhaustion.

Matthew 6:11

Jesus taught His disciples to pray for daily bread.

Acts 27:9

The prolonged voyage had already been dangerous and exhausting.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Spiritual leadership does not ignore physical needs.

People need:

Faith.

But they also need:

Food.

Rest.

Strength.

XXXIV. “NOT ONE HAIR WILL BE LOST”

Acts 27:34

“Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.”

Paul combines:

Promise.

And:

Practical instruction.

Cross References

Luke 21:18

Jesus used similar language to express God’s ultimate preservation of His people.

1 Samuel 14:45

Scripture uses the expression of not losing even a hair as a picture of complete preservation.

Matthew 10:30

Jesus taught that even the hairs of our heads are numbered by God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faith in God’s protection is compatible with eating the food needed for strength.

XXXV. PAUL GIVES THANKS IN THE STORM

Acts 27:35

“After he said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.”

Paul publicly gives thanks.

Where?

Not:

In a peaceful house.

But:

On a storm-battered ship.

Cross References

Luke 22:19

Jesus gave thanks before breaking bread with His disciples.

Matthew 14:19

Jesus gave thanks before distributing food to the multitude.

Acts 2:46

Early believers shared food with thankful hearts.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Thanksgiving Is Most Powerful When Circumstances Give You Every Reason to Complain.”

XXXVI. EVERYONE IS ENCOURAGED

Acts 27:36

“They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.”

Paul’s faith affects others.

Cross References

Acts 27:22

Paul had already called the people to take courage.

Hebrews 10:25

Believers are instructed to encourage one another.

Acts 27:25

Paul's confidence rested upon believing God's promise.

Spiritual Principle

Courage can become contagious.

One person who trusts God can strengthen:

Many.

XXXVII. THERE WERE 276 PEOPLE

Acts 27:37

“Altogether there were 276 of us on board.”

Luke gives the exact number.

Cross References

Acts 27:22

Paul had promised that no one aboard would die.

Acts 2:41

Luke frequently records specific numbers within the historical narrative.

Genesis 46:27

Scripture often preserves numerical detail in historical accounts.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's promise covered every person aboard—not merely Paul.

XXXVIII. THEY THROW THE GRAIN INTO THE SEA

Acts 27:38

“When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.”

Now even the remaining grain is sacrificed.

Cross References

Jonah 1:5

Sailors had previously thrown cargo into the sea during a severe storm.

Acts 27:18

The crew had already discarded cargo.

Acts 27:19

They had also thrown ship equipment overboard.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom knows when something valuable must be released in order to preserve something more valuable.

XXXIX. DAYLIGHT REVEALS A BAY

Acts 27:39

“When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could.”

Morning finally comes.

Cross References

Acts 27:26

Paul had already said they would run aground on an island.

Acts 27:41

The ship soon becomes stuck on a sandbar.

Psalm 107:30

God brings sailors toward safe haven after storms.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The daylight you prayed for may reveal a path you could not see in the darkness.

XL. THEY MAKE FOR THE BEACH

Acts 27:40

“Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and untied the ropes holding the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach.”

Now:

The anchors that helped them survive the night must be released.

Cross References

Psalm 107:30

God can bring storm-tossed travelers toward safety.

Acts 27:29

The anchors had stabilized the ship through the darkness.

Acts 27:17

The crew had repeatedly adjusted strategy in response to changing danger.

Spiritual Principle

What you need for one season may need to be released when God moves you into the next.

XLI. THE SHIP BREAKS APART

Acts 27:41

“But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.”

The ship is lost.

God had promised exactly that.

Cross References

Jonah 1:4

Violent seas can threaten to break a ship apart.

Acts 27:26

Paul had predicted that they would run aground.

Ezekiel 27:34

Scripture vividly portrays ships and cargo being destroyed by the sea.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Breaking of the Ship Does Not Mean the Breaking of God’s Promise.”

XLII. THE SOLDIERS PLAN TO KILL THE PRISONERS

Acts 27:42

“The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping.”

Another danger appears:

After the storm.

Cross References

Acts 16:27

The Philippian jailer had expected severe consequences if prisoners escaped.

Acts 12:19

Guards could face serious punishment when prisoners disappeared.

Acts 27:43

Julius immediately prevents the plan from being carried out.

Spiritual Principle

Surviving one danger does not mean another challenge cannot immediately appear.

XLIII. JULIUS SPARES PAUL

Acts 27:43

“But the centurion wanted to spare Paul’s life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land.”

Once again:

God uses Julius.

Cross References

Acts 27:3

Julius had previously treated Paul kindly.

Genesis 39:21

God can give His servants favor in the eyes of those responsible for them.

Acts 24:23

Paul had experienced similar favor during earlier imprisonment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can place compassion in the heart of the person positioned to stop the final threat.

XLIV. EVERYONE REACHES LAND SAFELY

Acts 27:44

“The rest were to get there on planks or other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.”

The promise is fulfilled.

Some arrive:

Swimming.

Others:

Holding wreckage.

But:

Everyone arrives.

Cross References

Acts 27:22

Paul had promised that no person would be lost.

Acts 27:24

God had specifically promised the lives of everyone sailing with Paul.

1 Peter 3:20

Scripture elsewhere remembers God's ability to preserve people safely through waters of judgment and danger.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“God Does Not Promise Everyone the Same Method of Deliverance, but He Is Faithful to Every Promise He Makes.”

Some swam.

Some floated.

All survived.

XLV. GOD'S PROMISE AND THE STORM

Acts 27 demonstrates a crucial truth.

God promised:

Paul would reach Rome.

But:

The promise did not prevent the storm.

Spiritual Principle

The presence of a storm does not mean the absence of a promise.

XLVI. OBEDIENCE COULD HAVE PREVENTED SOME LOSS

Paul warned them not to sail.

They sailed anyway.

The storm came.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can rescue us from consequences, but that does not mean wise warnings should be ignored.

Some storms are:

Unavoidable.

Others become worse because:

Wisdom was rejected.

XLVII. EXPERTS CAN BE WRONG

The pilot.

The owner.

The majority.

All agreed.

Paul disagreed.

Spiritual Principle

Human expertise should be respected, but it must never become an idol.

XLVIII. THE MAJORITY CAN BE WRONG

The majority voted to sail.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Truth Does Not Become Truth by Majority Vote.”

Biblical discernment sometimes requires:

Standing against consensus.

XLIX. A GENTLE WIND CAN BE DECEPTIVE

The gentle south wind appeared to confirm:

Their decision.

Then:

Euroclydon.

Spiritual Principle

Temporary success does not automatically prove a decision was right.

L. THE STORM REMOVED FALSE CONFIDENCE

At first:

They trusted experience.

Then:

Cargo.

Then:

Equipment.

Then:

The lifeboat.

Eventually:

All hope disappeared.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can use storms to reveal how fragile human sources of security really are.

LI. WHEN HUMAN HOPE DIES

Acts 27:20 says:

“We finally gave up all hope.”

Yet:

God had not given up.

Spiritual Principle

The end of human resources is not the end of divine resources.

LII. PAUL BECOMES THE LEADER

At the beginning:

Paul is a prisoner.

By the middle:

Everyone listens to Paul.

Why?

Because:

He has a word from God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Spiritual authority can become most visible when ordinary authority no longer knows what to do.

LIII. “THE GOD TO WHOM I BELONG”

Paul’s identity is settled.

He belongs to:

God.

Spiritual Principle

The storm can take possessions, comfort, and control—but it cannot change who belongs to God.

LIV. “THE GOD WHOM I SERVE”

Paul also knows:

His purpose.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Knowing whose you are should shape what you do.

Paul belongs to God.

Therefore:

He serves God.

LV. COURAGE IS ROOTED IN REVELATION

Paul does not say:

Everything will work out somehow.

He says:

God told me.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical hope is not wishful thinking; it rests upon the character and Word of God.

LVI. GOD GAVE PAUL THE LIVES OF OTHERS

This is remarkable.

Paul’s presence becomes a blessing to:

276 people.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

One faithful believer can become a channel of blessing to many people who do not yet share his faith.

LVII. “JUST AS HE TOLD ME”

Paul’s confidence rests on:

God’s Word.

Spiritual Principle

Faith does not demand that we understand every detail; it trusts the One who spoke.

LVIII. THE SHIP WILL STILL BREAK

The promise includes:

Shipwreck.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Sometimes God Saves You by Bringing You Through the Wreck, Not by Preventing the Wreck.”

LIX. FAITH AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

God promises survival.

Paul requires the sailors to remain.

Spiritual Principle

Divine sovereignty and responsible action are not enemies in Scripture.

God ordains:

The outcome.

And:

The means.

LX. THEY CUT AWAY THE LIFEBOAT

This action removes:

A selfish escape plan.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes obedience requires letting go of the backup plan that would undermine the path God has appointed.

LXI. PAUL CARES ABOUT FOOD

After spiritual encouragement:

Paul says:

Eat.

Spiritual Principle

God created human beings with spiritual and physical needs, and wise leadership respects both.

LXII. PAUL GIVES THANKS PUBLICLY

In front of:

Pagans.

Soldiers.

Prisoners.

Sailors.

Paul gives thanks to God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not hide your gratitude to God when unbelievers are watching.

LXIII. PAUL'S COURAGE SPREADS

The others:

Become encouraged.

They eat.

They regain strength.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful calm in one believer can stabilize an entire group in crisis.

LXIV. THE SHIP IS LOST BUT THE PEOPLE ARE SAVED

This is one of the greatest contrasts in Acts 27.

Lost

Ship.

Cargo.

Equipment.

Saved

276 lives.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Do Not Confuse the Loss of Something Important With the Loss of Everything.”

LXV. GOD USED BROKEN PIECES

Some reached shore on:

Pieces of the wrecked ship.

Spiritual Principle

God can use the broken remains of what failed to carry you the rest of the way.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Sometimes the Thing That Breaks Beneath You Still Becomes the Piece God Uses to Bring You to Shore.”

LXVI. THE PROMISE WAS FULFILLED EXACTLY

God said:

No lives lost.

Luke says:

Everyone reached shore.

Spiritual Principle

God’s faithfulness is revealed not merely in what He promises but in the fact that He does what He promises.

LXVII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 27

1. God’s Will Can Include Storms

Principle:

Opposing winds do not necessarily mean you are outside God’s purpose.

2. Wise Warnings Should Be Heard

Principle:

Ignoring sound warning can create unnecessary loss.

3. Human Wisdom Has Limits

Principle:

Experts and majorities can still be wrong.

4. God's Word Gives Courage in Crisis

Principle:

Paul believed God before circumstances changed.

5. Faith Uses Practical Means

Principle:

God promised survival, yet the sailors still had to remain and everyone still had to act wisely.

6. One Believer Can Encourage Many

Principle:

Paul's faith strengthened 276 people.

7. God Keeps His Promises

Principle:

The ship was destroyed, but every person reached land safely.

LXVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why was Paul sailing to Italy?

Paul had appealed his case to Caesar, and Roman authorities were transporting him to Italy for the next stage of his legal proceedings.

Question 2

Who was Julius?

Julius was the Roman centurion responsible for Paul and the other prisoners during the journey.

He repeatedly showed Paul kindness and later protected his life.

Question 3

What warning did Paul give at Fair Havens?

Paul warned that continuing the voyage would result in serious disaster and loss.

Question 4

Whose advice did the centurion follow instead?

He followed the advice of the ship's pilot and owner rather than Paul's warning.

The majority also decided to continue sailing.

Question 5

What happened after the gentle south wind began blowing?

The crew believed conditions had become favorable and sailed onward.

Soon afterward:

The violent Euroclydon storm struck.

Question 6

How severe did the storm become?

The ship was driven uncontrollably.

Cargo and equipment were thrown overboard.

Sun and stars disappeared for days.

Eventually everyone gave up hope of survival.

Question 7

What message did the angel give Paul?

The angel told Paul not to be afraid because he must stand before Caesar and because God had graciously given him the lives of everyone traveling with him.

Question 8

What did Paul say in response to God's message?

Paul said:

"I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me."

Question 9

Why did Paul say the sailors had to remain aboard?

Although God had promised everyone's survival, the sailors were still necessary for the appointed means of bringing everyone safely through the crisis.

Question 10

How many people were on the ship?

There were:

276 people.

Question 11

What happened to the ship?

It struck a sandbar.

The bow became stuck.

The stern was broken apart by the waves.

Question 12

How many people survived?

Every person aboard reached land safely.

God fulfilled His promise exactly.

LXIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 27 asks us several searching questions.

Do I assume every difficult wind means I am outside God's will?

Paul was moving toward God's promise.

Do I listen to wise warnings?

The sailors initially did not.

Do I assume the majority must be right?

They were not.

Do I mistake temporary favorable circumstances for God's approval?

The gentle south wind misled them.

What do I trust when my normal sources of control disappear?

Paul trusted God.

Can I say:

"The God to whom I belong and whom I serve"?

Do I believe God before circumstances improve?

Paul did.

Am I willing to follow practical wisdom while trusting God?

Acts 27 requires both.

Can others find courage because of my faith?

Paul encouraged 276 people.

Can I thank God while the storm is still raging?

Paul did.

Am I willing to release valuable things when necessary?

The crew did.

Can I trust God even if the ship breaks?

Paul had to.

LXX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Judge God’s Promise by the Weather”

The storm said:

You are going to die.

God said:

You are going to Rome.

Principle

Circumstances can shout loudly, but they do not have authority to rewrite what God has spoken.

LXXI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Majority Is Not the Final Authority”

The majority said:

Sail.

Paul said:

Stay.

The majority won the vote.

Then:

The storm came.

Principle

Truth is determined by reality and ultimately by God—not by popularity.

LXXII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Faith Does Not Mean Doing Nothing”

Paul trusted God completely.

Yet he told the sailors:

Stay aboard.

He told the people:

Eat.

The crew:

Dropped anchors.

Handled sails.

Swam.

Used pieces of wreckage.

Principle

Faith trusts God while responsibly using the means God provides.

LXXIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“A Believer Can Become the Calmest Person in the Storm”

Paul does not control:

The wind.

The sea.

The ship.

But:

He knows God.

Principle

Peace does not come from controlling the storm; it comes from trusting the One who remains Lord over it.

LXXIV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Ship Can Break While the Promise Remains Whole”

The ship is destroyed.

The promise is not.

Principle

Never measure God’s faithfulness by whether He preserves every temporary thing around you.

LXXV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God Can Use Broken Pieces”

Some people reached land on:

Pieces of wreckage.

Principle

What looks like the remains of disaster may become part of the means of deliverance.

LXXVI. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 27 is one of Scripture's great chapters about faith in crisis.

Paul is heading toward Rome.

Jesus said:

He must get there.

But between:

The promise.

And:

The destination.

There is:

A storm.

That matters.

Sometimes we imagine God's promise should produce:

Straight roads.

Calm seas.

Open doors.

Immediate progress.

But Acts 27 says:

Not always.

Paul is exactly where God's mission is taking him.

Yet:

The winds oppose him.

Travel slows.

Warnings are ignored.

The majority makes a poor decision.

A gentle wind gives false confidence.

Then:

Euroclydon strikes.

The ship loses control.

Cargo disappears.

Equipment disappears.

Sunlight disappears.

Stars disappear.

Finally:

Hope disappears.

But:

God does not disappear.

That is the great truth.

When everyone gives up hope:

Paul stands.

Why?

Not because:

The weather improved.

Not because:

Land appeared.

Not because:

The sailors found a solution.

Paul stands because:

God spoke.

He says:

“I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.”

That is faith.

Faith is not pretending the storm is small.

The storm was enormous.

Faith is believing:

God is greater.

Paul also teaches us:

Trust is not passivity.

God said:

Everyone lives.

Paul said:

The sailors must stay.

God said:

Everyone lives.

Paul said:

Eat.

God said:

Everyone lives.

They still:

Dropped anchors.

Cut ropes.

Hoisted sails.

Swam.

Held onto boards.

God's sovereignty and human responsibility work together.

Then:

The ship breaks.

That might look like failure.

But:

The promise never said the ship would survive.

God promised:

The people would.

Sometimes:

We ask God to save the ship.

God decides:

To save us through the wreck.

The ship may represent:

A plan.

A job.

A ministry strategy.

A possession.

A relationship to a certain circumstance.

A structure we thought had to survive.

Acts 27 reminds us:

God's promise is greater than the vessel carrying us.

Then:

Every person reaches shore.

Some swim.

Some float.

Some arrive holding broken pieces.

But:

All arrive.

Not because:

The sailors were perfect.

Not because:

The majority chose wisely.

Not because:

The ship was strong enough.

But because:

God kept His Word.

Acts 27 therefore calls us to:

Listen to wisdom.

Do not blindly follow the crowd.

Do not mistake a gentle wind for guaranteed approval.

Do not panic when the storm comes.

Remember whose you are.

Remember whom you serve.

Believe God.

Encourage others.

Take practical action.

Eat when you need strength.

Give thanks before the storm is over.

Release what must be released.

Stay aboard when obedience requires staying.

Cut away false escape plans.

And if the ship breaks:

Hold onto whatever God provides.

Because:

The God who promised the destination remains Lord over the storm.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 27.

Thank You that You remain God:

In calm seas.

In opposing winds.

In violent storms.

In darkness.

In shipwreck.

Help us recognize wise warnings.

Give us humility to listen before disaster teaches us what wisdom tried to teach us earlier.

Protect us from blindly following:

Experts.

Majorities.

Circumstances.

Feelings.

Help us test everything with wisdom and truth.

When gentle winds blow:

Keep us discerning.

When storms come:

Keep us courageous.

When we lose control:

Remind us that You have not lost control.

When our normal sources of direction disappear:

Be our guide.

When human hope reaches its end:

Strengthen our faith.

Help us say with Paul:

“I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.”

Thank You that we belong to You.

Help us remember:

Whose we are.

And:

Whom we serve.

Give us faith that acts wisely.

Keep us from confusing trust with passivity.

Help us use:

The anchors.

The food.

The wisdom.

The people.

The practical means You provide.

Make us sources of courage to others.

When everyone around us is frightened:

Give us calm confidence in You.

Teach us to give thanks before the storm has ended.

And when something important breaks:

Keep us from believing Your promise has broken with it.

If necessary:

Use even the broken pieces to carry us to shore.

Thank You that Your Word is dependable.

Thank You that no storm can cancel Your purpose.

Thank You that You carried all 276 people safely through the wreck.

Carry us faithfully through every storm You allow.

And may our confidence always rest:

Not in the strength of the ship.

But:

In the faithfulness of our God.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“So take courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.” — Acts 27:25

Central Truth

God remains faithful in the darkest storm, and His promises give courage when human hope disappears; believers therefore trust His Word while wisely using the means He provides, knowing that even shipwreck cannot prevent God from accomplishing His appointed purpose.

Acts 27 in One Sentence

As Paul sails toward Rome, ignored warnings lead the ship into a devastating storm and shipwreck, but Paul courageously trusts God's promise, strengthens 276 frightened people, combines faith with practical obedience, and sees every person reach land safely exactly as God had said.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 28 — Paul Reaches Rome

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 28 brings the Book of Acts to its powerful conclusion.

Paul has survived:

- Arrest.
- False accusations.
- Imprisonment.
- Political delays.
- A dangerous voyage.
- A violent storm.
- Shipwreck.

Now he and the other passengers have safely reached the island of Malta.

But Paul's difficulties are not over.

While gathering wood for a fire, a poisonous snake fastens itself to his hand.

The people immediately assume that Paul must be a murderer receiving divine judgment.

But Paul simply shakes the snake into the fire and suffers no harm.

Soon the same people who expected him to die completely change their opinion of him.

Paul then ministers on Malta.

He prays for the sick father of Publius.

The man is healed.

Other sick people come and are also healed.

After three months, Paul continues his journey toward Rome.

Along the way, believers come to meet him.

Their presence deeply encourages him.

At last Paul enters Rome—not as a free missionary traveling according to his own plans, but as a prisoner guarded by a Roman soldier.

Yet chains cannot stop the gospel.

Paul immediately begins speaking with the Jewish leaders.

Later he spends an entire day explaining the kingdom of God and showing from the Law of Moses and the Prophets that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Some believe.

Others refuse.

The Book of Acts then closes with one of the most remarkable pictures in Scripture.

Paul remains under Roman confinement, yet he continues:

Preaching the kingdom of God.

Teaching about Jesus Christ.

Speaking with complete boldness.

And doing so:

“Without hindrance!”

The central truth of Acts 28 is:

No storm, snake, prison, opposition, government, or human circumstance can stop the gospel of Jesus Christ from accomplishing God's purpose.

I. GOD BRINGS PAUL SAFELY TO MALTA

Acts 28:1 — Safe on the Island

“Once we were safely on shore, we learned that the island was called Malta.”

Acts 27 ended with a shipwreck.

The ship was destroyed.

But every person aboard survived.

God had promised Paul that the lives of those sailing with him would be preserved.

Now that promise has been fulfilled.

They discover that they have landed on Malta.

Their arrival was not accidental.

The storm had driven them there.

But behind the storm stood the providence of God.

Cross References

Acts 27:26

But we must be driven onto some island before this journey is over.

Acts 27:44

The rest were told to follow by holding onto boards or other pieces of the broken ship. In this way, everyone reached the shore safely.

Acts 27:41

The ship struck a place where two currents met and ran aground. The front of the ship became stuck and could not move, while the back of the ship began breaking apart under the force of the waves.

Spiritual Principle

God can fulfill His promises through circumstances that appear disastrous.

The ship was destroyed.

But God's promise was not.

Key Truth

What looks like a wreck may actually be part of God's route toward His appointed destination.

II. UNUSUAL KINDNESS IN A COLD PLACE

Acts 28:2 — The Islanders Welcome the Survivors

“The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.”

The survivors were exhausted.

They were soaked.

They were cold.

They had lost the ship.

Yet the people of Malta responded with compassion.

They built a fire.

They welcomed strangers.

They met an immediate practical need.

This reminds us that kindness can become a powerful ministry even when no sermon is preached.

Cross References

Matthew 5:47

If you are friendly only to your own people, what are you doing that is unusual? Even people who do not follow God do the same thing.

Hebrews 13:2

Do not forget to welcome strangers and show them hospitality, because some people have welcomed angels without knowing it.

Romans 12:13

Share what you have with God's people when they are in need, and always be willing to welcome others into your home.

Spiritual Principle

Kindness often opens doors that arguments never could.

Application

Never underestimate simple acts such as:

- Feeding someone.
- Welcoming a stranger.
- Providing warmth.
- Meeting an immediate need.
- Showing compassion.

God can use ordinary kindness in extraordinary ways.

III. A VIPER FASTENS ON PAUL

Acts 28:3 — Trouble After the Storm

“Paul gathered a pile of sticks and put them on the fire. A viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand.”

Paul had just survived a shipwreck.

Now a poisonous snake strikes him.

This demonstrates an important truth:

Escaping one difficulty does not guarantee that another difficulty will not follow.

Paul does not stand back expecting everyone else to serve him.

He gathers firewood.

While serving others, he is bitten.

Faithfulness does not make a believer immune from hardship.

Cross References

Genesis 3:15

I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.

Mark 16:18

They will be able to handle dangerous snakes, and even if they drink something deadly, it will not destroy them. They will place their hands on sick people, and those people will recover.

Luke 10:19

Look, I have given you authority to walk over snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will ultimately overcome you.

Spiritual Principle

A new attack does not mean God abandoned you during the previous victory.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not interpret every new difficulty as proof that you are outside God's will.

Sometimes the attack comes while you are doing exactly what faithfulness requires.

IV. PEOPLE JUDGE PAUL TOO QUICKLY

Acts 28:4 — “This Man Must Be a Murderer”

“When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said, ‘This man must be a murderer. He escaped the sea, but justice will not allow him to live.’”

The people immediately form a conclusion.

Paul survived the sea.

Now a snake bites him.

Therefore, they assume:

He must be guilty.

Their theology was simple:

Bad things happen to bad people.

But Scripture repeatedly warns us against making such judgments.

Suffering does not automatically prove personal guilt.

Cross References

Luke 13:2

Jesus answered them, “Do you think those Galileans suffered these things because they were greater sinners than all the other Galileans?”

John 9:2

His disciples asked Him, “Teacher, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Job 4:7

Think about this: when has an innocent person ever been destroyed? Where have truly upright people been completely wiped out?

Spiritual Principle

Human beings often judge circumstances without knowing the whole story.

Application

Be careful when saying:

“They are suffering because they must have done something wrong.”

Only God knows every circumstance, motive, and purpose.

V. PAUL SHAKES THE SNAKE INTO THE FIRE

Acts 28:5 — No Harm Comes to Paul

“But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no harm.”

Paul does not panic.

He does not deliver a speech.

He simply shakes the snake into the fire.

God preserves him.

Paul still has an appointment in Rome.

A snake cannot cancel what God has appointed.

Cross References

Mark 16:18

They will handle dangerous snakes, and if they drink something deadly, it will not destroy them. They will place their hands on sick people, and those people will recover.

Luke 10:19

I have given you authority to walk over snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will ultimately be able to defeat you.

Psalms 91:13

You will walk over the lion and the poisonous snake; you will trample the young lion and the serpent under your feet.

Spiritual Principle

God's servants are immortal until God's purpose for their lives is finished.

That does not mean believers should act recklessly.

It means nothing can remove them from God's providential care.

Key Truth

The snake was dangerous.

But God's purpose was greater.

VI. PUBLIC OPINION CHANGES QUICKLY

Acts 28:6 — From Murderer to “God”

“The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead. But after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.”

First they call Paul:

A murderer.

Then they call him:

A god.

Both conclusions are wrong.

This shows how unstable public opinion can be.

People can condemn you one moment and praise you the next.

Neither reaction should determine your identity.

Cross References

Acts 14:11

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in their own language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!”

Acts 14:19

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city because they thought he was dead.

Acts 12:22

The crowd shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not the voice of a man!”

Spiritual Principle

Public opinion is a poor foundation for identity.

Application

Do not live for either:

The applause of people.

Or:

The condemnation of people.

Live for the approval of God.

VII. PUBLIUS WELCOMES PAUL

Acts 28:7 — Hospitality from the Chief Official

“There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us and showed us hospitality for three days.”

Publius was an important official.

Yet he personally welcomed the shipwreck survivors.

Hospitality becomes one of the major themes of Paul's experience on Malta.

God often uses people to provide for His servants at precisely the right moment.

Cross References

Hebrews 13:2

Do not forget to welcome strangers, because some people have welcomed angels without realizing whom they were receiving.

Romans 12:13

Help God's people when they are in need, and make it your practice to welcome others and care for them.

3 John 1:5

Dear friend, you are acting faithfully whenever you serve the brothers and sisters, even when they are strangers to you.

Spiritual Principle

Hospitality is not merely social courtesy.

It can be genuine Christian ministry.

VIII. PAUL PRAYS FOR PUBLIUS' FATHER

Acts 28:8 — Prayer and Healing

“His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him, prayed, placed his hands on him, and healed him.”

Paul does not merely receive hospitality.

He ministers in return.

Publius had opened his home.

Now Paul enters the sickroom of Publius' father.

Notice the order.

Paul:

Prayed.

Placed his hands on him.

And the man was healed.

Paul understood that healing power belonged to God.

Cross References

Mark 1:31

Jesus went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her stand up. Immediately the fever left her, and she began serving them.

James 5:14

Is anyone among you sick? That person should call for the elders of the church. They should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Matthew 8:15

Jesus touched her hand, and the fever left her. She got up and began serving Him.

Spiritual Principle

Prayer acknowledges that the ultimate source of healing is God.

Application

When sickness enters our lives, believers should never overlook prayer.

We may seek medical help.

We may use medicine.

But we should also pray to the God who created the body and holds every life in His hands.

IX. THE SICK COME TO PAUL

Acts 28:9 — Healing Spreads Across Malta

“After this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured.”

The healing of one person caused others to come.

News spread.

The shipwreck that looked like a disaster created a ministry opportunity on an island Paul had never planned to visit.

God turned:

A storm.

Into:

A mission field.

Cross References

Matthew 4:24

News about Jesus spread throughout Syria, and people brought Him everyone who was suffering from different diseases and severe pain, those troubled by demons, those having seizures, and those who were paralyzed, and He healed them.

Acts 5:16

Crowds also came from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those troubled by evil spirits, and every one of them was healed.

Luke 4:40

As the sun was setting, people brought to Jesus everyone who was sick with different diseases. He placed His hands on each one of them and healed them.

Spiritual Principle

God can transform an unwanted interruption into an unexpected ministry.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When God changes your location, ask:

“What ministry has God placed in front of me here?”

X. GOD PROVIDES THROUGH THE PEOPLE OF MALTA

Acts 28:10 — Supplied for the Journey

“They honored us in many ways, and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.”

Paul arrived on Malta with nothing.

The ship had been destroyed.

Yet when he left, his needs were supplied.

God did not send supplies from heaven.

He used people.

This is often how divine provision works.

Cross References

Philippians 4:19

My God will provide everything you truly need from His unlimited riches in glory through Christ Jesus.

3 John 1:6

They have told the church about your love. You will do well to help them continue their journey in a way that honors God.

Galatians 6:6

The person who is taught God's Word should share good things with the one who teaches him.

Spiritual Principle

God's provision often comes through human hands.

Key Truth

When God gives an assignment, He is able to provide what is needed to complete it.

XI. THE JOURNEY RESUMES

Acts 28:11 — Three Months on Malta

“After three months we set sail in an Alexandrian ship that had wintered on the island. The ship had figureheads of the twin gods Castor and Pollux.”

Paul remained on Malta for three months.

Eventually the sailing season improved.

Another Alexandrian ship was available.

The vessel carried pagan symbols.

But Paul was not intimidated by them.

False gods carved on a ship could not compete with the living God who had preserved him through the sea.

Cross References

Acts 27:6

There the officer found a ship from Alexandria that was sailing toward Italy, and he put us aboard it.

1 Corinthians 8:4

So then, concerning food offered to idols, we know that an idol has no real divine power and that there is only one true God.

Acts 28:13

From there we continued to Rhegium. The next day a south wind began blowing, and one day later we reached Puteoli.

Spiritual Principle

Believers can live faithfully in a culture filled with false beliefs without surrendering their allegiance to the true God.

XII. PAUL ARRIVES AT SYRACUSE

Acts 28:12 — Three Days in Syracuse

“We landed at Syracuse and stayed three days.”

Luke records the stages of the journey carefully.

Syracuse was another step toward Rome.

Not every stage contained a dramatic miracle.

Sometimes God's guidance looks like ordinary travel from one place to another.

Cross References

Acts 20:6

After the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we sailed away from Philippi and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

Acts 21:4

We found the disciples there and stayed with them for seven days. Through the Spirit they warned Paul about going on to Jerusalem.

Acts 28:13

From there we continued on to Rhegium. The next day a south wind came up, and the following day we reached Puteoli.

Spiritual Principle

God is present not only in dramatic moments but also in ordinary stages of the journey.

XIII. THE JOURNEY MOVES CLOSER TO ROME

Acts 28:13 — Rhegium and Puteoli

“From there we sailed to Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli.”

Every mile brings Paul closer to Rome.

Years earlier he had desired to preach there.

Now God's promise is becoming reality.

The route was far more difficult than Paul might have imagined.

Yet God's destination had not changed.

Cross References

Acts 27:13

When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had received the weather they wanted. They raised anchor and sailed close along the coast of Crete.

Acts 28:12

We arrived at Syracuse and remained there for three days.

Romans 1:15

That is why I am eager to preach the good news to you who are in Rome also.

Spiritual Principle

God's promises do not guarantee an easy road.

They guarantee that God's purpose will stand.

XIV. PAUL FINDS BELIEVERS

Acts 28:14 — Fellowship at Puteoli

“There we found believers, who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome.”

Paul finds fellow Christians.

The gospel had already reached Italy before he arrived.

He spends seven days with them.

After months of storms, danger, and uncertainty, Paul experiences Christian fellowship.

Cross References

Romans 1:7

I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and called to belong to Him. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:24

I hope to visit you while I am traveling to Spain. After enjoying some time with you, I hope you will help me continue on my journey.

Acts 19:21

After these things happened, Paul decided that after traveling through Macedonia and Achaia he would go to Jerusalem. He said, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”

Spiritual Principle

Christian fellowship is one of God's gifts for strengthening weary believers.

XV. PAUL IS ENCOURAGED BY OTHER CHRISTIANS

Acts 28:15 — The Forum of Appius and Three Taverns

“The brothers and sisters there had heard we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and was greatly encouraged.”

Paul was a great apostle.

But even Paul needed encouragement.

When believers traveled out to meet him, Paul responded in two ways:

He thanked God.

And:

He took courage.

Strong Christians still need encouragement.

Cross References

Romans 1:12

What I mean is that when we are together, we may encourage one another through the faith that both you and I share.

Hebrews 13:1

Keep loving one another as brothers and sisters in God's family.

Philippians 1:3

Every time I remember you, I thank my God for you.

Spiritual Principle

Encouragement is spiritual ministry.

Application

You may never know how much your presence strengthens someone.

Sometimes simply showing up says:

“You are not alone.”

XVI. PAUL ENTERS ROME AS A PRISONER

Acts 28:16 — Guarded by a Soldier

“When we arrived in Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.”

Paul has finally reached Rome.

But not in the way most people would imagine.

He enters:

Under guard.

In chains.

As a prisoner.

Yet his confinement gives him access to people he might never have met otherwise.

Cross References

Acts 24:23

Felix ordered the officer to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and to allow his friends to care for his needs.

Ephesians 6:20

I am Christ's ambassador even though I am in chains. Pray that I will speak the message boldly, just as I should.

Philippians 1:13

As a result, everyone in the imperial guard and many others now understand that I am in prison because I belong to Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Chains can restrict a servant without restricting his ministry.

Key Truth

Paul was chained.

The gospel was not.

XVII. PAUL MEETS THE JEWISH LEADERS

Acts 28:17 — Paul Explains His Situation

“Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said: ‘Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans.’”

Paul does not waste time.

Only three days after arriving in Rome, he begins ministry.

He first contacts the Jewish leaders.

Paul explains that he has not rejected his people or deliberately attacked their heritage.

Cross References

Acts 25:8

Paul defended himself and said, “I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law, against the temple, or against Caesar.”

Acts 23:1

Paul looked directly at the council and said, “Brothers, I have lived before God with a clear conscience up to this very day.”

Acts 21:28

They shouted, “Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches people everywhere against our people, our law, and this place. He has even brought Gentiles into the temple and made this holy place unclean.”

Spiritual Principle

False accusations should be answered with truth rather than bitterness.

XVIII. ROMAN AUTHORITIES FOUND NO CAPITAL CRIME

Acts 28:18 — Paul Was Not Worthy of Death

“They examined me and wanted to release me because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death.”

Paul reminds them that Roman officials had examined the charges.

The evidence did not support execution.

Again and again, Paul's innocence had become evident.

Cross References

Acts 25:25

But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. Since he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to send him.

Acts 26:31

After leaving the room, they talked with one another and said, “This man is doing nothing that deserves death or imprisonment.”

Luke 23:4

Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no reason to charge this man with a crime.”

Spiritual Principle

God's servants may be falsely accused without being truly guilty.

Application

Maintain such integrity that accusations require falsehood to survive.

XIX. PAUL APPEALED TO CAESAR

Acts 28:19 — Forced to Appeal

“But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar—not that I had any charge to bring against my own people.”

Paul explains why he came to Rome.

His appeal to Caesar was defensive.

He was not seeking revenge against the Jewish people.

He wanted a fair hearing.

Cross References

Acts 25:11

If I have done something wrong and committed a crime worthy of death, I am not refusing to die. But if these charges against me are false, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.

Acts 25:7

When Paul entered, the Jewish leaders who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him and made many serious accusations, but they were unable to prove them.

John 18:35

Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own people and the chief priests handed You over to me. What have You done?”

Spiritual Principle

Seeking lawful protection is not the same thing as seeking revenge.

XX. PAUL IS BOUND FOR THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

Acts 28:20 — “Because of the Hope of Israel”

“For this reason, I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

Paul identifies the real issue.

He is imprisoned because of:

“The hope of Israel.”

That hope centers ultimately in God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ—especially the resurrection.

Cross References

Acts 26:6

And now I stand here on trial because I have placed my hope in the promise God made to our ancestors.

Ephesians 6:20

I am an ambassador for the gospel even while wearing chains. Pray that I will speak it boldly as I should.

Acts 23:6

When Paul realized that one part of the council was made up of Sadducees and the other of Pharisees, he called out, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees. I am on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.”

Spiritual Principle

Christian hope is not wishful thinking.

It rests upon God's promises and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

XXI. NO REPORT HAD ARRIVED FROM JUDEA

Acts 28:21 — The Leaders Had Heard Nothing Against Paul

“They replied, ‘We have not received any letters from Judea about you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you.’”

Surprisingly, the Jewish leaders in Rome had received no official accusation concerning Paul.

The controversy that had dominated Paul's life for years had apparently not followed him to Rome in the form he might have expected.

Cross References

Acts 21:21

They have been told that you teach Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or follow the customs handed down to us.

Acts 24:5

We have found this man to be a troublemaker. He stirs up disorder among Jews all over the world, and he is a leading figure in the group called the Nazarenes.

Acts 24:13

They cannot prove to you the things they are now accusing me of doing.

Spiritual Principle

Rumors may travel quickly, but they do not always survive careful examination.

XXII. THEY WANT TO HEAR ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

Acts 28:22 — “We Want to Hear Your Views”

“But we want to hear your views, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

The leaders know Christianity is controversial.

But instead of immediately rejecting Paul's message, they are willing to listen.

That gives Paul an opportunity to explain the gospel.

Cross References

Acts 24:14

But I freely admit this to you: I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything written in the Law and the Prophets.

Acts 24:5

We have found this man to be a troublemaker who creates unrest among Jews throughout the world, and he is a leader among the Nazarenes.

Acts 17:19

They brought Paul to the meeting of the Areopagus and asked him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?”

Spiritual Principle

Do not fear honest questions.

Questions can become doors for proclaiming truth.

XXIII. PAUL PREACHES ALL DAY

Acts 28:23 — The Kingdom of God and Jesus

“They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and many came to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God, using the Law of Moses and the Prophets to persuade them about Jesus.”

This verse gives us a remarkable picture of Paul's preaching.

From:

Morning.

Until:

Evening.

He teaches.

His subject is:

The kingdom of God.

His focus is:

Jesus.

His biblical foundation is:

The Law and the Prophets.

Paul did not present Christianity as disconnected from the Old Testament.

He showed how Scripture pointed toward Christ.

Cross References

Luke 24:27

Beginning with Moses and continuing through all the Prophets, Jesus explained to them the things written throughout the Scriptures concerning Himself.

Acts 17:2

As he normally did, Paul went into the synagogue, and for three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures.

Acts 19:8

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning with the people and trying to persuade them about the kingdom of God.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful preaching should be biblical, Christ-centered, patient, and persuasive.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not merely tell people what Christians believe.

Show them why Scripture points to Jesus Christ.

XXIV. SOME BELIEVE AND OTHERS REFUSE

Acts 28:24 — Two Responses to One Message

“Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.”

Same preacher.

Same message.

Same Scriptures.

Same opportunity.

Different responses.

Some believe.

Others refuse.

The preacher's responsibility is faithfulness.

The hearer's responsibility is response.

Cross References

Acts 17:4

Some of the people were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. A large number of God-fearing Greeks also believed, along with quite a few prominent women.

Acts 14:4

The people of the city were divided. Some sided with the Jews, while others sided with the apostles.

John 12:37

Even though Jesus had performed so many miraculous signs in front of them, they still refused to believe in Him.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel demands a response.

Neutrality toward Christ cannot continue forever.

XXV. THE HOLY SPIRIT SPOKE THROUGH ISAIAH

Acts 28:25 — Scripture Is the Voice of God

“They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul made this final statement: ‘The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through the prophet Isaiah.’”

Paul says:

The Holy Spirit spoke.

And He spoke:

Through Isaiah.

This is an important statement about biblical inspiration.

Isaiah was the human prophet.

The Holy Spirit was the divine source.

Cross References

Isaiah 6:9

God said, “Go and tell these people: You will keep hearing, but you will not understand. You will keep seeing, but you will not truly recognize what you see.”

2 Peter 1:21

Prophecy never came simply because a person decided to speak on his own. Instead, men spoke from God as the Holy Spirit guided and carried them along.

Hebrews 3:7

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear God’s voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Spiritual Principle

The Bible is not merely human religious reflection.

God spoke through human authors.

XXVI. HEARING WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING

Acts 28:26 — Spiritual Deafness

“Go to this people and say, You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”

A person can hear Scripture repeatedly and remain spiritually unmoved.

Physical hearing does not guarantee spiritual understanding.

Exposure to truth does not guarantee acceptance of truth.

Cross References

Isaiah 6:9

Go and tell these people, “You will continue hearing, but you will not understand. You will continue looking, but you will not truly see what is in front of you.”

Matthew 13:14

Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them: “You will keep hearing but will not understand, and you will keep looking but will not truly see.”

Mark 4:12

They may keep looking but not truly recognize what they see, and they may keep hearing but not understand, otherwise they might turn back and be forgiven.

Spiritual Principle

Repeated exposure to truth can either soften the heart or, when continually rejected, reveal increasing hardness.

XXVII. THE DANGER OF A HARD HEART

Acts 28:27 — Eyes Closed and Hearts Hardened

“For this people's heart has grown hard; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them.”

The problem was not lack of evidence alone.

The deeper problem was the heart.

They:

Closed their eyes.

Resisted hearing.

Refused understanding.

Spiritual blindness can involve deliberate resistance to truth.

Cross References

Isaiah 6:10

Make the hearts of these people insensitive. Let their ears become dull and their eyes become closed, so they do not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, turn back to Me, and be healed.

John 12:40

He has allowed their eyes to remain blind and their hearts to become hard so that they do not see with their eyes, understand with their hearts, turn back to Me, and receive healing.

Matthew 13:15

The hearts of these people have become dull. Their ears hardly listen, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, turn back to Me, and I would heal them.

Spiritual Warning

Every time truth is rejected, the heart is in danger of becoming harder.

Application

When God speaks through His Word:

Listen.

Respond.

Obey.

Do not continually postpone surrender.

XXVIII. SALVATION GOES TO THE GENTILES

Acts 28:28 — “They Will Listen”

“Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”

Paul announces that the gospel is going outward to the Gentiles.

This theme has appeared throughout Acts.

God's saving purpose was never intended to remain confined to one nation.

The gospel is for the world.

Cross References

Romans 11:11

So I ask, did Israel stumble so badly that there is no recovery? Certainly not. Instead, because of their rejection, salvation has gone to the Gentiles, and this is intended to stir Israel to desire what God is doing.

Isaiah 49:6

God says, “It is too small a task for you only to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back the people of Israel I have preserved. I will also make you a light for the nations so that My salvation may reach to the farthest parts of the earth.”

Acts 13:46

Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly and said, “It was necessary for God's message to be spoken to you first. But since you reject it and show that you do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles.”

Spiritual Principle

The gospel crosses every:

- National boundary.
- Racial boundary.
- Cultural boundary.
- Social boundary.

Jesus Christ is Savior for all who believe.

XXIX. DISAGREEMENT CONTINUES

Acts 28:29 — The Jews Depart Arguing

“After he said this, the Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves.”

Paul's message produced debate.

Some had believed.

Others rejected.

Now disagreement continues among them.

Truth often divides because people respond differently to it.

Cross References

Acts 19:9

But some became stubborn and refused to believe, speaking badly about the Way in front of everyone. So Paul left them, took the disciples with him, and continued teaching daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

John 9:16

Some of the Pharisees said, “This man cannot be from God because He does not keep the Sabbath the way we think He should.” But others said, “How could a sinful man perform signs like these?” So they were divided.

Acts 23:7

As soon as Paul said this, an argument broke out between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the whole group became divided.

Spiritual Principle

Division over truth is not always proof that truth has failed.

Sometimes division reveals the different conditions of people's hearts.

XXX. TWO YEARS OF HOUSE ARREST

Acts 28:30 — Paul Welcomes Everyone

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.”

Paul's circumstances are restricted.

His attitude is not.

For two years he receives visitors.

His rented house becomes a ministry center.

Paul cannot freely travel through Rome.

So God brings Rome to Paul.

Cross References

Philippians 1:13

Because of my imprisonment, everyone in the imperial guard and many other people have come to understand that I am in chains because I serve Christ.

Ephesians 3:1

For this reason, I, Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus because of my ministry to you Gentiles.

2 Timothy 4:17

But the Lord stood beside me and gave me strength so that through me the message could be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles could hear it. And I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

Spiritual Principle

When one ministry door closes, look for the door God has left open.

Application

Paul could have said:

“I cannot travel, so my ministry is finished.”

Instead he effectively said:

“If I cannot go to people, I will preach to everyone God sends to me.”

XXXI. THE GOSPEL CANNOT BE CHAINED

Acts 28:31 — “With Complete Boldness and Without Hindrance”

“He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with complete boldness and without hindrance!”

This is how Acts ends.
Not with Paul's death.
Not with Caesar's decision.
Not with a prison door.
But with preaching.
Paul proclaimed:
The kingdom of God.
He taught:
The Lord Jesus Christ.
He spoke:
With complete boldness.
And Luke's final emphasis is:
“Without hindrance!”
Paul is guarded.
Yet the Word moves freely.
Paul is confined.
Yet the gospel expands.
Rome may chain the messenger.
Rome cannot chain the message.

Cross References

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and all the way to the farthest parts of the earth.

Acts 4:29

And now, Lord, look at their threats and give Your servants the courage to speak Your Word with complete boldness.

Matthew 24:14

This good news about God's kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to every nation, and then the end will come.

Spiritual Principle

Governments can imprison Christians.

They cannot imprison Christ.

Enemies can oppose preaching.

They cannot cancel God's Word.

Key Truth

Acts begins with Jesus saying:

“You will be My witnesses.”

Acts ends with His witness reaching Rome.

The mission is continuing.

XXXII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 28

1. God's Promises Survive Every Storm

Paul reached land safely just as God promised.

The ship broke apart.

God's promise did not.

Principle:

Circumstances can collapse without God's faithfulness collapsing.

2. God Can Turn Trouble into Ministry

Paul never planned a missionary visit to Malta.

A storm brought him there.

Then God used him to minister to the people of the island.

Principle:

An interruption in your plans may become an appointment in God's plan.

3. Human Judgment Is Often Wrong

The islanders first called Paul:

A murderer.

Then:

A god.

Both judgments were mistaken.

Principle:

Never build your identity on the changing opinions of people.

4. Christian Encouragement Matters

When Paul saw the believers coming to meet him near Rome:

“He thanked God and took courage.”

Principle:

Even strong believers need encouragement.

5. Chains Cannot Stop Christian Witness

Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner.

Yet he immediately began teaching.

Principle:

Your circumstances may limit your freedom without eliminating your usefulness.

6. The Gospel Produces Different Responses

Some believed Paul's message.

Others rejected it.

Principle:

Our responsibility is faithful proclamation.

The hearer must respond to the truth.

7. The Mission Continues

Acts ends:

“Without hindrance.”

Principle:

The Book of Acts ends, but the mission of Acts does not.

The church still carries the gospel to the world.

XXXIII. WHAT ACTS 28 TEACHES ABOUT GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Acts 28 demonstrates God's providence repeatedly.

God Controlled the Destination

The storm drove Paul toward Malta.

God Preserved Paul's Life

The shipwreck could not kill him.

The viper could not kill him.

God Provided Through Other People

The islanders provided warmth.

Publius provided hospitality.

The people supplied provisions.

Believers provided encouragement.

God Opened Ministry Opportunities

Paul ministered on Malta.

He witnessed along the road.

He preached in Rome.

God Fulfilled His Promise

Paul reached Rome.

Key Truth

Providence means that God's purpose continues even when circumstances appear chaotic.

XXXIV. WHAT ACTS 28 TEACHES ABOUT CHRISTIAN WITNESS

Paul's circumstances changed continually.

His mission did not.

On Malta:

He ministered.

On the journey:

He encouraged and was encouraged.

In Rome:

He preached.

Under guard:

He preached.

In a rented house:

He preached.

To Jewish leaders:

He preached.

To everyone who came:

He preached.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A faithful witness does not ask only:

“Are my circumstances ideal?”

He asks:

“Who has God placed in front of me?”

XXXV. WHAT ACTS 28 TEACHES ABOUT THE GOSPEL

The gospel is:

Biblical

Paul reasoned from Moses and the Prophets.

Christ-Centered

He persuaded people concerning Jesus.

Kingdom-Focused

He proclaimed the kingdom of God.

Universal

The message went to Jews and Gentiles.

Powerful

Some were persuaded and believed.

Rejected by Some

Others refused to believe.

Unstoppable

Acts closes with the gospel being preached:

“Without hindrance.”

Key Truth

The gospel does not depend upon favorable circumstances for its power.

XXXVI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does Paul's safe arrival on Malta teach us about God's promises?

God had promised that Paul and the others aboard the ship would survive.

Acts 28 begins by showing that this promise was fulfilled.

The ship was destroyed, but every person reached shore.

This teaches us that difficult circumstances cannot cancel what God has determined to accomplish.

Question 2

What can we learn from the kindness of the people of Malta?

They saw cold, wet, exhausted strangers and immediately responded with compassion.

They built a fire.

They welcomed them.

Their kindness reminds believers that practical acts of compassion can become meaningful ministry.

Question 3

Why is the snakebite important?

Paul had survived the sea only to face another danger.

Yet God preserved him again.

The snakebite demonstrated that God's purpose for Paul had not changed.

He still had to reach Rome.

Question 4

What mistake did the islanders make when Paul was bitten?

They assumed his suffering proved he was guilty of terrible sin.

They judged his spiritual condition from his circumstances.

Scripture warns us not to assume that every tragedy is direct punishment for a particular sin.

Question 5

What does the changing opinion of the islanders teach us?

At first they thought Paul was a murderer.

Then they thought he was a god.

Their opinions changed completely within a short time.

This teaches us not to base our identity or faithfulness upon human praise or criticism.

Question 6

How did God use Paul's unexpected stay on Malta?

God turned the island into a place of ministry.

Publius' father was healed.

Other sick people came.

Paul was able to serve people he never would have met if the storm had not changed his journey.

Key Phrase:

“God can turn an interruption into an assignment.”

Question 7

Why was Paul encouraged when believers came to meet him?

Paul had endured years of hardship.

Seeing fellow Christians reminded him that he was not alone.

Their effort to meet him strengthened his heart.

This teaches us that Christian fellowship and encouragement are important even for mature spiritual leaders.

Question 8

How could Paul's imprisonment actually advance the gospel?

Because Paul was confined in Rome, soldiers guarded him and visitors came to him.

His imprisonment created opportunities to speak with people he might otherwise never have reached.

Paul's chains became part of his mission field.

Question 9

How did Paul explain Jesus to the Jewish leaders?

He used:

- The Law of Moses.
- The Prophets.
- The message of God's kingdom.

He demonstrated from Scripture that Jesus fulfilled God's redemptive promises.

Question 10

Why did some believe while others rejected Paul's message?

The same truth was presented to everyone, but hearts responded differently.

Some were persuaded.

Others refused to believe.

This demonstrates that hearing the gospel does not automatically produce faith.

A person must respond to God's truth.

Question 11

What warning does Acts 28 give about hardening the heart?

Paul quoted Isaiah's warning about people who heard but refused to understand.

Repeated rejection of truth can produce greater spiritual hardness.

We should respond to God's Word when He confronts us rather than continually resisting Him.

Question 12

Why are the final words “without hindrance” so important?

Paul was a prisoner.

Rome was the center of imperial power.

Christianity faced opposition.

Yet the gospel continued to be proclaimed freely.

The final message of Acts is that God's mission cannot ultimately be stopped.

XXXVII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 28 asks several important questions.

Am I Trusting God When My Plans Change?

Paul planned to reach Rome.

He did not plan to spend three months on Malta.

Yet God worked through the interruption.

Do I Judge People Too Quickly?

The islanders reached an immediate conclusion about Paul.

Am I making assumptions about people without knowing their entire story?

Am I Serving Where God Has Placed Me?

Paul did not spend three months complaining about Malta.

He ministered there.

What opportunities are immediately around me?

Do I Encourage Other Believers?

The Christians who traveled to meet Paul strengthened him.

Who needs encouragement from me?

Am I Allowing Circumstances to Silence My Witness?

Paul preached while imprisoned.

What excuse am I using for not speaking about Christ?

Is My Witness Rooted in Scripture?

Paul reasoned from Moses and the Prophets.

Can I explain why I believe what I believe from God's Word?

Is My Heart Soft Toward Truth?

Am I merely hearing Scripture?

Or am I allowing it to change me?

Do I Believe the Gospel Is Still Unstoppable?

Acts ends with bold preaching.

Am I living as though God's mission is still continuing today?

XXXVIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“You May Be Chained, but the Gospel Is Not”

Paul finally reached Rome.

But he arrived wearing chains.

From a human viewpoint this looked like defeat.

The great missionary was restricted.

His travel was limited.

A soldier guarded him.

Yet those chains became part of God's strategy.

Paul could still:

Teach.

Witness.

Receive visitors.

Explain Scripture.

Proclaim Christ.

Speak about the kingdom.

The government controlled where Paul lived.

It did not control what Paul believed.

The soldier could guard Paul's body.

He could not keep Paul from proclaiming Christ.

Rome could confine the messenger.

It could not confine the message.

Principle:

Do not measure the power of your ministry merely by the freedom of your circumstances. God can accomplish extraordinary spiritual work through very restricted conditions.

XXXIX. THE BOOK OF ACTS ENDS—BUT THE MISSION DOES NOT

Acts begins with Jesus saying:

“You will be My witnesses.”

The disciples begin in Jerusalem.

Then the gospel moves into Judea.

Then Samaria.

Then farther outward.

Peter preaches.

Stephen testifies.

Philip evangelizes.

Saul is converted.

Paul becomes a missionary.

Churches are planted.

The gospel crosses cultures.

Gentiles believe.

Missionaries travel through the Roman world.

Opposition grows.

Prisons cannot stop them.

Riots cannot stop them.

False accusations cannot stop them.

Storms cannot stop them.

Shipwreck cannot stop them.

A snake cannot stop them.

And eventually:

The gospel reaches Rome.

But Luke does not end Acts by saying:

“The mission was completed.”

Instead Paul is still preaching.

Still teaching.

Still witnessing.

Still proclaiming Jesus.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The unfinished feeling at the end of Acts is appropriate because Christ's mission continues through His church.

The gospel must still go:

To cities.

To towns.

To neighborhoods.

To homes.

To nations.

To people who have never truly heard.

The church is still called to be Christ's witness.

XL. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 28 is the conclusion of Luke's historical account, but it does not feel like an ending.

Paul is alive.

Paul is preaching.

The gospel is spreading.

Jesus Christ is being proclaimed in the capital city of the Roman world.

Think about the journey that brought Paul there.

He had been:

Threatened.

Beaten.

Arrested.

Falsely accused.

Imprisoned.

Delayed.

Transferred between rulers.

Placed aboard a ship.

Caught in a storm.

Shipwrecked.

Bitten by a snake.

Guarded by soldiers.

Yet none of those things stopped God's purpose.

Every apparent obstacle became another stage in the mission.

The storm brought Paul to Malta.

Malta became a mission field.

The prison brought Paul to Rome.

Rome became a pulpit.

The chains placed soldiers beside Paul.

Those soldiers became part of his audience.

The rented house restricted his movement.

But people came through its doors.

The great lesson of Acts 28 is therefore not simply:

Paul reached Rome.

The greater lesson is:

God's Word reached Rome.

And the chapter closes with a phrase that should remain in the heart of every believer:

“Without hindrance!”

Christ is still Lord.

The gospel is still powerful.

Salvation is still offered.

The Holy Spirit is still at work.

The church still has a mission.

People still need Jesus.

Therefore:

Keep preaching.

Keep teaching.

Keep witnessing.

Keep praying.

Keep serving.

Keep encouraging.

Keep opening Scripture.

Keep pointing people toward Christ.

Do not allow storms to stop you.

Do not allow criticism to stop you.

Do not allow changing circumstances to stop you.

Do not allow disappointment to stop you.

Do not allow opposition to stop you.

Do not allow limitations to convince you that God cannot use you.

Paul's circumstances were restricted.

His witness remained bold.

And until Jesus Christ returns, the church must continue the mission He gave in Acts 1:
To be His witnesses.
From where we are.
To the ends of the earth.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Your faithfulness throughout the life and ministry of Paul.

Thank You that You preserved him through the storm and safely brought him to Malta.

Thank You that when the ship was destroyed, Your promise remained secure.

Teach us to trust You when circumstances around us appear to be falling apart.

Help us remember that Your purpose is greater than any storm we face.

Thank You for the kindness shown by the people of Malta.

Give us hearts that notice people who are hurting, cold, lonely, discouraged, or in need.

Teach us to show practical compassion.

Help us welcome strangers.

Help us serve people without expecting something in return.

When unexpected trouble comes, give us Paul's confidence.

When one difficulty is followed by another, keep us from assuming that You have abandoned us.

Teach us to remain faithful.

Protect us from judging other people merely by their circumstances.

Keep us from assuming that suffering always proves guilt.

Remind us that only You know every heart and every story.

Father, keep us from living for human approval.

People may criticize us one day and praise us the next.

Teach us to seek Your approval instead.

Use the unexpected places in our lives for ministry.

When our plans change, help us ask:

“Lord, what do You want me to do here?”

Thank You for Christian fellowship.

Thank You for brothers and sisters who encourage us when we are tired.

Make us people who strengthen others.

Give us eyes to see discouraged believers.

Give us words that build them up.

Thank You that Paul's chains could not stop Your gospel.

When our circumstances become restrictive, show us the opportunities that remain.

If one door closes, help us faithfully use the door that is still open.

Give us Paul's commitment to Scripture.

Teach us to open Your Word carefully and show people the truth about Jesus Christ.

Give us patience when people have questions.

Give us courage when people disagree.

Give us compassion when people reject the message.

Keep our own hearts soft toward Your truth.

Do not allow us to hear Your Word repeatedly while refusing to obey it.

Open our eyes.

Open our ears.

Open our hearts.

Lead us to repentance whenever we are wrong.

Thank You that Your salvation reaches beyond every national, cultural, racial, and social boundary.

Give us a heart for the world.

Help us remember that every person needs the gospel.

Thank You that Acts ends with Paul proclaiming Your kingdom and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ:

“With complete boldness and without hindrance.”

Give us that same boldness.

May our homes become places where Christ is proclaimed.

May our churches become places where Scripture is taught.

May our lives point people toward Jesus.

May nothing silence our witness.

Until Christ returns, help us continue the mission.

Keep us faithful.

Keep us humble.

Keep us courageous.

Keep us praying.

Keep us witnessing.

And may the gospel of Jesus Christ continue going forward:

Without hindrance.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with complete boldness and without hindrance!” — Acts 28:31

Central Truth

God faithfully brought Paul through storms, shipwreck, danger, opposition, and imprisonment so that the gospel of Jesus Christ could reach Rome, demonstrating that no human circumstance can ultimately stop God's mission.

Acts 28 in One Sentence

Paul survives the shipwreck and the snakebite, ministers powerfully on Malta, reaches Rome under guard, boldly explains Jesus from Scripture, and continues proclaiming God's kingdom without hindrance, proving that the gospel cannot be chained.

Epilogue

The book of Acts ends in a way that almost feels unfinished.

Paul is in Rome.

He is under guard.

He has endured persecution, rejection, imprisonment, beatings, riots, false accusations, shipwreck, and years of opposition.

Yet he is still preaching.

Still teaching.

Still proclaiming Jesus Christ.

Acts closes with Paul “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

That is how Luke ends the story.

Not with defeat.

Not with silence.

Not with the gospel being restrained.

But with the message of Christ still going forward.

That ending is fitting because the mission of the church did not end with Paul.

It continued.

The apostles would eventually die.

The first generation of believers would pass away.

Empires would rise and fall.

Nations would change.

Cultures would shift.

Languages would develop.

Governments would come and go.

But the gospel would continue.

The fire would keep spreading.

That is one of the great lessons of Acts.

The church is not built upon the strength of one man.

It is not sustained by one generation.

It is not dependent upon one city, one nation, one culture, or one personality.

The church belongs to Jesus Christ.

He said, “I will build My church.”

And that promise still stands.

When we first opened the book of Acts, we found a small group of believers waiting in Jerusalem.

They were not powerful by the standards of the world.

They did not possess political influence.

They did not have great wealth.

They did not command armies.

They did not control the institutions of their society.

But they had something greater.

They had the risen Christ.

They had the Word of God.

They had the promise of the Holy Spirit.

And they had a mission.

That was enough.

From that small beginning, the gospel moved outward.

Jerusalem.

Judea.

Samaria.

The Gentile world.

Antioch.

Asia Minor.

Macedonia.

Greece.

Rome.

Again and again, the same pattern appeared.

The gospel was preached.

Some believed.

Some opposed it.

The church suffered.

The church prayed.

The Holy Spirit worked.

The Word of God spread.

Acts is filled with resistance, yet the resistance never becomes the final word.

Peter was arrested, but the gospel continued.

Stephen was killed, but the gospel continued.

The church was scattered, but the gospel continued.

Paul was stoned, but the gospel continued.

Paul and Silas were imprisoned, but the gospel continued.

Paul was placed in chains, but the gospel continued.

In fact, one of the remarkable truths of Acts is that opposition often became the very means through which the gospel spread farther.

What the enemy intended to stop, God used to advance.

The scattered church became a witnessing church.

The prison became a place of worship.

The courtroom became a pulpit.

The storm became a testimony.

The chains became an opportunity.

God repeatedly demonstrated that His purposes could not be overturned.

That truth should give the church confidence today.

We live in a different world from the believers in Acts.

The technology is different.

The governments are different.

The social structures are different.

The means of communication are different.

But the spiritual needs of humanity have not changed.

People still need forgiveness.

People still need hope.

People still need truth.

People still need reconciliation with God.

People still need Jesus Christ.

And the church still carries the same message.

The mission has not changed.

The church is still called to make disciples.

The church is still called to preach the gospel.

The church is still called to teach the Word of God.

The church is still called to pray.

The church is still called to live in holiness.

The church is still called to love one another.

The church is still called to take the message of Christ beyond the walls of its buildings.

Acts reminds us that the church is not merely an institution.

It is a people.

A people redeemed by Christ.

A people empowered by the Holy Spirit.

A people entrusted with the gospel.

A people sent into the world.

The church in Acts was alive because Christ was at the center.

When Peter preached, he preached Christ.

When Stephen testified, he pointed to Christ.

When Philip explained Scripture, he preached Christ.

When Paul entered a new city, he preached Christ.

The message was not centered upon personalities.

It was centered upon Jesus.

The same must be true today.

A church can have programs.

A church can have buildings.

A church can have music.

A church can have resources.

A church can have activity.

But if Christ is not central, something essential has been lost.

The fire of Acts was not produced by organization.

It was not created by excitement.

It was not manufactured by human effort.

It came from the presence and power of God.

That is why prayer appears so often throughout Acts.

Before Pentecost, the believers prayed.
When persecution came, they prayed.
When leaders were appointed, they prayed.
When missionaries were sent, they prayed.
When Peter was imprisoned, the church prayed.
Prayer was not an occasional activity.
It was part of the life of the church.
The early believers understood their dependence upon God.
That dependence remains necessary.
The church today does not need less dependence upon the Holy Spirit.
It needs more.
We do not need less prayer.
We need more.
We do not need less confidence in Scripture.
We need more.
We do not need a different gospel.
We need greater faithfulness to the gospel already entrusted to us.
Acts also reminds us that God uses ordinary people.
Peter was a fisherman.
Stephen was a servant.
Philip was an evangelist.
Barnabas was an encourager.
Lydia was a businesswoman.
Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers.
Paul had once been a persecutor of the church.
Their backgrounds were different.
Their gifts were different.
Their assignments were different.
But God used them.
That should encourage every believer.

You do not have to be famous to be faithful.

You do not have to stand behind a pulpit to serve Christ.

You do not have to travel across the world to be a witness.

You can serve where God has placed you.

In your family.

In your church.

In your workplace.

In your community.

In your conversations.

In your acts of service.

In your prayers.

In your willingness to speak the truth of the gospel.

The question is not whether God can use ordinary believers.

Acts has already answered that.

The question is whether we are willing to be used.

The believers in Acts were not perfect.

They had disagreements.

They faced internal problems.

They made difficult decisions.

They experienced failure.

Yet God continued to work through them.

That too should encourage us.

The strength of the church does not rest in the perfection of its people.

It rests in the faithfulness of God.

He works through imperfect people who trust Him, obey Him, and remain faithful to His Word.

As this commentary comes to a close, it is worth remembering that Acts is not simply a record of what God once did.

It is a challenge to consider what faithful Christianity should look like now.

Do we pray with the urgency of the early church?

Do we witness with their boldness?

Do we value biblical truth as deeply as they did?

Do we love one another sacrificially?

Do we trust the Holy Spirit?

Do we carry the gospel beyond the places where we are comfortable?

Do we believe that Jesus Christ is still worth everything?

Those questions matter.

The world around us may change, but the calling of the church remains.

We are still witnesses.

We are still servants.

We are still ambassadors for Christ.

We are still carrying the message of salvation to a world that desperately needs it.

The book of Acts may end at chapter 28, but the work of the gospel did not end there.

In a sense, every generation of believers writes another chapter through its obedience, witness, sacrifice, and faithfulness.

We are part of that continuing story.

The fire that began at Pentecost spread across the ancient world.

It crossed borders.

It crossed cultures.

It crossed oceans.

It crossed centuries.

And it has reached us.

Now the responsibility is ours.

May we not allow that fire to fade into mere tradition.

May we not become satisfied with comfortable Christianity.

May we not settle for knowing what the early church did while refusing to live with the same devotion.

May we be a people of prayer.

A people of the Word.

A people of courage.

A people of holiness.

A people of mission.

A people filled with love for Christ and compassion for the lost.

May the church once again be known not merely for its buildings, programs, or institutions, but for the unmistakable evidence of lives transformed by Jesus Christ.

The gospel is still true.

The tomb is still empty.

Jesus is still Lord.

The Holy Spirit is still at work.

The mission is still before us.

And until Christ returns, the church must continue to carry the message.

The book of Acts ends.

But the fire must keep burning.

May the church stay on fire for Christ until the whole world has heard.

Dr. Paul Crawford

Note from the Author

Writing **The Church on Fire: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Book of Acts** has been both a study of Scripture and a reminder of what the church is called to be.

The book of Acts has always stood out as a powerful record of faith in action. It shows us believers praying, preaching, suffering, serving, witnessing, giving, traveling, sacrificing, and trusting God in circumstances that were often difficult and dangerous. Yet through every hardship, the gospel continued to move forward.

That is what has impressed me most in preparing this commentary.

The early church did not have the advantages that many churches possess today. They did not have modern buildings, technology, mass communication, or large financial resources. What they had was far more important.

They had the truth of the gospel.

They had the risen Christ.

They had the power of the Holy Spirit.

And they had a willingness to obey God.

Those four realities changed the world.

This commentary was written with a simple purpose: to help readers understand the book of Acts clearly, carefully, and practically. My goal has been to move verse by verse through the text, explain

what is happening, identify the spiritual truths being revealed, and show how those truths still speak to believers today.

Acts is not only a book for pastors, missionaries, and Bible teachers.

It is a book for every Christian.

It teaches us how to pray.

It teaches us how to witness.

It teaches us how to respond to opposition.

It teaches us how to depend upon the Holy Spirit.

It teaches us how to remain faithful when obedience becomes costly.

It teaches us that the gospel is larger than any one person, church, culture, or generation.

It belongs to the whole world.

One of the greatest dangers facing the modern church is becoming comfortable with a Christianity that requires little sacrifice and produces little spiritual urgency. Acts presents a very different picture.

The believers in Acts understood that following Christ mattered more than personal safety.

They understood that truth mattered more than popularity.

They understood that obedience mattered more than convenience.

They understood that the gospel was worth carrying even when doing so brought rejection, persecution, imprisonment, or death.

That kind of faith challenges me.

I hope it challenges you as well.

As you read through these pages, I encourage you not to treat Acts merely as ancient history. Study the people. Observe their courage. Notice their mistakes. Listen to their sermons. Watch how they pray. See how the Holy Spirit directs them. Pay attention to how often the gospel advances through unexpected circumstances.

Then ask what God may be teaching you.

Perhaps He is calling you to greater boldness.

Perhaps He is calling you to deeper prayer.

Perhaps He is reminding you to trust Him in a difficult season.

Perhaps He is leading you to share the gospel with someone you have been hesitant to approach.

Perhaps He is simply reminding you that the mission of the church has never changed.

Whatever the case, my prayer is that this book will do more than add information to your mind. I pray that it will strengthen your faith, deepen your love for Scripture, increase your confidence in Christ, and stir within you a greater desire to serve Him faithfully.

The title **The Church on Fire** is meant to describe a church alive with spiritual purpose.

Not emotionalism.

Not spectacle.

Not religious excitement for its own sake.

But a church burning with love for Christ, devotion to truth, compassion for the lost, commitment to prayer, and dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

That is the kind of church the world desperately needs.

And that kind of church begins with believers who are willing to say:

“Lord, use me.”

Thank you for opening this book and walking through Acts with me.

May every chapter draw you closer to Jesus Christ.

May every verse strengthen your confidence in His Word.

May every lesson remind you that God still uses ordinary people who are willing to trust and obey Him.

And may the fire of devotion to Christ never go out in your life.

Dr. Paul Crawford

A Closing Prayer

“Father, I thank You for every reader who has walked through these pages. For the one who does not yet know You, I pray they would hear Your voice and receive Your Son, Jesus, as Lord and Savior. For the one who already believes, I pray You would set their heart ablaze with urgency—to speak, to share, to love, and to never be silent. May we all live as faithful watchmen, sounding the trumpet until the day You call us home. In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen.”

THE BIBLE WAY TO HEAVEN

1. Admit you are a sinner.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

No one is good enough to go to Heaven on his own merit.

No matter how much good we do, we still come short.

2. Realize the penalty for sin.

"For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23a)

Just as there are wages for good, there is punishment for wrong.

The penalty for our sin is eternal death in a place called Hell.

3. Believe that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again for you.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9)

4. Trust Christ alone as your Saviour.

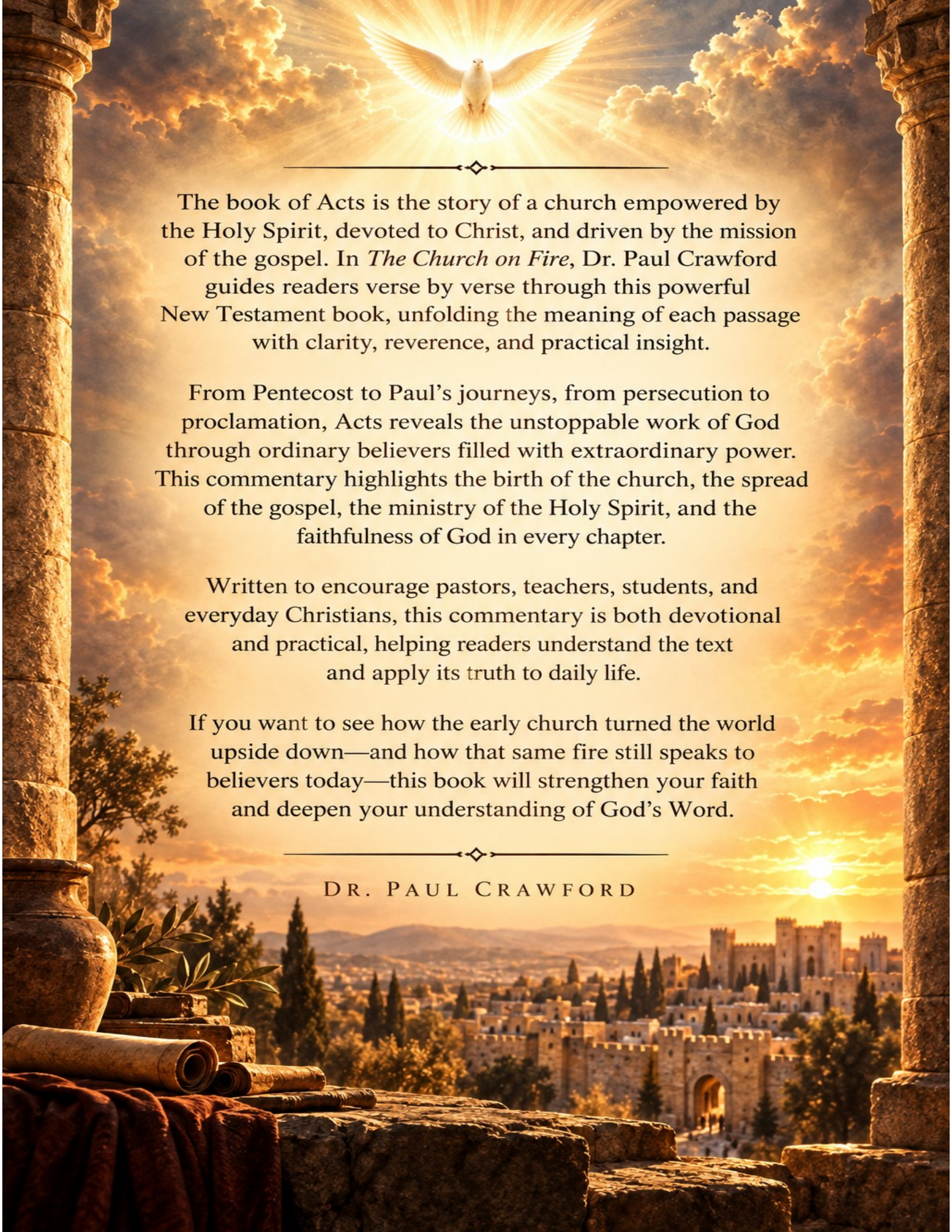
"...But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23b)

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Eternal life is a gift purchased by the blood of Jesus and offered freely to those who call upon Him by faith.

Anyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved forever. Being saved is a one-time event.

Dr. Paul Crawford is more than just a Christian Author; His books are a source of inspiration and guidance on your spiritual journey. His books are created with a deep sense of faith and a desire to uplift and inspire all who read.



The book of Acts is the story of a church empowered by the Holy Spirit, devoted to Christ, and driven by the mission of the gospel. In *The Church on Fire*, Dr. Paul Crawford guides readers verse by verse through this powerful New Testament book, unfolding the meaning of each passage with clarity, reverence, and practical insight.

From Pentecost to Paul's journeys, from persecution to proclamation, Acts reveals the unstoppable work of God through ordinary believers filled with extraordinary power. This commentary highlights the birth of the church, the spread of the gospel, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the faithfulness of God in every chapter.

Written to encourage pastors, teachers, students, and everyday Christians, this commentary is both devotional and practical, helping readers understand the text and apply its truth to daily life.

If you want to see how the early church turned the world upside down—and how that same fire still speaks to believers today—this book will strengthen your faith and deepen your understanding of God's Word.

DR. PAUL CRAWFORD