



Portion:

Title:

SCRIPTURES

- Romans 15:22-33
- Isaiah 52:15
- Acts 6-28

ROME OR BUST!

- Ready for Rome
- Details: Rome Calling
- Narrative: Damascus to Rome

SEED:

“For **I will show him how many things he must suffer** for My name’s sake.” Acts 9:16 NKJV

“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that **the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.** But none of these things move me; **nor do I count my life dear to myself,** so that I may **finish my race with joy,** and **the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus,** to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:22-24 NKJV

“But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for **as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem,** so you must also bear witness at Rome.”” Acts 23:11 NKJV

“So, as much as is in me, **I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome** also.” Romans 1:15 NKJV

FRUIT:

“For this reason I also have been **much hindered from coming to you**. But now **no longer having a place in these parts**, and having a great **desire these many years to come to you**,” Romans 15:22-23 NKJV

“But **now I am going to Jerusalem** to minister to the saints.” Romans 15:25 NKJV

“Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, **I shall go by way of you** to Spain.” Romans 15:28 NKJV

“Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you **strive together with me in prayers to God for me**,” Romans 15:30 NKJV

NARRATIVE FOR TODAY’S SCRIPTURES: ROMANS

Paul has long desired to visit Rome and testifies that he has been delayed for many years. What has hindered his progress? What roadblocks has he faced? He just revealed the spiritual reason he’s been hindered. His intention was and still is to gather everything he has amalgamated from what he knew before and has since perfected in Christ, and to spread the undeniable message of

the Gospel of Y'shua to nations and kings. Rome is where the king resides and that is why Paul uses Isaiah's prophecy to explain the reason he's been hindered. The Gospel in Rome will reach the ears of the king and Isaiah prophesied that kings would have no way to refute the truth. The king will be left in stunned silence. Of course, every enemy of the Gospel, all dominions, principalities, and powers in the spiritual realm and on earth have and will continue to come against that mission.

Nevertheless, as Paul nears the completion of his letter to Rome, he feels strongly that now is the time to head in that direction. He is convinced that from where he is currently situated his ministry is complete; there is no work left for him to do. His plan is to head to Spain and on the way he will stop in Rome to enjoy some time with this highly respected group of God's people, and then prayerfully receive the resources from them that he requires to continue on to Spain. Paul had one desire and that was to please the Lord. His entire life, from his conversion forward, was an exercise in commitment and trust in Yahweh's plan. God told him he was going to Rome and to Rome he will go!

Before Paul would head toward Rome, he had to stop in Jerusalem for practical reasons. On his journeys he had collected much needed resources for distribution to Jewish believers in need, contributions for widows, orphans, and the poor. Gentile converts

in the surrounding areas appropriately felt obligated to support Jews in Jerusalem, who believed Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. It made perfect sense. The former Gentiles new life in Christ was birthed from the roots of faithful Jews and they naturally wanted to give back. Paul calls this support fruit, and isn't that precisely what it is? It grew from what was sown into the Gentiles by Paul's ministry. Once Paul delivered this provision, his plan was to head to Rome; at least that's what He believed. And he is confident it is God's will to do so, and that it will produce every blessing God intends.

Paul was correct; he would get to Rome. It just wouldn't happen the way he preferred. His journey was dramatic, peppered with tragedies, complications, and evil schemes. The plot-twists spelled intrigue fueled by prophecy, as you will soon discover. Strap yourself in because Paul is headed for trouble. We will trace Paul's journey the entire way, from when he first appeared as Saul at Stephen's execution to his arrival in Rome. We will review every trial and persecution, hear about each false accusation, and expose every false witness against him. We will explore how Paul defended himself and the outcome of each legal battle, and then he will arrive in Rome. Yes, Paul is going to Rome, but his journey will not be what he imagines. Man does indeed make his own plans, but Yahweh must ordain each step.

Rightfully so Paul calls for prayer. As perfectly witnessed in the following narrative extracted from the book of the Acts of the Apostles detailing Paul's travels, he is not unaware that he will face challenges on his journey. Spanning from shortly after his encounter with Y'shua on the road to Damascus, to his arrival in Rome, Paul understood that he would face tribulation. He's not privy to the magnitude of the persecution, nor the complicated details, but he is certain he needs prayer.

He pleads for help. He petitions those he intends to visit in Rome to intercede for his protection against unbelieving Jews in Judea, and that those who do believe feel utterly fulfilled because of his ministry. He asks that they agree with him in prayer that it is God's will that he has a joyous arrival in Rome, so together they would be rejuvenated and enlivened. The Holy Spirit has already warned Paul that in every city he visits, chains and tribulations await. He has no concern for his own life, only that he can finish the race, the ministry assigned to him by the Lord. He knows that fervent prayers of a the righteous are heard and honored by God. Paul is faithful and obedient, and he has and will again testify before kings. He asks only for prayer that God would find favor over him as he makes his journey toward Rome.

"Think in Bible." DJH

INTRODUCTION TO TODAY'S MESSAGE:

Have you ever felt so compelled about a vision from the Lord that it seemed like a memory? It appeared as real to you as the past, but it really had not happened yet! What if you were so convinced about the outcome of that vision that nothing could shake you from pressing towards the destination? And even if you knew the journey would be fraught with persecution, difficulties, roadblocks, and unimaginable complications, would you stay the course—knowing the destination was a guarantee?

If we trace Paul's journey the entire way, from when he first appeared as Saul at Stephen's execution to his arrival in Rome, that is precisely what we will discover. We will review every trial and persecution, hear about each false accusation, and expose every false witness against him. We will explore how Paul defended himself and the outcome of each legal battle, and then he will arrive in Rome. And along the way, he had such compelling visions, and they drove him forward—powerful visions plus his unquenchable desire to please the Lord.

Prior to his first encounter with Y'shua on the Road to Damascus, Paul was the Church's most evil nemesis. And spanning from shortly after that encounter, to his arrival in Rome, Paul understood from prophecy that he would now be the one to face tribulations and persecution. "For I will show him how many things

he must suffer for My name's sake." Paul was not privy to the magnitude of the coming trials, nor the messy complicated details, but it did not take long for his persecution to begin. Shortly after his conversion, he finds himself on the other side of the "gavel."

The ups and downs are extreme. Maybe it's happened to you before, the experience of both applause and retribution, celebration and suffering. Can you imagine the successive occurrence of these polar opposite encounters? One moment you are being extolled, the next you are literally being stoned to within an inch of your life. When you examine these events closely, it's easy to understand why, in those who are willing to endure perseverance in the midst of persecution, it is such an admirable quality.

Nevertheless Paul pressed on. Even when his best friends tried to protect him, to hold him back, he was clear about his destination and nothing was going to dissuade him. "Now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the specific things that will happen to me there. What I do know is that the Holy Spirit has shown me that in every city chains and tribulations await. But, knowing these things in advance does not even tempt me to change course; I do not consider my life dear to myself. In my mind, I already died with Christ on that cross and I've already been resurrected as a new man, and no threat of suffering even comes close in comparison to the appreciation and gratitude I have for that experience. So, if

persecution or even torture and death are the cost, I am thrilled God would count me worthy of such things. I am going to finish this race with joy, the ministry which I've been assigned from the Lord Y'shua, to testify to the gospel of God's grace."

The Lord informed Paul that the persecution he had and will face is all by grand design. The ultimate destination is for him to bring his testimony to Rome! "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome." Paul is going to Rome; it's his destiny no matter what level of persecution it takes along the way and no matter what horrible persecution awaits. To Rome or Bust! "Or bust" means you will do or say anything to get where you are going or to achieve what you are called to achieve. Do you have the same convictions for where the Lord is leading you?

READY FOR ROME

1. I'm Done Here; Time to Move On!

A. Paul's longstanding desire to visit Rome

(1) God will Make it Happen

(a) The ministry at his current location is complete; there is no work left for him to do.

1. **"For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer having a**

place in these parts, and **having a great desire these many years** to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to **see you on my journey**, and to be **helped on my way** there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.”
Romans 15:22-24 NKJV

2. The Heart of the Matter

- a) *“**Delight yourself also in the Lord**, And He shall **give you the desires of your heart**. **Commit** your way to the Lord, **Trust** also in Him, And **He shall bring it to pass**.”* Psalms 37:4-5 NKJV

3. It's Time to Go to Rome

- a) Paul has long desired to visit Rome and testifies that he has been delayed for many years.
- b) What has hindered his progress? What roadblocks has he faced?
- c) He just revealed the spiritual reason he's been hindered. His intention was and still is to gather everything he has amalgamated from what he knew before and has since perfected in Christ, and to spread the undeniable message of the Gospel of Y'shua to nations and kings.

4. The Reason:

- a) Rome is where the king resides and that is why Paul refers to Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 52:15**b**) in Romans 15:20-21 to explain why he's been hindered.
- 1) *"And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but as it is written: **"To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand."*** Romans 15:20-21 NKJV
- b) We see Paul writes part {b} of Isaiah 52:15 in Romans 15:21, but what does part {a} say?
- 1) {a} *So shall **He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him** [will have no way to argue against Him]; {b} *For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider."* Isaiah 52:15 NKJV*
 - 2) The king will be left in stunned silence: the Gospel in Rome will reach the ears of kings and kings would have no way to refute the truth.

3) **For that reason:** Every enemy of the Gospel, all dominions, principalities and powers in the spiritual realm and on earth will continue to come against that mission.

5. Nevertheless, as Paul nears the completion of his letter to Rome, he feels strongly that now is the time to head in that direction.

- a) He is convinced that from where he is currently situated his ministry is complete; there is no remaining work for him to do.
- b) His plan is to head to Spain and on the way he will stop in Rome to enjoy some time with this highly respected group of God's people, and then prayerfully receive the resources from them that he requires to continue on to Spain.
- c) Paul had one desire and that was to please the Lord. His entire life, from his conversion forward, was an exercise in commitment and trust in Yahweh's plan!
- d) God told him he was going to Rome and to Rome he will go!

(2) Paul's longstanding desire to visit Rome...

- (a) We know historically, Paul winds up in Rome as a prisoner, not the way he planned it. He wanted to go there for ministry and to spend quality time with many old friends.
- (b) But, Yahweh had different plans.
1. “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for **he is a chosen vessel of Mine** to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. **FOR I WILL SHOW HIM HOW MANY THINGS HE MUST SUFFER FOR MY NAME’S SAKE.**”” Acts 9:15-16 NKJV
 2. “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that **the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.** But none of these things move me; **nor do I count my life dear to myself,** so that I may **finish my race with joy,** and **the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus,** to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:22-24 NKJV
 3. “But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for **as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.**”” Acts 23:11 NKJV

B. Where God Guides God Provides

(1) First to Jerusalem, then to Rome

(a) Paul is heading to Rome by way of Jerusalem

1. “But **now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints**. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. **For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things**. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, **I shall go by way of you to Spain. But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.**” Romans 15:25-29 NKJV

2. The Heart of the Matter

a) “A man’s heart **plans his way**, But **the Lord directs his steps**.” Proverbs 16:9 NKJV

3. Before Paul would head toward Rome, he had to stop in Jerusalem for practical reasons.

a) Charitable Contributions: on his journeys Paul had collected much needed resources for distribution

- to Jewish believers in need, contributions for widows, orphans, and the poor.
- b) Gentile converts in the surrounding areas appropriately felt obligated to support Jews in Jerusalem, who believed Jesus was the long awaited Messiah.
 - c) It made perfect sense. The former Gentiles new life in Christ was birthed from the roots of faithful Jews and they naturally wanted to give back.
 - d) Paul calls this support fruit, and isn't that precisely what it is? It grew from what was sown into the Gentiles by Paul's ministry.
 - e) Once Paul delivered this provision, his plan was to head to Rome; at least that's what He believed.
 - f) He is confident it is God's will to do so, and that it will produce every blessing God intends.
4. Paul was correct; he would get to Rome.
- a) It just wouldn't happen the way he preferred.
 - b) His journey was dramatic, peppered with tragedies, complications, and evil schemes.
 - c) The plot-twists spelled intrigue fueled by prophecy, as you will soon discover.
5. Strap yourself in because Paul is headed for trouble.

- a) We will trace Paul's journey the entire way, from when he first appeared as Saul at Stephen's execution to his arrival in Rome.
 - b) We will review every trial and persecution, hear about each false accusation, and expose every false witness against him.
 - c) We will explore how Paul defended himself and the outcome of each legal battle, and then he will arrive in Rome.
 - d) Yes, Paul is going to Rome, but his journey will not be what he imagines.
 - e) Man does indeed make his own plans, but Yahweh must ordain each step.
6. Paul already knew in the spirit that he needed to go to Jerusalem before heading to Rome. And He knew he was headed for trouble.
- a) In the Book of Acts, we can trace the steps of Paul's entire journey, from his conversion to his arrival Rome.
 - b) Included in these notes is...
 - 1) ...a section with detailed scripture references for each important event along the way, and...

2) ...a section written as narrative that describes Paul's journey as a story.

7. An important pattern to notice:

- a) Paul (Saul) was the leader who condoned the kangaroo court that judged and killed Stephen.
- b) Paul had to endure the same type of accusations and persecutions of false witnesses throughout his entire ministry that he allowed in Stephen's "trial".
- c) Paul visited Jerusalem three times throughout his ministry years. Once after three years, once after fourteen years, and once before his trip to Rome spoken of here in Romans 15, at which time he left Jerusalem as a prisoner.
- d) Paul constantly defended his position that he was NOT teaching against the Laws of Moses.
- e) In Rome "He explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading men concerning Jesus FROM BOTH THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE PROPHETS."

8. Paul knew he was going to get to Rome, but his journey was not what he would have chosen. Man does indeed make his own plans, but Yahweh must ordain each step.

- a) I am going to Jerusalem first to minister to the Jewish believers.
- b) Paul has provision for them from the Gentile converts; it's only right.
- c) Then Paul is heading to Spain so on his way he will finally visit Rome.
- d) He is confident it's God will, and it will produce everything it's supposed to. God's word will not return void!
 - 1) ***"So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."*** Isaiah 55:11 NKJV

C. Fervent Prayer

- (1) Strive together with me in prayers...
 - (a) Prayer Changes Things!
 - 1. "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, **that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,** that I may be **delivered from those in Judea who do not believe,** and that **my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,** that I may **come to you**

with joy by the will of God, and may **be refreshed together with you**. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” Romans 15:30-33 NKJV

2. The Heart of the Matter

- a) *“I will speak of Your testimonies also **before kings**, And will not be ashamed. And **I will delight myself in Your commandments**, Which I love. My hands also **I will lift up to Your commandments**, Which I love, And I will meditate on Your statutes. **Remember the word to Your servant, Upon which You have caused me to hope.**”* Psalms 119:46-49 NKJV

3. Rightfully so Paul calls for prayer.

- a) As perfectly witnessed in the book of the Acts of the Apostles detailing Paul’s travels, he is not unaware that he will face challenges on his journey.
- 1) Paul was the up-and-coming superstar in Judaism and now he is a traitor and blasphemer in the eyes of “his people”.
 - 2) Here in Romans 15, Paul is asking the very faithful believers in Rome to pray earnestly for

him, so that he is able to get in and out of Jerusalem without any complications.

- 3) Yet he knows in the Spirit this is unlikely.
 - b) Spanning from shortly after his encounter with Y'shua on the road to Damascus, to his arrival in Rome, Paul understood he would face tribulation.
 - 1) *“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that **the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.**”* Acts 20:22-23 NKJV
 - c) He's not privy to the magnitude of the persecution, nor the details, but knows he needs prayer.
4. He pleads for help.
 - a) He petitions those he intends to visit in Rome to intercede for his protection against unbelieving Jews in Judea, and that those who do believe feel utterly fulfilled because of his ministry.
 - b) He asks that they agree with him in prayer that it is God's will that he has a joyous arrival in Rome, so together they would be rejuvenated and enlivened.
 - c) The Holy Spirit has already warned Paul that in every city he visits, chains and tribulations await.

- d) Yet, he has no concern for his own life, only that he can finish the race, the ministry assigned to him by the Lord.
 - e) And he knows that fervent prayers of a the righteous are heard and honored by God.
 - 1) *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. **The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.**”* James 5:16 NKJV
 - f) Paul is faithful and obedient, and he has and will again testify before kings. He asks only for prayer that God would find favor over him as he makes his journey toward Rome.
- (b) History tells us that he did make it to Rome, and no doubt his ministry was abundant.
- 1. *“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, **preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ** with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”* Acts 28:30-31 NKJV
- a) Man does indeed make his own plans, but Yahweh must ordain each step (Proverbs 16:9).

DETAILS: ROME CALLING

2. A detailed view of Paul's journey to Rome

A. Integrated with scriptures references

(1) In contrast, **Part Three** is written as a narrative.

(a) Before heading to Rome on his way to Spain, Paul was going to make his third stop in Jerusalem since his miraculous conversion, and he already knew in the Spirit that it would be very risky.

1. "And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, **"Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'**" Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For **I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die** at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, **"The will of the Lord be done."**" Acts 21:10-14 NKJV

2. He knew and he was ready, willing, and able no matter what!
 - a) “Nevertheless, **please pray for my deliverance** from those in Judea who do not believe.” (Romans 15:30-31)
 - (b) After his second visit to Jerusalem (Acts 15), Paul had a vision that he must go to Macedonia and preach the gospel.
 1. **Vision:** “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “**Come over to Macedonia and help us.**” Now after he had seen the vision, **immediately we sought to go to Macedonia**, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Acts 16:9-10 NKJV
 2. “When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, **when he had passed through Macedonia** and Achaia, **to go to Jerusalem [a third time]**, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”” Acts 19:21 NKJV
 3. **Arrival:** “After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and **departed to go to Macedonia**. Now when he had gone over that

region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to **return through Macedonia.**"

Acts 20:1-3 NKJV

4. After Paul ministered there, they were so grateful for the invitation to participate in the blessings of Israel that they gave a contribution for Paul to bring to the saints in Jerusalem.
 - a) Paul knew in the spirit that he needed to go to Jerusalem for a third time before heading to Rome.
 - b) And He knew he was headed for trouble...
 - 1) *"And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. **They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.**"* Acts 21:4 NKJV
 - 2) **Prophecy:** *"And as we stayed many days, a certain **prophet named Agabus** came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, **'Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'** ""* Acts 21:10-11 NKJV

- c) Paul was about to punch his ticket to Rome, and he was not traveling first class!
- d) We trace the steps of Paul's entire journey, from conversion to Rome in the Book of Acts.

B. It began with his zealousness to preserve his cemented-in-stone understanding of Judaism.

- (1) Paul became the early Church's worst nightmare.
 - (a) He is first named at Stephen's execution. He oversees the brutality against Stephen, who was illegally stoned to death after false testimony against him.
 - 1. "And **Stephen**, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And **they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.** Then they **secretly induced men to say**, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also **set up false witnesses** who said, "**This man does not cease to speak blasphemous**

words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel." Acts 6:8-15 NKJV

2. Paul (Saul) was the leader who condoned the kangaroo court, and eventual wrongful capital punishment, even after Stephen gave his masterful self-defense (See all of Acts 7:1-53).
 - a) *"When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, **being full of the Holy Spirit**, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Then they cried out with a loud voice, **stopped their ears**, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city **and stoned him**. **And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen** as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my*

*spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “**Lord, do not charge them with this sin.**” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”*

Acts 7:54-60 NKJV

3. **Sowing and Reaping:** It should be no coincidence that later on, after his conversion, Paul had to endure the same type of accusations and persecutions of false witnesses throughout his entire ministry.
 - a) *“When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, “**This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.**””* Acts 18:12-13 NKJV
 - (b) However, before Paul’s journey to Rome would begin, and immediately after Stephen’s death, Paul (Saul) went on a rampage against the Church, determined to champion his Jewish religion.
 1. “Now **Saul was consenting to his death.** At that time **a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem;** and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for

Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” Acts 8:1-3 NKJV

2. **“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” Acts 9:1-2 NKJV**

3. Bound

a) **Sowing and Reaping:** Paul will eventually head to Rome **bound from Jerusalem.**

b) **Saul’s exploits:** He must have been the darling of the faith and a favorite of the High Priest’s office (which ironically, after his conversion, became Paul’s worst nightmare).

(2) Stephen’s stoning and Saul’s brutal persecution of the Church were the very inspiration for Y’shua’s intervention in his life.

(a) Saul’s “knocked off his feet” experience:

1. “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly **a light shone** around him from heaven. Then **he fell to the ground,** and heard a voice saying

to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, **"Who are You, Lord?"** Then the Lord said, **"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."** So he, trembling and astonished, said, **"Lord, what do You want me to do?"** Then the Lord said to him, **"Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."** Acts 9:3-6 NKJV

2. A straightforward transaction!

- a) Saul is knocked off course by Y'shua.
- b) Saul confirms it is the One he's been persecuting who has done so. (Y'shua and by extension the Church).
- c) He learns that resistance is futile.
- d) He immediately submits: "What do you want me to do?"
- e) Don't go into Damascus to persecute the Church; instead, go into Damascus and you will discover your alternate assignment.

(b) At his conversion, Paul is blinded (by the light), and is then led into Damascus.

- 1. "And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then

Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But **they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.** And he was **three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.**" Acts 9:7-9 NKJV

(c) God set in motion the encounter that would then open Paul's eyes (remove the "scales" that blinded him from the truth about Y'shua). And that is also where Paul will discover that his new assignment will be wrought with dangers and suffering.

1. "Now there was a certain **disciple at Damascus named Ananias**; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called **Saul of Tarsus**, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so **that he might receive his sight.**" Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him,

“Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.” And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, **“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”** Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. **Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.”**

Acts 9:10-19 NKJV

(d) Paul jumps into ministry immediately and instead of persecuting Jews who became Christians in Damascus, he informs them all that he’s become one of them. Understandably this confused many, nevertheless his reasoning could not be refuted!

1. **“Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues,** that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in

Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, **and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.**" Acts 9:20-22 NKJV

- (e) As such, he was treated just the way he had treated others who came to believe— with death threats and evil schemes against him.
 - 1. "Now after many days were past, **the Jews plotted to kill him.** But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket." Acts 9:23-25 NKJV
- (f) He ultimately makes his way to Jerusalem where Barnabas helps him get in front of the apostles to declare his conversion (first of three post-conversion visits to Jerusalem; it's now three years after conversion. There is an attempt on his life in Jerusalem, as well, and he doesn't stay long.
 - 1. "And when Saul **had come to Jerusalem,** he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and

did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and **brought him to the apostles**. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, **but they attempted to kill him**. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.” Acts 9:26-30 NKJV

2. We see from his letter to the Galatians that on his first visit he never had any significant interaction with Church leaders in Jerusalem; that came many years later. That is when he returned there for his second visit, after 14 years, to take part in the Jerusalem Council (see Acts 15:1-35).

a) ***“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)”***
Galatians 1:18-20 NKJV

3. Paul's second visit to Jerusalem to take part in the Jerusalem Council (see Acts 15:1-35).

a) ***“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the***

*circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and **when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship,** that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.”*

Galatians 2:1-10 NKJV

(g) Now, ponder Paul’s involvement in Stephen’s death when he turned a blind eye to false accusations against Stephen, as he recounts the events to a Jewish mob in his own defense, after being arrested in Jerusalem.

1. “And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, **I also was standing by consenting to his death,** and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.” Acts 22:20 NKJV

2. Because he was complicit in Stephen’s wrongful execution, Paul literally spent years defending himself against the same false accusations that led Stephen to his death.

a) *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever **a man sows, that he will also reap.**”*

Galatians 6:7 NKJV

(h) Each place he turned, Paul was accused of teaching that faith in Jesus replaced the Law of Moses.

1. “And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; **but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.**” Acts 21:20-21 NKJV

(i) But was he teaching such? Acts 21 records his defining moment on the subject during his third trip to Jerusalem.

1. **“What then? The assembly must certainly meet,** for they will hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. **Take them and be purified with them,** and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and **that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but**

that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.

But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.”” Acts 21:22-25 NKJV

2. You are being accused of the same things of which you accused Stephen; what do you have to say for yourself?
 - a) Paul is asked to take a the Nazarite vow of Numbers 6, if he wishes to state publicly that the accusations are false; he is not teaching against the Law, but rather he keeps and teaches Jews that obedience to the law is required.
 - b) For the Gentiles, well where they need to begin has already been decided at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and Paul was the one given the written outcome of that decision to spread throughout the region.
- (j) What does Paul do? He’s accused of teaching against the Laws of Moses and everyone is watching. If he is promoting such doctrine and also personally no longer

walking orderly according to the law, then this is his opportunity, his defining moment to say so. If not, he's asked to include himself in a vow that four other men have taken, and to take it a step further and pay their expenses, as well as his own. It's a Nazarite Vow straight from the Law of Moses in Numbers 6. So, if Paul is teaching against the Law, this is the moment to stand up and say, "Yes, it's true!" But he doesn't... Instead, he takes the vow!

1. "Then Paul took the men, **and the next day, having been purified with them**, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them." Acts 21:26 NKJV
2. Multiple times throughout his ministry he openly declares the same testimony; "I DO NOT FORSAKE THE LAW OF MOSES, NOR DO I TEACH OTHERS TO DO SO."
 - a) *"Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me [FALSE ACCUSATIONS]. But this I confess to you, **that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, BELIEVING ALL THINGS WHICH ARE***

WRITTEN IN THE LAW AND IN THE PROPHETS.”

Acts 24:13-14 NKJV

b) “**NEITHER AGAINST THE LAW OF THE JEWS**, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.” Acts 25:8 NKJV

(k) But the troublemakers in Jerusalem didn’t care. Even after Paul’s participation in the vow and his open declaration, they continued to falsely accuse him and to stir up controversy.

1. “Now when the seven days were almost ended, **the Jews** from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, “Men of Israel, help! **This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place;** and furthermore he **also brought Greeks into the temple** and has defiled this holy place.” (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)” Acts 21:27-29 NKJV

2. Paul knew this was coming!

a) That is why, here in Romans 15, he is asking for prayers of protection from those in Jerusalem who don’t believe, when he returns to the city.

- b) **Note:** it was not uncommon to bring Greeks and other gentiles into the temple, but only under the condition that they were in the process of converting to Judaism. In Paul's case, he was bringing Gentiles into the temple simply because they had come to believe in Y'shua, and that angered the Jewish unbelievers.
- (l) Such an uproar ensues after seven days that they seize Paul and beat him. When the commander of the local garrison (named Lysias, *Acts 24:6-7*) caught wind of the uproar, he shows up, stops the beating and binds Paul.
1. "And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, **seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple;** and immediately the doors were shut. Now as they **were seeking to kill him**, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. **Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains;** and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one

thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he **commanded him to be taken into the barracks.**

When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!" Acts 21:30-36 NKJV

(m) After he is rescued from the beating, Paul gets Lysias to let him give his testimony to the entire mob (Acts 21:37-22:21). But, even after his testimony, the ruckus crowd moves Lysias to "beat the truth out of him," which surprisingly he is willing to do. It's just about to happen when Paul tells the centurion assigned to beat him that he is a Roman citizen by birth. Before he lays a hand on Paul, the centurion informs Lysias of this crucial development. Of course, the commander is alarmed by this new information as, according to Roman law, you were NOT PERMITTED to bind and punish a prisoner without a trial

1. "And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!" Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw

dust into the air, **the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging,** so that he might know why they shouted so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, **“Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?”** When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, “Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.” Then the commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” He said, “Yes.” The commander answered, “With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.” And Paul said, “But I was born a citizen.” Then **immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.”**

Acts 22:22-29 NKJV

2. Now more interested in the truth because he is at risk of being disciplined by Rome, Lysias orders the Sanhedrin to come before Paul and state their accusations.

a) *“The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds, and **commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear**, and brought Paul down and set him before them.”* Acts 22:30 NKJV

3. Paul’s defense, which is undeniable, causes more conflict and he needs to be rescued from the mayhem. First he has a conflict with the High Priest; then he causes a conflict between the two accusing parties, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

a) “Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, **“God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law,** and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?” And those who stood by said, **“Do you revile God’s high priest?”** Then Paul said, “I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, **‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of**

your people.' " But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "**Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee;** concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "**We find no evil in this man;** but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks." Acts 23:1-10
NKJV

- (n) And then Paul's moment of confirmation from the Lord that he is right where he is supposed to be:

1. “But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as YOU HAVE TESTIFIED FOR ME IN JERUSALEM, **SO YOU MUST ALSO BEAR WITNESS AT ROME.**”” Acts 23:11 NKJV
2. He’s going to Rome!
 - a) **It’s not going to be a mission trip; it’s going to look more like his chaotic experience in Jerusalem.**
- (3) Next there is yet another plot to kill Paul and he needs to be secretly moved outside of Jerusalem to Caesarea (Acts 23:12-22). This is where Paul will meet Governor Felix (Acts 23:23-35) and where he is kept locked up until trial.
 - (a) Five days later, the High Priest Ananias and some elders bring their “evidence” (false accusations) against Paul in front of Felix.
 1. They do so using a professional orator, Tertullus (a spin doctor).
 2. Paul masterfully defends himself yet again, but Felix procrastinates and leaves him in prison for TWO YEARS until he leaves office and Festus takes over (Acts 24).
 3. The High Priest asks Festus to move Paul back to Jerusalem (so they can kill him along the way), but

Festus commands he be left in Caesarea, so he can hear Paul's story himself.

(b) Festus does so and asks Paul if he wants to go back to Jerusalem to defend himself, but Paul refuses and instead appeals to Caesar in Rome (Acts 25:1-21). Can you imagine the level of corruption Paul anticipated in the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Court)? It was so bad that he'd rather stand judgment before a pagan king!

1. "But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, **"Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?"** So Paul said, **"I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged.** To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know." Acts 25:9-10 NKJV

2. "When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. **But when Paul appealed to**

be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar.”” Acts 25:18-21 NKJV

3. Paul is GOING TO GET TO ROME one way or the other!
 - a) Festus agrees, but before he ships Paul off, King Agrippa comes into town and Festus tells him the whole story.
 - b) This incites Agrippa’s interest and he asks for Paul to be brought before him (Acts 25:13-27).
 - c) In Acts 26 Paul again recounts his entire history and testimony, this time for Agrippa. It is so compelling that Agrippa is nearly convinced to convert to Christianity (Acts 25:28).
- (c) In the end this is Agrippa’s ruling:
 1. “When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, **“This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.” Then Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”” Acts 26:30-32**
NKJV

2. PAUL IS GOING TO ROME!

a) *“**For I long to see you**, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established — that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that **I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now)**, that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.”* Romans 1:11-13 NKJV

b) *“For this reason I also **have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer** having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years **to come to you**,”* Romans 15:22-23 NKJV

(d) Paul arrives in Rome (Acts 28:11) after a harrowing trip which includes a shipwreck (Acts 27:1-28:10). And he begins his ministry:

1. Even in the storm God reminded him *“saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; **you must be brought before Caesar**; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’”* Acts 27:24 NKJV

2. “And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: “Men and brethren, **THOUGH I HAVE DONE NOTHING AGAINST OUR PEOPLE OR THE CUSTOMS OF OUR FATHERS [THERE IS THAT TESTIMONY AGAIN]**, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,” Acts 28:17 NKJV
3. In Rome, Paul put’s the exclamation mark on his ministry with this one testimony!
 - a) “*He explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, **PERSUADING THEM CONCERNING JESUS FROM BOTH THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE PROPHETS**, from morning till evening.*” Acts 28:23 NKJV
4. Isn’t this the perfect encapsulation of the entire study of the LETTER TO THE ROMANS? Grace-empowered Faith-based obedience to God.
 - a) “*Through Him we have received grace and apostleship **for obedience to the faith** among all nations for His name,*” Romans 1:5 NKJV

- b) *“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that **your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.**”* Romans 1:8 NKJV
- c) *“**For your obedience has become known to all.** Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.”* Romans 16:19 NKJV

NARRATIVE: FROM DAMASCUS TO ROME

3. **Summary in narrative form, Acts 6-28: Paul’s Journey from Stephen’s execution to his arrival in Rome.** (Links lead to sermon notes and videos on each topic.)

A. **Acts 6-7 (All Used Up for God)**

(1) INTRODUCTION

- (a) One moment you’re being selected as one of the few men, hand-picked to serve. It’s a complete honor and you humbly accept. Your reputation is without blemish and your commitment to God is obvious. The next moment God is working great miracles through you. A tick later, they are lying about you and you’re being publicly accused of things that could never be true, but you are indicted anyway. Blink your eyes and you’re standing at trial, the charges levied are beyond the pale,

outside the limits of acceptable behavior or the judgment of any civilized person. These accusations are only possible because they are being corroborated by false testimony, lying witnesses who have no conscience, and obviously no fear of the Lord. How did you go from being picked for a grand purpose to standing accused before this council so quickly?

- (b) Maybe this nightmare will end. The man in charge inquires, “Are these things true?” Ah, finally! Someone wants to know the truth. Does he? At this point, you don’t even need to speak on your own. God promised that when you get arrested and brought to trial because of Him, you need not worry beforehand about what to say; the Spirit will assemble your words. And it happens. For ten solid minutes you give the most lucid defense imaginable. You’re testimony is exculpatory; it’s clear that nothing they’ve said about you is true—you’re acquittal is imminent. You’ve presented everything the man in charge needs to hear to exonerate you.
- (c) You could rest your defense in that instant, but you don’t. Rather, you seize the opportunity; you look at your accusers, and all the members of the should-be-honorable court; and you tell them without hesitation,

“You are the guilty ones. You have committed the crimes I’ve been accused of here, and worse. You murdered the Just One who the prophets said would come. You missed the Messiah because you resist the very Spirit that has inspired my defense today. You are all guilty.”

(d) That does not go over well. What started as a good day is about to end in tragedy. What began as a moment of honor is about to be terminated with an execution. You are dragged out of the court and you are executed in a brutal onslaught. You are smashed with stones until your skull is crushed, your bones are broken, and your blood has spattered over the surrounding dust. And even then, with your last dying words, you ask your dear Lord, the very Messiah these murderers rejected, to let it pass. “Don’t hold this against them; they are just ignorant religious people.” And then you breathe your last breath.

(e) There are moments in life when you must come face-to-face with the purpose for which you were placed here on earth. You have an assignment and you can’t go back to what you were doing before. It’s true, even if in one moment you feel honored to have been selected for such a purpose, and in the next you are being stoned to

death. You can't control everything that happens between the bookends of your life, the dash on your gravestone, be it a few days or many years. But you can control this... Will you say yes!

(2) NARRATIVE

- (a) We are about to witness the rapid expansion of the Church and the need to raise up new leaders who can handle other aspects of the ministry, especially the daily distribution of resources to take care of the poor, the needy, and the widows. Seven men are assigned leadership roles, Stephen being one of them. His effectiveness places a target on his back and he soon becomes the subject of false accusations in an attempt to indict Him. It is yet another example of the vitriol of the religious elite, desperate to maintain control of their religious system. The growing popularity of those who claim Y'shua is the Messiah represents an existential threat to their ability to stay in power and maintain control over the Jewish population. But, despite their best attempts the religious hypocrites are losing their grip and even many members of the priesthood are converted. The testimony of the apostles and the

miracles is just undeniable and they too are coming to acknowledge that Y'shua is indeed the Messiah.

- (b) Stephen is dragged before yet another kangaroo court overrun by a high priest and priesthood that have become despotic, corrupt, and have descended to such depths of depraved leadership that they will resort to anything to stop these Y'shua-followers. Nevertheless Stephen, with the demeanor of angel and the knowledge of a Torah scholar, defends his position. They claim he is speaking against Moses and God, that he is spreading blasphemy against the temple, the priesthood, Judaism and the law, and that Y'shua, who he claims is the Messiah, wants to destroy the temple and disregard the customs of Moses. Remember, these are false accusations brought by lying witnesses. After listening to his defense, it's undeniable; he is clearly innocent of all charges. And ironically, he uses his expertise in the Torah and Prophets, the very things they claim he is violating, to demand his own acquittal. He is not only innocent of all charges, but he has demonstrated by use of the Torah that Y'shua is truly the Messiah!
- (c) But they don't care. They are not in search of truth, only to eliminate any opposition that threatens their grip on

power. As a result Stephen is stoned to death, all while he displays Christlike forgiveness of his enemies, right up to the very moment of his last breath. And then we are introduced to the main character whose life and story will dominate the rest of the Book of Acts—Paul. But we meet him first as Saul, a Pharisee of Pharisees, a man who has such a visceral hate for “Christians” that prior to his conversion he becomes their greatest enemy. His first public display of such takes place here as he serves as the overseer of Stephens illegal execution.

- (d) Let’s go on a supernatural journey with Paul, from this moment when we first hear his name, to the dramatic encounter with Christ leading to his conversion, and all the way to Rome twenty-eight years later where he teaches all things concerning salvation in Y’shua and the kingdom of God.

B. Acts 8-9 (Instant...)

(1) INTRODUCTION

- (a) When is instant a good thing? “That’s the \$64,000 question.” And ironically, the use of that colloquialism is the perfect object lesson to explain the nuances of “instant.” I’m sure you’ve heard the phrase...“That’s the \$64,000 question.” It’s not formal or meant to be literal,

but certainly typical and used often, recognizable by just about everyone in the conversation. But where did it come from? The expression originated in 1941 on the CBS quiz show, "Take It or Leave It." A contestant could choose to take a small prize or bet everything on a bigger prize, the largest being \$64,000. If he opts for the immediate smaller payout, he'd satisfy his desire for instant gratification. But hold out, and he can win the ultimate prize. Maybe 64K does not seem so ultimate in the present day, however, that amount in 1941 equates to a much larger pile of cash today. Hold out, get the answer right, and at the time this was written you'd take home nearly \$1.5 million!

- (b) I took one of my sons to dinner when he was eleven years old. I slid a twenty dollar bill across the table and told him he could have it right away. His eyes were wide with excitement. Twenty bucks is a big deal for an eleven year old. But, before he could slip it out from under my fingers, which pressed it firmly against the table, I offered him this: you can take the twenty dollars now, or you can wait one year and I will give you one hundred dollars instead. For everyone listening, you know that any investment that can yield five-fold returns

in twelve months is breathtaking. But, for an eleven year old, those calculations were not dominating his thoughts. What was alluring was the instant benefit of the twenty dollars. That evening, my son somehow figured it out and chose wisely; he held off for the hundred. But, more important was the lesson, especially in this instant-gratification-instant-satisfaction world in which we live. Instant or immediate gratification is simply the urge to satisfy a craving right now, without considering its long term effects or the bigger picture. Fast food; point of purchase sales; substances to change your mood; ordering out instead of cooking at home; procrastination instead of immediately doing what's necessary; and hijacking the benefits of marriage without the commitment of marriage, like premarital sex and cohabitation, are all driven by desires for instant gratification.

- (c) The entirety of our culture has gone the way of...in an instant! Just add water; no assembly required. I want it, I want it now, and I want it easy. Do it to me or for me! It's the microwave lifestyle. It's instant coffee, oatmeal, yeast, rice, soup, mashed potatoes, and pudding. Remove from the freezer; remove from the package, and

bake at 400 degrees for 40 minutes. Don't let it thaw out first—place it directly from the freezer into the oven. And, get over it; it's not the end of the world if you must preheat the oven first!

- (d) Moreover, instant gratification and instant satisfaction do not end with food-stuffs. That's just surface tension. Below "just add water" is: instant access, instant results, instant answers, and instant messenger. It's an Instagram world. And when there's a problem to solve, it's instant cures, instant relief, and instant repair.
- (e) But, when is instant a good thing? "That's the \$64,000 question." If we turn it around and see it from God's perspective, God wants instant obedience; instant action; instant transformation; and an instant change in direction, worship, attitude, mindset, beliefs, and choices... Yes, you have instant access to God, so when you look for results, answers, cures, relief, and satisfaction, the only way to be truly gratified is by instant obedience to Him, as demonstrated by your actions. God speaks and you say, "Here am I! Send me. What do you want me to do?"

(2) NARRATIVE

- (a) We are about to witness the most shocking and abrupt about-faces imaginable. It's immediate, comprehensive and permanent! To repeat, our first introduction to Paul, the would-be most prolific writer of the New Testament; the formulator of written Christian theology and doctrine; and one of the greatest leaders in Church history; was as Saul, its greatest enemy. Even consider that through his relationships with Gamaliel, his mentor and teacher, it was highly probable that Paul was present at all the recent trials in the Sanhedrin we've read about: Y'shua's in Matthew 26, the previous two trials involving the apostles in Acts 4 and 5, and the one against Stephen in Acts 6 and 7. It seems very possible that his disdain and visceral hatred for Y'shua-followers comes from personal experience and those emotions fuel his continued persecution at the start of Acts 8.
- (b) But, before we encounter what might be the most dramatic turn-around in the Holy Scriptures, we join Philip preaching and bringing miracles to Samaria. His testimony is so compelling that Simon, a famous sorcerer in the city, has a true conversion. And in order to fully appreciate this key moment in Bible history, you must recognize that Philip is only in Samaria because

the disciples of Y'shua, other than the original apostles, were fleeing Jerusalem to avoid persecution from the likes of Saul.

(c) Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem the apostles are notified about the work and effectiveness of Philip and they send Peter and John to Samaria to investigate. They introduce the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the laying on of hands, to all those who had recently been baptized in the name of the Lord. When Simon, the recently converted sorcerer, sees the Spirit's power in motion, he offers to pay Peter and John for a little download for himself. It comes across as if he is hoping to add this feature to his bag of magic tricks. Boy does Peter lay into him—in exactly the way we'd come to expect from him. The rebuke is scathing and Simon immediately repents.

(d) At that time, Philip is prompted by the Lord to move on from there and on his journey he encounters a eunuch from Ethiopia. Philip is directed by the Holy Spirit to approach the man who he finds reading from the scroll of Isaiah, what you would recognize today as Isaiah 53:7-8. The eunuch is sure he cannot really understand what he is reading on his own, nor to whom Isaiah is

referring, and Philip steps in to explain. The outcome is wonderful; the man comes to believe Y'shua is the Messiah and Philip baptizes him right away.

Immediately Philip literally disappears from there in a nanosecond, as he is whisked away by the Spirit, and he reappears in another city.

- (e) Then our attention turns back to Saul who was on a mission to persecute Christians. He was given authority by the high priest to travel to the synagogues of Damascus and to arrest all who had converted and to bring them bound back to Jerusalem for judgment. But God has a different plan for Saul. He is about to be smacked into another universe. Saul is stopped in his tracks by an encounter with Y'shua Himself! He is knocked to the ground, blinded by the light, and chastised harshly by the audible voice of Y'shua. Saul's immediate response, and I mean immediate, is to change course. "Who are You, Lord?" And, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" It's that definitive!
- (f) The Lord commands him to go into the city and that he would receive further instructions. He obeys instantly! The men with him saw nothing but did hear the same audible voice. It's obvious that Paul was previously

blinded to the truth about Y'shua, but here he gets up off the ground and is literally blind; the men with him had to lead him by the hand into Damascus, where he fasted three days and sat sightless. Simultaneously, a man named Ananias was given a vision about Saul and that he would be coming to him to "receive his sight." Ananias knows Saul's reputation and he is reasonably apprehensive. But, the Lord assures him it is all good, that He has big plans to use Saul and that He will show Saul that he's been chosen for both great ministry and great suffering. Ananias obeys and meets with Saul, touches him, and immediately the scales of blindness fall from his eyes; he is encountered by the Holy Spirit and is then baptized.

- (g) After Saul recovers from the fast and from his dramatic experience, his intention in Damascus shifts from persecution to preaching. He both confounds the Jews and is rejected by them; nevertheless he does prove to them that Y'shua is the Messiah. He proves it but they won't accept it, so Saul goes from an enemy of the church to an enemy of the Jews, who then plot to kill him. It's stunning how, in an instant, Saul finds himself on the other side of the "gavel" and how immediate his

persecution began, that which God had just revealed to Ananias. “For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” Saul is forced to escape under the cover of darkness and literally under the cover of a basket, and he returns to Jerusalem, for the first time as an overt friend to “Christianity.” Understandably, the people who know his reputation are apprehensive and scared, but Barnabas risks it and brings Saul to the apostles to whom he relates his testimony. Saul then disputes with the Hellenists in Jerusalem, over the messiahship of Y’shua, and they too want to kill him, so he flees the city and heads toward his hometown of Tarsus. Saul’s first visit to Jerusalem as a convert is short lived, but the Church continues to grow. He’ll be back a few more times on his journey to spread the Gospel.

- (h) Then our attention turns back to Peter. What is he doing? He’s now in Lydda, a city near Joppa, and we watch him heal Aeneas, a man bedridden for eight years. The miracle turns many people to the faith. Then, over in Joppa a devout woman named Tabitha falls ill and dies. Disciples in Joppa knew that Peter was in a nearby city and they send for him. Peter immediately comes to Joppa and God uses him to raise this devout

woman from death to life. The testimony draws many more people to the Lord. Peter stays for a while in Joppa with a man named Simon. This sets the stage for yet another About-Face!

C. Acts 10-12 ([Prepared Beforehand](#))

(1) INTRODUCTION

- (a) Peter is not the only one you know. It's the human dilemma—obstinance, stubbornness, resistance. It's difficult to alter engrained thoughts, persistent tendencies and incessant behaviors. You might think you can just relax. All it takes to change the old man into the new man is to be born again. However, there is ample evidence that is far from real. The truth is that being born again grants you access to all the resources necessary to root out enmeshed beliefs, break old habits, and make better choices. Yes, access granted but transformation denied, unless you are willing to do the work.
- (b) That is why we are instructed to take every thought captive, to make them obedient to Christ. That is why we are told to renew our minds—it's where the transformation begins. Actions follow mindsets. And that is why Paul was open about his struggles, and by

inference we are cautioned about the challenges we all face. At times, I still do what I shouldn't and I don't do what I should.

- (c) No, Peter and Paul are not the only ones, but in Peter we have the perfect example, the quintessential case study. Even as a man who enjoyed walking in the inner circle of Christ, one who witnessed His persecution, torture, and then crucifixion at the hands of the religious elite with all their hypocrisy, and had himself faced persecution as their captive—Peter still had erroneous religious beliefs baked into his psyche. He was sure that he would have nothing to do with Gentiles because Yahweh wanted nothing to do with Gentiles. He definitely did not inherit that mindset from his Jewish Scriptures; they teach quite the opposite. Peter, however, is about to become the pioneer of the proper perspective; you will not avoid the Gentiles, rather you will go to the Gentiles with this message; “Yahweh is not prejudice; Y’shua is for everyone!”
- (d) Peter was holding on to his engrained thoughts, persistent religious tendencies and incessant behaviors. And he would have never ministered to the Gentiles if Yahweh did not intervene. God initiated Peter’s

transformation by first exposing his enmeshed beliefs. That helped him break old habits and make better choices. And God used prophecy to soften his sclerotic mentality... "Old men shall dream dreams; young men shall see visions." Yahweh gave Peter a vision and this was its ultimate fruit. "I'm God's work of art. I've been created by God and empowered in Christ to obey His Word and the specific calling on my life. This calling was prepared for me beforehand with the expressed purpose that I walk in it." And so he did; he went to the gentiles and told them, "Yahweh is not prejudice; Y'shua is for everyone!" God has prepared dreams and visions for you as well—it is time for you to walk in them!

(2) NARRATIVE

- (a) The Church takes its first turn towards the Gentiles. Sure we know that Saul, who had his great about-face last week, will eventually, as Paul, focus a large portion of his ministry towards the nations, but Peter is first to jump in the water. This will not be an easy task, and impetuous Peter will not go quietly. As usual with him, it's going to take a supernatural experience to move him in the right direction.

- (b) We begin first with the Gentile side of the equation. Cornelius was a God fearing Roman Centurion in Caesarea. This means, although not a complete convert to Judaism, he was worshiping and obeying the one true God, he and his household. An angel comes to him and tells him to send for Peter who is in nearby Joppa. "Peter has something to tell you."
- (c) Meanwhile, Peter is simultaneously having his famous vision with the unclean animals on a blanket. Just like we saw with Saul and Ananias in Acts 9, God inspired both men about one another simultaneously. Peter is told three times to kill and eat and three times he rejects the idea of consuming unclean animals. Why three times? Because Peter can be a bit thickheaded and it takes three times for him to recognize that the vision is not at all about food. "Peter, don't call anything unclean that I call clean," God says. And right as he comes out of his trance, three messengers from Cornelius arrive with the invitation to his house in Caesarea. It's perfect timing because had they arrived before Peter's vision, he would have rejected the invitation, not believing he should visit an "unclean household." Peter thinks, "If God called Cornelius to send for me, then I guess I

should go and not call anything unclean that He calls clean.” You might want to note that Peter denied knowing Y’shua three times on the night He was betrayed (John 18), and Y’shua restored Peter with three different commissions after His resurrection (John 21).

- (d) Here’s the thing; Peter was clear that the vision was not about food, so why do Christians worldwide and throughout Church history insist on using Peter’s vision as proof God changed His mind on biblical dietary laws? In short: it wasn’t, and He didn’t, so you shouldn’t. And when Peter finally meets with Cornelius, he makes it definitive. “I’m here because God prepared to send me, and it’s clear that simultaneously He had you send for me. And it’s also clear that my manmade tradition would have prevented me from coming, had I not had the vision and revelation that I should never call a man common or unclean whom God has made clean, no matter what their religious background or national heritage.” So, just in case you still thought the vision was about food, the matter has now been settled, as Peter interprets the vision for us. In other words, he DOES NOT leave it for you to interpret! “I should not call ANYTHING unclean that God calls clean means I

should never call a MAN common or unclean whom God has made clean! The vision was given to remove my prejudice against Gentiles.” “Let me also elaborate for a moment about our tradition,” Peter says. “The tradition that we should not visit or fellowship with Gentiles, is just that, a manmade tradition. The Torah teaches the exact opposite. We were called to be a light to the Gentiles and it took this wild vision to break through my extreme prejudice.” I pray whatever prejudice you have carried all these years, about the interpretation of these passages, is now also gone!

- (e) Cornelius tells Peter that God told him that Peter had something important to share, and Peter does... “So, why have I come to this household? It’s simple. God is not prejudice, even though we have been; the Messiah of Israel is for every person of any nation, as long as they repent and believe. And that Messiah is Y’shua of Nazareth. Through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive the remission of sins.” Well, that is all the entire household of Cornelius had to hear. They all come to believe, his family and friends; they encounter the Holy Spirit and are baptized in the name of Y’shua.

- (f) Then Peter must return to Jerusalem to explain to his Jewish brothers what happened in Caesarea and that Y'shua is for everyone, not just Israel. They have a religious response at first, but the testimony is so compelling that they quickly come into agreement and rejoice. Again Peter explains, "God is not prejudiced; we should not call any man unclean that God calls clean."
- (g) Then our attention turns to Saul for a bit. Barnabas, who already took a chance on Saul when he visited Jerusalem for the first time after his conversion, is ready to take another chance. He goes to Tarsus, Saul's hometown, to fetch Saul to bring him to Antioch for ministry. Saul had moved back to Tarsus after he was chased from Jerusalem shortly after the first time he visited post-conversion. Now Barnabas brings him to Antioch where they work in ministry together for a whole year. They even successfully managed some of the resources collected to support those in Judea.
- (h) Finally our attention turns to Herod Agrippa. He becomes the first official Roman enemy of the Church. He has James, the brother of John killed and he arrests Peter during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and puts

him in a Roman prison. He intends to put Peter on trial after the Passover holiday, and we should expect the outcome will be similar to James'. However, Peter is supernaturally freed from his chains and released from prison by an angel and his testimony encourages the many who were fervently praying for him. It does not go so well for the prison guards who Herod has executed for insubordination. In addition, it ends very badly for Herod as well. He accepts worship as if he is God and Yahweh has him eaten to death by worms.

D. Acts 13-14 ([Christian Idolatry](#))

(1) INTRODUCTION

- (a) Maybe it's happened to you before, both applause and persecution, celebration and suffering. Can you imagine the successive occurrence of these polar opposites? One moment you are being extolled, the next you are being stoned. And quite frankly, it is easy to understand why perseverance in the midst of persecution is an admirable quality. But, what may be even more difficult, and therefore more commendable, is when you don't become a victim of your own fame. When the whole world wants to applaud you, how do you respond? When praise, acclamation, admiration, adulation,

compliments, and tribute are forthcoming, do you accept the worship, draw attention to yourself, soak it up, or deflect it away?

- (b) Maybe you are the one offering worship. Do you turn leaders into idols? Do you bow in the wrong direction, worshiping the worship? Are you applauding the worship, the one who worships, or the One being worshiped? Are you involved in Christian idolatry or the Christian faith. Is Y'shua the Lord of your life or one of the many objects of your idolatry, your religion? That's a scary thought. Are you addicted to the truth or are you addicted to the experience.
- (c) The journey never turns out the way you've planned. You can certainly be confident that you are called and you can certainly be sure of your destination, but the road you will travel has many questions strewn along the path, many roadblocks, and a myriad of twists and turns. There will be victories and some losses along the way; there will be persecution and there will be many things to tempt you, maybe none worse than the temptation to become full of yourself, imagining "I'm all that!" Or possibly you tempt another by fostering that idea about him, "He's all that!" Do neither, but rather,

bow your knees only to the Father of your Lord Y'shua the Messiah, from whom the whole family of mankind receives breath. And, if you are ever tempted to boast or to feed someone's boasting, do this instead; boast in the Lord. For it is not someone who commends himself that is approved by God, but the one whom the Lord commends. That says it all!

(2) NARRATIVE

- (a) Barnabas and Saul return to Antioch from Jerusalem. It was prophesied that they be in ministry together and sent out on a mission. So, they head out west to the coast and they sail to Cyprus to minister in Salamis on the eastern shore and then they head over to Paphos on the western shore. In Paphos, they encounter a Jewish sorcerer who has become an advisor to the local proconsul. He does whatever he can to run interference between the missionaries and the proconsul, so he will not get converted. However, Paul speaks judgment over the sorcerer, pronouncing he would become blind. It happens just as he declared and that is all the proconsul had to see; he believed in that moment!
- (b) Paul and his group leave Paphos, and sail north to Perga in Pamphylia (the southern coast of modern-day Turkey).

From Perga they moved inland, further north to Antioch in Pisidia (in Galatia, still modern-day Turkey). Paul teaches in the synagogue on the Sabbath and he gives a little turbocharged history lesson starting with Israel in Egypt. He mentions the judges, kings Saul and David, and then how John the Baptist pointed to the Christ. He speaks of how many Jews missed Him and then had him executed and how Christ raised from the grave to fulfill God's promises. You see, David died and stayed dead, but Y'shua got right up out of the grave and never rotted in the earth. He goes on to teach that Y'shua came with the message of forgiveness, and not just what it means, but how it is actually practiced. Paul warns them that they don't want to be in the group that misses Him.

- (c) The following week the whole city (Antioch in Pisidia) comes out to hear him and the controversy really heats up; the Gentiles are overjoyed that they have the same path to salvation, but the jealous Jews attempt to deny, refute, and counter every word Paul spoke, to the point of blasphemy. Paul and Barnabas drop the hammer on these obstinate Jews, but they still stir up trouble against those who believe. Persecution is the name of the game

and they chase Paul and Barnabas from the region.

Then, exactly the way Y'shua instructed His disciples to do, they shake the dust off their feet and move on.

- (d) In the next city, Iconium, they go right back to the synagogue. The same thing happens; some believe and the ones who don't become aggressive—this time they want to kill Barnabas and Paul. Once they realize their intention, they flee the city for their next stop on their mission.
- (e) Lystra is the next destination. This is where Paul encounters a crippled man from birth and heals him. The pagans witness the miracle and begin to worship Barnabas, who they call Zeus (the supreme god), and Paul who they see as Hermes (because in Greek mythology Hermes, the son of Zeus, was the messenger of the gods). Barnabas and Paul run into the crowd to stop the madness: "We are literally here to preach against this very thing. We want you to reject useless idols and accept the true and living God. He is the creator of all things and your gods are fake and can do nothing." Nevertheless, it is impossible to control them. Pagans do what pagans do; they will sacrifice to anything they think is a god!

- (f) Then Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and Iconium showed up in Lystra to stir up trouble. They finally get what they want as they instigate the people to stone Paul until they believe he is dead. They drag him outside the city and dump off his broken bloodied body. But Paul got up, dusted himself off and went back into the city overnight. The next day he leaves Lystra with Barnabas and heads to Derbe.
- (g) He preaches the gospel in Derbe and makes many more disciples. Then, he goes back through each city in which he was recently persecuted, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia. His experience allows him to teach one of the most important lessons for every believer; “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Finally, Paul sets up a leadership structure in each local church and then they head back to Antioch (in Syria) to report all that happened among the Gentiles.

E. Acts 15 (A Schism in the Making)

(1) INTRODUCTION

- (a) Try this on for size! Your whole life you’ve been told that in order to have any chance of eternal life, you have to obey very specific rules and regulations, and not just

obey, but to do so with bulls-eye exactitude. And that doing your very best will only prove that you will never be good enough to accomplish this daunting task.

(b) Now... introducing the Gospel of Jesus Christ! In the presentation of Y'shua to the masses, one could come to the saving grace of Yahweh by simply believing in this Rabbi, Y'shua. Believe He willingly died on a cross after being beaten, mocked, spat upon, and having a crown of thorns placed on His head. Believe that after all that, He was buried in a cave with a massive two-ton stone placed to seal the entrance. Why? There is no way for an ordinary person to pass in or out without some plan to move a huge rock, unless of course you have access to an angel whom can roll away the stone. And, to add a few additional incredible details to the story, this dead Rabbi resurrected from the dead, walked out of the grave and mingled with His disciples and many others for forty days, and then He floated away into the clouds, while His disciples simply stared in amazement!

(c) In Acts 15, certain men were not buying into this simplistic message of Christ crucified! They perverted the message of salvation by adding some dependency on a system of religious acts necessary to perform in

conjunction with the work of Christ, in order to be born-again. It's likely they felt as if they got ripped off because previously they were forced to work for something that now anyone could freely receive. They were not having it! And, they were making it known in no uncertain terms.

- (d) These, not so small dissensions, became a schism in the making. They marked the beginning of significant theological differences that have been morphed into all sorts of bad doctrine throughout human history. These mutations have caused schisms, time and time again. Instead, why not just work harder at learning, believing, and trusting the simplistic message of the Gospel of Salvation, rather than, add to it or adjust it to our man-contorted ways, just because it sounds too good-to-be true?

(2) NARRATIVE

- (a) The church faces its first internal crises. There are some Jewish believers who come from the religious class that are saying that Gentiles coming to the faith must be circumcised and, in fact, must adhere to the entirety of the law of Moses to be saved. Paul and Barnabas vehemently oppose this false doctrine. Let's be clear

about what's wrong with the doctrine being espoused; there are requirements being added to what it takes to be born-again. The problem is not circumcision or the law, only that they are being required for salvation. And quite frankly, anything other than faith being required would represent the same problem. And although Paul has not yet written what Christians understand today, about what is necessary to be saved, he already knows it! "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8)

- (b) Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem to address this serious matter and a council is convened, what becomes known as the Jerusalem Council. A dispute ensues and Peter is the first to speak. He reminds everyone of his testimony with the Gentiles and how they discovered that God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to salvation; everyone is saved by faith alone. And he also reminds them that none of their relatives could ever get saved by the law, so how could that be a requirement for the Gentiles coming to the faith.

- (c) Barnabas and Paul weigh in and report the testimonies from their recent mission trip and about all the Gentiles who came to Y'shua by faith alone! Then James stands up to speak. He's the leader in Jerusalem and first he affirms Peter. Then he assures that the Gentiles coming to faith is all according to prophecy and he makes a ruling. Here are the three categories of laws Gentiles should immediately adhere to when they come to the faith. They should abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, and unclean eating practices. Yes, they should obey God's laws, but their ability to do so has nothing to do with salvation. Then he reminds them that, like all of us raised as Jews, we learned the Torah over our whole lifetime in the synagogues every Sabbath, and so will these new Gentile converts. It's perfectly fine that they start with these areas of law and learn more in time.
- (d) After the ruling, Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas are sent to Antioch to deliver a letter with what was officially decided. The people are understandably encouraged. Judas and Silas also had a lot to say and prophesied over the people, which was also very encouraging.

(e) Judas heads back to Jerusalem, but Silas, Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch to minister. Paul then tells Barnabas that he wants to go on a second missionary journey to retrace the steps of their recent mission trip to check on the people in each city. Barnabas wants to bring John Mark, but Paul does not agree, likely because John Mark could not be trusted to stick with the work required, as he previously bolted on them in Pamphylia, before they went to Antioch in Pisidia. He missed all the persecution and is thus untested. Those sentiments don't sit well with Barnabas (the son of encouragement) and the disagreement gets heated. The solution is to split up: Barnabas takes John Mark to Cyprus; and Paul takes Silas through Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches.

F. Acts 16-18 (A Man on a Mission)

(1) INTRODUCTION

(a) He's a man on a mission. It was not easy the first time; in fact, it almost killed him. But he's willing to do it again, and this time it will be longer and further than before. It's inspired and will be directed by visions from God. "I want to examine the fruit of my work. Was it all worth it? I want to strengthen those who've been

touched by God and I want to touch many more people with the truth. I want to go whenever and wherever God directs!”

- (b) But, it almost killed him the first time. Actually, those that wanted him dead thought they had killed him. But he got right up when they were not looking, bloodied and broken, smashed and dented by stones, bruised and beaten, and he kept on going. What would be different this time? This predictably is how man reacts when you challenge his long-held beliefs. But he’s a man on a mission and nothing is going to stop him. What about you?
- (c) The times have changed; a few thousand years have passed, but man, not so much. Challenge a belief system, expose lies to the truth, and man will oftentimes become violent. It’s still happening today; it’s all around us. Speak truth to the establishment and you will be censured and censored; lied about and attacked; charged and charged at; apprehended and incarcerated; and removed from the public square or removed from life itself.
- (d) It’s a different time, but have times really changed? Has man really changed? Paul was a man on a mission and

the call for each of you, in your own special way, is to be a people on a mission, even if those within the sound of your voice become violent—even if you are censured and censored; lied about and attacked; charged and charged at; apprehended and incarcerated. Yes, even if there is an attempt to remove you from the public square or remove you from life itself, will you accept the mission?

(2) NARRATIVE

- (a) Paul revisits the cities of his first missionary journey to check on the new converts and he arrives in Derbe and Lystra; that's where he meets Timothy. Paul takes Timothy with him as he intends to travel back through his previous ministry destinations. Before they leave together, Paul circumcises Timothy because he knows the disposition of the Jews in those destinations; they will know Timothy's father is Greek and Paul did not want to add to the controversy. But something extraordinary happens. As they head north, the Holy Spirit directs them to bypass the cities of Asia. These are cities where the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are located. On his journey, Paul has a vision of a Macedonian man who is begging him to come to

Macedonia to bring help, which he naturally assumes means to bring them the gospel of salvation.

- (b) Paul and his party arrive in Philippi, the major city in the lower region of Macedonia, and that is where he meets Lydia. She's from Thyatira in central Asia, one of the cities Paul bypassed on his way to Macedonia via the Spirit's prompting, and she seems to be quite the entrepreneur. Paul shares the gospel and her whole household comes to faith and is baptized.
- (c) Paul and Silas are eventually beaten and imprisoned in Philippi after Paul delivers a slave girl from demonic possession; she is being used as the main attraction of a lucrative fortune-telling racket. The owners of this slave-girl are furious that Paul ruined their business, by casting out the demonic spirit, and they have them tossed into the deep recesses of a Philippian prison. Paul and Silas respond by worshipping God openly from their cell. God intervenes overnight and shakes the prison with an earthquake and looses the shackles from their feet and the prison gates are flung open. The prison warden is ready to take his own life, thinking all the prisoners have escaped, when Paul stops him, indicating he is still

there. The warden's entire family comes to faith and is baptized as a result of what they witnessed.

- (d) The city judges want to secretly release them that next morning, but Paul is not happy about being part of an unjust public beating, then only to be released privately without someone being held accountable for their illegal actions. Paul makes sure the city officials are informed that both He and Silas are Roman citizens, who were treated contrary to Roman law. The officials are petrified they will be exposed to and then held accountable by Rome. So, they beg Paul and Silas to leave quietly. Paul graciously agrees and they stop to visit Lydia's household on their way out of Philippi.
- (e) They leave Philippi and come to Thessalonica. Paul teaches in the synagogue as usual and uses the scriptures to prove that Y'shua was the long-awaited Messiah. And yet again, the Jews who did not believe become jealous. They even go to the home that was hosting Paul and Silas to cause trouble and when they could not find them, they drag the homeowner in front of city officials and accuse him of breaking Roman law. He is fined and released.

- (f) The local church thought it best to have Paul and Silas leave Thessalonica and they send them off to Berea. Things are better there. Instead of reacting violently in an effort to protect their old belief systems, the Bereans are more reasonable, humble, and open-minded than the jealous Jews in Thessalonica. They listen to what Paul has to say and then they search the word of God themselves to prove or disprove what they are hearing. It is all good until Jews from Thessalonica come over to cause trouble. Silas and Timothy stay behind in Berea, and Paul leaves for Athens.
- (g) In Athens, Paul finds a city filled with philosophers who are interested in anything new that they might use to enhance their philosophy or stimulate deep thoughtful debate. Paul notices they are very religious, fastidious about the gods they worship and how they would not risk missing a god they don't know about, so they even have an alter to THE UNKNOWN GOD. Paul uses their religious zeal to introduce them to the ONE TRUE GOD by telling them, "I know who your unknown God is!" Paul leaves Athens and some of the philosophers join him.

- (h) From Athens Paul heads to Corinth. That is where he meets Aquila and his wife Priscilla and this is where Silas and Timothy catch up to him. It is in Corinth that Paul famously says to the Jewish people, who refuse to see the truth, that it is time to leave them and focus on the Gentiles. God tells Paul to be bold in Corinth, unafraid of persecution, because he will be protected. That is refreshing for Paul as he had already faced quite a bit of violent persecution on his first mission. Plus he and Silas were recently flogged and imprisoned in Philippi in Macedonia. He stays in Corinth for eighteen months and even when he is accused and brought before the proconsul, nothing happens to him, just like God promised. It did not go so well for Sosthenes, however, the ruler of the synagogue who believed. He is beaten before he is released.
- (i) Paul remained in Corinth for quite some time and then heads back to Antioch in Syria. Priscilla and Aquila are with him. He stops off in Ephesus and ministers there. He leaves Priscilla and Aquila behind in Ephesus and heads back to Antioch. That is where they meet Apollos, a Jewish man born in Alexandria (Egypt) who came to Ephesus. He is well-spoken, well-versed in Scriptures,

and well-instructed in the way of the Lord. He is also quite fervent. He has solid teachings about Christ, but knows only the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila add to his knowledge of God's ways by apparently introducing him to the Holy Spirit. He becomes a powerful tool for the kingdom as he sails to Achaia (in Greece) to minister to those whom Paul had recently brought to the faith.

G. Acts 19-20 ([Lessons on Salvation!](#))

(1) INTRODUCTION

- (a) "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." How are we made new in an instant? Acts chapter 19 begins with the Apostle Paul asking certain disciples, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Do you find this question odd? Does it make you wonder why it is that the apostle Paul asked the question in the first place? The more you consider the reason why he would ask the question, the more you return to the thought that he would probably be equally aghast if he was to visit most congregations today! Let's be sure we know the Holy Spirit intimately,

lest we be found guilty of the same indictment. As basic as is this part of our doctrine, no leader wants to be held accountable for assuming everyone within the sound of his voice can answer that question properly. “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” God desires we dig deeper into the subject, as each of us is expected to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit.

(2) NARRATIVE

- (a) Paul begins his third missionary journey and will, on the front end, spend two years in Ephesus. The first thing he does is introduce the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as it seems they still don't understand, even though Aquila and Priscilla had stayed behind in Ephesus on the last trip and introduced the idea to Apollos. As usual, those in the synagogue, who refused the truth, caused problems and spoke evil of the Way and Paul needs to spend most of his time teaching outside the synagogue, gathering at the school of Tyrannus. There was such an anointing on Paul's life that even garments that he touched carried the grace of God to heal the sick and deliver the people.
- (b) At some point a traveling circus show of exorcists arrives in Ephesus and they attempt to invoke the name

of Jesus to cast out a demon, but as they are not true believers, they do so by referring to Christ as the one Paul knows. The demon uses the possessed man to beat these seven pseudo-exorcists to a pulp. They are actually seven brothers, sons of a Jewish priest, and they are caused to run out of the house naked and humiliated. The entire episode served as an amazing witness and it caused those in the area dabbling in witchcraft to collect all their magic books and to burn them in a massive blaze. It was an extremely expensive sacrifice and God's word spread powerfully in Ephesus as it prevailed over the darkness of witchcraft.

- (c) After the radical transformation of those once embroiled with the occult and the book burning, Paul has an inspiration from the Holy Spirit. "From Ephesus, I am going up through Macedonia, down into Greece, and then I am heading back to Jerusalem. And from there I will be heading to Rome." A commotion then erupts in Ephesus because the silver craftsmen become aware that the more Paul leads people away from their paganism, the more money they lose on their lucrative idol worship business, specializing in the goddess Diana whose temple is "protected" in the city. They

basically conduct a kangaroo court in the main theater of the city until the city clerk puts an end to it. He is very concerned they have not followed proper legal protocols and that if Rome gets wind of it, they would have no defense for their actions. He encourages those with a grievance to bring the matter before the courts and have it settled in a civilized manner. Plus he assures them that they have nothing to worry about; it is indisputable that Diana is the great goddess, the gift of Zeus.

- (d) When the riot and madness had ended, Paul warmly and generously acknowledged the tenacity of his disciples and left for Macedonia, where he moved through the region bringing words of encouragement to God's people. Then he headed to Greece where he remained for three months. He left Greece for Macedonia and then left Philippi (in Macedonia) for Troas after the Days of Unleavened Bread. Troas is where Paul preaches late into the night and a young man sitting the window falls out after he dozes off. He dies but is resuscitated by Paul who goes right on teaching until morning.

(e) Paul then strategically makes his way from Troas to Miletus, bypassing Ephesus on his return trip to Jerusalem. From Troas he summons the Church leadership in Ephesus and delivers a sobering and persuasive message as he bids them a final farewell, revealing that he won't see them again in this life. He reviews how his entire life is a witness to his faith and how he held nothing back. He emphasizes how he considers his physical life unimportant, and that his priority is to finish the work he's been assigned, and to be joyful no matter what happens along the way. Paul then gives them leadership advice about being faithful shepherds and leaves them with a few sobering warnings. Don't draw people unto yourself and don't be in ministry for reasons of personal gain. Depend on God for everything and recognize how I worked to support myself and the others with me, so no one could claim I was in it for the money. I supported the others with me to teach you another important lesson. Take care of those in need! It was an emotional time filled with tears and kisses, mostly because Paul had told them that this was it; they would not see him again.

H. Acts 21-22 ([Forgiven... yet Liable](#))

(1) INTRODUCTION

- (a) If you are born-again, you will not be held accountable for your sins on judgment day; Y'shua has all of them covered. However, that does not blot out the consequences of your sinful behavior here on earth. Simply put, "You can escape eternal condemnation for your sin, but you cannot escape sin's earthly ramifications." Said another way, "You may not be punished for your sins, but you will be punished by your sins!" words that represent both a sigh of relief and sober warning. And let's be clear; there can be no relief without Christ. Absent a contrite heart and genuine repentance, your sins destine you to eternal condemnation and earthly suffering.
- (b) So, what is the subtle nuance here? When one comes to Christ, the born-again encounter is a result of a heart-change inspired by the gift of grace through faith and evidenced by repentance and confession. A contrite heart is proof of true repentance and God's promise to all those in Christ—you are forgiven! He covers all the eternal consequences of your transgressions and you are permitted to live with God forever! In other words, "You will no longer be punished for your sins."

- (c) However, you are not relieved of the potential devastating consequences that sin causes in this life, even when you are forgiven by God. Think of it this way; in God's economy there are no small sins and no big sins. Any sin not covered by the blood of Y'shua will land you in eternal damnation. However, here on earth, the more serious the sin, the more serious the consequences. And here's the rub. This is true even if those sins have been erased into eternity because you've repented and been forgiven.
- (d) On earth your sins have a cost. Steal bubble gum and you are condemned to hell without Christ, but here on earth, nothing will happen. Commit adultery, repent through Christ, experience His forgiveness, and your marriage is still devastated. Plus, you just might bring a child into a very damaged situation. The sin itself is the consequence. In other words, "You are punished by your sins."
- (e) Why such a dire warning? Because although God wants you to experience the significant relief, confidence, and certainty that in Christ your sins are forgiven, He also wants you to be horrified by the prospect of continuing to sin. And if you are a Christian, don't see the

consequences of sin on earth as God's condemnation, nor is it necessary to carry the burden of those sins for which you have been forgiven. That is not the point! It's best to rest in God's forgiveness, even when sin has caused difficulties and struggles and turmoil on this side of eternity, and rather see this as a sobering warning of sin's consequences! As a Christian, you will not be punished by God for your sins, but here on earth, your sin itself is the punishment!

(2) NARRATIVE

- (a) Paul is ready to head back to Jerusalem. He is warned not to go; it will be too dangerous. But, he is intent on going, even if it will cost him his life. We see what Paul is really made of as he testifies to his friends. "You're compassion touches my heart, but you must know this about me. I am ready to be locked up again for Christ and die for Christ if I must!"
- (b) Paul arrives in Jerusalem and is welcomed as he testifies about the fruit of his ministry. He meets with James and the other elders and reports the testimonies of what God did with the Gentiles. That is when Paul hears he is being accused of teaching Jews against Circumcision and the Law! James makes Paul an offer that will prove

otherwise. James explains that Jewish believers remain fervent about obeying God's laws, even after they have come to faith in Y'shua, and they want to know Paul's stance on this issue. James also reminds Paul, who was there at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, that there were even Torah commands that Gentiles must adhere to once they come to faith: no idolatry, no unclean foods, no sexual immorality! Ironically, Paul was actually the one charged with sharing the ruling of that Council among the Gentiles on his following mission trip. Paul accepts James' offer and his choice tells the whole world this one thing: the accusations against him are not true and that he actually still keeps the law himself.

- (c) However, his claim does not matter to the unbelieving Jews who continue to accuse him of teaching men everywhere things contrary to the Jews, contrary to the temple, and contrary to the law. Obviously that is not true, but one other accusation they make is true: he brought Greeks into the temple, which would be perfectly fine if those Greeks were God-fearers who were in various stages of conversion to Judaism. But, these Greeks were not; they were Gentiles who had

encounters with God via a born-again experience with Christ, and Jewish tradition had no protocols in place for that. But let's be clear. Even though Paul did do that, he violated no Torah command, only Jewish tradition. And as we know from much past experience in the Gospels and in Acts, religious Jews are easily moved to violence when you mess with their tradition. And that is precisely what happens.

- (d) They arrest Paul. The mob-like crowd of unbelieving Jews literally want to kill him, but the local Roman military commander, Claudius Lysias, got wind of what was happening and he takes some soldiers and intercepts the mob as they are beating Paul. The commander has Paul chained and then inquires about the charges. The crowd could give no coherent answers, so he takes Paul into the nearby outpost headquarters to question him. The crowd is so invasive that the soldiers must carry Paul away.
- (e) Paul eventually speaks to the commander and then he addresses the entire raucous crowd in the Hebrew language, and he tells his whole road-to-Damascus-conversion-experience. But when he gets to the end of his testimony and tells them that in his early days of

believing, the Jews in Jerusalem gave him a hard time and he left Jerusalem to go to the Gentiles, it made them wild with anger. They respond like savages, tearing their own cloths and throwing dirt in the air! The commander is forced to bring Paul back inside to question him and decides that if he does so while whipping him, it will extract the truth. Paul has been here before and he is just not up for another scourging, so he reveals something to the soldier, who is about to whip him, that alters the entire situation and set Paul on a new course. "I am a Roman citizen." This halts the whole process because punishing a Roman, before proper legal proceedings are conducted, is illegal! So, instead of beating him, he is released to the Jewish courts! The chief priests and all their council appear as Paul sits in hot seat. Let the trial begin!

I. Acts 23 (Great Purpose)

(1) INTRODUCTION

- (a) "Be of good cheer." Has anyone ever said that to you? Well, maybe not using that specific wording, which is more biblical in nature. But, perhaps something more like, "Look up; look on the bright side; think positive; put your chin up; it will all work out; this too shall pass;

cheer up, it's not that bad, etc." You all know what that feels like, as there is not one of you who has not been at rock bottom when some chipper person, with all the best intentions, comes along and looses one or more of those affirmations in your presence. And you all thought the same thing. "It's easy for you to say; you're not the one with the problem." Or, possibly you pondered something not quite as nice as that, a thought that would be completely inappropriate to record here! Either way, you know the feeling.

- (b) But, what if it was the Lord speaking and you were altogether confident it was true; you could, should, "Be of good cheer!" He does tell us precisely that you know. "You will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." He makes this promise so we can experience supernatural peace in the midst of dreadful circumstances. And sometimes we receive this word even before we are in such circumstances, as preparation for the inevitable.
- (c) You are called to a great purpose in the Lord and undoubtedly that calling will be fraught with dangers and difficulties. But along with that calling He says, "Be of good cheer!" Sure, the Holy Spirit may say to you

one day, "In every city chains and tribulations await." But His calling always comes with a promise, "All things work together for good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose," and a guarantee, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Now, if God promises that when you love Him and follow His purpose for you as one of "the called" it will always work out in your favor, and He guarantees to be on your side every time, then certainly you can "Be of good cheer!" even when chains and tribulations await.

(2) NARRATIVE

- (a) Paul begins his testimony before the Sanhedrin. He stands with a clear conscience and this infuriates the high priest who has Paul slapped in the face! Paul's reflex response is to rebuke the man who ordered such an unrighteous act, only to realize that it was the high priest. Paul knows the Torah forbids such disrespect, even if the high priest showed blatant disregard for the law.
- (b) Paul shifts strategies as he perceives the makeup of the room is both Sadducees and Pharisees and he knows they have issues with one another. He uses their differences to divide the room by identifying himself as

a Pharisee and then he inserts the knife. He knows the Sadducees and Pharisees differ in their belief on a few big doctrinal issues: resurrection, angels, and spirits. So, he inserts his claim that he is being persecuted over the belief in the resurrection of the dead. That immediately draws the Pharisees to his aid and they quickly wish to dismiss the charges. That literally escalates a fight and Claudius Lysias is worried they will tear Paul apart in the midst of their infighting, so he has his soldiers return him to the Roman headquarters. The Lord appears then to Paul, while he is being held in the barracks, and tells him that the persecution he is dealing with is all by grand design. The ultimate purpose is for him to bring his testimony to Rome! (NOTE: this is why in his letter to the Romans he says in Chapter 15 that he is confident he will make it to Rome.)

- (c) Meanwhile, back on the religious front, forty Jewish men are scheming a conspiracy for how they can assassinate Paul, including the story they will tell Claudius Lysias to get him to bring Paul back into the council for further questioning. However, Paul's nephew is nearby and overhears the sinister plot and informs Paul, who sends him on to tell Claudius Lysias, who

then makes an elaborate plan to protect Paul and move him over to Caesarea to be heard by Governor Felix. He transports Paul using an extravagant military escort, along with a letter to Felix explaining the situation. Paul is safely delivered to Felix in Caesarea who questions him and determines that in order to make a proper determination he must hear further from Paul's accusers. Let the trial continue...

J. Acts 24-26 (Influence the Influencers)

(1) INTRODUCTION

- (a) "You will be brought before governors and kings as a testimony." Very interesting words from our Lord, predicting very interesting times. One may believe that Y'shua meant those words for other disciples, for another time in history. But, I'd argue they are prophetic for more than the twelve He addressed that day. The simple fact is that Paul was not one of them and he was actually the first to literally be "brought before governors and kings."
- (b) I don't believe it was the legal issue Paul faced that was the primary reason for being put on display in the presence of the governing authorities and royalty, nor his main motivation for his formal request to go before

Nero, Caesar of Rome, the supreme leader of the day. I am convinced that Paul's readiness to present before governors and kings and his boldness to go before Caesar was based on this principle: if you cause the head to turn, the body will follow. And he was ready, willing, and able to do so. Are you?

- (c) In his last communication, a letter written to Timothy from Rome, the location of his final imprisonment and death as a martyr, Paul summarized the philosophy of his entire ministry. Preach the word of God, be ready whether it is convenient or not. Reprimand and rebuke as necessary, but also use plenty of encouragement. Do it all with absolute patience and by being an excellent teacher, using clear instruction. Be willing to be vaporized into a mist for God, as if your life is a cool glass of water being tossed into a blazing fire. And fight for the faith until your last dying breath, like a sprinter straining for the tape. This is the attitude in which Paul faced the most prominent leaders of the day. He was an influencer of people of influence. What about you?
- (d) To influence people of influence. That is an idea close to my heart. Long ago, when I moved away from my professional life and into full time ministry, those were

the words that God impressed upon me. Quite simply, the more you can touch the lives of those who can touch so many more lives, the more lives you can touch. It describes the commission to make disciples succinctly. It's been a passion of mine ever since. I pray you too will desire to touch many lives with the truth of God's word, regardless of your calling or profession. One thing is for certain, to do so you must be ready and bold whether it is convenient or not.

(2) NARRATIVE

- (a) Paul goes on trial in Caesarea. The High Priest uses an eloquent public speaker to present the case against Paul. He turns out to be a real suck up to the Roman governor, acting like they are living the dream under such excellent Roman leadership. He presents what turns out to be a bunch of dribble—hearsay without a stitch of evidence. He even lies by conveniently leaving out certain important facts. The Jewish hypocrites, standing by, perjure themselves by agreeing with this sweet talking fraudster.
- (b) Paul then has the opportunity to present his defense. He is happy to answer to the ridiculous accusations. They can't prove a single word of what they accuse him. Paul

still believes and adheres to everything written in the Law and the Prophets. He tells governor Felix exactly what happened in Jerusalem that led to his arrest. Felix adjourns to make a decision, but he never does. He did call Paul back into a meeting to introduce his Jewish wife, who wished to hear about Christ, but Paul's message was so convicting that Felix freaks out and just puts him back in lock down. Felix does call him into additional meetings to chat now and again, but only does so in hope that Paul would get the hint that he was open for a bribe, but Paul never bites! Two years elapse and Felix eventually leaves office.

- (c) Porcius Festus succeeds him and Paul is still in custody. The new governor visits Jerusalem and the religious leaders quickly tell Festus about Paul and move to have him brought back to Jerusalem, but only so they can ambush his convoy along the way and kill him. Festus won't have it. He orders Paul to stay in Caesarea, and says that when he arrives, those who want him on trial again can come bring their case against him in Caesarea and that is when he will judge Paul's innocence or guilt. He hears the case and clearly there is no wrongdoing according to Rome. He asks Paul if he is willing to go

back to Jerusalem to stand trial in the Jewish court and Paul is adamant with his response... In what may be the most scathing indictment of the corrupt Jewish leadership, Paul says he would rather go to Rome and sit before a pagan king to be judged, than go back to Jerusalem to sit before the corrupt Sanhedrin, the lying Jewish council! That is when Paul makes a formal request to go before Caesar for a final determination, and Festus concludes that it is to Caesar he shall go! Paul is going to get Rome one way or another.

- (d) However, before Festus sends him to Rome, King Agrippa and his wife Bernice arrive in Caesarea, probably to acknowledge Festus' appointment to replace Felix, who was the previous long-standing governor. Festus then trots Paul out in front of the regional king, in addition to many other prominent leaders. Festus already knows Paul is innocent, but he needs something to tell Caesar about Paul's charges when he sends him to Rome. So, he explains the situation to Agrippa, in hope that he will hear the case and help him formulate a letter explaining the indictment, so he can send it to Caesar with Paul. Agrippa agrees to hear what Paul has to say.

(e) Paul appears before the king and all the most important people in the city. Paul happily begins his defense to the charges against him, starting with his younger days. King Agrippa (Herod Agrippa II) officially gives Paul the floor to speak for himself. Paul lays out his perfect defense in lavish detail, from his early life, to his conversion on the road to Damascus, to his post-conversion life of ministry. His testimony is so compelling that Agrippa is nearly converted to Christianity in the process, but ultimately retreats to a private space to discuss a verdict. His conclusion: "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains." Agrippa tells Festus they could have simply freed Paul at that moment had he not appealed to Caesar. But because he did, off to Rome he goes!

K. Acts 27-28 ([Stay in the Boat](#))

(1) INTRODUCTION

(a) Final musings of Paul: Too much information to integrate into a single thought. Too many inflection points and interconnections to assimilate. It all led to this one moment when all that God's been doing congealed in an instant, into one single reason: "For the hope..." Picture in your mind how it might be portrayed in a

movie. It's the culmination of the entire narrative, the climax of the story that both reveals the final missing piece and settles every issue at once. Every question is answered when the main character rewinds every memory in ten seconds, reliving in his mind all the events you just spent two hours watching. It takes place in a single moment that amalgamates all the pieces, and the confusing twisted story of seemingly unrelated scenes suddenly all makes sense.

(b) I wish I could make that happen for you. Maybe I can. God created man in His own image and then Adam sinned in the garden and creation went into a tailspin. It looked really bad and seemed to ruin everything. Man had departed from God and death was introduced. And somehow that horrible event must end with a better outcome than had Adam never tasted the fruit. The long twisted history of mankind ensues: murder and selfish desires; intrigue and greed and rebellion; prophets and judges and kings; the birth of a child called to save us all; rejected and crucified by more Adam-like men, as if nothing will ever change; those who believe and those who torture those who believe; and somehow the purple thread that weaves throughout the entire story,

and holds it all together, never breaks. Zoom in and you can see the writing woven into its fibers. It says “Hope!”

(c) And what is most fascinating of all is that I had this burning desire in my heart to somehow get to Rome, but I could never have imagined how God would make it happen. It’s another of those purple threads. First there was the desire; then a prophecy ensuring I would one day be here; in between I was stoned and persecuted and ridiculed and rejected; then one day I was rescued by a Roman soldier as I was being beaten by Jews in Jerusalem; he sent me to testify in the Roman courts and I witnessed before governors, a king, and many prominent people; then I was asked if I’d prefer to return to the Jewish courts for a final ruling and I appealed my case to Caesar instead, right here in Rome. But it gets better. On my way here I almost died in a shipwreck in a storm, except God spoke to me again and reminded me of His promise that I must testify in Rome, so all I had to do was trust Him and stay in the boat. It’s what Jonah would have done had he obeyed the Lord in the storm. It’s what Peter would have done had he truly understood the Lord in the storm. And it’s what you need to do. Stay in the boat in the storm and be saved!

(d) All that has happened has brought me here, to this very moment, “For the hope!” I was born a Roman citizen; I was trained in the law by the most prestigious scholar; I became the worst persecutor of all; I had the most dramatic conversion; my journey was filled with fruit and torture; and all along I was desperate for this one thing. I would do anything to get to Rome just to tell you this... “For this reason, for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.” You see, it all looked lost when Adam ate from the forbidden tree and he introduced death into creation. But that Adam could die was there all along and we know this because he did. What I have to tell you now is that Adam’s sin can work to your advantage. That is why I am in chains. Better than Adam had, who always faced the risk of dying, there is a greater promise, a promise of life everlasting without any risk. You don’t have to die; you can live forever. All you need is Y’shua, the long awaited hope. All you need to do when the storm is raging is to stay in the boat!

(2) NARRATIVE

(a) Paul finally travels to Rome. The beginning of the trip is uncomplicated, the high point is probably that we are told that Julius, the centurion of the Augustan Regiment

in charge of Paul's transport, takes a liking to Paul. This will literally save Paul's life later in the trip.

- (b) Things take a turn after their arrival on Crete. Winter is approaching and Paul gets a sense from God that they must stay put for the winter because if they continue there will be a tragedy. Lives, cargo and the ship itself will be lost. Unfortunately, Julius is more influenced by the majority, who say to carry on, and soon after they depart the ship is caught in a massive storm that goes on for days. The sailors try to secure the boat by bolstering the hull with the ropes used to lower the lifeboat. The storm continues and the men are shrouded in darkness, as the sun cannot penetrate the clouds. The men become hopeless, but Paul assures them. "No one will die if you listen to me. I am on this ship because I **MUST** appear in Rome, and all those with me will survive too." Fourteen days into the nightmarish storm, the men sense they are close to land and they think their best chance of survival is to escape in the lifeboat. Paul warns them that they will die if they leave the ship at that moment. But, if they stay in the boat they will live; not a hair on their heads will be harmed. Somehow

they trust Paul, who then convinces them to take some food to strengthen themselves.

- (c) The boat eventually gets stuck on a sandbar close to the island of Malta and as the boat is being battered to pieces, the soldiers decide to execute all the prisoners, and this is when Julius' affection for Paul saves his life. He does not want Paul harmed, so the commander instructs the men to loose the prisoners and for all men to jump overboard and get to shore. Every man survives just as Paul promised.
- (d) On Malta they are treated kindly by the natives. They build a fire to warm the wearied men and Paul is bitten by a viper while helping to collect firewood. At first the natives believe this must be the deserved punishment for a bad man, until Paul shakes off the serpent into the fire and suffers no ill-effects. That's when the natives think he must be a god! Paul then finds himself in the presence of Publius, the most important man on the island, who hosts them for three days. Paul heals the man's dying father and this causes all the other sick people on Malta to come to Paul. He heals them all. The grateful citizens of Malta provide everything they need for the remainder of their journey to Rome.

- (e) Paul and company stay just over three months on Malta and are able to leave on an Alexandrian ship, which had wintered there for safe-harbor. They eventually arrive in Rome and Julius delivers Paul to Caesar's captain of the guard. He is not kept in nasty prison, but instead finds favor and lives alone in a small dwelling under watch of the palace guard.
- (f) Paul then gets to live his dream, a chance to minister in Rome. He meets with the local Jewish leaders to bring them up to speed about why he is in Rome. He summarizes his entire testimony and journey and more importantly presents them with the hope that is in him. The reason I am in chains is because I have been preaching about Y'shua, the one our people have been hoping for over many generations. Paul stays incarcerated for two years, but he is under house arrest and not in a prison cell. He is permitted to receive visitors as he wishes, who can provide for his needs, but more importantly those to whom he can teach about salvation in Y'shua and the kingdom of God.
- (g) In his letter to Rome, Paul says, "For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you for many years. I no longer have a reason to delay, so now I'm

coming. And when I get there, I will bring the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” So many things had hindered him as you now know in intricate detail, but when he get’s there, no one will be able to refute the truth.

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

- 1. Romans 15:22-33 emphasizes Paul’s longstanding desire to finally visit Rome and how he feels that it is time to head in that direction after all that has hindered him along the way:**
 - A. Describe in your own words the highlights of Paul’s journey to Rome beginning with his first appearance at Stephen’s execution (See Acts 6-28).
 - B. Highlight each major event along the way.
 - C. Be sure to mention every challenge he faced.
 - D. Remember to include each important prophecy that guided his journey, beginning at his conversion.
 - E. Your essay should be between 3000 and 6000 words!