

A Rabbi Examines the Acts of the Apostles

The Faith and Practices of the Early Believers in
Yeshua

Rabbi Claude Scheiner

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the glory of Adonai, the God of Avraham, Yitz'chak, and Ya'akov, and His Son, Yeshua, the Messiah and Redeemer of Israel.

It is also dedicated to Carole, my loving wife since 1979, and to our son Sean, the pride and joy of our lives.

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Preface

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles is a critically important work that addresses many important issues affecting the body of Messiah to this day. If you genuinely desire to know what people believe, read their writings but also look at what they do! When we examine what the Apostles and all the early believers actually did, then that becomes a clear context for understanding the meaning of their writings. Unfortunately, many theologians, recent and past, have little to do with this epistle. Sure, it may be quoted when people want to “cherry-pick” Scriptures to advance a “witnessing script” or to relate a geography lesson on the travels of the Apostle Paul. It has also been a source of useful stories for sermon illustrations but rarely for doctrine. Some Bible teachers have even asserted that we should not take doctrine from the book of Acts, that it was a “transitional book” from law to grace, from Israel to the Church. What a horrific and biased way to treat the Word of God! Whatever happened to the faith “once for all delivered unto the saints”? To think this way essentially writes off the faith of the earliest believers who

were arguably closer to the source and context of that original faith! As it says in Psalm 11:3, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

I find a parallel between this erroneous bias and faulty hermeneutic with the failure of the Protestant Reformation, which is often hailed as a corrective to the errors of the Roman Catholic church and based on a serious “back-to-the-Bible” movement. The fact is that the Protestant Reformation, as important a correction to Catholic error as it was, utterly failed in actually returning to the words of the Bible. The Reformers only went back to the writings of the early church Fathers in the 3rd and 4th centuries, who were already off the path and infected by many theological errors, specifically Replacement Theology. Had the Reformers actually gone all the way “back-to-the-Bible”, as is often claimed, they would have discovered the recorded context of the very Torah-positive, grace-filled believers as the book of Acts clearly demonstrates. This all begs the question, “How did they miss it and how do they continue to miss it even today”?

I believe the current reason for such disparate treatment of the book of Acts stems from a commonly encountered bias in terms of hermeneutics. It is the reading of texts with the colored glasses of an a priori assumption that is the essence of what is termed “eisegesis”, which is a subjective method of interpretation by in-

serting one's opinions into the text and essentially "seeing what you are predisposed to see". The overuse and abuse of allegory is also a favorite tool of theologians who go "off page", so to speak. The problem with allegory is that it is a theologically borderless world with no guard rails, a free-for-all where there exists no objective corrective to the faulty conclusions arrived at by such a distortion of the message and the context. The appropriate and scholastically responsible approach to understanding Scripture is termed "exegesis" and seeks to be free of personal and external bias by adhering to the normal rules of historical/grammatical construction to inform the reader. It is also dependent upon the very important word "context". This word should always be understood not only with respect to the surrounding words and phrases in any given text but also must include the larger context of what was in the belief system of the original hearers of the words. In other words, how did the original hearers understand the words spoken or written to them? Many times, their responses and subsequent actions are recorded and should be weighed to assist our understanding of any text in question.

The author of the book of Acts is Luke, the same author of the Gospel of Luke. In this epistle, he begins with a reference to his prior work, the Gospel according to Luke. I take this as his counsel that to fully understand and appreciate his writings in the book of Acts, it is necessary to place that within the frame-

work of the continuation of his prior work. We should, therefore, strive to see continuity as opposed to contrast. Context is always important. History is always important. Understanding the dominant theologies of the Judaisms of the day is always important.

I would apply that same logic to this study guide. Much of the conclusions the reader will discover herein are dependent on a thorough understanding of the content of my prior book, *Sacred Cows*. In that work, I laid a significant foundation for understanding the errors of modern theology, specifically Replacement Theology and Dispensationalism as well as the common errors in misunderstanding the writings of the Apostle Paul, especially in the area of the application and purposes of the Torah, and the inclusion of gentiles and their place concerning Torah observance. I cannot reproduce all of that material in this commentary, so, like Luke's beginning comments on the book of Acts referring to his earlier work, I strongly suggest the reader carefully study and appreciate my earlier foundational work titled *Sacred Cows*.

This study guide is not intended to attain a new pinnacle of scholarship or to impress the reader with an exhaustive avalanche of facts, figures, and minutia that infuse the work with the impression of importance. That may be useful for a Bible trivia game but not for our purposes here. I have seen and

read many commentaries, both from Evangelical Christian as well as Rabbinic sources that seek to do that. They may make an initial impression that leaves the reader stunned and humbled and many fall into the trap of assuming that the super-abundance of information equates to sound theology and/or useful teaching. That is not to say that the study provided herein is lacking in objective truth presented with clarity.

The focus of this study guide is to address the broad questions regarding what actually constituted the faith and practices of the earliest believers in Yeshua. What did they believe, and of equal importance, what did they do? What was their relationship with the Torah and how did gentiles fit into this paradigm? Because of this narrow focus, this work may not satisfy all readers, especially those interested in all the minutia and “rabbit trails” available. Those are not wrong to study and, in fact, can be a fun learning experience, but that is not the purpose here. I intend to remain focused on the above sets of questions as we study the book of Acts to ascertain answers directly from the text to the questions posed above.

I have designed this work to function as an interactive discovery guide to assist the earnest student of the Word of God to fully explore and examine what the text actually states. I will, therefore, keep commentary as minimal as possible and only offer it when necessary to point out the greater context of

important historical beliefs and practices of the people you are reading about. I invite the student to approach this journey with an open mind, a willing heart, and a desire to fully learn and embrace what Paul called “the full counsel of God”.

My goal, as always, is to remain faithful to the written Word of God, cautiously “testing all things” through that lens, and to teach what the Scriptures actually say with the utmost clarity.

All Scripture quotations in this book are from the World Messianic Bible. It has also been known as the Hebrew Names Version (HNV) and the World English Bible: Messianic Edition (WEB:ME).

The acronym Tanach or Tanakh is from three Hebrew words: the T represents Torah or the five books of Moses, the N represents Nevi'im or the Prophets and the CH or KH represents Ketuvim or the Writings. These represent the threefold division of what is erroneously called the Old Testament.

Yeshua is the Hebrew name that is transliterated as Jesus. Since there is no letter J in Hebrew or Greek, and only recently in English for that matter, it is linguistically proper to use the correct name for the Messiah. No one in the first century in the land of Israel heard the letter J pronounced, so names like Jesus, James, or Jehovah are incorrect.

Chapter One

Chapter 1

- In verse 1, Luke begins by referring his reader to his earlier work, the Gospel according to Luke.
 - Would Luke teach something in the Book of Acts that was contrary to what he recorded in his prior work?
 - If so, how would that affect your belief in the continuity and authority of the Bible?
- In that same verse, Luke refers to “all that Yeshua began both to do and to teach”.
 - What did Yeshua DO? Read Matthew 5:17-19 and answer the following questions:
 - Did Yeshua come to “do away with the Torah”?
 - Did He come to bring it to its fullest?

- Did Yeshua envision a time when the Torah would “pass away”?
- In the words of Yeshua, what differentiates those who are called “great in the Kingdom of Heaven” from those who are called “least in the Kingdom of Heaven”?
- According to Yeshua, does it matter what we “DO” and what we “TEACH”?
- What did Yeshua TEACH? Read Matthew 28:19,20.
 - If Yeshua taught and lived the Torah, and it was not to “pass away”, then what did He command His disciples to teach?
 - Is it possible that Yeshua reversed his earlier affirmation of the perpetuity of the Torah with some “new and different teaching” for the disciples to carry forward? How would that square with Luke’s statement that he wrote about everything that Yeshua began both to do and to teach until the day He gave his instructions to the disciples as listed in Matthew 28:19,20?
 - Is there anything in the text that suggests a different

teaching for Jews and gentiles?

- Luke records that Yeshua also “showed himself alive after he suffered, by many proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about God’s Kingdom.”
 - Would Yeshua’s teaching regarding God’s Kingdom be any different after His resurrection?
- Yeshua commanded the disciples, “Don’t depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me.”
 - Did Yeshua’s words to the disciples still retain the same level of authority after His resurrection? Perhaps more?
 - How important do you think it is to actually follow the instructions of Yeshua for our lives?
 - Do we get to “pick and choose” which “commands” are for us?
- Yeshua said, “For Yochanan indeed immersed in water, but you will be immersed in the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” He also said, “But you will receive

power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.”

- How does this Divine empowerment relate to their mission to make disciples of all nations?
- How effective do you think the disciples would have been in their witness if they had proceeded without this Divine empowering by the Holy Spirit?
- Have you seen examples of people or ministries who seem to be functioning on human strength without a true spiritual anointing of the Holy Spirit?
- When the disciples asked Yeshua an “end times” question about the timing of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel in verse 6, how did He respond in verse 7?
 - What does that mean for us?
- How does the text in verse 9 describe Yeshua’s ascension?
 - The disciples were questioned by angelic beings asking them why they stood looking into the sky. Do you see any parallel to believers today who are staring

into the sky preoccupied with their theory of the pre-tribulational “rapture”?

- According to verse 11, will Yeshua’s return be “in secret” as some cultic groups have claimed, or will it be visible to all like His departure was?
- What is a Sabbath’s day’s journey and why would that be important?
 - If the Sabbath observance was “done away with”, as is frequently taught today, what does it mean that the disciples still observed it?
- The Apostles, or Emissaries, went into the upper room where they were staying in Jerusalem along with the women and Miriam, the mother of Yeshua, and with His brothers.
 - How many people do you think were staying there?
 - Verse 14 describes all the believers were in “one accord” referring to single-mindedness. How difficult would that have been to maintain in cramped living quarters? How important do you think being in “one accord” is in any community of believers for effective prayer and supplication?

- In verse 15 the physical location is no longer the small “upper room” as now we have the figure of about 120 being present.
- Peter stood up and recounted the prayers of King David against his enemies in Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8. Peter related the same to Judas. Acts 1:17 says, referring to Judas, “For he was counted with us, and received his portion in this ministry.” Given that Judas was never “saved”, as Evangelicalism uses the term, does this teach that it is possible that unbelievers, like Judas, can be “counted with us” and “receive a portion” of a ministry?
- According to verses 21-22, what were the qualifications for the “replacement” for Judas?
 - Why might these personal qualifications be important to the credibility of their corporate witness?
- According to verses 23-26, what do you make of their decision-making process in the selection of the replacement?
 - They apparently chose two candidates who met the above criteria and then sought God’s guidance. Do

you believe that they earnestly sought the will of God in their prayer for direction?

- Does their subsequent acceptance of the outcome show their reliance on God superintending their method?

Chapter Two

Chapter 2

- According to most modern translations, the festival that was being celebrated in verse 1 was called Pentecost. This is the Greek word, meaning “fifty”, used to describe the existing and ancient festival of Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks. The Hebrew word “Shavuot” is the plural form of the word “week”. It was called this because the date of the festival was determined by literally counting seven weeks from the day after the start of Passover, according to Exodus 34:22, Deuteronomy 16:9-10 and Leviticus 23:15,16. The Bible clearly states that the counting of the seven weeks was linked to Passover, which was and is always celebrated according to Leviticus 23:5 per the lunar calendar on the 14th of the month of Nisan.
- The current practice of determining the Christian holiday of Pentecost is to count fifty days from the celebration of Easter. Is it not interesting that even

today, per Church councils that began under Constantine in 325 CE, the annual date for Easter is still determined to be the first Sunday following the full moon after the vernal equinox, according to the pagan calendar?

- What are we to make of current church traditions that rename Biblical festivals and celebrate them on the wrong days?
- The text, in verse 1, states that the believers, by now numbering 120, were all gathered together in one place. Given that “upper room” apartments in Jerusalem were small, do you think they were still all meeting there?
- The “one place” referred to is most likely the temple precincts. Where else would torah-observant Jews celebrate the annual festival of Shavuot?
- Luke specifically informs us, in verse 5, that this body of believers were all Jews. Even the visitors from Rome in verse 10 were listed as Jews and proselytes. Why is it significant that there are no gentiles present yet within this body of early believers in Yeshua? Note that “proselytes” were gentiles who underwent the man-made ritual conversion to be accepted “as Jews”.

- The text in verse 4 refers to the disciples talking in different languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak. Verse 6 states, “everyone heard them speaking in his own language”. Verse 8 states, “How do we hear, everyone in our own native language”. Verse 11 states, “we hear them speaking in our languages the mighty works of God”. Were these actual known languages or some kind of emotionally charged, ecstatic, poly-syllabic babbling like what is practiced in some Pentecostal/Charismatic circles today?
- Beginning in verse 14, the apostle Peter begins a long recitation of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 wherein this current experience of the Holy Spirit is shown to be in fulfillment of the prophecy of the Messianic age. He then proceeds to explain, in detail, how the Messiah’s death and resurrection were pre-ordained and prophesied in the Tanach. Peter also demonstrates that these specific prophecies regarding the death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah were well known to King David, long before the Messianic advent. If King David knew all this about the future Messiah, how does that affect your understanding of the object of his faith? Do you think he kept this knowledge to himself? Consider all the psalms written by David that are Messianic.

- In verse 36, Peter is still addressing “all the house of Israel” with no mention of gentiles yet. If these earliest believers in Yeshua were all Jews, and obviously torah-observant and involved with the temple, how is it that many church groups paint the picture that this earliest group of believers were now called “Christians” and part of “the church” and separate from “the Jews”? Is there anything in the text to warrant such a conclusion?
- The message of repentance was preached by John the Baptist, by Yeshua and by His disciples. Here, Peter is sharing the same message. He is placing the object of identification of the immersion as “in the name of Yeshua the Messiah”. He further states that this calling is to “you and your children” referring to the Jews present but also to those “who are far off”. This could either refer to future generations of Jews or possibly a hint of including gentiles who were considered “far off” in terms of access by the standards of the Judaism of the day. Do you think God has always had a plan to include gentiles along with Jews? Consider Deuteronomy 4:1-9, Isaiah 56: 1-3. 6-8, John 10:1-18, Acts 15, Romans 11:11-24 and Ephesians 2 in deciding.

- In verse 11, the text informs us that about 3,000 souls gladly received his word and were immersed. If this event were still being held at “the upper room”, as some teach, how did they baptize 3,000 people in a small apartment?
- The temple precincts had hundreds of available facilities for immersion called “mikvah” in the singular and “mikvaot” in the plural. Everyone who entered the temple area underwent a ceremonial immersion to enter the temple grounds as required in the Torah. This was done as an outward identification of their status of ritual purity required to be in attendance. How does this outward immersion ritual depict the inner cleansing by the Holy Spirit as they placed their faith in Yeshua as the promised Messiah?
- The text informs us in verse 42 that these new Jewish believers “continued steadfastly in the emissaries’ teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.” Actually, an argument can be made that the text refers to “the prayers” referring to the daily, liturgical prayers said during the temple service and repeated in Jewish congregations everywhere. Considering the teaching of the apostles, would they teach anything contrary to

what Yeshua taught and told them to teach? Revisit Matthew 5:17-19 and Matthew 28:19,20 as you consider this.

- Recall that many of these Jews were visitors and pilgrims who came to attend the festival of Shavuot, one of the three pilgrimage festivals along with Passover and Sukkot. They came from many countries and were planning on shortly returning to their homes. Upon encountering the gospel message and coming to faith, they were eager to stay on and to learn more. Does this help explain why the text states in verses 44-45 that, “All who believed were together, and had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods, and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need.”? Some commentators have tried to use this text as justification of some type of communist style socialist norm for believers. Communism is a government-enforced redistribution of wealth. Why is that wrong? Is that what is being described in these verses?
- Verse 41 and 47 both describe new Jewish believers as being “added to the assembly”. The apostles and other believers were already an existing body of believers before the events of Acts 2. So, is it fair to say that a

“new” body of believers called “the church” was born on this day or that the text actually refers to these “new” believers as being added to an already existing body of believers? Why is it important to think of continuity here instead of contrast?

- Verse 47 also states that the early believers were not only praising God but “having favor with all the people”. If the early believers actually rejected the Torah and the temple service, would they have retained the favor with all the people? Is there anything in the text that suggests such a thing?

Chapter Three

Chapter 3

- Luke informs us in verse 1 that Peter and Yochanon (John) were going up into the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. This corresponds to the afternoon offering, about 3:00. We already learned that these earliest Jewish believers were observant of the Torah and participated in the temple services and “the prayers”, likely a reference to the liturgy. Here we see them on their way into the temple for the sacrificial offering. Is there anything in the text to suggest that they were wrong in their attempt to worship in this fashion and that God had changed His mind regarding participation in the temple services?
 - How does their desire to engage in the temple services contrast with what you have been taught were the practices of these earliest believers in the Messiah?

- When a man lame from birth approached Peter and John and asked for alms, Peter said, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have, that I give you. In the name of Yeshua the Messiah of Nazareth, get up and walk!” According to many in the modern day Charismaniac world of “name it and claim it” or what some have called “blab it and grab it”, was their lack of silver and gold an indication of their lack of faith? After all, if they only had enough faith, they would possess much wealth, right? After all, weren’t they both “King’s kids” and deserving of wealth and prosperity?
 - What was their “real wealth”? What did they DO?
 - Many who teach the “prosperity gospel” today and possess much of the world’s wealth claim that, due to their faith, they no longer have to say, “I have no silver or gold.” But neither can they say with any effective authority or power, “get up and walk”!
- In verse 8, an obviously verified miracle had occurred when the man lame from birth immediately began “walking, leaping and praising God.”
- What is recorded in verse 10 about the people’s reaction to what they had just witnessed?

- In verse 12 what does Peter say about the source of this miraculous healing and what does he expressly disclaim? Why is that an important ethic for today's so-called "faith healers"?
- In Peter's retelling of the crucifixion, he squarely includes responsibility upon some of the Judean Jews and their leaders, but he also said, in verses 17-18, "Now brothers, I know that you did this in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But the things which God announced by the mouth of all His prophets, that Messiah should suffer, he thus fulfilled." It has often been repeated throughout the centuries "the Jews killed Jesus" and this has often been used as justification for all manner of prejudice and injustice done to Jewish people over the ages. Consider the following Scriptures in answering the question of the ultimate responsibility of the death of Messiah:
 - Mark 10:45, "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
 - John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

- John 10:17,18, “Therefore the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down by myself.”
- Isaiah 53:4-6, “Surely he has borne our sickness and carried our suffering; yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”
- Acts 4:26-28, “The kings of the earth take a stand, and the rulers plot together, against the Lord and against his Messiah. For truly, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together against your holy servant Yeshua, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your counsel foreordained to happen.”
- Based upon the above scriptures, what can we conclude about the ultimate responsibility and purpose of Messiah’s death?

- Peter continues his message with the clear resounding call in verse 19-21, “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, so that there may come times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Messiah Yeshua, who was ordained for you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God spoke long ago by the mouth of his holy prophets.”
 - Was this a call to some kind of legalism wherein people “earned their place” by some kind of performance-based acceptance before God?
 - If Peter was calling people to repent (teshuva), which means “return”, to what were they to return other than God’s Torah?
 - Was there any other revelation of God’s truth in existence other than his Torah?
 - If this gospel were something entirely “new” and previously “unheard of” how could they return to it?
- Peter continues his thought in verse 22, “For Moses indeed said to the fathers, ‘The Lord God will raise up a prophet for you from among your brothers, like me.

You shall listen to him in all things whatever he says to you.”

- As Peter identifies this “prophet like Moses”, what are we to make of those who claim that Yeshua came to “do away with Moses and the Law”? If that is a true claim, how can he be “like Moses”?
- If the claim is true, that Yeshua is not “like Moses”, why should we listen to him? Wouldn’t that make him a “false prophet”?
- In verse 23 Peter says, “It will be that every soul that will not listen to that prophet will be utterly destroyed from among the people.”
 - Are the specific teachings of the Messiah considered “optional theology” or “opinions without authority”?
 - If theologians and Bible teachers do not “listen” to the words of Messiah, meaning to hear, understand and obey, what is to be their outcome?
- In verse 24 Peter says, “Yes, and all the prophets from Samuel and those who followed after, as many as have spoken, also told of these days.”

- Based on this verse, can we truly state that this gospel or “good news” is something brand new that was unknown before this time?
- Were believers of old aware of all these prophecies?
- Consider Paul’s use in Romans 4 of the faith of Abraham and the faith of David as examples of Biblical saving faith in the Messiah.
- Peter finishes his sermon in verses 25-26, “You are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘All the families of the earth will be blessed through your offspring.’ God, having raised up his servant Yeshua, sent him to you first to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your wickedness.”
 - Are Peter’s words an affirmation of the covenant or a denial of it?
 - What was the primary blessing Peter invoked in his message?

Chapter Four

Chapter 4

- We saw in the last chapter that many of the people who witnessed the miracle of the healing of the lame man were “filled with wonder and amazement”. Many repented and came to faith. There were others, however, who were not so pleased. It is important to remember that the temple priests and Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, unlike the Pharisees who did.
- Who were listed in verse 1 that were upset by the teaching of the Apostles?
 - What was the basis of their objection and why do you think it was important to them?
- These religious leaders were so upset that they put the Apostles in custody overnight. Why do you suppose they felt that threatened by their teaching? Consider that it was the High Priesthood that demanded Yeshua

be put to death.

- Does an exalted position of authority or religious status, such as we see here with the Sadducees, guarantee that their teaching is from God?
- Is there a corollary to today's religious leaders who persecute true teaching that is in conflict with their own?
- The text in verse 4 indicates the message of the Apostles was quite effective. How do you account for this?
- According to verses 5-6, who were present at the inquiry the following day?
 - Would it be normal to feel intimidated by being brought before this tribunal?
- What did Yeshua promise the disciples in Matthew 10:19,20?
- According to verse 8, how was Peter energized and empowered in his response to them? What lesson is that for us as we face challenges to our faith and practices?
- The man who had been healed was standing there in

front of them all. Peter made the claim linking his healing to the name of Yeshua. Peter states in verse 12, “There is salvation (yeshuah) in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that is given among men, by which we must be saved!” Examine this name in Matthew 1:21 where it states, “You shall name him Yeshua, for it is he who shall save (yoshia) his people from their sins.” The wordplay in Matthew as well as here in Acts revolving around the name Yeshua is linked to the word yoshia, meaning to save. This meaning can only be communicated and understood when using the actual Hebrew name “Yeshua” and not the later transliterated form of “Jesus”, which has no linguistic relation to the Hebrew language. Do you think it is important to use the actual, correct name of the Messiah?

- Verse 13 states, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and Yochanon, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled. They recognized that they had been with Yeshua.”
 - Peter and John were fishermen, not scholars of the caliber of the priests and Sadducees. Does advanced education and qualifications from men guarantee the truthfulness of their teaching?

- Where did Peter and John get this boldness from?
- Can others recognize in you that you are with Yeshua?
- The healed man stood as factual proof of the miracle. The leaders could say nothing against it. Verse 16 shows they affirmed the reality that it “can be plainly seen by all those who dwell in Jerusalem, and we can’t deny it”.
 - Instead of rejoicing over an obvious miracle and giving glory to God, what was their fear as listed in verse 17?
 - What was it about the name of Yeshua that was so central to that fear?
 - In our modern culture, why is there such an emotional reaction in opposition to the Messiah?
- In verse 18, the Sanhedrin “commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Yeshua.”
 - What do you do when a religious institutional authority gives rulings at variance with the written word of God?

- Can you think of other historical or modern-day examples of religious institutions and teachers teaching against the word of God?
- Are we enslaved to the “traditions of men” or are we bound to the eternal, unchanging word of God?
- What was Peter and Yochanon’s response in verse 19?
- What does verse 21 say that the Sanhedrin wanted to do but couldn’t? What prevented them?
- When the Apostles returned to their own company and reported everything that occurred, what was their response?
 - The prayer that followed was based on the Torah and Psalm 2:1-2. Why is that significant as a point of authority?
- In verses 27 and 28, the leaders stated, “For truly, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together against your holy servant Yeshua, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your counsel foreordained to happen.”

- In the study on Chapter 3, we saw how it was not just “the Jews” who were responsible for the death of Yeshua. Who all is listed here?
- All that these people listed were “to do” is identified as “whatever your hand and your counsel fore-ordained to happen.” What does this mean when assigning ultimate responsibility for the death of Yeshua?
- The believers laid out the threats against them and prayed for what? In verse 31, what was the answer to their prayer?
- In verses 32-37, we see an example of the corporate choice of communalism as opposed to government-mandated communism.
 - Remember that these earliest believers were from all over the geographic region (see Acts 2) and were originally planning on staying in Jerusalem only for the festival of Shavuot. Even the Apostles were Galileans without property or financial means in Jerusalem. After the extraordinary experiences they shared, they all chose to stay on to support this movement.

- Instead of a government-controlled redistribution of wealth and centralized economic planning, the believers freely gave of their abundance to support those who lacked out of their heart-felt desire to see this ministry continue to expand.
- It is of interest to note that this practice was not the norm of the congregations founded by Paul in the diaspora. In fact, those congregations also sent support to the congregation of Jerusalem believers.

Chapter Five

Chapter 5

- In the opening 4 verses of the chapter, we see a continuation of the example of the people sharing their possessions but with a twist.
 - What was the sin of Hananiah and Shappirah?
 - Peter clearly states in verse 4 that they were under no specific requirement to give anything or any percentage of anything they sold.
 - How was their disingenuousness viewed by the Apostles?
 - Can you speculate as to their motive for having lied? Since their giving was done in public, could it have been pride?
 - According to Peter, to whom had they actually lied?

- Why was it important to maintain integrity in the arena of financial giving? Is that still important today?
- In verse 11, most modern translations have inserted the word “church” for the underlying Greek word “Ecclesia”. Throughout the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, known as the Septuagint, abbreviated as LXX which means 70, the consistent translation of the Hebrew word “kehal”, which means “assembly”, uses the Greek word “ecclesia”.
 - Why do you suppose the modern translations have switched to a different word to translate the same Greek word, ecclesia?
 - Since the actual word “church” is not really a “Bible word” but an inserted translation, what does the word “church” mean and where does it come from? You might want to search this out through various resources.
 - Why do you suppose the modern translators insist on making a separation between the believers in the Tanach (Old Testament period) and the believers in the Apostolic times (New Testament period) if the

underlying text does not support it?

- What is the difference between viewing the Bible through the lens of continuity or through contrast?
- In verses 12-16 we see the advancement of the kingdom of God.
 - Many people were afraid to openly and publicly join the Apostles but apparently there were quite a few who did so privately.
 - What drew the multitudes from the cities around Jerusalem to come to the temple?
- The High Priest and the sect of the Sadducees laid hands on the Apostles and put them in custody. What does verse 17 say was the reason behind their actions?
 - The early believers were teaching the resurrection of the Messiah. The doctrine of the resurrection was clearly taught by the Pharisees and expressly disclaimed by the Sadducees. It was doubly offensive to the Sadducees, as well as the High Priest, as they had been complicit in his death.
- According to verses 19 and 20, who opened the prison

doors and released the Apostles from custody and what were they told to do?

- Did they do what they were told to do?
- Meanwhile, the High Priest called the entire Sanhedrin together to deal with the matter.
 - When they discovered that the Apostles were not in custody but were back out preaching, what was their reaction according to verse 24?
 - The text records that the Apostles were brought in "without violence", meaning not by force. What was their fear, according to verse 26?
- The High Priest charged them in verse 28, "Didn't we strictly command you not to teach in this name? Behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood on us."
 - According to the opinion of the High Priest, how effective had the Apostles been in their ministry?
 - What was the fear of the High Priest?
- Peter's response in verse 29 was, "We must obey God

rather than men."

- Peter recognized that ultimate authority resides in God and not the traditions of men that stand in opposition to it.
- On the balance scale of truth, when the word of God overrides the traditions and theories of men, where do you stand?
- Like Peter and the early believers, are you willing to maintain your commitment to the truth of the word of God, even if it means rebelling against human religious authorities that stand in opposition to it?
- Peter's response was quick and to the point.
 - What was the focus and essence of his message in verses 30-32?
 - Is the gospel, the resurrection and the forgiveness of sins a ready message for you to share with those who ask you about your faith?
- The High Priest and the Sadducees were quite reactive to this message. Remember that the Sadducees did not believe in any resurrection but the Pharisees did.

- What does verse 33 say was their emotional reaction?
- The leader of the Pharisaic party was Gamaliel (Gamaliel) who is described in verse 14 as "a teacher of the Torah, honored by all the people."
 - This great scholar challenges the High Priest and the Sadducees with a remarkable thought. What is the essence of his argument in verses 38 and 39?
 - How incredible do you find it that this great scholar was advocating even for the possibility of affirming the message of the gospel?
- What did the council finally do in verse 40?
- What was the reaction from the Apostles as stated in verse 41?
- Did the Apostles heed the threat against them? What did they continue to do in verse 42?

Chapter Six

Chapter 6

- Chapter 6 begins with the description of an issue between two camps of Jews, the Hellenists, or Greek speaking Jews, and the Hebrews, referring to the Hebrew speaking Jews. Both of the groups were Jewish. The primary differences were due to cultural and language differences rather than ethnicity. It is not an absolute separation on the basis of language, however. Many of the Hellenist Jews spoke Hebrew and many of the Hebrew Jews spoke Greek.
 - Hellenist Jews tended towards assimilation with Greek thought and even attempted to blend Greek philosophical ideas with the Torah. Examples here are Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus.
 - Hebraic Jews were far more traditional in terms of Torah observance and interpretation. The Greek philosophical structures and cultural practices were

rejected and considered anathema by the Hebraic Jews. It is of note that the Apostle Paul was trained as a Pharisee under Gamliel and not only was fluent in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek but learned much about Greek culture and philosophy. The need for such training for a Pharisee was undoubtedly to be able to effectively interact with the Roman government. Later in his writings we see Paul quoting Greek philosophers and poets such as Aratus and Epimenides (Titus 1:12) and Meander (1 Cor 15:33).

- As we recall from chapter 2, there was a large influx of Jews from all over for the festival of Shavuot. In response to their new-found faith in Messiah, they chose to stay in Jerusalem, although they were not financially prepared to do so. There was, therefore, a significant need for increasing support. The leadership responded by appointing dedicated, godly men to serve the needs of the growing congregation.
 - As listed in verse 3, what were the qualifications for these servants?
 - As noted in verse 4, what was the desired outcome for this allocation of resources?

- According to verse 5, how did this plan appeal to the whole multitude?
- According to verse 7, was their plan effective?
- What do you make of the statement that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith"?
- How does verse 8 describe Stephen?
- Opposition to Stephen's teaching soon arose from within the synagogue of "The Libertines", also called the "Freedmen" or "Freed Slaves". This was a congregation of Jews who had been emancipated from Roman slavery. This included Jews from Cilicia so it may have been the congregation that Paul had attended, being from Tarsus. Perhaps Paul was in attendance during Stephen's teaching and was the source of his anger against this movement.
- What does verse 10 indicate about Stephen's responses?
 - Would we do as well under pressure?
 - How sharp do we keep our sword of apologetics?

- Are we prepared, like Stephen, to obey 1 Peter 3:15 that says, "Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with humility and fear"?
- Verses 11 and 12 describes the methodology and ethic behind the opposition party. Do you think this describes an honest debate over the facts or something else?
- Verses 13 and 14 make a critically important statement regarding these so-called witnesses. Were these witnesses true or false?
- Why is it important to recognize that the testimony of these witnesses was false?
- The false witnesses alleged that Stephen was guilty of the following:
 - Blasphemy against Moses (Moses = Torah)
 - Blasphemy against God
 - Spoke against the Temple
 - Spoke against the Torah

- Yeshua will destroy the Temple
- Yeshua will change the customs of Moses (Torah)
- Recalling that the testimony of the witnesses was FALSE, what does it mean when we read modern commentary from theologians that appears to agree with the false witnesses more than with Stephen?
- Verse 15 describes the countenance of Stephen as he is hauled before the Sanhedrin. How do you account for this? How does verse 3 aid in your understanding?
- How do you think you would do in a similar circumstance?

Chapter Seven

Chapter 7

- In verse 1, the High Priest asks a very specific and pointed question. What was the question?
 - Why was this question so important?
 - The answer to this question will be the foundation and major premise of a logic argument that will either take us to truth or to error.
 - Traditional Christian commentaries are consistent in accepting as their premise that these were all “true statements”.
 - Traditional Christianity does teach against the temple, against the Torah and against the customs of Moses.
 - Replacement theology and the more recent error of Dispensationalism are based on the assumption that

these statements were and are true.

- The author, Luke, is careful to point out that these charges were FALSE. What do you make of the discrepancy between what is written in the record with what is taught by the traditions of men in today's theological world?
- In verse 2, Stephen begins a long and in-depth historical account of the very foundations of the Jewish faith. As an eloquent and Spirit-filled leader, his message was in concert with and supported the Apostolic message of “Repent” or “Teshuva”, meaning a return to God and His Torah. It is important to consider that Stephen's amazing message was content rich and historically solid especially as he was speaking before a hostile crowd with no preparation time. He had no notes, outlines or Powerpoint slides. How would you fare if suddenly called upon before a hostile crowd to explain the basis of your faith in the Messiah?
 - Since Stephen's defense is based squarely on the Torah for his authority, can it be truly affirmed that he was “against the Torah” as was falsely claimed?
 - Since his defense was very pro-Temple/Tabernacle,

can it be truly affirmed that he was “against the Temple” as was falsely claimed?

- Since his defense was very pro-Moses, can it be truly affirmed that he was “against Moses” as was falsely claimed?
- Stephen’s in-depth historical review would certainly have been known to everyone in attendance as it was the very basis of their faith.
 - Why do you suppose that he chose to assert what was common knowledge?
 - Is there value in beginning a defense by demonstrating the commonality of the origins of the faith?
- In verse 37, he quotes Moses who said, “The Lord our God will raise up a prophet for you from among your brothers, like me.”
 - As Yeshua is presented as this “prophet like Moses”, what would it mean if He went against the very Torah given to Moses from the mouth of God?
 - If Yeshua was “against the Torah”, would He be

considered a false prophet? Consider Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:15.

- What does this mean for teachers and theologians today who teach “against the Torah”?
- In refuting the charges against him, Stephen affirmed his high view of the Torah, Moses and the Temple/Tabernacle.
 - He went so far as to link the present rejection of Yeshua to the hard-heartedness of past leaders who have also resisted the Holy Spirit. Consider the supernatural courage it must have taken to do this in a hostile environment.
 - In verse 53, he stated, “You received the Torah as it was ordained by angels, and didn’t keep it!”
- Is mere possession of the Torah the same as doing what it says?
- Is there a difference between “lip-service” and obedience of faith.
- As Yeshua is the Messiah, as prophesied in the Torah, does it not mean that rejecting Him is also

a rejection of the Torah?

- The description of the reaction from the crowd in verse 54 includes the phrase “cut to the heart” and “gnashing at him with their teeth”. Does this sound like a respectable and fare-minded legal deliberation?
- According to verse 55-56, in his Spirit-filled state, Stephen shares a vision of Yeshua standing at the right hand of the glory of God.
 - According to verse 57, what was the reaction of the crowd?
 - The text says in verses 57 and 58, “But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears, then rushed at him with one accord. They threw him out of the city and stoned him.”
- This clearly demonstrates that the final actions were not on the basis of established legal procedure, especially since we know that the Sanhedrin was not allowed to prescribe the death penalty under Roman law.
- Is there a link between feverish emotionalism and the “mob mentality”?

- When people are screaming and refusing to listen, does it give license for unbridled hatred and violence?
- According to verses 59 and 60, how did Stephen respond to the unlawful, murderous attack upon him?
 - What did he do?
 - How would you fare in the same situation?

Chapter Eight

Chapter 8

- This chapter begins in verse 1 with the statement, “Saul was consenting to his death”.
 - Whose death?
 - The artificial, man-made chapter and verse divisions in the Bible oftentimes stop thoughts that should be viewed as continuous.
 - It is important to see Saul as having been present at the persecution of Stephen. Later in Acts 22:20, Saul states, “When the blood of Stephen, your witness, was shed, I also was standing by, consenting to his death, and guarding the cloaks of those who killed him.”
 - The irony here is that Paul will later be tried for essentially the same charges that were falsely applied to Stephen.

- The text informs us in verses 1-8 that “a great persecution” began against the believers.
 - What was the net effect of this persecution?
 - What did those who were “scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” actually do?
 - Do you see the sovereignty of God at work here?
 - When we see or experience persecution do we rebel against it in the flesh or see it as ordained by God to further His work?
 - As a hammer strikes hot iron and sends sparks in all directions, the same can be said for fleshly persecution aimed against God and His purposes.
- The account of the sorcerer Simon is reported in verses 9-11.
 - What do you make of someone claiming to be some “great one”?
 - Why were the people so impressed with Simon?
 - What was their standard used in determining his au-

thority?

- Why did the people continue to listen to him?
- Are there people today, perhaps in ministry, making a similar public claim about their own greatness?
- Are people in today's world similarly led astray by "signs and wonders"?
- The text in verse 12 states that the people responded to Philip's gospel message and believed and were immersed.
 - Was it the good news message of Philip that resulted in such evangelistic success or was it a display of "signs and wonders"?
- Verse 13 would appear to indicate that Simon also came to faith and was baptized, but later historical accounts seriously question the authenticity of his faith.
 - Is it possible that someone may appear to have a legitimate experience of salvation only to be found questionable at a later date?
 - What should that teach us about the wisdom of

making hasty or uninformed assessments of the spiritual condition of others?

- The Apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to minister to these Samaritans.
 - In Acts 1:8 we read, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.”
 - The pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Jews in Acts 2, the Samaritans in Acts 8, and the Gentiles in Acts 10, should be understood as three broadening spheres of the ever-expanding gospel message.
- A question arises from the reading of this passage in Acts. How do you receive the Holy Spirit? Is there a specific sequence to the experience? Consider the following examples:
 - Acts 2:38 states, “Repent and be immersed, every one of you, in the name of Yeshua the Messiah for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
 - The order of sequence is repentance and faith,

baptism, and immediately receiving the Holy Spirit without laying on of hands.

- Acts 8:12 states, “... they believed ... they were immersed” and in verse 17, “... they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”
 - The order of sequence is faith, baptism, laying on of hands, and they received the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 19:6 states, “When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them.”
 - The order of sequence is faith, baptism, laying on of hands, and they received the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 10:44 states, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word.”
 - The order of sequence is faith, and they received the Holy Spirit without laying on of hands, followed by baptism.
- Ephesians 1:13 states, “In Him you also, having heard the word of truth, the Good News of your salvation – in whom, having also believed, you were

sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”

- The order of sequence does not appear to be a rigid formula. The Holy Spirit is sovereign in His manifestations.
- It appears that baptism and the laying on of hands can be applied anytime subsequent to faith in Messiah. Any attempt to make a rigid, legalistic sequence in the application of either ritual is not supported by the Scriptural evidence.
- When Simon saw the Apostles laying on their hands and the people receiving the Holy Spirit, what was his reaction as evidenced in verses 18 and 19?
 - What was wrong with his assumptions?
- What was Peter’s response and assessment of Simon’s spiritual condition as stated in verses 20-23?
 - How does this answer the earlier question regarding the spiritual status of Simon’s supposed faith?
- Verse 25 indicates that the Apostles “returned to Jerusalem and preached the Good News to many villages of the Samaritans.”

- The Scriptures do not indicate that the Apostles preached anywhere to the Samaritans on their way into Samaria prior to this incident with the Samaritan believers.
- Do you think their experience of seeing the manifestation of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritan believers also helped the Apostles overcome any reluctance on their part regarding their prejudice against them?
- In Acts 8:26, Philip is instructed by the Angel of the Lord to go south into the desert.
 - Without anything else to go on, Philip is obedient. How do you account for such faith-filled obedience?
 - Is there a parallel here with the faith of Abraham when he was given similar directions to leave his home?
 - Is your faith strong enough to encourage such obedience?
- In verse 27, Philip has a divine appointment to witness to this Ethiopian.
 - How would this have turned out if Philip had not

had the faith to follow his assignment to go south into the desert?

- Have you ever missed divine appointments to witness to people based on your lack of obedience? If so, how can this example help you in the future?
- In verse 30, Philip met the Ethiopian at his point of need rather than beginning an unrelated sermon or memorized “canned witnessing script”.
 - How is that a good example for us to follow in our attempts to influence and guide others?
- In verse 35, Philip answered the immediate question of the prophecy in Isaiah and used this as a point of reference to other Scriptures to teach about Yeshua.
- Luke 24:13-27 relates the story of Yeshua’s post-resurrection appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus.
 - Luke 24:27 states, “Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”
- What is the importance of understanding Messianic

prophecy as rooted in the Tanach (Old Testament)?

- We see the example of faith followed by baptism with no mention of the laying on of hands or any subsequent outward experience of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter Nine

Chapter 9

- As this chapter begins the story of the Apostle Paul, it is necessary to research a little bit of what the Scriptures teach regarding his background and identity.
 - Along with being a Jew, what was Paul's other citizenship status?
 - See Acts 22:27,28
 - What city was his citizenship based in?
 - See Acts 21:39
 - Were both his parents Jews?
 - See Philippians 3:5
 - Would Paul have worn the types of clothing that were common in his day according to the Torah?

- See Numbers 15:37-40
- What languages did Paul speak?
 - See Acts 21:37
 - See Acts 22:2
- What was Paul's background in terms of marketable skills?
 - See Acts 18:3
- Paul had always had two names from birth.
 - His Hebrew name, given at his circumcision, was Sha'ul, or Saul.
 - His Roman name, since he was born a Roman citizen, was Paulus.
 - The Apostolic writings record both his Hebrew and Roman names. See Acts 13:9.
 - There is no support from the Scriptures for the concept that Yeshua "changed his name from Saul to Paul". That is a later invention of Christianity.
- What was his educational background?

- See Acts 22:3
- Paul's education in Tarsus and under Gamli'el proved to be a high level of understanding of the prevalent philosophies of his day.
 - In Acts 17, Paul demonstrates he is conversant with Stoicism – a focus on the denial of pleasure, Epicureanism – a focus on the indulgence of pleasure, and even quotes a pagan philosopher Aratus from Cilicia.
 - In Titus 1:12, he quotes another pagan source, Epimenides.
 - In 1 Cor 15:33, he quotes another pagan source, Meander.
 - Can you see why God chose Paul to be His Apostle to the Gentiles?
- After coming to faith in Messiah, Paul still acknowledges his heritage by claiming "I am a Pharisee" in Acts 23:6.
 - Why is it significant that he does not repudiate his status and identification as a Pharisee?

- As Acts chapter 9 opens, we see Saul going to the high priest and asking for letters of authority to persecute this rapidly enlarging group of Messianic believers.
 - As a Pharisee, how significant is it to see him “cross party lines” to ask authority from the Sadducean authority to persecute these believers?
 - Consider the previous counsel of the learned Pharisee Gamli’el in Acts 5 against such actions. What drove Saul with such intensity to ignore the wise counsel of his teacher?
- In Acts 9:3-9 we see the story of Saul’s experience with the revelation of Yeshua to him.
 - How surprising do you think this experience was for Saul?
 - Why do you suppose Saul’s fellow travelers were not permitted to experience this vision, but only Saul?
 - What do you suppose was going through Saul’s mind during three days of blindness as he fasted?
- In verse 10, we are introduced to a believer living in Damascus named Hananiah.

- How does Saul later describe Hananiah in Acts 22:12?
- How significant to your understanding of this early believer is it that he is described this way?
- It appears that Luke, the writer of Acts, is consistent in portraying these early believers in Yeshua as devoutly Torah observant. How does this impact your opinion regarding the authority of the Torah in the lives of believers today?
- What was the mission given to Hananiah from the Lord?
- Hananiah expressed his concern about this assignment based on an accurate understanding of the history and present reality of the situation. His response to the Lord did not indicate any refusal but an acknowledgment of the danger. How did the Lord's answer to him alleviate his fears? What did he do?
- According to verse 16, does being a believer guarantee a lack of suffering?
- Saul was the first among a long line of people throughout history who once persecuted believers and who

subsequently came to faith in Messiah.

- Saul began to publicly proclaim Yeshua as Messiah and publicly confounded his opponents. His zeal-ousness was apparently redirected in support of the truth instead of in opposition to it as before.
- Do you think his effectiveness in ministry was enhanced by his background?
- How would an understanding of opposing view-points assist you in effectively countering those views?
- In Galatians 1:12, Saul refers to the gospel and states, “For I didn’t receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Yeshua the Messiah.”
 - How important do you think it was to Saul to have this experience of direct communication to establish a baseline of theology in understanding the gospel?
- When Saul’s opponents could not refute his teaching, they resorted to physical threats against him forcing him to escape for his life.

- Do you see any contemporary examples of this same response in use today in our culture?
- According to Galatians 1:17-18, Saul tells us that another three years passed before he went up to Jerusalem.
 - What can you imagine were Saul's fears and apprehensions about being back among his former colleagues and people he previously prosecuted?
 - When he finally returned, what was his reception like?
 - Do you think there was a rational basis to question the validity of Saul's claim to having accepted the gospel message?
 - How was the tension resolved?
- Later in Acts 22:17-21, Saul relates another visionary experience with Yeshua directing him to leave Jerusalem. According to Galatians 2:1, it would be another fourteen years before Saul returned to Jerusalem.
- Verses 32-35 record the healing of a paralytic named Aeneas. How is this similar to the healing mentioned in Acts 3?

- Do we see a continuity here in the methodology and the message?
- Verses 36-43 record the resurrection of a believer named Tavita. Two men were sent to bring Peter. Since Tavita was already dead and prepared for burial, what do you think was their expectation from Peter?
 - What was the end result of Peter praying for her?
 - According to verse 42, what was the consequence of this miracle in terms of the advancement of the gospel?

Chapter Ten

Chapter 10

- The passage begins in Acts 10:1,2 stating, “Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man, and one who feared God with all his house, who gave gifts for the needy generously to the people, and always prayed to God.”
- Where the text describes Cornelius as “one who feared God” it is actually translating the Greek word “phoboumenoi” meaning “God-fearers”. This term does not merely reflect a person’s morality as such. It does not mean, “He is a God-fearing man.” It was a legal and technical term for a specific type of gentile who was drawn to the worship of the God of Abraham but chose to not undergo formal ritual conversion to “become a Jew”, a practice, by the way, entirely man-made without any Scriptural foundation. These “God-fearers” were already conversant with the Torah and observant of its

teachings, including the food laws of Leviticus 11.

- Quite possibly, the only reason Cornelius opted for this intermediate status of God-fearer instead of full ritual conversion was his military position. Certainly, the politics of his “converting” would have been an issue for him and his future with Rome. Without a doubt, any leader in the Roman army could not be perceived as having divided loyalties.
- Verse 3 states that this gentile was praying “at about the ninth hour of the day”.
 - The ninth hour of the day corresponded to 3:00 in the afternoon.
 - What is the significance of a gentile praying at the same time as the afternoon sacrifices at the temple?
- During his prayer, Cornelius receives a vision in response to his prayers.
 - What does it mean that his prayers are apparently heard and answered before the text describes his coming to faith in the Messiah?
- In verses 5-6, what is Cornelius instructed to do?

- In verses 7-8, did he do what he was instructed to do?
 - Why is obedience significant?
 - What might have been the outcome if he had failed to follow through with the direction given to him?
- In verses 9-14, we read about the experience Peter had on the rooftop of the house where he was staying.
 - Was this experience reality or was it a vision?
 - According to verse 10, was the food already prepared or not?
- The test Peter was challenged with was whether or not he would adhere to the written Torah to respond to the question of eating unclean food.
 - For Peter, the only source of definition of what is “common or unclean” was the Torah.
 - Did Peter pass the test?
 - Is there any evidence that he ever ate anything, let alone unclean food?
- Verse 15 has often been used to claim that God changed

His rules about eating unclean foods.

- Is there any mention of food in verse 15?
- What do you think it refers to?
- Verse 17 demonstrates that “Peter was very perplexed in himself what the vision he had seen might mean.”
 - After three repetitions of the vision, Peter still did not understand its meaning.
 - It is apparent that Peter did not conclude that it was now okay to have a pork sandwich for lunch.
- Verse 19 relates that while Peter was still “pondering the vision”, the Spirit informed him about the three men sent from Cornelius and to go with them, “doubting nothing”.
- Verses 21-23 show Peter’s obedience to the Spirit by going with the men to visit Cornelius.
 - Why is obedience significant?
 - What might have been the outcome if he had failed to follow through with the direction given to him?

- Verses 24-26 show the reception of Peter by Cornelius.
 - What did Cornelius do that was considered inappropriate?
 - What was Peter's response?
 - Is there a lesson in humility here that could teach current spiritual leaders today?
- Verse 28 is Peter's "Aha!" moment.
 - Peter's declaration that they "know" how it is an "unlawful thing" for a Jew to have interaction with a gentile betrays the source of that tradition of men. Nowhere in the Torah is such a "law" found. Israel was always destined to be a light to the gentiles. There is nothing about gentiles that needs to be avoided. The only separation involves pagan beliefs and practices, but never the people themselves.
 - There is nothing in the Torah about restricting a Jew from having fellowship with or entering the home of a gentile. Peter was struggling with the common prejudice of the day that arose from the man-made Eighteen Measures against contact with gentiles.

- The significant statement by Peter that “God has shown me that I shouldn’t call any man unholy or unclean” is a full and satisfying answer to the meaning of Peter’s vision. Peter had passed the test regarding the food challenge by applying the correct standard, the Torah, instead of man-made traditions. Here, God is asking Peter to follow suit in applying the same standard, the Torah, to the issue of acceptance of gentiles instead of the traditions of men he was previously in bondage to.
- If Peter clearly states that his understanding of the vision is that “God has shown me that I shouldn’t call any man unholy or unclean”, then why do you suppose that theologians and Bible teachers reject Peter’s own interpretation and teach that the vision was about God changing the food laws?
- Peter’s use of the word “therefore” in verse 29, clearly shows that his “coming without complaint when I was sent for” is to be understood as the resolution to the tension of his prejudice against gentiles that he was struggling with and that the vision resolved.
- Verses 30-33 recount the vision given to Cornelius and his subsequent obedience and readiness to hear the

message from Peter.

- How important is a heartfelt readiness and openness to the gospel in terms of effectiveness?
- Do you think the prior prayers of Cornelius might have prepared his heart to receive the gospel?
- Peter begins his message in verse 34 by declaring “Truly I perceive that God doesn’t show favoritism, but in every nation he who fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.”
 - This new understanding, based on the vision given to him, was a radical departure for Peter as well as the others with him.
 - Peter is revealing his comprehension of the prior vision as God having cleansed these gentiles through faith and that Peter should therefore not consider them unclean.
- Verses 35-43 include Peter’s gospel message to the crowd assembled to hear him.
 - In verse 37, Peter states that “you yourselves know what happened”. This group of gentiles who were

“God-fearers” and connected to the temple were in a prime position to have heard the accounts of Yeshua and his passion.

- In verse 39, Peter is adding his credentials of the story as having been an eyewitness to the events. How does this give him even more credibility with his hearers?
- In verse 43, Peter explains that “All the prophets testify about him, that through his name everyone who believes in him will receive remission of sins.”
 - According to Peter, the principle of sins being forgiven through faith in the Messiah is found in all the writings of the prophets. Can it be then said that this knowledge of saving faith is only confined to the linear time period called the “New Testament” era?
- In verse 44, we see the Holy Spirit falling upon all those who heard the word, while he was still speaking.
 - What do you make of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit acting in such a fashion?
 - Was there time for laying on of hands?
 - Was there time for baptism?

- Was there time for the Rabbinic ritual created for the conversion of gentiles?
- The message is clear that the only element required of anyone, Jew or gentile, for their salvation is placing faith in the work of Messiah.
- In verse 45, "They of the circumcision" refers to that group of Jewish believers who had been taught that gentiles needed to undergo the man-made Rabbinic ritual in order to be saved. We will see this issue resolved later in Acts 15.
- In verse 47, Peter follows the logic of what has just occurred.
 - What was his conclusion?
 - When Peter stated that "They have received the Holy Spirit just like us" does this establish the matter that there is no difference between Jew and gentile regarding access to God through faith in His Messiah?

Chapter Eleven

Chapter 11

- This chapter begins by informing us that the news of the events in the previous chapter had reached the ears of those in Jerusalem.
- The text states in verses 2-3 that "When Peter had come up to Jerusalem, those who were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"
 - Was anyone on either side of this issue discussing eating unclean foods?
 - Those "who were of the circumcision" refers to that subset of the Messianic community still clinging to the man-made Rabbinic requirement that required ritual conversion of gentiles and disallowed interaction with them. Instead of rejoicing over these gentiles coming to faith, they criticized Peter for not

following their traditions regarding separation from gentiles.

- What was "the issue" that was the source of the tension?
- Verses 4-16 include Peter's retelling of the events of his vision from God and the subsequent events that explained it to him.
 - Obviously, Peter understood the vision of the unclean animals in the sheet as a reference to his prejudice regarding gentiles, otherwise his application of this as a response to the issue at hand stated in verse 3 would not make sense.
- Verse 17 explains Peter's unassailable logic.
 - According to Peter's statement, was there any difference in the way Jews or gentiles experience salvation?
 - His subtle challenge to those questioning him involved recognizing the sovereignty of God and the evidence of the bestowing of the Holy Spirit with "the same gift" on those believing gentiles.
 - His statement, "who was I, that I could withstand

God?" was directed at his detractors with considerable force.

- According to verse 18, what was their unified response?
- Their acknowledgment that "God has also granted to the gentiles repentance to life!" demonstrates that the sole issue this "party of the circumcision" had was their prejudice against gentiles and their fealty to their man-made Rabbinic separation from them and had nothing to do with any so-called abrogation of the food laws in Leviticus 11.
- According to verse 19, when Jewish believers had left Jerusalem, where did they travel to?
 - Did they preach the gospel to Jews and gentiles or only to Jews?
 - How does this inform us of their previous commonly held belief about prejudice against gentiles?
 - Some of these believers from Cyprus and Cyrene began sharing the gospel with Greeks, meaning gentiles.

- According to verse 22, when news of this successful outreach to the gentiles reached the leadership in Jerusalem, what did they do?
 - Barnabas was originally from Cyprus. Why did it make sense to choose him to investigate what was happening in Antioch?
 - In Acts chapter 8, we saw the Jerusalem elders send Peter and John to verify what they had heard about the Samaritans receiving the gospel message. Why had this been a surprising turn of events?
 - If the Samaritans were coming to faith, how much more challenging was it for these believers to realize gentiles coming to faith as well, without the Rabbinic invention of ritual conversion?
- According to verses 23-24, what was the reaction of Barnabas after his investigation?
- According to verses 25-26, why do you suppose Barnabas sought out Saul and have him come to Antioch?
- As a Torah scholar fluent in Hebrew and Greek, how appropriate was Saul as the choice to teach these new believers?

- In verses 27-30, we see the prophetically induced response from these believers to help each other during the coming famine.
 - In sending additional relief to the Jerusalem congregation, it was a gift of grace that could also demonstrate equality in terms of their faith.
 - Do you think that the Jerusalem congregation may have been encouraged by this gracious act?
 - How do you think it may have helped in their overcoming previously held prejudices against gentiles?

Chapter Twelve

Chapter 12

- The chapter begins with a description of King Herod. This was Herod Agrippa, whose grandfather was King Herod the Great who had actually murdered his own sons, including Aristobulus the father of Herod Agrippa when he was age three.
 - What do you make of the dynasty of Herod the Great?
 - What effect do you think that may have had on Herod Agrippa's values?
 - Consider that Herod's bloodline was half Levite and half Edomite with no lineage to the line of King David, a requirement to be a legitimate king in Israel.
- In verses 1-4, we see King Herod acting in a very self-serving political way, appealing to his base and committing murder to advance his standing among his con-

stituents.

- Is there a parallel to politicians in our world today?
- Is there ever anything “new under the sun”?
- In verse 3, when King Herod saw that the murder of Jacob “pleased the Judeans, he proceeded to seize Peter also.”
 - What do you think was Herod’s purpose in holding Peter in jail?
 - According to verse 5, what were the rest of the believers doing during this time?
- According to verse 6, how securely was Peter being held in prison?
 - Why do these details become important as the story proceeds?
- In verse 7, as the angel of the Lord appears to Peter and wakes him up, he tells him to “stand up quickly”, “get dressed and put on your sandals”, “put on your cloak and follow me”.
 - As these events were happening during Passover

week, do you think it triggered Peter's recalling of the Passover instructions found in Exodus 12:11 which states, "This is how you shall eat it: with your belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's Passover."

- Is there a parallel here between the Lord's mighty acts of deliverance of His people in the Exodus and Peter's deliverance here?
- Is God "the same yesterday, today and forever"?
- In verse 11, the text relates that Peter "had come to himself" after the experience.
 - Do you think that if you had experienced such a miraculous escape with the help of an angel it might take you a few minutes to gather yourself and process what had just happened?
 - What was the reaction of the disciples like?
- In verses 18-19, it is recorded that "there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter".

- Why do you suppose that the guards who were on duty next to Peter and the ones on duty in front of the door would be concerned about his disappearance?
- Do you think allowing a prisoner to escape with no explanation would have been tolerated in the Roman army?
- What happened to the guards?
- Ever the politician, King Herod Agrippa went to Caesarea where he made a great festival to the Emperor Claudius.
 - While there, envoys from Tyre and Sidon had made friends with the King's personal aide, seeking peace. According to verse 20, what was their purpose in this outreach?
 - In verse 21, we see King Herod Agrippa, playing the role of the politician, dressed in royal clothing, sitting on the throne and making a speech.
 - In verse 22, what were the people claiming about his words?

- In verse 23, what was God's response to his actions?
- Is there a lesson here for politicians today?
- What was the end result of all the turmoil as recorded in verses 24-25?
 - Can you see the sovereignty of God working His purposes behind the scenes in this chapter?
 - How can this help us take comfort when we experience trials and tribulations?

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter 13

- In verse 1, we are introduced to the "prophets and teachers" in the assembly in Antioch, apparently from many regions.
- In verse 2, as they were fasting, what happened?
- In verse 3, we see the ordination of Barnabas and Saul, involving fasting, praying and laying on of hands.
 - The word Apostle refers to a sent one based on the Hebrew word "shaliach".
 - The root for this word is "shalach" which means "to send".
- According to verse 4, who was the authority behind the decision to send these men out on a mission trip?
 - Is it important today to have such an authoritative

direction in ministry?

- What do you make of ministries today that apparently "wing it on their own power"?
- According to verse 5, what was their target audience for their message?
 - Does this support Paul's later phrase in Romans 1:16, "for the Jew first, and also for the Greek"?
- The text also indicates that Yochanan Mark was with them.
 - How important do you think it was for them to take along someone who had been an eyewitness of the history of Yeshua and his teachings?
- The Apostles travel to Paphos, the capital of Cyprus and meet a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet "whose name was Bar-Yeshua" which literally means "son of Yeshua", not an uncommon name at that time.
 - Would a Jewish false prophet who practiced sorcery be in violation of the Torah?
 - As some kind of court official, how much influence

do you think he had with the proconsul Sergius Paulus.

- According to verse 7, this proconsul was "a man of understanding" and "summoned Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God."
 - Do you think he was genuinely seeking the truth in his wishing to hear their message?
- In verse 8, what was the action of the false prophet, also named Elymas the sorcerer?
 - Spiritual opposition to the gospel message has always been a challenge for ministries.
 - How is this still a real issue in today's world?
 - Is resistance and opposition to the gospel less or more in today's society?
 - According to verse 9, what was the source of Saul's power?
- As an aside, consider the text in verse 9 that states, "Saul, who is also called Paul".
 - As stated previously, Paul had always had two names

given at birth, His Hebrew name Shaul and his Roman name Paulus.

- How does this refute the idea that God "changed his name on the road to Damascus"?
- In verse 10, how did Saul name this false prophet/sorcerer?
 - What did Saul then proclaim upon him?
 - In Saul's words, what was the source of this judgment, from Saul, himself, or from God?
- According to verse 11, what happened to the false prophet?
 - How appropriate and ironic is it for a supposed "prophet" to lose his vision?
- According to verse 12, what was the result of this miracle?
- In verses 13-15, we see Saul and Barnabas traveling to Antioch.
 - Where did they visit?

- What day of the week was it?
- After the customary reading of the Torah and the Prophets, the Apostles were asked to share any word of exhortation.
 - If Saul and Barnabas would have been teaching an anti-Torah message, as is often claimed today, would their teaching have been received by the synagogue leadership?
 - Would they have even offered it?
- Paul shares an in-depth historical review of his Torah-based faith.
 - Do you see any similarities between his historical foundation-based approach with the one he likely heard from Stephen in chapter 7?
 - Paul squarely bases his entire message on the covenant promises God made to the patriarchs. How important is this foundation to our understanding of the gospel message today?
 - Why do you suppose many current preachers tend to ignore this foundation?

- Paul links the offspring of King David to the promised Messiah.
 - In verse 23, when Paul mentions "God has brought salvation", how important is it to realize that the Messiah's actual Hebrew name, Yeshua, means salvation? Does the transliterated form of "Jesus" make the same connection? If not, why continue in that "tradition of men" by ignoring his actual name?
- According to verse 26, who is this word of salvation sent out to?
- Verse 29 refers to the death of Yeshua where it states, "When they had fulfilled all things that were written about him".
 - What was the source of these writings that prophesied about Messiah's death, burial and resurrection?
 - Did the people of that time frame have sufficient Biblical knowledge for them to place faith in Messiah and to experience the new birth? Consider Paul's later examples of the faith of Abraham and the faith of King David in Romans chapter 4.
- According to verse 30, who raised Yeshua up from the

dead?

- Was the proof of His resurrection witnessed by anyone or was it just a story?
- In verse 32, this promise of the "good news" or "gospel" was made to whom?
- According to verse 38, remission of sins is through whom?
- According to verse 39, justification of all things is available to whom?
- Why was justification never available through the rituals of the tabernacle system?
 - They were a necessary part of a temporary cleansing or covering (kaphar/atonement) that allowed the worshipper to stand in the presence of God without being killed but they never imparted complete forgiveness and eternal life.
 - The sacrifices and the priesthood did demonstrate God's method of forgiveness by highlighting the transference of the sinner's identity to an innocent victim to provide atonement. This allows God to

remain just while forgiving.

- It is the ultimate identity of Messiah as the innocent, substitutionary atonement that makes possible such forgiveness and justification as Hebrews 10:4 spells out.
- In verses 42-43, what was the response of the hearers in the synagogue?
 - Do you find that surprising?
 - Do you think a covenant-based, Messiah-centered message of salvation would be so warmly received in non-Messianic Jewish congregations today? Why or why not?
- According to verse 44, what was the overall response to their message in this city?
 - Was everyone happy?
 - Why or why not?
- Remember that these congregations included Jews, converts and seeking gentiles.
 - Why do you think the ethnic gentile element was so

eager to hear more of Paul's message?

- Why do you think the ethnic Jewish element were jealous of the success of Paul?
- What was the response of some of the ethnic Jewish element to Paul's message?
- Since Paul never delineated a "separate path for gentiles" which would support the Rabbinic invention of "ritual conversion" for them, do you think this was viewed as a threat to the ethnic Jewish element's theology of control and domination?
 - It does not appear that the ethnic Jewish component of the synagogues was offended by the gospel message of Yeshua as the resurrected Messiah.
 - It does appear that their objections to Paul's message was seen as a threat to their Jewish "exclusivity" and their theology of ritual conversion of gentiles.
 - Later, in his epistle to the Galatians, Paul again deals with this "Galatian heresy" of requiring ritual conversion of gentiles as a requirement to salvation. Apparently, some theologians can be quite stubborn and recalcitrant in refusing correction.

- Do you see any parallels between these legalistic teachers and Bible teachers and theologians of today who are equally stubborn and resistant to the clear teaching of the word of God?
- According to verse 46, what was the response of Paul and Barnabas?
 - Paul cites Isaiah 49:6 in which God speaks to Messiah in setting the wider field of His mission to include gentiles.
- According to verses 48-49, what was the outcome of their ministry in the region of Galatia?
- According to verse 50, what did the ethnic Jewish element do and what effect did that have on the ministry of Paul and Barnabas?
- How does verse 52 describe the resultant experience of the disciples?

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter 14

- In verse 1, when the Apostles visited the city of Iconium, how effective was their ministry there?
- In verse 2, where did resistance come from and what was the result?
- In verse 3, how did their "persistence against resistance" work out for them?
 - Is your boldness "in the Lord" or in the strength of your own flesh? What's the difference?
- In verses 4-7, was everyone receptive to the gospel message?
 - How does this reflect what Yeshua stated when he said in Matthew 10:34, "Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword."?

- Does the current proclamation of the gospel still produce similar results?
- In verses 6-18, we see Paul and Barnabas ministering to the gentile crowd in the city of Lystra.
 - Previously, they had preached in local synagogues, but here perhaps there wasn't one.
- In verse 8, how is the crippled man described?
 - Compare this to the crippled man who was healed in Acts 3.
- In verse 9, how did Paul "see" that this crippled man "had faith to be made whole"?
- What happened in verse 10?
- In verses 11-13, what was the reaction of the multitude who witnessed this event?
 - Do you think their pagan background was the context of their misunderstanding regarding the source of the healing and the identity of Paul and Barnabas?
 - Do you think the Apostles had a greater challenge when preaching to gentiles who were ignorant of the

Torah?

- Is ignorance of the Torah still a problem today when teaching people about the faith?
- How important is it for people today to fully understand the foundational teachings of a Torah-based faith?
- Have gentile believers today ever mixed Biblical faith with pagan practices and/or teachings?
- In verses 14-17, Paul and Barnabas tried to appeal to these pagans by appealing to the natural revelation of the created order.
 - His later attempts to do this in Athens were largely unsuccessful due to the lack of Torah foundation in his hearers.
- In verse 18, it demonstrates that even their attempts to communicate "hardly stopped the multitudes from making a sacrifice to them."
 - There are many stories of modern and past missionaries who have related similar stories regarding the difficulty of communicating the gospel message.

- Are there sub-groups within our society that seem to have similar language and cultural barriers to a proper understanding of the gospel?
- In verse 19, we see the militant, unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium pursuing Paul and Barnabas to harass and intimidate them.
 - To what do you attribute such intense hatred and desire to persecute?
 - These same multitudes who were ready to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods, were now persuaded to stone them. How do you account for such a fickle response?
 - What was the end result of their persecution for Paul?
- In verse 20, we see that Paul rose up and entered the city.
 - It is not recorded, but do you think some of the inhabitants there might have been shocked to see him, since they assumed he was dead?
 - Paul and Barnabas moved on to Derbe, a town in the other direction.

- In verses 21-23, we see Paul and Barnabas have success in Derbe. They then decide to return to previous missions in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.
 - What reason is given for their desire to return to these congregations?
 - Is there wisdom in following the Apostolic example of appointing a "plurality of leadership" in local congregations?
 - What is the downside of having a single, authoritative figure in charge of a congregation? Is it even Biblical?
 - Some modern missionary efforts have been criticized by focusing only on "getting people saved" and lacking a significant follow-through to ensure growing to maturity. How can the example of Paul and Barnabas serve to inform us of their wisdom?
- In verse 24-28, Paul and Barnabas completed their missionary campaign and returned home to Antioch, where they began.
 - Why do you think it was important for the ones who sent them out to hear of their exploits?

- Luke makes a point to state that not only did they report "all the things that God had done with them", but also "that he had opened a door of faith to the nations".
 - How significant was it that this gospel message was also available to the gentiles?
 - Throughout their travels, the main issue that many Jews had with their message was apparently not the claim of Yeshua being the Messiah of Israel or that forgiveness of sins was possible through His name. The intense, and sometimes violent, response had much more to do with their teaching against the man-made Rabbinic requirement of ritual conversion of gentiles to become a proper member of the covenant. How does this set the stage for the main issue in the next chapter of Acts?

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter 15

- In Acts 15, we see the issue of gentile inclusion reach a boiling point and we also see the resolution of that tension. The findings of the early Jerusalem council act as a baseline of understanding and should resonate throughout the centuries as the definitive ruling on the issue. It is perhaps the capstone of the issue for the early Messianic community. Unfortunately, many modern theologians and Bible teachers are not content with this original Spirit-led wisdom and continually challenge what the Scripture actually states. Let us not follow that path but seek to understand what the text actually says. It is critically important to keep “the issue” correctly in focus as we proceed through the chapter. Many theologians and Bible teachers change the issue into something that was not being addressed. If you answer the wrong question, you will get a wrong result.
- Over the last 14 chapters, Luke has presented us with

a progressive history of the expansion of the gospel message to Jews, then to Samaritans and finally to gentiles. Consider how this is a fulfillment of the following Scriptures:

- Matthew 28:19,20
- Luke 24:47
- Acts 1:8
- In Acts 14:26-28, we found the Apostles had returned to Antioch, their starting point for their travels.
- In Acts 15:1-2, we learn of some men who came down from Judea, referring to Jerusalem.
 - What were they teaching?
 - Were they referring to “how much Torah is applicable to gentiles”?
 - Was their “issue” related to the salvation of the gentiles?
- The “issue” at hand was whether a gentile could be “saved” without undergoing the Rabbinic invention of ritual conversion, culminating in circumcision.

- Is there any Scripture, anywhere in the Torah, that would support their theology and practice?
- According to verse 2, were Paul and Barnabas in agreement with their view?
- How did the men of Antioch decide to resolve this issue?
- According to verse 4, when Paul and Barnabas and a few others arrived in Jerusalem, what was their reception like?
- Verse 5 describes a sub-set of the community in Jerusalem.
 - What sect were they attached to?
 - Were they believers in Yeshua?
 - What was their position regarding gentile inclusion?
 - Based on the above, is it possible for people today to be “believers”, yet be under the sway of other “traditions of men” that are shown to be in conflict with the Scriptures?
- Verse 6 states, “The emissaries and the elders were gath-

ered together to see about this matter”.

- What was “this matter” the text refers to?
- Did “this matter” have anything to do with how much of the Torah is applicable to gentiles or was it the stated “issue” in verse 1?
- Verse 7 states that “there had been much discussion”.
 - It would be fascinating to have all that “much discussion” recorded for us to review and ponder upon. Unfortunately, we do not. Let us be content and limit ourselves to “what is written” and avoid speculation.
- According to verse 7, Peter rose up to speak.
 - Peter recalls the prior incident of the gentile Cornelius and his family all coming to faith, as recorded in Acts 10.
- In verse 8, Peter states that “God, who knows the heart, testified about them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just like He did to us”.
 - Does his use of the phrase, “just like He did to us”,

imply a sameness or a difference?

- In verse 9, he further states, “He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.”
 - Is Peter affirming a “separate path for gentiles” or is he refuting such a notion?
 - Is anyone’s heart cleansed by faith or by some other means?
- Verse 10 refers to a “yoke” being placed on their necks.
 - Within Rabbinic Judaism, the word “yoke” refers to the “whole Torah”, which includes the Oral Torah, the Rabbinic man-made traditions and rulings.
 - Peter is contrasting this was simple faith in Yeshua as the only requisite for salvation, Jew or gentile.
- In verse 11, how does Peter resolve the answer to the original “issue” at hand?
 - How does the phrase “just as they are” act as the exclamation point on his argument?
- Verse 12 states, “All the multitude kept silence, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul reporting what signs and

wonders God had done among the nations through them”.

- What do you make of the parties to the issue remaining silent and listening?
- How difficult is it today to get arguing parties to remain silent and listen?
- What do you think was the effect on the hearers of all those adventures of Paul and Barnabas that we have read about in the last few chapters?
- In verse 13, we see Jacob (Yaakov), the Lord’s brother and leader of the Jerusalem council, stand and introduce an opinion for them to consider and vote on to resolve the issue at hand.
 - What was the issue, again? See verses 1 and 5.
- In verses 14-18, Jacob gives a Scriptural basis for this inclusion of the gentiles from Amos 9:11,12.
 - Jacob is stating that the Kingdom of the House of David will be rebuilt and that all the nations (gentiles) that God has favorably dealt with will bear His name and be included.

- The gentiles that Paul and Barnabas and Peter have all witnessed regarding represent those gentiles who call on the name of the Lord.
- Verses 19-20 record the decision by the council to the “issue” question raised in verse 1 about gentiles needing to undergo ritual conversion “to be saved”. Jacob begins his judgment statement with “that we don’t trouble those from among the gentiles who turn to God”. Other translations say, “that we should not make it difficult”.
- As a criterion for salvation, why is it important to not “make it difficult”?
- Are there examples today of variations of the gospel message that “add to” the message with legalistic interpretations? Why is this wrong?
- Can it ever be true that adding to the gospel message is not, in effect, subtracting from it?
- Verse 20 lists four specific minimum requirements that the council should adopt in relation to Jewish/gentile relations.
 - To abstain from the pollution of idols.

- From sexual immorality.
- From what is strangled.
- From blood.
- They obviously did not believe this list, or any list of requirements, should be added to the criterion for a valid salvation experience.
 - Does this list provide some kind of blanket exemption for the gentiles from participating in any of the rest of the Torah?
- These four requirements have their basis in Jewish/gentile table fellowship. Remember that the gentiles being referred to here are largely coming to faith directly from paganism and they have little to no knowledge about the Torah. These four requirements have everything to do with pagan practices at the local temples. Gentiles coming to faith had to have some minimum understanding of these prohibitions, not to “get saved” but because they “were saved” by faith and needed to interact at the synagogue to learn more.
- Verse 21 finalizes the reasoning of the Jerusalem council by stating, “For Moses from generations of old has in

every city those who proclaim him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath”.

- The word “For” links this as the reasoning of the previous statements.
 - Referring to Moses means referring to the Torah, as this is read every Sabbath.
 - The overall wisdom of the council is that, once some minimum standards to allow Jewish/gentile fellowship are established, these new gentile believers will be in attendance at the synagogue every Sabbath to hear the rest of the Torah and grow in their Torah-based faith.
 - There is a logic to the sequence here. Faith comes first, followed by growing in maturity and observing the Word of God. The council is applying the wisdom of “not putting the cart before the horse” and demanding observance of Torah or Rabbinic inventions as a requirement to salvation. As noted by the Apostles themselves, that does not work for Jew or for gentile.
- According to verse 22, what was the reaction of the

assembly to this resolution to the initial “issue” from verse 1?

- What did they do?
- Verses 23-29 record the text of the official letter sent by the leadership of the Jerusalem council.
 - To whom was the letter addressed?
- The letter acknowledged that “some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the Torah.’ to whom we gave no commandment.”
 - Why do you think it was important for the council to acknowledge the error of this previous teaching and to distance themselves from any connection with these teachers?
 - How does legalistic teaching “trouble and unsettle” the soul?
- The text states that the council had “come to one accord”.
 - How important is to be “in one accord” in matters of

essential questions of the faith?

- How difficult is that today?
- Is it even possible?
- In verse 30, Paul and Barnabas and other chosen representatives from Jerusalem, brought the letter to the congregation in Antioch.
- In verse 31-35, what was the reaction there?
- In verses 36-41, we see Paul wanting to take Barnabas and revisit their previously established congregations in the area.
 - Who did Barnabas want to take along?
 - Why did Paul object?
 - What happened between Paul and Barnabas?
 - Where did they each ultimately go?
- Was the rift between Paul and Mark permanent? Consider the following Scriptures:
 - Philemon 1:24

- Colossians 4:10
- 2Timothy 4:11

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter 16

- In this chapter we are introduced to Timothy, the young disciple that Paul took under his wing.
- In verse 1 we learn that Timothy was “the son of a Jewess who believed, but his father was a Greek”.
 - According to the prevailing Jewish tradition that was extant in that time period, Timothy would not have been considered Jewish, because his father was a gentile. The standards of that era followed what is referred to as “patrilineal descent”, meaning Jewishness was determined solely through the father.
 - The very fact that Timothy had not been circumcised as a baby was proof of his status as a gentile.
 - The Rabbinic definition switched after the second temple times to what is referred to as “matrilineal descent”, meaning through the mother. Current Rab-

binic definition in Israel, at least among the Orthodox, follows this definition. Most Reform and Messianic Jewish congregations recognize Jewishness being established from either parent, as it should be. Further clarification on this issue can be found in my previous book, “Sacred Cows”.

- Verse 2 states that, “The brothers who were at Lystra and Iconium gave a good testimony about him”.
 - Apparently, Timothy had a solid upbringing which resulted in his strength of faith and outward character.
- Later in 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul writes, “having been reminded of the sincere faith that is in you, which lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, in you also”.
 - Recalling that Paul had previously ministered the gospel there in his last trip to Lystra, perhaps Lois and Eunice had come to faith in Yeshua at that time.
 - What do we learn here regarding the impact of living in a faith-filled home?
- Also, in 2 Tim 3:14,15 Paul writes, “But you remain

in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them. From infancy, you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Messiah Yeshua”.

- Consider Timothy’s godly upbringing by his mother and grandmother.
- What was the body of Scripture that Paul is referring to here? What is later called the “New Testament” had not been written yet! Only the Tanach, what is referred to as the Old Testament, was extant at this time, yet Paul clearly states that these Scriptures “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Messiah Yeshua”.
- In chapter 15 of Acts, we learned the wisdom of the Jerusalem council that concluded that gentiles coming to faith in Messiah did not need to undergo the Rabbinic invention of ritual conversion to Judaism, the centerpiece of which was circumcision.
 - According to verse 3, why did Paul have Timothy circumcised? Was it not that, because he was regarded as a gentile, that he would not have had credibility as

a teacher in the synagogues?

- Obviously, Paul did not have an issue with applying the Torah-based instruction regarding circumcision when it was correctly applied as a “sign of the covenant” and not the later incorrect misuse of it as an “entrance rite” to the covenant and “conversion ritual” for gentiles.
- According to verses 4 and 5, the Apostles continued their journeys through various cities.
 - What was part of the content they delivered to the assemblies? Would it have included the letter referenced in the last chapter regarding the issue of gentile inclusion?
 - Who authored it and why was that important?
 - What was the result of their receiving these decrees?
- In verses 6 and 7, we see the Holy Spirit directing the Apostles in their movements.
 - What do you make of the Holy Spirit “forbidding them to speak the word in Asia” or “not allowing them” to go into Bithynia?

- How do verses 9 and 10 resolve this question for us?
- When God is guiding us, is it sometimes difficult to initially understand His will?
- Paul and his company did not find a synagogue within the city of Philippi. He did find a gathering of gentile women praying by a riverside on the Sabbath.
 - The description in verse 14 of Lydia as “one who worshipped God” is elsewhere translated by the term “God-Fearer”, a technical term for a gentile who was seeking the God of Abraham but had not yet submitted to the Rabbinic forms of ritual conversion, which included special prayers, instruction, a ritual immersion and, for the males, circumcision.
 - Lydia and her household were the first to receive the gospel in Philippi.
 - How was Lydia’s heart prepared to receive the gospel?
 - What was her response to Paul’s message?
- In verses 16-18 we are introduced to the fortune telling slave girl having “a spirit of divination”.

- What was her message as she followed Paul and company for many days?
- Was her message technically true?
- What was Paul's response and action?
- Why do you think Paul would not want any linkage between his ministry and this girl's prophetic utterances?
- Do you think Paul was following the example of Yeshua in not accepting testimony from demons?
- In verse 19, we learn the responses of the slave girl's owners to her having been released from demonic possession.
 - Were these owners joyful and full of compassion to see the girl's deliverance or were they only selfishly reactive to their loss of income through her sorcery?
 - What does that tell you about these men?
- In verse 20 we see the charge against them of "being Jews".
 - Is being Jewish a crime?

- Is it a crime in our day and age?
- How do we account for such anti-Semitic bigotry in our “advanced culture” today?
- Has society really changed all that much?
- According to verses 22-24, what happened to Paul and Silas?
 - Did “cooler heads prevail” when the rest of the population spoke up?
 - Did the official “magistrates” uphold a righteous standard of law and order, presumption of innocence, a fair trial, right to cross examine and deliberation by a jury of their peers?
 - Were the actions of the mob and the magistrates lawful, even under Roman law?
 - What are we to make of our current culture where anti-Semitic mob actions go unpunished? Is our culture any better?
- According to verse 25, what were Paul and Silas doing?
 - How incredible do you find that?

- Would you be able to remain so focused and steadfast in the same or similar situation?
- Do the events described in verse 26 explain why, in verse 27, the jailer was “about to kill himself”?
 - Can you imagine what the punishment was, under Roman law, for a jailer to have his prisoners escape?
- What was Paul’s response in verse 28?
- What effect did this experience have on the jailer, according to verses 29-30?
- What was Paul’s message to him, according to verses 31-32?
- According to verses 33-34, what was the response of the jailer? What did he do?
- In verses 35-36, the magistrates decided to send word and to have Paul and Silas released and to “go in peace”.
 - What was Paul’s response in verse 37?
 - According to Roman law, as Romans themselves, Paul knew their public beating without a trial was an unlawful act against them. His demands for their

accountability caused quite a stir.

- According to verses 38-39, what was the reaction of the magistrates upon learning Paul and Silas were Roman citizens?
- According to verse 40, after seeing the believers at Lydia's house, they were encouraged and departed.

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter 17

- In verses 1-2, we see Paul entering a Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica where he reasoned with them on three Sabbaths.
 - It is important to note the phrase, “as was his custom”. What does this say regarding Paul’s observance of the Sabbath?
- Verse 2 states that he “reasoned with them from the Scriptures”.
 - What were the Scriptures he used?
 - What was the content of the message that he demonstrated from those Scriptures?
 - What does this say about the value of those Scriptures and their ability to establish the gospel message?

- According to verse 4, how effective was his message?
 - It appears that Paul had greater success with bringing in a large number of God-fearing gentiles than with the Jewish population.
- According to verse 5, were these “unpersuaded Jews” acting in line with civility and grace or something else?
- What do you make of the phrase describing the Apostles as, “These who have turned the world upside down”?
 - How was the gospel message seen as an upending of people’s pet theologies and philosophies and counter to the cultural norms of the day?
 - If the gospel message was at odds with cultural norms almost 2,000 years ago, how much more so is that true today?
 - These troublemakers sought to continue their persecution of the believers through the prevailing Roman legal system. How is such “lawfare” being used today in our own culture, rather than dealing with a fact-based dialogue and honest debate?

- According to verse 10, Paul and Silas were forced to escape to Berea to avoid further persecution.
- In verse 11 we see that the Jewish people in the Berean synagogue are described as “more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”
 - How important is “teachability” in terms of understanding?
 - What were the Scriptures that these noble Bereans examined?
 - How foundational to faith is that particular body of Scripture?
 - Can you envision a time when that particular body of Scripture would no longer hold authority as the standard of faith? If so, what does that mean for the continuity and permanence of our faith?
 - If these noble students of the Word had found a discrepancy between Paul’s teaching and the written Scriptures, would they have continued to receive his teaching?

- Paul's claims were checked against this standard, how important is it for today to use the same standard to test the claims of current theologians and Bible teachers?
- If the teaching and theology of modern Bible teachers is not in line with this same standard, what should be our response?
- According to verse 13, the Jews of Thessalonica who had previously troubled Paul and Silas were not content to leave them alone after they had left. As soon as they heard of their work in Berea, they came there to cause further trouble.
 - The text records that he left Silas and Timothy behind to continue teaching the congregation hoping that his departure would draw away the focus of the agitators.
 - Why do you suppose there was so much fleshly hostility directed to Paul?
 - Do you see similar reactive hostility to the gospel message today?
- In verse 16, we see Paul arriving in Athens, a prominent

city wholly devoted to the pantheon of Greek gods and a cosmopolitan center of many competing ideologies and philosophies.

- How does that description fit many of our modern cities and educational institutions today?
- What was the cause of Paul's spirit being provoked within him?
- Do you have a similar reaction to seeing idolatry in our own modern culture?
- Paul attempted to channel his inner provocation into action.
 - What did he do?
 - Did he restrict his activities to the synagogue only?
 - The "Epicurians" were largely focused on indifference that led to self-indulgence.
 - The "Stoics" were largely focused on a discipline of self-denial of pleasure.
- According to verses 19-20, were these philosophers eager to hear more from Paul?

- What did they do?
- How does verse 21 explain their interest?
- In his previous teaching within synagogues, Paul had the advantage of a common source of authority, namely the Torah, upon which to base his claims regarding Yeshua and the gospel. There was a wealth of information to draw upon to establish a basis for his message. When attempting to communicate directly with the pagan world, he had no such “common ground” of agreement.
 - How prepared are you to be able to “contextualize” the gospel message so that your hearers can comprehend the essential message?
- Paul’s attempt to communicate the concepts of the Transcendence and natural revelation about God was designed to create a logical basis for his gospel message. He did not directly attack their systems of belief but tried to find points of commonality.
 - How is that a good example for us to follow as we attempt to bridge the culture gap when sharing the gospel?

- When people feel attacked, do they generally become more or less defensive?
- As people become more defensive, how open are they to further open and honest discussion?
- In verse 28, Paul quotes two pagan philosophers, Epimenides and Aratus.
 - How important might this have been to his hearers to realize he was conversant with their understanding and culture?
 - Can we see the value of Paul's education, under Gamliel, which included Greek language, culture and philosophy?
 - Does a basic knowledge of what other people believe assist us in communicating?
- In terms of overall effectiveness, despite his noble attempts to "contextualize" his message, his efforts were largely unsuccessful.
 - Despite what the numbers may conclude, there were some present who came to faith.

- Should we be discouraged by a lack of favorable response to our message, or should we take encouragement from the few that do come to believe?
- What does this say to modern evangelistic efforts that seem to over-emphasize the “numerical” value of their success?

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter 18

- In verses 1-4, we see Paul arriving in the major city of Corinth, a city steeped in pagan religion. It did possess a number of Jews and a synagogue, however, due to Claudius expelling them from Rome. He found someone of the same trade so he could work to provide for his needs.
 - How important was it to Paul that he does not make financial demands for support from congregations? See 2 Cor 11:8-9.
 - Is there wisdom from Paul that can apply today?
- How did Paul spend his time on the Sabbath?
- Paul experienced much success in his ministry in the synagogue, so much so, that the Jewish element became reactive and opposed him.

- Do you see a pattern emerging regarding Paul's ministry in various locations?
- He has some success and that triggers resistance from those who feel threatened by his message.
- Does resistance to your proclamation of the gospel indicate that your communication is somehow faulty, or does it indicate that you are "hitting the mark" by evoking such reactions?
- In verse 6, apparently Paul had had enough of the attacks and decided to move on to a new focus group, namely, gentiles.
 - His statement, "From now on, I will go to the gentiles!" should not be understood as an absolute statement but was limited to that particular group of Jews. Later, we see him ministering in Ephesus to Jews and gentiles.
- According to verse 7, where did Paul go to next?
- According to verse 8, what happened to the leader of the synagogue Paul had just left?
 - How do you think the remaining unbelieving Jews

have felt about Paul “sheep stealing”, including their synagogue leader, and setting up a competing congregation right next door?

- According to verses 9-11, how was Paul encouraged to remain and teach there?
 - How long did he stay there teaching?
 - What was the content of his teaching? Recall that the only extant written word of God was the Tanach which includes the Torah. The Apostolic writings, later referred to as the “New Testament”, did not yet exist.
 - Given that most of the members of this congregation were gentiles, can it truly be said that they were not taught the Torah?
 - If Paul was against the continuation of the Torah as authoritative for believers in Yeshua, as is often suggested, would this have made any sense?
- In verses 12-13, we see the unbelieving Jews unifying in their opposition to Paul’s ministry and attempting to stop him with appeals to the pagan court system.

- This type of “lawfare” involving politicizing and weaponizing the justice system to silence an opponent is seen in our day as well.
- According to verses 14-16, before Paul could speak, he was interrupted by Gallio, the civil judge.
 - What was the judge’s preemptive decision?
 - In today’s legal procedure, this might be viewed as a bench motion to reject the case as there was no civil or criminal case to answer for but merely questions of a religious nature, to which the court had no interest in addressing.
- According to verse 17, what happened to Sosthenes, the new ruler of the synagogue who had replaced Crispus after he had come to faith in Yeshua and left with Paul?
 - Do you think this may have been because the court felt their time had been wasted or in reaction to Sosthenes attempting to use the legal system to his own ends?
- In verse 18 it is recorded that Paul shaved his head, for he had a vow.

- This could only be the Nazarite vow as detailed in Numbers 6.
- The head was shaved at the start of the time period of the vow and shaved again at the completion, with the length of hair representing the time duration of the vow. The hair was offered as a sacrifice in the temple. We see later in Acts 21 Paul's attempt to fulfill this.
- If Paul was against the continuation of the Torah as authoritative for believers in Yeshua, as is often suggested, would this have made any sense?
- In verse 19, we see Paul arriving at Ephesus.
 - Where did he go?
 - To whom did he minister?
- In verse 20, does it appear that Paul experienced a more receptive crowd than he had in Corinth?
- According to verse 21, what was his reason for needing to depart?
 - The text does not specify which feast Paul was desiring to keep but the Torah lists three pilgrimage

feasts to be kept in Jerusalem, Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot.

- If Paul was so desirous to keep this Torah-based feast, is it fair to claim that Paul was “against the Torah”?
- His statement that, “I will return again to you if God wills”, is a common sentiment and acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God. Ancient and modern Judaism uses the phrase “B’Ezrat Hashem”, meaning “with the help of God”. Also, see James 4:13-15.
- In verses 22-23, we see Paul making the rounds of previously established congregations, following the example of a true shepherd caring for the flock.
- In verses 24-26, who came to Ephesus preaching the gospel?
 - What was his background?
 - Apparently, this man had been working independently and unconnected to the Jerusalem congregation.
 - Since the text states he was already accurately and forcefully declaring the gospel with great fervor in

the Spirit, we recognize his ministry as valid.

- What, according to verse 25, was the only issue in which he was apparently lacking?
- It is a point of accuracy to include the ritual of immersion into Messiah but not as a prerequisite to salvation.
- What did Priscilla and Aquila do to help him complete his understanding?
- Did they offer this counsel publicly or privately? Why do you think that was wise?
- In verses 27-28, we see the ministry of Apollos continue with much effectiveness.
 - What was the body of Scripture that he used to prove Yeshua was the Messiah?
 - Paul acknowledged the ministry of Apollos in 1 Cor 4:6 and also in 1 Cor 16:12.

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter 19

- In verses 1-7 we discover a curious story involving Paul meeting with some “disciples” whose theology was incomplete.
- In verse 2, the text is usually translated as, “He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They said to him, “No, we haven’t heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”
 - This and similar translations often miss the point. It sounds like they were unaware of the existence of the Holy Spirit. How is that possible as the Holy Spirit is mentioned throughout the Tanach?
 - It is best understood as a statement referring to the prophesied manifestation of the Holy Spirit as was promised to the disciples in Jerusalem. As this group of disciples of John, the Baptist, were removed from

the Jerusalem assembly, it stands to reason that their understanding and experience were also removed.

- It is also important to recall that John, the Baptist, did not have a full understanding of the identity of the Messiah until years into his ministry when Yeshua came to be baptized by him. These disciples of John, although professing faith, needed to have a complete understanding and full experience.
- How important do you think it was to these believers to have this added knowledge and experience of the Holy Spirit?
- How did this validate their faith experience in the eyes of Paul?
- In verse 8, we see Paul engaging in dialogue in the synagogue and speaking boldly for three months.
 - Some translations describe Paul's style as "arguing" but this has an unnecessarily negative connotation to modern ears. Rabbinic discourse is often in the style of classical "argumentation" but not usually with a heated, emotional meaning. It is more of a type of philosophical discourse and professorial, usually

involving the frequent use of questions and dialogue.

- If Paul had been engaging in fleshly arguing, would his listeners have tolerated him for three months?
- According to verses 9-10, were all his listeners tolerant and teachable?
 - What was the cause of their issue?
 - What did they do?
 - What wisdom did Paul show in how he responded to this resistance?
 - How long did Paul continue there and what was the end result?
 - Did Paul minister to both Jews and gentiles?
- In verses 11-12, the text explicitly states that, “God worked special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out.”
 - Does the text imply that Paul “laid hands on these special cloths and anointed them to be used for mira-

cles”? This has been a favorite practice among today’s “faith-healers” and charlatans who often offer similar items for a “seed-faith contribution of money”.

- The text says that these items “were carried away from his body”, likely implying that others did this.
- Regardless, it clearly states that there were many bone fide miracles, and that God was behind them.
- In a city like Ephesus, wholly given over to idolatry and the pursuit of magical arts, how important do you think this exhibition of power was to validate Paul’s message?
- In verses 13-16, we see a band of Jewish exorcists plying their trade and, like Simon with the “laying on of hands” in Acts chapter 8, thought they could simply add “the name of Yeshua” to their bag of magical tricks.
 - Given that the name “Yeshua” was not an uncommon Jewish name, these exorcists had to be specific by saying, “We adjure you by Yeshua whom Paul preaches”.
 - How did the evil spirit respond to the attempts by the exorcists?

- Perhaps this experience of rebuke was implying that these exorcists did not possess authority to claim anything in the name of Yeshua.
- According to verse 17, what was the end result of their embarrassing experience?
 - Does this speak to the sovereignty of God overriding the errors of man?
- In verses 18-20, how was the ministry of Paul enlarged?
 - What did these people do?
 - Why do you suppose there was a need for a public “book burning” of occultic sources?
 - Does this serve as an example for people coming to faith today to make a “clean break” from occultic associations?
 - Why would that be important?
- In verse 23, it states, “About that time there arose no small disturbance concerning the Way”.
 - Do you think that the numbers of people coming to faith and publicly burning their expensive occultic

items might have garnered the attention of the local pagan idol makers? Why would they have been threatened by that?

- When teaching the truth of the Bible and demonstrating how it challenges and refutes pagan practices, is it reasonable to expect resistance and hostility even today?
- If this was true in Paul's day, then how much more strongly do people react today when their man-made traditions based in paganism are shown to be in error?
- How strongly do believers today react when confronted by clear examples of their syncretistic blending of elements of the Bible with pagan traditions?
- In verses 24-27, we learn of such resistance to Paul.
 - Who was Demetrius and what was his trade?
 - How was his trade threatened by Paul's effectiveness in proclaiming the gospel?
 - What did he do to stop the advance of the gospel?

- His appeal to his fellow craftsmen was two-fold. Which do you think was actually more important to him of the two, business or religion?
- In verses 28-34, we see an angry crowd, riled up for action, with a unifying slogan, ignoring the normal path of civil litigation in dispute resolution and starting a riot.
 - Have we seen such behavior in our current society?
 - What does verse 29 indicate regarding the general comprehension of the people regarding what the issue was?
 - Paul wanted to enter the fray, but his friends didn't allow him. Do you think their counsel was wise?
 - What does verse 32 indicate about the understanding of this "mob mentality"?
 - Do we see evidence of the same dynamic occurring in our culture today?
- In verse 33, the Jewish community, not connected with the believers in "the Way", decided to make an attempt to quell the disturbance.

- Do you think this element of the Jewish community in Ephesus believed that the rioters would not distinguish between the believers and themselves?
- In verse 34, it appears that the mob would not listen to anyone who “was a Jew”.
 - Is such wholesale antisemitism still prevalent in our society today?
 - How long did the crowd continue their “temper-tantrum”?
- In verses 35-41, we see the town clerk, probably a Roman appointed mayor or administrative official bringing order to the rioters.
 - What was the essence of his counsel?
 - What were his comments regarding the men who had been unlawfully brought there?
 - His appeal was to turn the energy and focus of the crowd, and especially Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen, to pursue their issues through legal means. He then dismissed the assembly.

- What would have happened if this person tasked with being in charge of the city had been derelict in his duties and failed to promptly correct and dismiss this mob and restore law and order?
- Are there examples in our current society where rioters are allowed to continue committing lawless acts, sometimes involving arson, property damage, assault, battery, rape, murder and other crimes where the assigned officials have been derelict in their duties and have allowed such behavior to continue with reckless disregard for the safety of the citizens?
- What does this suggest about our current society?

Chapter Twenty

Chapter 20

- Verse 1 begins with, “After the uproar had ceased,”.
 - Do you think this was the end of all persecution for Paul and his companions?
 - Do any of us ever get to a place where we can safely let down our guard and believe that “the uproar has ceased”?
 - As long as we are faithfully proclaiming the truth of the Word of God, can we also be certain that we will meet with resistance and persecution?
- How does verse 3 answer the previous question regarding continued persecution?
- According to verse 6, what festival did Paul celebrate while in Philippi?

- Why might it be significant to note this?
- From this reference, can it be fairly stated that Paul was no longer “Torah observant” and thought that the Torah was “done away with”?
- Verse 7 states, “On the first day of the week, when the disciples were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day; and continued his speech until midnight.”
 - Traditional Christianity frequently uses this text to argue that the early “Christians” met on Sunday.
 - It is critical to understand that the word “day” is not in the Greek text, it is inserted by translators. The actual sentence literally states, “On the first of the week”.
 - According to Jewish reckoning of time, a new day begins after sunset, therefore, the above reference indicates Paul is talking about the time after sundown on the weekly Sabbath (Saturday). The fact that he continues preaching until midnight is further evidence of this. It can hardly be argued that Paul held a “Sunday morning service” and preached until

midnight!

- According to verse 8, “There were many lights in the upper room where we were gathered together.”
 - Exodus 35:3 states, “You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day.”
 - The source of the flames would either be those still burning that were set prior to the Sabbath or were lit after the conclusion of the Sabbath after the setting of the sun.
- Verses 9-12 relates the story of Eutychus, whose name means “fortunate”. This young man fell asleep and apparently fell three stories and was taken up dead.
 - Some think that the young man did not actually die. Luke, who recorded the story, was a Physician and stated that “he was taken up dead”. Do you think he was wrong in his diagnosis?
 - If the young man had not died and was brought back to life, why would the text say the others were “greatly comforted”?
 - What did Paul do?

- What was the result?
- What impact do you think this had on their faith and the validity of Paul's ministry?
- Verses 13-16 relate Paul's travel itinerary.
 - According to verse 16, Paul wanted to arrive in Jerusalem to participate in which feast?
 - From this reference, can it be fairly stated that Paul was no longer "Torah observant" and thought that the Torah was "done away with"?
- Verses 17-38 record Paul's farewell address.
 - In verse 19, how does Paul describe his service to the believers?
 - How does verse 20 speak to his response to the trials he endured?
 - According to verse 21, did Paul minister to both Jews and gentiles?
 - In verses 22-23, Paul relates his being "bound by the Spirit" in his direction forward, despite rumors or pending afflictions.

- How is that a model for all believers?
- How does verse 24 provide clarity to us regarding Paul's priorities and values?
- How can we apply the same to our own lives?
- In verse 26, Paul alludes to the responsibility to fully declare the "whole counsel of God".
 - Would this statement of Paul be true if, as is later claimed, he rejected the authority of the Torah?
 - As an aside, this author has always chosen to utilize his personal Bible teaching outlines and Scripture lists when counseling and teaching others. This practice is based on Paul's words here regarding the "best practice" model of "declaring the whole counsel of God" rather than limiting that teaching and counsel to the smaller subset of memorized facts and Bible verses.
- In verses 29-30, Paul warns about false teachers.
 - How does he describe their ethics and tactics?
 - From where do these false teachers emerge?

- Why do you think it is important to recognize this fact?
- Does the claim to be a Bible teacher, theologian, pastor, etc., automatically confer unquestioned authority or are they also subject to the Word of God and accountable to its “teaching, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness” as outlined in 2 Tim 3:16?
- What is the apparent motivation of these false teachers?
- In verses 31-35, how does Paul relate his own work ethic as an example in contrast to these false teachers?
 - What does this ethic say to some in ministry today who appear to have an inordinate affection for money and personal wealth?
- In verses 36-38, we see Paul’s final farewell.
 - What did he do?
 - What was the response of the believers?

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter 21

- In verses 1-6, we find Paul on his way from Ephesus to Jerusalem with a stopover in the city of Tyre.
 - What previously occurred here, according to Matthew 15:21-28? Do you see this as an early indication of a later purposeful outreach to the gentiles?
 - According to verse 4, Paul found disciples there. Do you think this may have been the fruit of Yeshua's prior outreach?
 - How do you feel when you arrive in a strange place and find "fellow believers"?
 - When these disciples warned Paul, through the Spirit, to not go up to Jerusalem, was this the first warning he had? See Acts 20:23.
 - After having spent a week with these believers and

their prayerful sendoff, how do you think this was encouraging to Paul and company?

- In verses 7-8, we see Paul and company at a short stopover but refreshed in spirit by a visit with more believers.
 - Have you ever traveled and stopped in a local congregation for fellowship, even though you didn't know anyone?
 - Isn't it amazing how, as believers, we can visit a congregation of "strangers" and yet experience "instant fellowship"?
- In verses 8-16, we see Paul and company arrive in Caesarea, near to Jerusalem, and stay with Philip and his family.
 - We recall Philip as the traveling evangelist from Acts 8. According to 8:40, he apparently finally settled down from his travels and had a family in Caesarea where we find him.
 - Luke tells of the prophet Agabus arriving. He previously recounted his prophetic ministry in Acts 11:28.

- What did this prophet Agabus say and do?
 - Was he warning Paul not to go on to Jerusalem?
 - According to verse 12, what did Paul's companions think and what was their counsel?
 - According to verse 13, what was Paul's firm response?
 - Is it possible that the reason for this prophecy was not to dissuade Paul from his intentions but to help his companions to understand and have faith when these things actually do occur to Paul?
 - According to verse 14, how did the disciples leave the issue?
 - Is placing our concerns and anxieties in the "will of the Lord" something we simply "tack on" at the end of our prayers or do we really embrace what that means for us?
- In verses 15-17, we see Paul and company and a few others going up to Jerusalem.
 - Traveling to attend a festival in Jerusalem would be

a joyous occasion, involving the singing of many psalms enroute.

- Do you think this communal experience may have helped with their fears about what may lay in store for Paul?
- How were Paul and company received by the brothers in Jerusalem?
- Verses 18-20 records Paul's missionary report to the Elders in Jerusalem.
 - Recall that Paul's previous report in Acts 15 was years prior to this.
 - According to verse 19, how detailed a debrief do you think his report was?
 - What was their response in verse 20?
- Verse 20 contains some interesting things deserving of mention. It includes the statement, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Judeans of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Torah".

- The Greek word “myriad” is normally rendered “ten thousand”.
- The text here states “many” myriads, so multiples of ten thousand are in view.
- The text further states “how many myriads”, so “many” multiples of ten thousand are in view.
- The point is, there may have been 30-40,000 or perhaps more Jewish believers in Jerusalem at that time.
- A final point is that “they are all zealous for the Torah”.
- If, as many church theologians and Bible teachers assert, the Torah was “done away with”, how is it that we find this record of a rather large number of Messianic, Torah-observant Jewish believers in Yeshua at this time, some thirty years or so after Yeshua sent out His disciples?
- In responding to the above question, some have suggested that these early believers were “still in bondage to the law” and had not yet grown in their understanding of grace versus law, as if that could ever be. How is that an unfounded and arrogant response?

Do they truly believe they have knowledge superior to those closest to the original source of “the faith once delivered unto the saints”?

- According to verse 21, what was the rumor that these Jewish believers had heard about Paul’s teaching?
 - Did Paul ever teach Jews to forsake Moses, referring to the Torah?
 - As recounted so far in the book of Acts, what was the consistent content of Paul’s teaching in all the congregations of Jews and gentiles he ministered in?
 - Did Paul ever teach Jews to forsake circumcision?
 - Didn’t he even circumcise Timothy, who would have been considered a gentile by the standard theology of the day?
 - Did Paul ever teach Jews to forsake traditions and customs that were not in violation of the Torah?
 - Why is it important to understand that Paul’s epistles to the Romans and Galatians had already been written prior to this incident?

- In those epistles, his words have often been twisted into an anti-Torah theology, when, in fact, he was merely teaching against a legalistic misuse of the Torah.
- Would Paul teach one thing and then turn around and do the opposite?
- Consider the irony that Paul is standing accused of essentially the same things that Stephen was accused of in Acts 6-7 where Paul stood in approval of the actions against him?
- Further consider the irony of almost 2,000 years of errant Christian anti-Torah theology that essentially agrees with these lies regarding both Stephen and Paul.
- What did the leadership and all the elders decide was the best course of action for Paul to do?
 - Verses 23-24 refer to Paul taking a Nazarite vow plus paying the expenses involved for four others which involved a sacrifice at the Temple.
 - What would such a public display of Torah observance demonstrate to these other Messianic Jews

who had heard these rumors regarding the content of Paul's teaching?

- According to verse 24, the leadership concluded that by Paul following their advice with such a public display of Torah observance, “Then all will know that there is no truth in the things that they have been informed about you, but that you yourself also walk, keeping the Torah”.
 - Does this sound like the leadership knew these charges against Paul and his teachings were false?
 - If they did know these to be untrue statements regarding Paul and his teaching, why do so many theologians and Bible teachers today believe these false statements regarding Paul's teaching to be true?
- In verse 25, the leadership recalled their previous council in Acts 15, which Paul was also present for, regarding gentile inclusion and their universal disregard of the misuse of circumcision as “ritual conversion”. Here they reiterated the basic content of that letter previously sent out to the congregations assuring them of their status as fellow believers, without having to “become Jews”.

- In verse 26, what do we see Paul doing?
 - Do you think it would have been enough for Paul to simply issue a statement or a press release, print a leaflet or participate in a debate to settle the matter?
 - Why do you suppose his strongest statement was related to what he actually did?
- Verses 27-28 describes “some unbelieving Jews from the province of Asia”.
 - What did they do when they saw Paul?
 - Did Paul have previous trouble with unbelieving Jews attacking his message and his person?
 - Does resistance to the proclamation of the gospel ever cease?
- Verse 28 lists the charges they were making against Paul.
 - Did Paul teach against the people?
 - Did Paul teach against the Torah?
 - Did Paul teach against the Temple?
 - Did Paul bring gentiles into the Temple?

- Did Paul defile the Temple?
- Verse 29 explains the false assumption they were making.
- According to verse 30, what was the result of this commotion?
 - Do you see a parallel here with the mob mentality of the crowd Paul dealt with in Ephesus?
- In verses 31-32, what was the crowd attempting to do?
 - Was this action in violation of the very Torah they were accusing Paul of breaking?
 - What did it take to stop the civil disturbance?
- In verse 37, Paul sees an opportunity to make his case to the people.
 - Why do you suppose the commander of the soldiers was surprised to hear Paul speaking Greek?
- In verse 38, who did the commander think Paul might have been?
- How did Paul respond in verse 39?

- Might his background as a Jew from a prominent Greek speaking city explain why he knew the Greek language?
- In verse 40, Paul addressed the people.
 - In what language did he speak?
 - Why was that important?

Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter 22

- In verses 1-2, Paul begins his defense before the people.
- In verses 3-5, Paul relates his pedigree.
 - Did Paul say that he “was” a Jew, as in past tense, or did he say, “I am a Jew”?
 - Why does that distinction make such a difference?
 - Is it even possible to “change” from being a Jew to being a gentile or the other way around?
 - Some modern theologies attempt to assert that Paul discarded his heritage and “became a Christian”. How does that square with his plain assertion here?
 - Paul states his resume to include having been trained at the feet of Gamliel, a leading Pharisee and well known to his hearers. In fact, many in the crowd

probably knew of Paul's training.

- Paul's history as a zealous student "according to the strict tradition of the law of our fathers" further establishes his solid background.
- In verses 4-5, what evidence does Paul give to support his zeal?
- Would this have been public knowledge to the crowd?
- Verses 6-11 recount Paul's story of his dramatic encounter with Yeshua.
 - Upon identifying the source of this great light to be a vision of Yeshua of Nazareth, is there any recorded objections from his hearers?
- In verses 12-16, Paul continues his story of his arrival in Damascus.
 - How is Hananiah described in verse 12?
 - Was Hananiah Torah observant?
 - In verse 14, Hananiah tells Paul that the God of our fathers has appointed him to know three things.

What are they?

- By linking Paul's vision of Yeshua to his "seeing the Righteous One", the Messianic implication is clear. Did Paul's hearers object to this as he spoke?
- Did the counsel for Paul to undergo an immersion in His name elicit any response from his hearers?
- In verse 17-20, Paul relates his having gone into the Temple to pray.
 - If Paul had "taught against the Temple" as was claimed, why would he have gone there to pray?
 - As Paul related his experience of this vision from Yeshua, is there any indication yet of a reaction from the crowd?
 - Paul's acknowledgment of his complicity in the death of Stephen is notable. Do you think Paul thought about the similarity between the charges leveled against Stephen and those against himself?
- In verse 21, what does Yeshua tell Paul will be the focus of his ministry?

- According to verses 22-23, how did the crowd react to this news?
 - According to the text so far, the crowd had been listening to Paul's testimony and experiences.
 - Is there any evidence of a negative reaction to Paul's assertions regarding Yeshua as the Messiah?
 - What was the single issue that caused the crowd to become inflamed and reactive?
 - Was it the gospel of the death and resurrection of Yeshua and His Messianic claim that caused such a reaction or was it the mention of gentile inclusion?
- According to verse 24, how did the Roman officer in charge handle the situation?
 - What did this officer plan to do to obtain the truth?
- According to verses 25-30, we see the culmination of this initial incident.
 - What was the basis of Paul's challenge to this practice?
 - What did the centurion advise the commanding offi-

cer?

- What did he learn from Paul?
- What action did this revelation force the officer to do and what was his mental state?
- What final plan of action did this officer decide to do to resolve the questions surrounding Paul's actions?

Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter 23

- In verse 1 we see Paul standing before the Sanhedrin.
 - What term does he use to address them?
 - Did he consider himself separate from them or part of them?
 - What was his public claim regarding how he had conducted his life to that very day?
 - If he had truly rejected the authority of the Torah, as he was charged with doing, could he have made this statement truthfully?
- In verse 2, what do we see the high priest do?
- What was Paul's response in verse 3?
 - Do you see a parallel here to Stephen's rebuke in Acts 7:53?

- After being informed in verse 4 of the identity of the high priest what was Paul's response in verse 5?
 - As Paul quotes the Torah in Exodus 22:28, does this further establish his commitment to the authority of the Torah?
- In verses 6-9 we see Paul applying the wisdom of the "divide and conquer" strategy.
 - According to verse 6, what did Paul perceive was the "political makeup" of this Sanhedrin?
 - What was the one card he could play to garner support?
 - What did Paul cry out to the council?
 - Did he claim that he "was" or "had been" a Pharisee or that "I am a Pharisee"?
 - Why would his continued identification as a Pharisee be critical to his claims to garner support?
 - If he had disclaimed "being" a Pharisee, would his tactic have worked?
 - Since the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrec-

tion, the existence of angelic beings, heaven, hell or the supernatural world, what does Paul claim that fueled support from the Pharisees?

- What do you think was the motivation of the Pharisees who stood up and publicly supported Paul?
- Due to this wise political maneuvering, Paul had a victory in these proceedings by essentially “splitting the vote” across party lines.
- According to verse 10, was the issue peacefully resolved? What happened?
- According to verse 11, how was Paul comforted?
 - Paul had previously desired to go to Rome and now he saw how his prayers would be answered.
 - As Paul underwent his future trials, how do you think this vision of his destiny would support him and give him courage and direction?
- In verses 12-15, we learn of a plot to kill Paul by a group of lawless conspirators.
 - According to verse 12, what was the level of commit-

ment these conspirators had?

- According to verse 13, how many people were complicit in this conspiracy?
- According to verse 14, who else was complicit?
- What does this say about the level of corruption in the Sanhedrin of that day?
- In verses 16-19 we learn of Paul's nephew's intervention to inform on this conspiracy.
 - What do you make of the wisdom of the commander in listening to the young man "privately"?
- In verses 20-22, the young man accurately relates the details of this conspiracy.
 - In verse 22, why did the officer charge the young man to keep this a secret?
- Being charged with keeping civil order in Jerusalem, why did the officer see the need to disallow such a lawless murder to occur "on his watch"?
 - In verses 23-24, how did the officer quickly respond to this threat?

- In verses 25-35, we see how the story continues.
 - This officer writes a detailed letter to Felix, the governor.
 - In verse 27, he relates the story of how Paul had been seized by the Judeans and almost killed. He also claims that he rescued Paul “having learned that he was a Roman”.
 - How truthful was this account by the officer?
 - Did he leave anything out of his report?
 - Was there anything self-serving in his “spin” of the account?

Chapter Twenty-Four

Chapter 24

- In verse 1 we see Paul brought before the Roman governor, Felix.
 - What do you make of the fact that the prosecutor, Tertullus, “informed the governor against Paul” before Paul was called in?
 - Should any judge hear a prejudiced report about a defendant prior to formal proceedings?
 - What does this say about the ethics of this governor and the integrity of the judicial proceedings?
- In verses 2-4, we read the prosecutor’s opening statement.
 - Does he begin with a fact-based account of the charges against Paul?

- What do you make of this obvious abundance of flattery heaped upon the governor?
- Do you smell politics here?
- According to verses 5-6, what were the actual charges laid against Paul?
 - Was Paul the source of the instigation of insurrections or was it those who opposed him?
 - Did Paul actually profane the Temple?
- According to verse 9, there were Judeans present affirming these charges.
 - According to verse 19, these Judeans were probably not eyewitnesses making these affirmations.
- In verse 10, as Paul addressed the governor, how was his tone was different than the prosecutor's?
- In verse 11, why was it important for Paul to link his claims to the fact that the governor could verify these things?
- What do you make of Paul's defense in verses 12-13?

- This challenge by Paul to show proof of their allegations was a demand for justice.
- According to verses 14-15, what does Paul admit to?
 - “The Way” is a reference to the sect of the Nazarenes, one of many sects within Judaism.
 - In Acts 5:17 the Sadducees are referred to as a sect.
 - In Acts 15:5, the Pharisees are referred to as a sect.
 - According to verse 14, what was Paul’s attitude towards the Torah and the Prophets?
 - If Paul was against the Torah, as is claimed by many theologians and Bible teachers today, does his statement here make any sense?
- According to verse 15, Paul’s “hope toward God” included the belief in the resurrection of the dead.
 - Since the Sadducees rejected belief in the resurrection, can it be said that they believed “all things which are according to the Torah, and which are written in the Prophets” like Paul claimed he did?
 - Based on the above, who was more Torah observant,

Paul or the Sadducees?

- According to verse 16, what did Paul always strive for?
 - How is this a good model for us to follow?
- According to verses 17-18, what was Paul doing and why?
 - If Paul was truly against the Temple, why did he have this desire to bring an offering and to undergo ritual purification to do so?
- According to verse 19, were his accusers of misconduct at the Temple even present to give eyewitness statements in these proceedings?
- In verses 20-21, Paul challenges those present to lay claim to any misconduct committed in their presence.
 - What is the one thing he mentions that he cried out when standing among them?
- According to verse 22, what does Luke record as to Felix's knowledge concerning the Way?
 - What does Felix decide to do with the case against Paul?

- In verse 23, Paul, as a Roman citizen, is given some measure of privileges but remained in confinement.
- According to verse 24, why do you suppose Felix wanted to hear more from Paul?
 - Do you think Felix or his Jewish wife, Drusilla, were curious about his teachings?
- According to verse 25, what was the content of Paul's teaching to them?
 - Did Paul "pull his punches" or offer "cheap grace" to appease them?
 - What was the response of Felix to Paul's message?
- How does verse 26 inform us as to the motivations of Felix regarding his keeping Paul captive?
- How does verse 27 further demonstrate the corruption behind Felix's actions with Paul?

Chapter Twenty-Five

Chapter 25

- In verse 1 we are introduced to Porcius Festus, who replaced Felix as governor.
 - What did the high priest and the principal men of Judea ask of him?
 - According to verse 3, what was their real intent regarding Paul?
 - What was Festus's response?
 - In verse 5, we have the statement of Festus regarding Paul. Does it sound like Festus granted Paul the presumption of innocence?
- In verses 6-7 we see Paul brought before Festus in Caesarea.
 - How does verse 7 characterize the charges that were

brought against him?

- According to verse 8, Paul's response to these charges is recorded.
 - What did he say about the Torah?
 - What did he say about the Temple?
 - What did he say about Caesar?
 - As Paul has made it clear that he is not anti-Torah or anti-Temple, why do so many modern theologians and Bible teachers claim the exact opposite?
 - Shouldn't we believe Paul's own statements?
- According to verse 9, why did Festus ask Paul to go to Jerusalem for further examination?
 - Like it was with his predecessor Felix, do you think politics was involved here as well?
- According to verses 10-11, what did Paul do?
 - As a Roman citizen, Paul had this right of appeal.
 - Do you think he saw this as a way to fulfill his desire to visit Rome as well as the fulfillment of Yeshua's

prophecy to him about his going to Rome?

- According to verse 12, what was the response of Festus?
- In verse 13, we see the arrival of King Agrippa and his wife Bernice.
- In verses 14-15, Festus related the story of how he “inherited” this legal action against Paul from his predecessor. He further explained how he attempted to address the issue.
- According to verse 16, what was the custom of the Romans regarding legal proceedings against a Roman citizen?
- According to verses 18-19, how does Festus characterize the charges that were made against Paul?
- According to verses 20-22, how did this action resolve?
- According to verse 23, how does Luke describe the setting for this hearing of Paul?
 - Considering that King Agrippa and Bernice, along with their retinue and the commanding officers and the principal men of the city were all present, do you

think that Paul might have felt a little intimidated?

- In verses 24-27, Festus presents the reasons for the proceedings.
 - Do you read any exaggeration in his statements?
 - Do you read any self-serving sentiment in his statements?

Chapter Twenty-Six

Chapter 26

- In Matthew 10:18-20, Yeshua tells the disciples, “Yes, and you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the nations. But when they deliver you up, don’t be anxious how or what you will say, for it will be given you in that hour what you will say.”
 - How might these words have comforted Paul as he was standing before King Agrippa and the assembly?
 - How important might this same promise become to us in our days as well?
- In verse 2, Paul states his intention to enter a defense, “concerning all the things that I am accused by the Judeans”.
 - According to Acts 25:8, what were the three things the Judeans charged against him?

- In verse 3, do you think Paul was flattering the king or do you think he knew that King Agrippa really was aware of the issues involved?
- In verses 4-5, Paul makes a claim regarding his public conduct, from his youth up, regarding his strict adherence to the sect of the Pharisees.
 - Would Paul have made this claim if he knew his claim could be challenged?
 - His added statement, “if they are willing to testify”, is a not-so-subtle challenge to his opponents, essentially saying, “Put up or shut up”.
 - How important is the public conduct of our life as we stand as a witness for Messiah?
- In verses 6-8, Paul states the content of the charge against him and puts it in context.
 - Does he state this in terms of some “new Christian teaching” outside the framework of Judaism or does he base this squarely on the Torah?
 - If it is possible for the Jewish fathers and all the

twelve tribes of Israel to believe in the resurrection, why would it not be possible to believe in the resurrection of Yeshua?

- In verses 9-11, Paul relates his history of being on the other side of the issue and the degree of zeal with which he persecuted the believers.
- In verses 12-18, Paul relates his testimony of how Yeshua revealed Himself to him and also promised further revelation.
 - In sharing his testimony, do you sense that Paul is including important segments designed to bring truth and conviction?
 - As Paul is defending himself, do you think he has an eye towards witnessing to his audience?
 - How might this be a good example for us to remember when we find ourselves “under attack” from opposition?
- In verses 19-20, Paul relates how he was faithful to his newly assigned mission to Jews and gentiles alike.
- In verse 21, what does Paul say was the reason behind

his having been seized and threatened in the Temple?

- In verses 22-23, Paul made several claims.
 - According to Paul, where does his help come from?
 - When Paul states that he is testifying, “saying nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said would happen”, does that sound like he is anti-Torah?
 - What theology regarding Messiah does Paul draw from the Prophets and Moses?
- In verse 24, what was the reaction of Festus who was present during Paul’s presentation?
 - Do you think his reaction was a thoughtful response or a fleshly reaction?
 - Is it possible that there was an element of conviction involved that his defense mechanisms were reacting to?
 - Is it reasonable to expect similar reactions from people as we witness to them?
- How does Paul respond in verse 25?

- Are you prepared to “boldly declare words of truth and reasonableness”?
- In verses 26-27, Paul refocuses on King Agrippa.
 - How important is the claim that the passion and resurrection of Yeshua was well known and not something done in secret?
 - How does Paul’s appeal to this very public knowledge add weight to his claim?
 - What body of Scripture does Paul appeal to in support of these Messianic claims?
 - How does this apply to King Agrippa?
- According to verse 28, does King Agrippa know what Paul is talking about and trying to do?
 - Does his awareness of this buttress the idea that Paul was correct in verse 3 about the King’s knowledge?
- In verse 29, Paul broadens his appeal to his entire audience.
 - How have these proceedings changed from being about charges against Paul to being about a convict-

ing gospel message to all those present?

- How is that a good example for us to follow when we are attacked?
- In verses 30-32, we see the resolution to these proceedings.
 - What did they conclude in verse 31?
 - What was King Agrippa's conclusion in verse 32?

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Chapter 27

- As we come to the last two chapters in the book of Acts, we see the record of the travels of the Apostle Paul. Some view this material as necessary but boring. For those of us who have done some sailing, it can be viewed as exciting, perhaps even exhilarating. Either way, it is helpful to plot his travels on a good Bible map to get a sense of the various locations mentioned. From reading the text and seeing the great distances involved, it is not hard to comprehend the dangers and difficulties they encountered.
- For further background, consider Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 11:25, "Three times I suffered shipwreck. I have been a night and a day in the deep." Those experiences had occurred sometime prior to his last recorded voyages here in the book of Acts.
- The voyage begins from the coastal city of Caesarea

under the watch of a centurion named Julius, who was in charge of the prisoners, including Paul.

- In verse 3, how does Julius treat Paul?
- Is this because he knew Paul was a Roman or do you see the hand of God here granting favor to Paul?
- Luke is careful to list all the ports of call during the voyage and describes sailing conditions along the way.
 - How does this add to the authenticity of his report?
- According to verse 8, having reached a place called Fair Havens, they stayed a while.
 - In verse 9, it is recorded, “the Fast had now already gone by.” This can only refer to the traditional Yom Kippur fast. If Paul and company had rejected the Torah, including celebrating the festivals of Leviticus 23, why would this date have mattered and why note it?
 - At this time of year, the seas would be quite rough, as will be proven later. Perhaps this is the reason for Paul’s counsel against further travel by sea.

- According to verses 11-12, what was decided and what was the rationale?
- Their experience at sea changed quickly from a soft south wind to a violent storm.
 - Describe the power of this storm and how it affected their ability to maintain control of their ship.
 - What did they do with the lifeboat?
 - In verse 19, what did they do out of desperation?
 - How important was this equipment to the operation of the vessel?
 - How drastic must have been the situation to take such a measure?
 - How many days had they been enduring this frightening experience?
 - What effect do you think this had on the crew and prisoners?
 - What does verse 20 say about the duration and intensity of this experience for them?

- How disorienting would it have been to be stormed tossed on the open sea and to be without sun or stars?
- In verses 21-22, what was Paul's counsel and prophetic exhortation?
- In verse 23, what does Paul say about the source of his encouragement?
- In verse 24, Paul is reassured of the original mission given him through the vision of Yeshua. How would that have been an encouragement to him?
- In verse 25, Paul boldly declares, "Therefore, sirs, cheer up! For I believe God, that it will be just as it has been spoken to me."
 - Paul grounded his expectation of his future in what he had been told as it originated from God.
 - Can we apply the same application for ourselves as we study His Word?
- According to verse 27, how many days have they been experiencing this terror on the sea?
 - By taking "soundings", the sailors were able to mea-

sure the rise of the sea floor which would mean they were approaching land.

- They had no actual control of the ship at this point so they lowered four anchors from the stern hoping to slow the ship.
- What did the sailors attempt to do in verse 30?
- What did Paul say to the centurion in verse 31?
- What did the soldiers do in verse 32?
- According to verses 33-37, how did Paul encourage the people present?
 - What was the result in verse 36?
 - How many souls are listed in verse 37?
- In verse 39-41, what did they do when they saw a beach?
 - In their attempt to reach the shore, their ship ran aground leaving the stern to be repeatedly beaten by the waves.
- What did the soldiers want to do in verse 42?
- What did the centurion in charge do and why?

- Do you think this centurion had come to respect Paul as he personally witnessed his steadfast faith and encouraging leadership?
- How did they all survive and escape from the shipwreck and get to shore safely?
 - How was their safe arrival on land a fulfillment of what Paul had previously told them?
 - Do you think this shared experience had an impact on their opinion of Paul and his message?

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Chapter 28

- According to verse 1, the shipwrecked crew, soldiers and prisoners arrived on the island of Malta.
 - This was close to 600 miles from their last position at Crete. It would take quite a storm to carry them that far for so many days.
 - Had they missed the island of Malta and continued to be blown westward it would have been disastrous. There were no more places to land for another 200 miles or so until the coast of Tunisia. Without the ship's tackle to control the ship, they would have certainly perished.
 - The site of their landing in Northeast Malta is today called, "St. Paul's Bay".
- According to verse 2, how was their reception as the shipwrecked stragglers arrived on the beach?

- What happened to Paul in verse 3?
- According to verse 4, what did the local people conclude was the reason for this?
- What did Paul do in verse 5?
 - Would you be as calm as Paul is described here?
- According to verse 6, what did these islanders conclude as they saw Paul suffer no ill effects?
- In verses 7-10, we see Paul and company being offered yet more hospitality.
 - In verse 7, who entertained Paul and company for three days?
 - In verse 8, who was sick and what happened?
 - In verse 9, what was the result of this healing?
 - According to verse 10, what was the overall impact the islanders had on Paul and his traveling companions?
 - How encouraging must it have been for them all?
 - What effect do you think this had on the centurion

and the soldiers?

- After three months and a stop in Sicily, they arrived at mainland Italy.
 - According to verse 14, how were they encouraged?
- Word had spread of Paul's arrival, so what happened in verse 15?
 - What was Paul's response?
- What special arrangement for Paul is stated in verse 16?
 - Apparently, special consideration was given to Paul, perhaps because was a Roman citizen.
 - Also, perhaps the testimony of Julius, the centurion who had accompanied Paul, had some influence.
- In verse 17, Paul begins sharing with the Jewish leadership about his previous trials and the false charges leveled against him.
 - What does Paul say about the claims against him?
 - His claims to have done "nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers" would certainly be

untrue if, as he is often misrepresented today, he was anti-Torah.

- In verse 18, what does Paul state was the conclusion that the Roman authorities had reached regarding the charges against Paul?
- According to verse 19, who forced Paul's hand to appeal to Caesar?
- According to verse 20, how did Paul describe the reason that he was in custody?
 - His characterization of the Messianic faith as "the hope of Israel" demonstrates that he saw continuity with this faith as rooted in the Torah, not a contrast that rejected it.
- In verse 21-22, what did the Jewish leadership say to Paul that would have been comforting to him?
 - What does it mean that even though these Jewish leaders had heard nothing but negative reports about "this sect", referring to the Way, they desired to hear directly from Paul?
- According to verse 23, Paul spent an entire day at his

lodgings entertaining these Jewish seekers.

- What was the primary focus of his message to them?
- What was Paul's primary source material for establishing and persuading them regarding the claims of Yeshua?
- If Paul was anti-Torah, as some current theologians and Bible teachers assert, does this passage make any sense at all?
- According to verse 24, what was the result of Paul's ministry to the Jewish community?
 - Whenever the gospel message is shared, there are always some who accept and some who do not.
 - Success is not determined by a quantitative comparison, but by the fact that the message was faithfully declared, leaving the results to God.
- Verse 25 states that "they didn't agree among themselves", which is a polite way of saying they were arguing.
 - This should not be considered a negative outcome.

- The fact that they were “arguing” means they were talking about it, which is ultimately a good thing.
- It is this “planting of seeds” that God can use to produce faith.
- In verses 25-27, Paul quotes the prophetic passage from Isaiah 6:9-10.
 - This was the same passage of Scripture that Yeshua used in Matthew 13 to explain why many did not understand His parables.
 - Yochanon (John the Baptist) also referred to this to explain why some Jewish people had difficulty accepting the message about Yeshua.
 - How do the descriptions of “calloused hearts”, “dull ears”, and “closed eyes” explain why people today often reject the gospel message?
 - Can it be truly said that these descriptions only apply to Jewish people?
- In verse 28, what does Paul say about this gospel?
 - Does the fact that the good news of salvation being

sent to the gentiles mean that it is no longer for the Jews?

- Why do so many current theologians and Bible teachers think that God has abandoned His people, Israel?
- Consider what the Apostle Paul clearly states in Romans 11:1, “I ask then, did God reject his people? May it never be!”.
- Also, consider Paul’s statement in Romans 11:11-12, “I ask then, did they stumble that they might fall? May it never be! But by their fall salvation has come to the gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy. Now if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the gentiles, how much more is their fulness!”
- According to verse 29, “the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves”.
 - Paul faithfully planted the seed of the gospel.
 - Some believed and some did not.
 - He left them with much to discuss among them-

selves for a long time to come.

- They were finally dealing with the gospel and the Messianic claims of Yeshua.
- According to verses 30-31, how long did Paul stay and what did he do?
 - How do you see the grace of God in Paul's life in terms of guidance, provision, granting favor, validating his ministry through miracles and granting him opportunity to advance the gospel message?
- Although Luke's record of Paul ends here, the story of his experience is further related in some of his letters.
 - In Philippians 4:22, Paul writes from Rome, "All the holy ones greet you, especially those who are of Caesar's household". Imagine the influence Paul had during his captivity in Rome!
 - In Philippians 1:12-14 Paul shares, "Now I desire to have you know, brothers, that the things which happened to me have turned out rather to the progress of the Good News, so that it became evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my bonds are in Messiah, and that most of the brothers in the

Lord, being confident through my bonds are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear.”

- Finally, near the end, Paul also writes in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, “For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. From now on, the crown of righteousness is stored up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing.”
- May we all follow in the steps of Paul and remain faithful to the faith. After all, it was Paul who said, “Be imitators of me, even as I also am of Messiah”.
- According to Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel, “A disciple is not above his Master.”

Author Bio

See my previously published work titled "Sacred Cows: Examining the Traditions of Men in the Light of the Word of God" available through Amazon.

I have a vast and varied experience, beginning with a 16-year active-duty career in the United States Navy where I served in many capacities including Avionics, Electronic Warfare, and Espionage systems. I did many tours overseas including having served at Danang Air Base, Vietnam. I then shifted gears and became trained and certified to work in the U.S. Navy's Counseling and Assistance Centers for the majority of my active-duty time. During this period, I was privileged to provide meaningful and in-depth counseling and education to fellow service members struggling with many issues.

After leaving the military, I added several professional certifications as a counselor, instructor, and clinical supervisor and worked in several community counseling agencies. I eventually became a clinical director of counseling programs for criminal

offenders and was on a county and state board. Additionally, I have volunteered as a Mentor with a local Veteran's court to provide guidance and direction to other fellow veterans.

Over the course of many years of study, I was ordained as a Messianic Jewish Rabbi in 2013 at Congregation Bet Shalom v'Emet in Fresno, California under the authority of Rabbi Amnon Shor. He is a native-born Israeli with dual citizenship here in the U.S. His knowledge of Hebrew, the Bible, and the many intricacies of Judaism is amazing. I was blessed to have had the opportunity to study and learn under such a great leader in the Messianic movement. If you ever have the opportunity to visit his congregation in Fresno, California, I personally guarantee you will be blessed beyond measure, challenged in your understanding of the Bible, and filled with a greater appreciation of the Jewish heritage of the faith in Messiah Yeshua. His website is www.betshalomfresno.org. Additionally, he is also on YouTube.