

CONCERNING THE WAY

June 8, 2010

LESSON 104: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



Chapter 27

Acts 27:1-3 When it was decided that we should sail to Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were transferred to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the emperor's division. (2) After boarding a ship from Adramyttium that was about to sail to the ports on the coast of Asia, we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, went with us. (3) The next day we arrived at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and allowed him to visit his friends there and receive any care he needed.

Very late in the summer of A.D. 59 Festus finally gives the order to transport Paul from Caesarea to Rome. Notice that Luke and others went with Paul on a ship along with the centurion Julius and other prisoners, their eventual destination being Rome. Aristarchus joined them, Paul's Thessalonian friend who had accompanied him to Judea (Acts 19:29, 20:4, Colossians 4:10, Philemon 24), probably to be a personal assistant to Paul.

We don't know anything about Julius the centurion, other than how he treated Paul throughout the journey. He gives Paul so much freedom and even defers to him later on during the journey – it makes one wonder if it was more than just the fact that Paul was a Roman citizen. I think Paul may have won this man over, maybe even to belief in Christ.

They boarded the ship in Caesarea and sailed along the Asiatic coast, stopping in Sidon first. Even though Paul was in custody of the Romans, he was being treated very well, even allowed to have friends along with him and to be visited by friends in the ports they stopped in.

Luke's description of the sea voyage, storm and shipwreck in this chapter is very realistic, obviously written by an eyewitness. All scholars agree that its geographical and other references are accurate in description, location and time setting. It has been called the best record of nautical practices from ancient times.

Acts 27:4-6 After putting out from there, we sailed on the sheltered side of Cyprus because the winds were against us. (5) We sailed along the sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia and reached Myra in Lycia. (6) There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy and put us on it.

You can see all these places on the map provided at the end of the lesson. This part of the trip, from Sidon to Myra, was about 440 miles and took about 15 days. It was getting close to wintertime and travel this time of year could be dangerous, but Alexandrian ships made this voyage to Rome all the time and were used to the potential hazards. In fact, the captains and crews of these ships received special bonuses and insurance for sailing this time of year.

Acts 27:7-8 We sailed slowly for a number of days and with difficulty arrived off Cnidus. Then, because the wind was against us, we sailed on the sheltered side of Crete off Cape Salome. (8) Sailing past it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

Apparently the wind was so strong they were unable to sail straight west to Italy from Asia, so they had to sail south to Crete, going around the southern side of the island where they were somewhat sheltered from the constant buffeting of the winds.

Acts 27:9-11 Much time had been lost, and because navigation had become dangerous and the day of fasting had already past, Paul began to warn those on the ship, (10) "Men, I see that during this voyage there will be hardship and a heavy loss not only of the cargo and ship, but also of our lives." (11) But the centurion was persuaded by the pilot and the owner of the ship and not by what Paul said.

The "day of fasting" refers to the Jewish Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. In the year 59 A.D., Yom Kippur fell on October 5th, so it was already a very dangerous time of year to be making a sea crossing. The Mediterranean Sea was known to be very hazardous from September 14 on, and no ships dared sailed at all from November 12 through February 7. There's no way they could get to Italy now before that time, so they had to find a place to spend the winter. The pilot and owner of the ship apparently didn't think Fair Havens was a good place to winter, and wanted to push on 40 miles further west to Phoenix, a more secure harbor.

Paul has the gift of prophecy, so they should have listened to him. However, he was probably just speaking from experience, as he had been through several shipwrecks before and probably didn't look forward to going through another one! It is interesting that Paul, even though he is under arrest, will be the one to guide all of the people on board this ship through the dangers of the storm and shipwreck, showing them clearly that God is with Paul and is protecting him. Luke slows down and gives the details of this story, which is very dramatic.

Acts 27:12-13 Since the harbor was not a good place to spend the winter, most of the men favored putting out to sea from there on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix and spend the winter there. It is a Cretian harbor that faces southwest and northwest. (13) When a gentle breeze began to blow from the south, they thought they could make it to Phoenix, so they hoisted anchor and began sailing along the shore of Crete.

As you can see by the map, they were trying to get as far west as they could before they had to stop for the winter. It seemed like a good decision at first, but trouble came quickly...

Acts 27:14-17 But it was not long before a violent wind (called a northeaster) swept down from the island. (15) The ship was caught so that it couldn't face the wind, and we gave up and were swept along. (16) As we drifted to the sheltered side of a small island called Cauda, we barely managed to secure the ship's lifeboat. (17) The ship's crew pulled it up on deck and used ropes to brace the ship. Fearing that they would hit the large sandbank near Libya, they lowered the sail and drifted along.

This violent wind would be like a typhoon or hurricane. They were caught in this wind and driven along by it, out of control and at the mercy of the wind and the sea. The rowboat was normally towed behind a ship in good weather rather than stowed on board. It was used for landings, to maneuver the ship for tacking, and to lay anchors (not a lifeboat in the modern sense, although it could be used as way to escape for some of the sailors, as we'll see).

The large sandbank near Libya was in an area named Syrtis, two gulfs on the North African coast (modern Libya), greatly feared by sailors because of their shifting sandbars and treacherous shallows.

The Syrtis here is the so-called Great Syrtis, toward Cyrenaica. It had a horrible reputation as a sailors' graveyard. Josephus says the name alone struck terror in those who heard it. It was near the famous Scylla and Charybdis mentioned in Homer's Odyssey.

Acts 27:18-20 The next day, because we were being tossed so violently by the storm, they began to throw the cargo overboard. (19) On the third day they threw the ship's equipment overboard with their own hands. (20) For a number of days neither the sun nor the stars were to be seen, and the storm continued to rage until at last all hope of our being saved vanished.

You can get an idea of how far they were blown along by the wind by looking at the map, which generally was blowing them in the right direction, towards Italy. They couldn't tell that, though, not being able to see the sun or the stars for a number of days, and they really felt they would not survive.

Acts 27:21-26 After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood among his shipmates and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have sailed from Crete. You would have avoided this hardship and damage. (22) But now I urge you to have courage because there will be no loss of life among you, but only loss of the ship. (23) For just last night an angel of God, to whom I belong and whom I serve, stood by me (24) and said, 'Stop being afraid, Paul! You must stand before the emperor. Indeed, God has given to you the lives of everyone who is sailing with you.' (25) So take courage, men, because I trust God that it will turn out just as he told me. (26) However, we will have to run aground on some island."

The sense of the Greek in verse 21 is not that they had no food necessarily, but no one felt like eating because of the constant thrashing around of the ship by the raging seas.

Paul's presence is protecting all of them on the ship, because God is making sure he gets to Rome. This is a great witness to the pagan men on the ship, and Paul makes a specific prophecy that comes true exactly as he said it would. This story would be told by these men to their children and grandchildren for many years.

Acts 27:27-29 It was the fourteenth night, and we were drifting through the Adriatic Sea when about midnight the sailors suspected that land was near. (28) After taking soundings, they found the depth to be twenty fathoms. A little later they took soundings again and found it was fifteen fathoms. (29) Fearing that we might run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and began praying for daylight to come.

They had been driven by this storm for fourteen days! They had been blown far west of Crete and were approaching the island of Malta. The sailors could probably hear the sound of waves breaking against the rocks near the shore, so they started taking soundings. A fathom is about 6 feet, so the first time they took a sounding, the depth was about 120 feet, then the next time it was about 90 feet. They then dropped anchors to hopefully stop themselves until morning, when they might be able to see where they were at and steer around the rocks near the island.

Acts 27:30-32 Meanwhile, the sailors had begun trying to escape from the ship. They lowered the lifeboat into the sea and pretended that they were going to lay out the anchors from the bow. (31) Paul told the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men remain onboard, you cannot be saved." (32) Then the soldiers cut the ropes that held

the lifeboat and set it adrift.

Some of the crew decided to try to save themselves, but Paul saw through their ploy. Part of the plan of God to save everyone on board includes everyone having the faith to stay on the ship! Also, the skills of these sailors would be needed to get the ship closer to shore the next day. Notice the Roman soldiers are now following Paul's advice!

Acts 27:33-35 Right up to daybreak Paul kept urging all of them to eat something. He said, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been waiting and going without food, not eating anything. (34) So I urge you to eat something, for it will help you survive, since none of you will lose so much as a hair from his head." (35) After he said this, he took some bread, thanked God in front of everyone, broke it, and began to eat.

Paul, who has become the leader on the ship, gives another prophecy that no one on the ship will be harmed in the least. The angel had told him this back in verse 24. Paul took this opportunity to pray to the true God in front of all these pagans on board the ship. What a witness!

This prayer of thanks Paul gave would probably have been the b'rahkah, the traditional blessing made by Jews before eating bread. It went like this:

"Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. Amen"
This prayer lifted the hearts of everyone on board:

Acts 27:36-38 Everyone was encouraged and had something to eat. (37) There were 276 of us on the ship. (38) After they had eaten all they wanted, they began to lighten the ship by dumping its cargo of wheat into the sea.

We see here that there were a lot of people on board this ship – Paul had thanked God in front of 276 people. The purpose of lightening the ship was to raise her in the water and let her run as close to the beach as possible before grounding.

Acts 27:39-41 When day came, they didn't recognize the land, but they could see a bay with a beach on which they planned to run the ship ashore, if possible. (40) So they cut the anchors free and left them in the sea. At the same time they untied the ropes that held the steering oars, raised the foresail to the wind, and headed for the beach. (41) But they struck a sandbar and ran the ship aground. The bow stuck and couldn't be moved, while the stern was broken to pieces by the force of the waves.

They didn't recognize the land because they had been blown 476 miles off course! Malta is sixty miles south of Sicily, and is a fairly small island eighteen miles long and eight miles wide. They pulled the anchors and raised a sail in order to make a dash for the beach which they saw, but before they could reach the shore they ran aground on a shoal. The small bay on the island of Malta where the ship finally grounded, behind a small island, has been called St. Paul's Bay since that time.

Acts 27:42-44 The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners to keep them from swimming ashore and escaping, (43) but the centurion wanted to save Paul, so he prevented them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. (44) The rest were to follow, some on planks and others on various pieces of the ship. In this way everyone got to shore safely.

These soldiers weren't necessarily cruel, but this was normal procedure. They would be legally responsible if any of the prisoners escaped, and the soldiers would be punished.

When a wooden ship ran aground in weather like this, it didn't take long for the waves to pound it to pieces. So everyone got off the ship as quickly as possible and made their way to land any way they could. The power of God made sure that every one of the 276 passengers made it safely to the beach.

Chapter 28

Acts 28:1-2 When we were safely on shore, we learned that the island was called Malta. (2) The people who lived there were unusually kind to us. It had started to rain and was cold, so they started a bonfire and invited us to join them around it.

The island of Malta is still known by that name today. The ship had traveled 625 miles in the storm! The Greek word translated "people", or "islanders" in other translations, actually means "barbarians", but Luke wasn't being insulting, that's just how foreigners who spoke neither Greek or Latin were referred to in those days.

Acts 28:3-6 Paul gathered a bundle of sticks and put it on the fire. A poisonous snake was forced out by the heat and attached itself to Paul's hand. (4) When the people who lived there saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "This man must be a murderer! He may have escaped from the sea, but Justice won't let him live." (5) But he shook the snake into the fire and wasn't harmed. (6) They were expecting him to swell up or suddenly drop dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

The snake may have been still because of the cold and just looked like another stick until it felt the heat of the fire and went after Paul.

The reason Justice is capitalized in verse 4 is because they were speaking of the pagan goddess Justice. People in those days believed that the goddess Justice made sure that guilty people would not escape judgment. The fact that Paul wasn't hurt by the snake, to the people that witnessed it, meant that he was innocent. God protected Paul from harm again.

Christ had promised that His followers, in carrying out His great commission, might "take up serpents" without harm (Mark 16:18). This experience of Paul's is the only actual example of that kind of an event recorded in the New Testament, though there may have been others. This promise was for protection, not for show, and was not intended to be true for all time, especially after the completion of the New Testament.

Acts 28:7-9 The governor of the island, whose name was Publius, owned estates in that part of the island. He welcomed us and entertained us with great hospitality for three days. (8) The father of Publius happened to be sick in bed with fever and dysentery. Paul went to him, prayed, and healed him by placing his hands on him. (9) After that had happened, the rest of the sick people on the island went to him and were healed.

God used Paul on the island of Malta, on the way to Rome, to witness to the people there by healing all the sick people on the island. Notice again that it is only an apostle who has the gift of healing these people; no one else is doing it. It is possible that Luke assisted with treating some of these

people when there was no need for supernatural healing, but he doesn't take any credit here. Luke doesn't tell us so, but I'm sure Paul took the opportunity of preaching to all these folks. The healings powerfully authenticated his message of salvation to the Maltese people.

Acts 28:10-11 The islanders honored us in many ways, and when we were about to sail again, they supplied us with everything we needed. (11) Three months later, we continued our sailing onboard an Alexandrian ship that had spent the winter at the island. It had the Twin Brothers as its figurehead.

The islanders repaid Paul for what he had done with generous hospitality. They had lost everything in the shipwreck, but these wonderful people gave them everything they needed to go on to Rome. Apparently they spent the winter at Malta, and then were able to book passage on another Alexandrian ship that was bound for Rome in the spring.

The "Twin Brothers" was a name for the pagan deities Castor and Pollux, well known today as the astrological sign of Gemini, the Twins. According to Greek mythology they were twin sons of Zeus and Leda. Greek ships often had a figurehead of a deity, so Castor and Pollux were the patron deities of this ship. They were considered the "gods of navigation". If their constellation, Gemini, was seen during a storm it was an omen of good luck. We don't really know why Luke would mention this detail, unless it was just to contrast the superstitious beliefs of these people with the truths of Christianity.

Acts 28:12-14 We stopped at Syracuse and stayed there for three days. (13) Then we weighed anchor and came to Rhegium. A day later a south wind began to blow, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. (14) There we found some brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. After this, so we arrived in Rome.

Syracuse was a city on the eastern coast of the island of Sicily. It was 75 miles from Malta. Rhegium was a city on the southern tip of Italy. It was 80 miles from Syracuse. Puteoli was a city on the western coast of Italy south of Rome. It was in the Bay of Naples some 220 miles to the north of Rhegium. Here the voyage ended; the rest of the journey was by land.

After staying with some fellow Christians for a week, they go on to Rome, traveling the 140 mile distance to Rome on the Appian Way, the straightest and oldest of Roman roads. All this time Paul was accompanied by these Roman soldiers and the centurion Julius, so they were very kind to him, letting him stay with friends along the way.

Acts 28:15-16 The brothers there heard about us and came as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and felt encouraged. (16) When we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with the soldier who was guarding him.

Christians from Rome came down a ways to meet Paul, and this encouraged him. This may have included his old friends Aquila and Priscilla, who had probably come back to Rome by now. Three years earlier in his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul had expressed his deep desire to see them someday (see Romans 15:24), and that day had finally come. Paul enters Rome with quite an entourage, almost like an honor guard, although he most likely was chained to a Roman guard at all times.

The fact that there were Christians there shows that God's message had already spread as far as Italy

and the capital of the empire. No doubt a church had been planted in Rome by Roman Jews who had gone to the Pentecost feast, heard Peter's sermon, were saved, and returned home with the good news (2:10).

The Forum of Appius was a small traveler's stop on the Appian Way about 43 miles south of Rome. It was described by Horace as "crammed with boatmen and stingy tavernkeepers". Three Taverns was another stop on the road about 33 miles south of Rome.

Again you can see the leniency the Roman soldiers had toward Paul, as they allowed him to live under house arrest in a rented place instead of throwing him in some dark dungeon with other prisoners.

"Capital of the vast Roman Empire, the so-called "eternal city" was, in the first century A.D., an incomparable cornucopia of brilliant marble monuments, polished columns, dazzling temples, imposing palaces, panoramic parkland, and extravagant stadiums. Not only was the architecture of Rome unique, the population was an exceptional blend of wealthy aristocracy, middle class, the poor, and a population of slaves that comprised at least half the city's population of over two million residents. Within this population was a substantial Jewish community of at least forty thousand, large enough to necessitate several dozen synagogues." Steve Ger

Acts 28:17-20 Three days later, Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. When they assembled, he said to them, "Brothers, although I haven't done anything against our people or the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. (18) They examined me and wanted to let me go because there was no reason for me to receive the death penalty in my case. (19) But the Jews objected and forced me to appeal to the emperor, even though I have no countercharge to bring against my own people. (20) That's why I asked to see you and speak with you, since it is for the hope of Israel that I'm wearing this chain."

Once again and for the last time in the book, Paul reaches out to the Jews. He was still hoping to convince them of the truth of the gospel. Like he did before when he was on trial in front of the Jews, Paul claimed to be faithful to the Jewish people and to the God of Israel.

The "hope of Israel" Paul mentions in verse 20 is the hope of the Messiah. But since the Messiah had come, it meant more than that. To Paul and all Christians since it means the hope of the Messiah's resurrection, the fact that since the Messiah was resurrected, so also will we be.

Acts 28:21-23 The Jewish leaders told him, "We haven't received any letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or mentioned anything bad about you. (22) However, we would like to hear from you what you believe, because people are talking against this sect everywhere." (23) So they set a day to meet with Paul and came out in large numbers to see him where he was staying. From morning until evening he continued to explain the kingdom of God to them, trying to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and the Prophets.

I'd say that people were talking against the sect of Christianity! Riots over the issue of Jesus Christ caused the Jewish community to be expelled from the city in A.D. 50 (Acts 18:2), and had only been allowed to return six years earlier in 54.

As he had done so many times before in synagogues all over Israel, Asia, and Greece, Paul used the Hebrew scriptures, our Old Testament, to try to convince them that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

And, since it says he explained the kingdom of God to them, he taught them that Jesus was coming back to rule the earth from Jerusalem, just as the prophets said. The fact that the kingdom of God is a future certainty is a consistent teaching of the New Testament (Matthew 5:20, 6:10, 7:21, 8:11, 26:29, Mark 14:25, 15:43, Luke 1:33, 11:2, 13:28-29, 14:15, 19:11, 21:31, 22:16-18, 29-30, 23:42, 51, Acts 1:3-6, 14:22, James 2:5, Revelation 11:15, 12:10).

He was not teaching these Jews that the kingdom had arrived in the Church! The term "kingdom of God" includes the death and resurrection of Christ as its basis but also looks ahead to Christ's reign on earth. Faith in Christ is how you enter the kingdom, and that is what Paul was preaching.

Acts 28:24-27 Some of them were convinced by what he said, but others wouldn't believe. (25) They disagreed with one another as they were leaving, so Paul added this statement: "The Holy Spirit was so right when he spoke to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah! (26) He said, 'Go to this people and say, "You will listen and listen but never understand, and you will look and look but never see! (27) For this people's minds have become stupid, and their ears can barely hear, and they have shut their eyes so that they may never see with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn and let me heal them.'"

As always, the presentation of the gospel caused division. Some believed, but the majority utterly rejected it. Paul then quotes Isaiah 6:9-10. The same thing that happened in Isaiah's day was happening here (Notice Paul's clear statement that it was the Holy Spirit that spoke through the prophet). This is very important, and this closes the book of Acts.

Acts 28:28-29 You must understand that this message about God's salvation has been sent to the gentiles, and they will listen." (29) When he had said these words, the Jews left, arguing intensely among themselves.

Like he had done many times before, Paul was announcing that he had done his duty by preaching the gospel to the Jewish community and he no longer had any responsibility to them. Evangelism would now be focused on the Gentiles. This is Paul's final word. God has temporarily put aside the nation of Israel, and has turned to the Gentiles.

This verse has been widely misused as a final denunciation and repudiation of Jews everywhere and at all times for having rejected the gospel. This horrible interpretation could not be further from the truth. It wasn't even a final repudiation of the Roman Jews. Some of them did accept the gospel, and this was just Paul's practice of giving the gospel first to the Jews, and when it was rejected, he would turn to the Gentiles. He had done this throughout his ministry in every community.

There has always been a faithful Jewish remnant. Paul deals with that issue in the book that we will study next, Romans 9-11. In those chapters he makes it clear that the spiritual blindness of the majority of the Jews to Jesus did not take God by surprise, but God is using it as an opportunity to invite Gentiles to respond to His grace. Also, it is the Gentile response to the gospel that eventually provoke the Jews to jealousy and allow them finally to recognize their Messiah (Romans 11:1-11). In fact, this was a great motivation for Paul (Romans 11:12-14). God is not through with the Jews!

Acts 28:30-31 For two whole years Paul lived in his own rented place and welcomed everyone who came to him. (31) He continued to preach about the kingdom of God and to teach boldly and freely about the Lord Jesus, the Messiah.

Paul was allowed to have his own place (under house arrest) and most likely both Jews and Gentiles came to him to be taught.

Even though he was under arrest, it was a time (two years!) where he was allowed to live in his own place and freely preach the kingdom of God and to teach about the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This is amazing, a miracle from God. Paul was preaching and teaching in the capital city of the world! The gospel would spread from Rome like wildfire. Do you see the sovereignty of God at work here?

Some think that the book of Acts ends abruptly, almost like Luke didn't mean to end it here. But I believe this is exactly where the Holy Spirit wanted to end it. Despite all attempts to stop it, the message of Jesus Christ continued to go out, and it continues today.

So what happened after this? We know that during his two years in custody in Rome Paul wrote what is called the "prison epistles" - Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. In these letters he seemed very sure that he would be released, and was looking forward to a 4th missionary journey. We know that Paul lived for another five years or so from the end of Acts.

We don't know the details, but apparently no charges were filed in Rome and Paul was released after two years. Knowing that they could not get a verdict of guilty, his Jewish accusers probably never showed up and therefore lost the case by default. No one knows for sure whether he ever got the opportunity to actually speak to the emperor Nero or not, but an angel in Acts 27:24 said that he would stand before the Emperor, so we must believe that he did.

After his release, church tradition says that Paul returned to the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia and then went west to Spain according to his original plans (Romans 15:22-28). After Paul left Rome, the attitude towards Christianity changed. The emperor Nero ended the tolerance of this new religion and began severely persecuting Christians in AD 64. Paul apparently returned to Rome in late 67 or early 68 and was arrested (or was arrested elsewhere and brought back to Rome). This time his imprisonment was much harsher, which he speaks about in 2 Timothy 2:9. This time he knew he was about to be executed (2 Timothy 4:6-8). During this time of imprisonment he wrote the books of 1st and 2nd Timothy, and Titus. Church tradition says that Paul was brought to trial and convicted. In A.D. 67 or early 68, he was beheaded outside of Rome on the Ostian Way.

Paul's Life	
Birth of Paul	around the time of Christ's birth
Conversion of Paul	a.d. 33
First missionary journey	47-48
GALATIANS written after first journey	49
Apostolic council at Jerusalem	49
Second missionary journey	49-52
1 and 2 THESSALONIANS written during second journey	51
Third missionary journey	56-58
1 and 2 CORINTHIANS written during third journey	55-56
ROMANS written during third journey	57-58
Arrest in Jerusalem	58
Journey to Rome	59-60
In Rome awaiting trial, under guard	60-61

PHILEMON, COLOSSIANS, EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS written from prison	61
Paul released, revisits churches, resumes evangelistic ministry	62-66
1 TIMOTHY, TITUS written	63-66
Paul arrested, imprisoned at Rome	66-67
2 TIMOTHY written from prison	67
Paul executed	67

In AD 70, as we have talked about before, divine judgment finally fell upon Israel. God removed their temple and their land from the Jews, and they would not return until the 20th century. Today the Jews are once again in the Holy Land, which was prophesied in the Old Testament. But they are mostly in unbelief – they have adopted a western secular society. The vast majority of Jews are not even looking for their Messiah any more. This cannot last – without that hope Judaism and the nation of Israel cannot survive.

We have seen in Acts how the Gentile church was started, and how they had such a zeal for evangelism. Making the spread of the gospel their passionate priority is what took the Roman Empire by storm! Much of that zeal for telling others about Jesus Christ is gone from the church today. Most churches are more concerned with the social gospel (which is false) than they are truly preaching the true gospel of Jesus Christ, and more interested in entertaining the sheep than teaching them the Word of God.

The Jews are more receptive to the gospel today than they've ever been. More and more Jews are coming to Christ, in Israel and all over the world. Knowing that Jewish unbelief is what's keeping Jesus from returning ought to motivate us to reach out to Jewish people, and tell them about their Messiah. There are some good Christian organizations that make reaching Jewish people their focus, and we should support them. It was the Jews that gave us the gospel, our Savior, and our scriptures. We should be returning the favor that the Jews did us by making Jewish evangelism, just as much as Gentile evangelism, our passionate priority.

This concludes our study in the book of Acts, and the end of the history portion of the New Testament. It seems appropriate to do a couple of lessons on church history next, to see what happened after the events of Acts. So, I will make the attempt to do a brief synopsis of important events in Christian history from the end of Acts to the modern age. I'll warn you, some of it isn't pretty. But church history is not taught in schools, nor is it taught by most churches! Many people don't know what the Reformation was all about, or think that the Spanish Inquisition was just a Monty Python comedy sketch. I believe it's important that we know about church history, so we can learn from the mistakes and the victories both.

Then, after two lessons on church history, we will do a detailed study on what many people believe is the greatest book in the Bible – the apostle Paul's masterpiece, his letter to the Romans.

Paul's Third Journey and His Journey to Rome

