



life ablaze

A 28 day journey
through the book of Acts

CONTENTS:

LET ACTS SET YOUR LIFE ABLAZE | HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

DAY 1	THE PROMISE	ACTS 1
DAY 2	THE SPIRIT	ACTS 2
DAY 3	GOD'S HEALING	ACTS 3
DAY 4	TAKE COURAGE	ACTS 4:1-31
DAY 5	GOD'S JUDGMENT	ACTS 4:32-5:16
DAY 6	GOD'S WORK	ACTS 5:17-6:7
DAY 7	DYING TO LIVE	ACTS 6:8-7:60
DAY 8	REACHING OUT	ACTS 8
DAY 9	AMAZING GRACE	ACTS 9:1-31
DAY 10	WALLS COME DOWN	ACTS 9:32-10:48
DAY 11	BETTER TOGETHER	ACTS 11
DAY 12	PRAYER POWER	ACTS 12
DAY 13	ON MISSION	ACTS 14
DAY 14	FINISHING STRONG	ACTS 14
DAY 15	CONFLICT RESOLUTION	ACTS 15
DAY 16	GOD'S GUIDANCE	ACTS 16
DAY 17	COMMON GROUND	ACTS 17
DAY 18	A KINGDOM MARRIAGE	ACTS 18
DAY 19	SPIRITUAL WARFARE	ACTS 19
DAY 20	THE LOCAL CHURCH	ACTS 20
DAY 21	FIVEFOLD MINISTRY	ACTS 21
DAY 22	YOUR JESUS-STORY	ACTS 22
DAY 23	GOD'S PROTECTION	ACTS 23
DAY 24	GOD'S DELAYS	ACTS 24
DAY 25	GOD'S FAITHFULNESS	ACTS 25
DAY 26	A REASONABLE HOPE	ACTS 26
DAY 27	AGENTS OF HOPE	ACTS 27
DAY 28	THE JOY OF IT	ACTS 28

LET ACTS SET YOUR LIFE ABLAZE

WELCOME TO THIS GUIDEBOOK TO THE BIBLICAL BOOK OF ACTS.
THERE IS NO BOOK LIKE ACTS...

Acts is the continuation of Jesus' ministry: Luke authored first his Gospel, and then Acts. The parallels are undeniable. In the first, Jesus is empowered by the Spirit to model an otherworldly intensity and joy, to preach the word, to be a portal of God's healing power, and to respond to murderous persecution in resurrection power. In the second, the church is the spiritual body of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit to do these exact same things.

Acts unveils God's intended trajectory for his people. There is a strategy in the heart of God that becomes clear in Acts. We discover God's timeless plan for his people – the anchor of Scripture, the strength of community, the place of leadership, the yearning for new horizons, the possibilities in prayer, the thrill of the Spirit, and the power to overcome whatever man, demon or nature throw at you. Following this divine directionality is the only way to make sense of how a single church (AD 30) became 34 churches by the end of the New Testament era, then 3,4 million churches by today.

Acts is the link that holds the Gospels and the Epistles together. The New Testament starts with 4 Gospels, detailing the life of Jesus. It ends with 22 letters, written by apostles and their delegates to leaders and churches. But how do we hold these two together? We don't. Acts does it for us – it recounts the remarkable story of the earliest church, picking up almost seamlessly where the Gospels end. It explains how an exclusively Jewish community gathered around a Jewish Saviour becomes a mainly non-Jewish church gathered around a universal Lord.

Acts captures the 'high-water mark' for the church. Beaches often have high water marks to tell us how high the ocean has been and can be once more. For the discouraged believer and the stifled church, this book is a tonic that inspires us to attempt great things for God, and expect great things from God. We might be in a different place and different time, but the Spirit is upon us every bit as much as he was upon them.

Acts calls you to write Acts 29. The book finishes, in chapter 28:31, with a starting line – the final verse tells us that the gospel is going forward 'with all boldness and without hindrance'. This is God's attempt to get each generation, each church movement, each church, and each believer to write the next chapter – one that faithfully continues the momentum and trajectory that so clearly emerges in the first 28 chapters.

Acts is incendiary. In its opening chapters, God transforms a rag-tag group of terrified, ordinary men and women into courageous dynamos, living adventurously and spreading the life, fame and message of Jesus – at great personal risk. Then for 30 years (AD 30-62), we track the flame of love for Jesus spreading across the face of the ancient earth. In the process of prayerfully reading these accounts, we can be set aflame ourselves.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

Give God and his word time. Try to find a designated place and time. Set aside at least 15 minutes. If you have less time, then only do part of a day's devotion. All of hell would prefer you not to, so ask God to help you to follow through.

Be curious. This devotion provides limited commentary. On purpose. By asking many questions it guides you to engage Acts for yourself. This presumes that most of the insights in Acts are there for anyone who will take out the time to prayerfully, expectantly and thoughtfully read it.

Listen. Come to the word with hunger and receptiveness. The final question each day – the directive that you write something down – helps you discern what it is God is saying to you through his word. It also serves as a journal record, so that you can later come back and retrace your journey.

Supplement. When you come to a verse that you would like to study more than this devotional guide allows, google 'biblehub Acts 1:8' (or whatever verse you are studying). Open the top find. Then click on 'comment' in the header bar.

Share. Expression deepens impression. Don't keep what God is teaching you everyday to yourself. Encourage others with your insights, and encourage them to use this devotional guide you think it will serve them too.

DAY 1: THE PROMISE

PREPARE

"If we're going to impact our world in the name of Jesus, it will be because people like you and me take action in the power of the Spirit. Ever since the mission and ministry of Jesus, God has never stopped calling for a movement of 'Little Jesus-es' to follow him into the world and unleash the remarkable redemptive genius that lies in the very message we carry – the Lord Jesus is alive." – Alan Hirsch

"If you want to build a ship, don't summon people to buy wood, prepare tools, distribute jobs, and organize the work, rather teach people the yearning for the wide, boundless ocean." – Antoine de Saint-Exupery

The year is AD 30. Acts begins where the Gospels end – Jesus has triumphed over death! Today we see that it is not enough to know that Jesus is alive. We also need to experience this reality for ourselves...

OPEN ACTS 1

DISCOVER

- v1-3: Who wrote Acts (v1)? Notice the word 'began' (v1) – this implies that the church is the continuation of the ministry and mission of Jesus. In his last 40 days on earth, what primary fact of history was Jesus reinforcing? What was the subject of his teaching (v3)?
- v4-8: What would the disciples need before they could change the world? What effect would this have on them (v8)?
- v9-11: When Jesus ascended, what promise did the disciples receive?
- v12-14: What was the dominant activity of the church at this stage?
- v15-26: What decision needed to be made? How was it made?

APPLY

- Jesus' first promise is that, with him in heaven, we will experience the Spirit. The Father promised 'the gift' (v4) in Scripture (Joel 2:28-29). As did Jesus even before he was crucified (John 7:37-39). It is an experiential immersion in the presence and power of Jesus (v5). It grants us spiritual power, and gives us a high level of assurance that Jesus is alive, and that our Father loves us (Rom 5:5). Have you experienced the Spirit?
- Jesus' second promise is we will be empowered to be his witnesses the world over. Verse 8 reveals the outreach strategy of the Spirit, as well as the structure of the book of Acts: the gospel spreads into Jerusalem first (ch 1-7), then Judea and Samaria (ch 8-12), then to the ends of the earth (ch 13-28). Jesus empowers us for a work that is as expansive as the earth. Have you experienced the Spirit empowering your witness to others?

PRAY

- Ask God for more of his Spirit in your life – both to deepen your revelation of Jesus, and your impact in the world.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 2: THE SPIRIT

PREPARE

"When you strip it of everything else, Pentecost stands for power and life. That's what came into the church and world when the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost." David Wilkerson

"Unfortunately, the vast majority of outsiders perceive Christianity as disconnected from the supernatural world – a dimension they believe can be accessed and influenced. All the while, authentic Christianity is at its heart supernatural." David Kinnaman

Today we learn how the outpouring of the Spirit makes living a supernatural life very natural. We also see where the fire that spreads across the earth to this day first got started...

OPEN ACTS 2

DISCOVER

- v1-4: Pentecost was the second of the annual harvest festivals, coming 50 days after Jesus' death on Passover. "All" most likely included the entire 120 assembled in the upper room (1:15). On this day, what did they hear and see when the Spirit was poured out?
- v5-13: How did those who came into contact with this freshly empowered community initially respond?
- v14-21: Here we see Peter as a dynamic leader and preacher. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that changed this man who was once a coward, who denied Jesus three times. How did Peter connect this outpouring to the prophecy of Joel?
- v22-36: Preaching is born in the history of the church. What are the big ideas in Peter's message? Notice especially that the Spirit's main ministry is to lift up the fame, message and life of Jesus.
- v37-39: What does Peter have to offer to those who are responsive to his message?
- v42-47: What strikes you about the life, purpose and activities of this early church?

APPLY

- The phenomena of fire and wind (v2-3) never recur in subsequent outpourings of the Spirit in Acts. What do you think they convey? Would you say you're on fire for Jesus? How can you open up the sail of your life to the wind of the Spirit?
- What is the connection between the Spirit and the preaching of Jesus?
- How does the life, purpose and activities of your church compare to that of this church?

PRAY

- Ask God to make the winds of the Spirit blow and the fires of the Spirit to burn in your life, in your church, and in your generation.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 3: GOD'S HEALING

PREPARE

"Come and see the victories of the cross. Christ's wounds are our healings. His brokenness our wholeness. His conflicts our conquests. His agonies our repose. His groans our songs. His pains our ease. His shame our glory. His death our life. His suffering our salvation." – Matthew Henry

"Christ is the Good Physician. There is no disease he cannot heal; no sin he cannot remove; no trouble he cannot help." – James Aughey

Today we see God's 'whole-making' power up close...

OPEN ACTS 3

DISCOVER

- v1-12: This event occurs in AD 31. Notice how the miracle causes the beggar to be in awe of God (v8), while the onlookers are in awe of Peter and John (v11-12). Why do you think this is?
- v13-16: What does Peter ascribe this healing to?
- v17-26: Notice the names Peter gives to Jesus in his message: 'God's servant' (v13, 26), 'the Holy and Righteous One' (v14), 'the author of life' (v15), 'the Messiah' (v18), 'the Lord' (v19), and 'prophet' (v22).

APPLY



- Which of these names of Jesus means the most to you personally?
- God's future kingdom already comes in foreshadows. This man's healing provides a tiny sample of the future 'healing' of the entire cosmos. In fact all the miracles of Jesus are 'tastes of the powers of the Coming Age' (Heb 6:5). Verse 21, for example, mentions the future restoring of all things. This looks forward to when Christ will return and he will vanquish all evil, suffering, brokenness and death, and usher in a kingdom marked by immortal bodies, abundant joy, righteousness and eternal life. Have you experienced 'foretastes' of these through faith in Jesus? What relational, emotional or physical healing do you currently need in your life?
- The primary healing we need is spiritual. In fact the Greek word for salvation is 'sozo' which includes the idea of wholeness. Peter highlights some benefits of salvation: the gift of saving faith (v16), the wiping out of your sins (v19), times of refreshing (v19), the promise of heaven (v21), the promise of blessing (v25), and the promise of power to live a godly life (v26). Which of these are most meaningful to you at the moment?

PRAY



- Thank God for his gift of salvation. Ask him for a taste of the Coming Age in an area of brokenness in your or another's life.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 4: TAKE COURAGE

PREPARE

"Here is the world. Beautiful as well as terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid." - Frederick Buechner

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." - Nelson Mandela

Today we see that the Spirit is not given to help us escape from the harsh realities in this world. We see how Jesus' apostles face the first real resistance to God's call on their lives head on – in the power of the Spirit...

OPEN ACTS 4:1-31

DISCOVER

- v1-7: The Sadducees represented the privileged aristocracy who worked closely with the Romans to protect their own political and economic interests. What had upset them, and what action did they take? Notice the growth of the church – Acts records the impact of the gospel in numbers: 120 (1:15); then 3,000 (2:41); and at this stage the men alone were about 5000 (v4).
- v8-13: Just a few weeks had passed since Annas and Caiaphas had been involved in the condemnation of Jesus. What gave Peter courage in the moment (v18)? How did Peter force them to encounter Jesus once again? What is unique about Jesus in the history of the world (v12)?
- v14-22: What made it so difficult for the opposing religious leaders to bring the witness of the apostles to a stop?
- v19-20: What helped Peter and John overcome their fear of people?
- v23-30: This is our only insight in the book of Acts into what they prayed for in prayer meetings. What impresses you about what and how they prayed?
- v31: What was the effect of this prayer meeting?

APPLY

- What people or situation has challenged or intimidated your faith? How do you cope with this generally? What can you learn from Peter and John?
- Do you have a group of believers you regularly pray with? What tips can you apply from this Acts 4 prayer meeting to your personal prayer life and to prayer meetings?
- The Spirit fills both individuals (v18) and gathered believers (v31). Have you experienced the Spirit both on your own, and when with others in prayer or worship?

PRAY

- Ask God to fill you with the Spirit so you can face life's challenges head on, and so you can share the message of Christ with others.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 5: GOD'S JUDGMENT

PREPARE

"There are, in the end, only two ways open to us: to honestly and honorably make an admission of how far we are from the Christianity of the New Testament, or to perform skillful tricks to conceal the true situation." – Søren Kierkegaard

"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." – the apostle Peter (1 Pet 4:7)

Today we discover how God feels about us deceiving others through a false projection of our levels of godliness. A young couple 'performs skillful tricks' and God deals a firm hand of judgment...

OPEN ACTS 4:32-5:16

DISCOVER

- 4:32-37: How is oneness of heart and mind demonstrated in these verses?
- 5:1-2: The year was AD 32. Ananias and Sapphira abused the fellowship through their deception and thereby threatened its unity. The sin of this couple was not that they should have given more. The sin involved both deceiving people by presenting a façade of godliness that was far greater than the reality.
- 5:3-10: What was the core sin (v3, 5)? Did the couple confess (v8)?
- 5:11: Why did God allow this event to happen? It seems God was dealing strongly with this sin because the church was just getting started, and he wanted to display his hatred of hypocrisy, right at the beginning of the church's history – for all of us to remember.
- 5:12-16: Now that the church has an increased awe of God, do they grow or diminish in power?

APPLY

- Where the Spirit is, there is great generosity and unity. How generous are you?
- There are two kinds of hypocrisy. The first is the simple inability to always live up to our standards. All of us are this kind of hypocrite. Thankfully, there is God's grace available to us as we confess our failures (1 John 1:9). But there is a kind of hypocrisy that is far more serious – intentionally projecting an air of righteousness that isn't real, and reveling in the admiration our deception achieves for us. Instead of confessing, we conceal. Is there any sin and failure to confess in your life? Is there this second kind of hypocrisy to repent of?
- The Spirit is holy. The descriptor most often used of the Spirit is the word 'holy'. This passage highlights the Spirit's hatred of sin, his passion to make us more like Jesus, and his ability to imbue God's people with a life-giving 'fear' (the better word might be 'awe') of God. How can you be more aligned to the heart-searching, holiness-imparting work of the Spirit in your own life?

PRAY

- Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart, and to make you more holy.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 6: GOD'S WORK

PREPARE

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life, that no one can sincerely try to serve another without also enlarging himself." — Ralph Waldo Emerson

"When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.' " – Matt 9:36-38

Today we are inspired by the apostles' commitment to God's work in two ways: They stick at it regardless of how hard it is, and they raise up more people to do the work...

OPEN ACTS 5:17-6:7

DISCOVER

- 5:17-32: What was the root cause of the persecution (v17)? How does God deliver them from prison? What were the apostles doing that angered the religious authorities (v25, 28)? What basic names and facts about Jesus do we learn about Jesus (v29-32)?
- 5:33-39: What was Gamaliel's message to the religious leaders? How was his influence in saving the apostles' lives an example of the very point he made?
- 5:40-42: How did the apostles respond to their suffering for Jesus' name?
- 6:1-7: The growth of the church created problems when a number of Greek-speaking (as opposed to Hebrew) Jews responded to the gospel. The resulting cultural barrier led to a conflict between the widows. This required good intervention by leadership. How did the twelve apostles respond to those needs?

APPLY

- Do you consider yourself a worker in God's kingdom? If so, do you only work for God, or also with God (v39)? And how committed are you? Do you, like the apostles, stick at it even in seasons of discouragement or hardship?
- And do you also seek to recruit and raise up yet more workers? We learn much about this in 6:1-7. **Here are three main lessons:** 1) Existing leaders should not spread themselves too thinly. Leaders need to maintain focus on those things God has called them to do (v2). 2) Every need or challenge facing the church is an opportunity for somebody to experience the thrill of being used by God. In this case, the apostles felt 7 more leaders/workers were needed. 3) Not just anyone should be allowed to be a leader in God's church. They don't need to be perfect or even highly gifted, but they must have the respect of people in the church, have some spiritual wisdom and have a trusting relationship with God (v3). The result: releasing new workers multiplies God's work (v7).

PRAY

- Avail yourself to God to do his work. Ask him for yet more workers.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 7: DYING TO LIVE

PREPARE

"Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live, taking the form of a readiness to die. A soldier surrounded by enemies must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then there will be a suicide, and he will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine." – GK Chesterton

"Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it." – Jesus (Mark 8:35)

Today we meet a courageous man who was living to die, and dying to live – he is the church's first martyr...

OPEN ACTS 6:8-7:60

DISCOVER

- 6:6-15: The year is AD 34. What do you learn about Stephen in these verses? What do the accusations against Stephen tell us about why the Jewish religious leaders were so upset (6:13-14)?
- 7:1-50: Stephen's defense is the longest message in Acts. It is a selective recital of Old Testament history, including sections on Abraham (v2-8), Joseph (v9-16), Moses (v17-34), and Israel's apostasy (v35-50).
- 7:51-53: His message was cut short when Stephen applied his history lesson to Israel's present rejection of the Messiah (v51-53). What was happening here? Stephen responded to the charges by turning them on his accusers: they were the ones who were really disobeying God because they rejected his appointed leaders.
- 7:54-58: Do you notice any connection between the Spirit's power and human suffering?
- 7:59-60: Can you see the parallels between Stephen's death and Jesus'?

APPLY

- How can you become more steeped in Scripture so that you can, at a moment's notice, articulate its storyline to others?
- In what aspect of your life would you like to experience more of 1) the Spirit's wisdom to enable you to face complex situations and 2) the Spirit's power to enable you to face difficult ones?
- Is there anything in the way Stephen faces his death that can help you one day face your own?

PRAY

- Ask God to fill you with his Spirit and with wisdom, with courage and calm, with joy and resolve – come what may.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 8: REACHING OUT

PREPARE

"Have you ever wondered what it feels like to have a love for the lost? Many believers look for the arrival of some feeling of benevolence that will propel them into bold outreach. It is impossible to love 'the lost'. You can't feel deeply for an abstraction. Don't wait for a feeling or love in order to share Christ with a stranger. You already love your heavenly Father, and you know that this stranger is created by him, but separated from him. It is not primarily out of compassion for humanity that we share our faith or pray for the lost; it is first of all, love for God." - John Piper

"We should be more concerned with reaching the lost than pampering the saved..." - David McGee

Today we see Philip's love for God lead him to inspirational outreach...

OPEN ACTS 8

DISCOVER

- v1-4: Why did God allow persecution to happen to the Jerusalem church (v4)?
- v5-8: The Samaritans were a racially mixed group of partly Jewish and partly Gentile ancestry, disdained by both Jews and non-Jews (see John 4:4; 4:20–21 for example). How did God use Philip to reach them?
- v9-25: We meet Simon the Sorcerer (v 9-25). How did he attempt to get spiritual power? What was his motivation for wanting this power (v18-19)? In contrast, what is God's way for his people to receive spiritual power (v 20-23)?
- v26-29: How does God interrupt a revival to get the gospel into Africa?

APPLY

- Have you ever experienced God pushing you out of your comfort zone so that you can engage new people with the love and message of Jesus?
- The story of Simon demonstrates that becoming a Christian does not instantly resolve character defects, especially egotism. What are your character defects that God's Spirit still needs to transform in your life?
- **Draw inspiration from Philip reaching the Ethiopian:** 1) *Be available to God. Philip was willing to embark on a long journey across a desert road.* 2) *Expect some divine appointments. God sovereignly brought Philip across the Ethiopian's path.* 3) *Build relationships. The man invited Philip to come up and sit with him (v31).* 4) *Get spiritual conversations going. Philip respectfully asks (v30) and answers (v34) questions.* 5) *Be ready to explain the gospel. The man asks Philip to do this (v30-31).*

PRAY

- Ask God for freedom from destructive character defects, and for power and opportunities to share your faith with others.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 9: AMAZING GRACE

PREPARE

"Human religion proclaims, "What goes around comes around. God helps those who help themselves. You get what you pay for". But God's grace proclaims, "You get what someone else paid for. God helps those who can't – even don't – help themselves. What goes around stops at the foot of the cross, never to come around again." – Daniel Montgomery

*"Grace means God moving heaven and earth to save sinners who could not lift a finger to save themselves."
– James Packer*

Today we see what's so amazing about God's grace as Saul in AD 35 receives it...

OPEN ACTS 9:1-31

DISCOVER

- v1-2: This chapter unfolded in the years of AD 35-38. This is the first time in Acts that Christians are described as belonging to The Way, a name based on Jesus' calling himself this (John 14:6), and the path of discipleship he called people to (Matt 7:14). Saul is another name for Paul. What do we know about Saul (7:58–8:3)? What further insights do you have about him from these verses?
- v3-9: What stands out to you from Saul's encounter with Jesus Christ and his salvation? Jesus' reference to Saul's 'persecuting me' (v4) shows his identification with his followers: to persecute Christians is to persecute Christ. This is likely how Paul came to see the church as the body of Christ.
- v10-17: Compare and contrast Ananias' encounter with the Lord (v10-16) with that of Saul's. What is the significance of Ananias addressing Saul as 'brother'?
- v18-20: What were the initial changes and subsequent changes we observe in the newly converted Saul?
- v21-30: What were the responses of believers and non-believers to Saul's ministry?

APPLY

- **What's so amazing about God's saving grace?** 1) *Grace chooses us. Paul never chose Jesus. Jesus chose him. Back behind our initial 'choice' for Christ, was Christ's drawing power in our lives. If God can save Paul, he can save anyone.* 2) *Grace accepts us. Paul, the chief of sinners, behaved unacceptably. Yet Jesus, instead of destroying him, showed him a kindness, mercy and forgiveness. Our bad deeds don't disqualify us. Then again, our good deeds don't qualify us. It's all grace.* 3) *Grace changes us. Before he hated Jesus and his people. But once he got a new heart, he loved Jesus and his people, as well as those who opposed him. Ananias (v17) and Barnabas (v27) are men themselves who, having been saved by grace, were conduits of it to others. What difference has saving grace made in your life?*

PRAY

- Praise God for his grace in choosing, accepting and changing you.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 10: WALLS COME DOWN

PREPARE

"Sometimes our walls exist just to see who has the strength to knock them down." - Darnell Lamont Walker

*"For Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two groups (Jews and Gentiles) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace."
– Paul (Ephesians 2:14-15)*

The year was AD 39. This chapter marks a major wall coming down: the all-Jewish church starts to reach out to and accept Gentiles. So entrenched was this wall, that a good Jew (like Peter) would never eat a meal at a Gentile's home. Yet God found a way to drive Peter out of his 'ethnic superiority' into a culture (and a home) very different to his own...

OPEN ACTS 9:32-10:48

DISCOVER

- 9:32-43: Acts 1-5 centered around Peter. We come back to him in chapters 9-12. What strikes you as most interesting about the miracle experienced by Aeneas? And Tabitha?
- 10:1-8: How did God prepare Cornelius for Peter? What does Cornelius have in common with Tabitha (v4)?
- 10:9-33: This was likely the first time ever Peter had entered the home of a gentile (v25). In what ways did God prepare Peter for Cornelius? What evidence is there that Cornelius expected God to work?
- 10:34-43: In his message, notice how Peter summarised Jesus' earthly ministry (v38).
- 10:44-48: How did Peter know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God had accepted these Gentiles?

APPLY

- In what ways do you minister to the poor like Tabitha and Cornelius did?
- What are the walls in your life that must come down? Nothing obstructs the flow of the gospel like cultural or religious barriers. Our prejudices and pride get in the way of what God wants to teach us, and how God wants to use us. Perhaps we limit our relational and ministry range to people similar to ourselves. Birds of a feather may flock together, but not God's people. This grieves God's heart. Jesus came to break us out of the belief that our culture is somehow better than another's. Jesus seeks to make himself at home in all cultures. More than that, he wants to bring cultures together.

PRAY

- Ask God to help you grow your relational and ministry range to include people very different to you.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 11 – BETTER TOGETHER

PREPARE

“One piece of log creates a small fire, adequate to warm you up, add just a few more pieces to blast an immense bonfire, large enough to warm up your entire circle of friends. Sure, individuality counts. But teamwork dynamites.” – Jin Kwon

“When ordinary people team together in a culture of honour, they will always outstrip the effectiveness of even the most brilliant individual superstars.” – Ryan Termorshuizen

Today’s chapter blitzes over a history that lasted about 4 years: AD 40-44. We hear Peter recount the divinely orchestrated teaming together of many people to see a church planted in Cornelius’ home. Then we meet a new church in Antioch, a church that is famous for its attention to teamwork...

OPEN ACTS 11

DISCOVER

- v1-3: What kind of reception was awaiting Peter when he went back up to Jerusalem?
- v4-18: What seemed to be the final and most convincing proof to Peter of God's working in the Gentiles (v15-18)?
- v19-21: Antioch was the second greatest metropolis of the church and the mother of Gentile Christianity. How did the Antioch church come about? Was this primarily by God's power, or by human dedication, wisdom and skill (21)?
- v22-24: How does Barnabas take the fledgling Antioch church under his wing? What kind of leader is he?
- v25-26: How does Paul first become involved in church leadership?
- v27-28: We meet the prophets (see also 13:1; 15:32; 21:9). Their role involved edification and encouragement as they spoke things that had been revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes they even foretold the future, as Agabus did here.
- v29-30: How does the Jerusalem church's kindness to the Antioch church (v22), come back to bless them?

APPLY

- What inspiration can you take from Barnabas' heart for the church and people?
- In the Antioch church we see a team of people starting it (v20), another church helping it (v21), a leader bringing new people into his team (v25, 27), everybody chipping in (v29), and this community's readiness to help the church that initially helped them (v30). That's teamwork! How can you be a better team player in God's church and kingdom than you are right now? How can you better lean upon others? How can you better serve and encourage others?

PRAY

- Ask God to help you be a better kingdom team player.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 12: PRAYER POWER

PREPARE

"Let us never forget to pray. God lives. He is near. He is real. He is not only aware of us but cares for us. He is our Father. He is accessible to all who will seek Him." – Gordon Hinckley

"No one is greater than their prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing; the people who are not praying are straying. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few pray-ers; many singers, few clingers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere." – Leonard Ravenhill

Today we see the power of a praying church...

OPEN ACTS 12

DISCOVER

- v1-5: Herod Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great, who tried to kill the boy Jesus. Who was the first apostle executed (v2)? Who was arrested next? How do you think he felt? What hope did he have (v5)?
- v6-11: Peter was hardly an escape artist. He was half asleep throughout his so-called 'escape'. The angel had to rouse him and direct him (v7-8), and he remained in a stupor until the angel led him through the gates and into a side street (v9-11). The mention of earnest prayer (v5) continues Acts' emphasis that every step in building the church is due to God's blessing and supernatural intervention.
- v12-17: Can you see the humour in this account? While the church was knocking on heaven's door asking God to help Peter, Peter was knocking on theirs, asking them to help him.
- v18-25: Peter escaped Herod's execution attempt, but Herod didn't escape God's judgment. What does verse 3 and 22 reveal about Herod's state of heart? Notice how Herod tried to slow the spread of the word down. But God sped it up (v24)! Unlike Herod, who took credit that wasn't his, Peter gave all glory to God.

APPLY

- Have you personally experienced the power of prayer? Who do you pray with? How have you seen God respond to a group of people who were earnestly praying?
- What bold, kingdom-advancing prayers are you praying – for others, for yourself, for your church?
- Jesus said that, "Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). How do you see this play out when comparing Peter and Herod in this chapter? What Herod-like qualities do you need to repent of in your own life?

PRAY

- Think of an 'impossible' prayer request or need that you have. Pray it.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 13: ON MISSION

PREPARE

"Mission is in the very heart of God. It's not co-incidence that the first two letters in the word God are 'go'."
– Brian Houston

"It is not the church that has a mission. It is a mission that has the church." David Bosch

At this point in Acts, Peter disappears from center stage. From chapter 13 onwards, Paul is in the forefront. Today we witness a life that was lived on mission. In his case, Paul's mission would lead him to travel great distances. As you reflect on his life, remember that every believer is called to mission – to leave our comfort zones and travel – across the room, across the street, and perhaps even, across the world...

OPEN ACTS 13

DISCOVER

- v1-3: In AD 46 Saul (another name for Paul) and Barnabas headed off from their home church in Antioch on a 2-year mission trip. Why did they go?
- v4-12: On their first stop, Cyprus, they encountered a sorcerer called Bar-Jesus (or Elymas). Who joined them (v4)? What unusual miracle happened here?
- v13: On their next stop, Perga, who deserted them? Keep your finger on this page, and turn to 15:37-38 for more insight.
- v14-16: In another town called Psidian Antioch, they visited a synagogue. How did the opportunity to preach the gospel arise?
- v17-41: In his message, what two interesting descriptions of David did he mention (v22, 36)? Who is Jesus (v23, 33)? What two events in Jesus' life are at the core of the gospel (v28-30, 37)? What did Jesus achieve for those who believe (v38-39)? What does Paul call the gospel (v26, 32)?
- v42-52: What were the three kinds of responses to the gospel (v42, 43 and 45-46)? Notice Paul's strategy of first preaching to the Jews, then the Gentiles in each town. What do you think it must have felt like for Paul to be on mission with Jesus (v52)?

APPLY

- Is your 'heart after God' (v23)? Do you know the joy of the Spirit (v52)?
- Have you experienced Jesus calling or sending you to a particular ministry? If so, have you been faithful to it (like David (v36) and Paul) or a deserter (like John)?
- What opportunities to reach others with the gospel have you had, and do you currently have?
- Paul and Barnabas were immediately responsive to the call of God, and headed off in a direction without certainty, but lots of faith. What initiative can you take that lines up with whatever God has called you to?

PRAY

- Praise God that he sent the gospel to you (v26) and gave you to eternal life (v48).
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 14: FINISHING STRONG

PREPARE

"More than anything, I want to finish strong before the Audience of One. My legacy - what people think of me - hardly matters. What matters is that when I stand before the Lord, he says, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' " - James Dobson

"If I am knocked down or fail, by God's grace, I try again, and again, and again. The human spirit can handle much worse than we realize. It matters not just that I finish, but how I finish what God has called me to do." - Nick Vujicic

Today we are inspired to finish what God has called us to, as we watch Paul get knocked down, but get up again. They finish their 2-year long missionary journey by God's grace with a testimony of God's goodness and sustaining grace...

OPEN ACTS 14

DISCOVER

- v1-6: Jesus once warned that he did not come to bring peace, but a sword where he would divide one person against another (Matt 10:34). How do you see that happening in Iconium?
- v8-13: Use your imagination: how do you think Paul "saw that the lame man had faith to be healed" (v9)? How did the crowd misinterpret this miracle?
- v14-18: How did Paul and Barnabas correct the misinterpretation? What theology do we learn from the apostles in these verses? Notice that Paul highlights the goodness of God to all people, whether they know him or not.
- v19-20: How fickle! One moment they are worshipping Paul, the next they are trying to kill him. Do you think some kind of healing happened, or was Paul just tougher than stone?
- v21-23: After reaching many in Derbe, the apostles visited some of the churches they had recently planted in various cities. What two things did they do in each church visit (v22 and 23)?
- v24-28: Mission accomplished! What did they report back on to their home church?

APPLY

- Have you ever experienced the gospel creating a dividing effect?
- Think of some of the ways God has blessed even your non-Christian friends.
- Paul, still wounded, highlighted that life in God's kingdom involves hardships. What strength do you draw from Paul's words and example?
- Who are the pastors God has called to give leadership to your church? How can you encourage them?
- In what areas of your life are you tempted to quit, or to lose passion?

PRAY

- Ask God to help you not only start strong, but more importantly, to finish strong.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 15: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

PREPARE

"Conflict forces us to be fully present because it shatters our ego – stripping away all hope of escape or sugar coating. It removes all superficial layers. Conflict is painful because it wakes us up out of our created illusions. And if we lean into it, conflict can be the catalyst to our enlightenment." - Alaric Hutchinson

"Always approach conflict with an eye for resolution. When handled effectively, successful confrontations bring us together. To manage conflict effectively, you must begin by recognizing there are three sides to every story: Yours / Theirs / The Truth." - Angie Morgan

Today's chapter begins with one conflict then ends with yet another. The first seems unresolvable, but in the end it is. The second seems resolvable, but turns out not to be...

OPEN ACTS 15

DISCOVER

- v1-6: The book of Acts started as a pure Jewish church, but Acts 10 onwards reveals how God started to include the Gentiles. At this first council (AD 48), what were the conflicting views the apostles and elders met to discuss?
- v7-12: What events recorded in earlier chapters in Acts does Peter and then Paul and Barnabas appeal to?
- v13-18: Peter and Paul had appealed to experience. What did James appeal to as he argued along similar lines? Why is Scripture even more important than experience in discerning God's will on a matter?
- v19-31: What decision did they reach? And how did they get the message out there? Elsewhere in scripture we know that sexual immorality is always wrong, but the reason they limited the kind of meat eaten is because of the cross-cultural sensitivity of these new mixed churches – very few Jews who had been converted would suddenly be able to eat the meat that Gentiles ate.
- v32-41: Paul and Barnabas came to the point of 'agreeing to disagree' and going their separate ways. What good came out of this temporary solution?

APPLY

- In the Jerusalem council, what principles do you observe that are vital to follow as we face conflict with others in our Christian community?
- Both Paul and Barnabas seemed to have strong cases for their points of view. Under what kinds of circumstances should we surrender deep convictions that are challenged by another?
- Apply these insights to any unresolved conflict in your own relationships.

PRAY

- Ask God to give you discernment, wisdom, courage and grace as you face conflict, both in the church and in your personal life.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 16: GOD'S GUIDANCE

PREPARE

"If you lower the ambient noise in your life and listen expectantly for the whispers of God, you will hear them more often. When you follow that prompting, your world will be rocked." – Bill Hybels

"Be still and quit rushing through the streets long enough to become aware that there is more to life than your little self-help enterprises. If God is the living center of redemption, it is essential that we be in touch with and responsive to that personal will." – Eugene Peterson


Today we see how Paul discerned God's guidance as he set out on yet another mission trip...

OPEN ACTS 16


DISCOVER

- v1-5. Who was with Paul on this trip – his second missionary trip commencing in AD 50? (See also 15:40.)
- v6-12: What were the unusual means by which God guided Paul and his team? Notice the word 'we' (v10). This is the first time the first-person plural occurs in Acts, indicating that Luke, the author of Acts, had joined the team.
- v13-15: How do you see God's hand guiding and using Paul in these verses? Notice that the 'man from Macedonia' (v9) in Paul's vision turned out to be a woman.
- v16-20: What do you learn about the occult, God's delivering power, exploitation, greed and false accusation in these verses?
- v22-34: Notice how God guided the jailor and his family to faith (v33) through Paul and Silas' example of joy (v25) and kindness (v28), through a miracle (v26), and through gospel preaching (v31-32). What were the effects of his newfound faith upon the jailor's life (v33-34)?
- v35-40: What did Paul's team leave behind in the city of Philippi (v40)? What letter in the New Testament was later written to this church?

APPLY

-  What decisions are you currently trying to make? **To discern God's guidance, apply the insights in this chapter:**
1) Seek God in prayer (v13, 16). 2) Seek wisdom from spiritual leaders (v4) and from other believers (v10).
3) Be sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit (v6-7). 4) Be kind to others and rejoice in God whatever the situation (v25, 28). 5) Trust God to open doors (v14, 15, 35) and close doors (v7, 23, 39).

PRAY

-  Seek God in prayer now about decisions you are trying to make. If you're ready, tell God that regardless of where he guides you – blessings or hardships – you will go.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 17: COMMON GROUND

PREPARE

"We need to contextualize the gospel. This means that we need to show its relevance to a particular culture. Notice we do not make the gospel relevant. The gospel is inherently relevant – without our help. The challenge for us communicators is to show that relevance to a person or culture, in their particular situation and worldview." – Mark Driscoll

"I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News." – Paul (1 Cor 9:23)

OPEN ACTS 17

DISCOVER

- v1-9: How did Paul plant the Thessalonian church? (He would later write 1 and 2 Thessalonians to them.) What was their persecutors' core accusation against the gospel (v7)?
- v10-14: What was so impressive about the Jews in Thessalonica (v11)?
- v15-16: What distressed Paul about the city of Athens?
- v17-21: How is it that Paul was set up with a chance to preach to the city of Athens in the famous Aeropagus?
- v22-23: How did Paul creatively find common ground with his hearers in his gospel message? Why did he not start with scripture like he did in Thessalonica (v3) and Berea (v11)? (Clue: was there a synagogue in Athens?)
- v24-29: How did Paul seek to inform and correct their theology of God? Notice the way he built upon common ground (v28). When he mentioned that God did not live in temples built by men, he referred to magnificent Parthenon, just above and behind him as he spoke.
- v30-34: After building common ground, Paul confronted them with two days in God's calendar: one in the future, one in the past. What are these days (v31)?

APPLY

- What are the idols (God-substitutes) esteemed in your culture? And your life?
- Do you ever feel distress that people around you live without reference to the God of the Bible, and without awareness of the importance of Easter (Resurrection Sunday) and Judgment Day?
- In what ways does Jesus confront our culture (v7)? And connect with the deeper questions of our culture, showing the gospel's relevance (v22-23)?
- If Paul spoke to your culture today, how do you think he would have informed or corrected its theology of God? In your dialogue with people, are you ever tempted to compromise aspects of the gospel to make it more palatable?

PRAY

- Ask God to show you how to build common ground with the people and culture you are trying to reach, and to show the gospel's relevance to them.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 18: A KINGDOM MARRIAGE

PREPARE

"At the heart of a good marriage is a friendship, based on a deep oneness that develops when two people, who speak the truth in love to one another, journey together to the same horizon." - Timothy Keller

"One warrior can put to a flight a thousand, but two can put to flight ten thousand" – Moses (Deut 32:30)

In contrast to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), who partnered to deceive God's people, today we meet a married couple who partnered to serve God's people...

OPEN ACTS 18

DISCOVER

- v1-3: The year was AD 50. Who were Paul's first friends and converts in Corinth? What two things did he have in common with them?
- v4-8: Notice the recurring method of Paul – he would preach first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles (Rom 1:16). In Corinth, the Jews rejected his message (v6), but did all of them do so (v8)?
- v9-17: How did this direct promise from God to Paul (10) come to pass? How long did he stay there as a result? What 2 letters would he later write to this church?
- v18-22: In AD 52, Paul completed his second missionary journey by returning to his home base. But before he did, which couple did he leave in which city?
- v23-29: The year is AD 53. How did Priscilla and Aquila help Apollos?

APPLY

- **If you are married or plan on being married, take inspiration from Priscilla and Aquila's example:**
 - 1) See closed doors as a chance for God to open a new door (v2). 2) Study God's word together. Warmly receive both the gospel and gospel messengers into your lives and home (v3). Paul lived with them for 18 months.
 - 3) Put God's kingdom first, and embrace both the adventure and the cost of it (v18-19). They relocated their lives in support of Paul's apostolic ministry. Later Paul would commend them for risking their lives for him (Rom 16:4).
 - 4) Function as a team. Their names are always mentioned side by side. They were not just lovers and friends, but partners. Not only in business (v3), but also in ministry. 5) Don't suppress each other's contribution or voice. In a patriarchal world, the husband was usually mentioned first, but in most cases in the New Testament, Priscilla is mentioned first, highlighting her active role. 6) Evangelize, disciple and develop others (v26). They had a hand in the making of a great preacher, Apollos. 7) Use your home in ministry. Later their homes would be a major base for the Ephesian church (1 Cor 16:19) then the Roman one (Rom 16:5).

PRAY

- If married, pray for (or with) your spouse. If not, pray for a married couple you know.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 19: SPIRITUAL WARFARE

PREPARE

"Spiritual warfare is very real. Everyday there is a furious, fierce, and ferocious battle raging in the realm of the spirit between the forces of God and the forces of evil. Whether you believe it or not, you are in a battlefield." - Pedro Okoro

"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith." – Peter (1 Pet 5:8-9)

Today we see Paul taking much ground from Satan, then experiencing backlash...

OPEN ACTS 19


DISCOVER

- v1-7: What two things did Paul deem missing in these 12 new believers?
- v8-10: These few verses describe some of Paul's most fruitful years – the planting of a base church in Ephesus whose influence extended into the region beyond (AD 54-56). What was his method (v9)? What was the effect (v10)?
- v11-20: One remarkable event that happened in Ephesus was an attempt to imitate Paul's deliverance ministry that surprisingly backfired in a 'reverse exorcism'. How did God use this to advance his gospel (v17-20)?
- v19-34: After two years of potent ministry in Ephesus, Paul was forced to leave because of a riot. How did Demetrius turn a crowd of Ephesians into a mob that threatened Paul's life, and finally oust him from Ephesus (20:1)?
- v35-41: How did the city clerk skillfully calm and dismiss the mob?

APPLY

- **Throughout the book of Acts, a 'complete' initiation into the Christian faith involves** 1) *faith in Jesus*, 2) *repentance from a life steeped in sin and idolatry*, 3) *baptism in water*, and 4) *an infilling experience of the Holy Spirit*. In your own life, have you experienced all 4?
- In verse 19, many Ephesians choose Jesus over material possessions. In verse 27, many Ephesians choose material possessions over Jesus. In your own life have you made a clear choice to serve Jesus over money (Matt 6:24)?
- Have you ever dabbled in the occult (v19)? If so, have you properly renounced this?
- Notice that Satan, in his cosmic battle against the cause of Christ, loses much ground in Paul's preaching and in the reverse exorcism, but lashes back through the riot. Where in your life, family or church are you aware of the reality of spiritual warfare?

PRAY

-  Thank God for the amazing fact that he uses us, sinful humanity, to spread the gospel and advance his kingdom. Ask him for revival in our day.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 20: THE LOCAL CHURCH

PREPARE

"Nothing on earth has greater potential to change lives and carry out kingdom work than your local church. When it gets it right, its beauty is indescribable and its power breathtaking." - Bill Hybels

"Upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." – Jesus (Matt 16:18)

OPEN ACTS 20

DISCOVER

- v1-6: The year is AD 57. How many people was Paul travelling with? (Clue: don't forget to count Luke, the author of Acts who writes, 'we' in verse 6.)
- v7-8: It appears Paul stayed in Troas for 7 days (v6) so that he could meet with the church, who could probably only all make it for their appointed weekly meeting. What day of the week did they meet? What two activities occurred in their church meetings?
- v9-12: This story has a touch of humour in it when you know that the name Eutychus means 'lucky'. How was he both unlucky and lucky on this occasion?
- v13-16: Many have wondered why the Holy Spirit saw to it that this much detail be included. One possibility is that these verses give dignity to the day-by-day journey (v15) of life and faith. The destination is not everything.
- v17-35: In this message to the many elders/pastors of the Ephesian church, what does Paul impress upon them about leading others spiritually from his example (v17-27), then by direct instruction (v28-32), then from his example (v33-35)? What was Paul's driving passion (v24) and his central method (v27)? Notice the degree of relationship he had with them (v36-38).

APPLY

- The many churches represented by Paul's team (v4) show a great collaboration of churches. Why do you think the interdependence of local churches is so crucial?
- Though in a hurry to get to Jerusalem (v16), Paul shifted his plans to make the church meeting in Troas (v6-7). Do you prioritize the weekly gathering of the church similarly?
- The church meeting included communion and preaching (v7). How do you maximize these two events in your own church and life?
- "The church is the hope of the world, and its future rests in the hands of its leaders." (Bill Hybels). Paul's message concurs with Bill's quote. How can you best support and receive the spiritual leadership in your church?

PRAY

- Pray for the thriving of specific local churches near you. Pray for the leaders in your church along the lines of Paul's words.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 21: FIVEFOLD MINISTRY

PREPARE

"An Acts-inspired movement of churches involves radical communities of disciples, empowered by the Spirit, built on a fivefold ministry, organized around mission, where everyone (not just the leaders) is equipped for God's work." - Alan Hirsch

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." – Paul (Ephesians 4:11-12)

Today, as we reflect on Acts so far, we see God's gift of fivefold ministry to his church...

OPEN ACTS 21

DISCOVER

- v1-6: After saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders, who is next?
- v7-9: What is Philip called (v8)? And his four girls (v9)?
- v10-14: What was Agabus' prophetic word to Paul? Did it deter Paul?
- v15-26: Paul did not renounce his Jewishness when he became a Christian, but he insisted that Gentile converts need not become Jewish. Despite his ground-breaking work amongst Gentiles (v19), what reputation had he developed amongst Jewish Christians of Jerusalem (v20-21)? What advice did James give him (v22-25)?
- v27-40: When the non-Christian Jews found Paul at the temple, how did some of them stir up a mob (v28-29)? Who rescued Paul from being beaten to death (v32-35)? How did Paul (no doubt still bleeding) manage to turn this situation around and end up preaching to this murderous mob (v37-40)?

APPLY

- To thrive and mature, we need all five kinds of leaders that God raises up in a movement of churches. **Apostles** (like Paul) break open new frontiers and plant new churches upon the gospel. Their message: 'Let my people go.' **Prophets** (like Agabus and Philip's daughters) bring prophetic words with great accuracy and power. They say, 'Let my people hear.' **Evangelists** (like Philip) lead many to Christ. Their plea: 'Let my people reach out.' **Pastors** (like Barnabas in Acts 11 and the elders in Acts 20) care for God's flock. Their message: 'Let my people care.' Although the other 4 can teach, **teachers** effectively open up the scriptures and doctrine to people. Their message: 'Let my people know.' Some leaders have combinations of these gifts. In your own church and walk with God, who are the various people who God has used in these five ways? In your own gift-mix which of these 5 do you see traces of?

PRAY

- Pray for those in the fivefold ministry that you are connected to. Ask God to stir up all 5 'passions' in you – going, hearing, reaching, caring and knowing.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 22: YOUR JESUS-STORY

PREPARE

"If the focus of our testimony is our changed life, we as well as our hearers are bound to be disappointed. Focus instead on Jesus and his grace." - Michael Horton.

"The unbelieving world should see our testimony lived out daily. But don't just live it – share it too. Closed mouths only lead to closed gates." - Billy Graham

The year is AD 57. Today we listen in on Paul giving his Jesus-story (aka 'testimony') to some non-Christian Jews who have just tried to kill him (21:37-40). The reason: Paul has spent decades introducing Gentiles to the Jewish God, and has taught them they can be accepted by God without becoming Jewish – an idea that many Jews found unacceptable. Let's hear how he tries to explain his ministry to them...

OPEN ACTS 22

DISCOVER

- v1-5: Paul recounts his AD 35 conversion, previously described in Acts 9. This time Paul adds new information. What language did he speak in (v2)? How does Paul argue for how thoroughly Jewish he was (v3-5)?
- v6-11: How did Paul come to faith in Jesus as the Messiah?
- v7-16: Who soon after, prayed for him, baptized him and prophesied over him in a way that confirmed his call to tell people about Jesus?
- v17-21: What subsequent experience yet again reinforced his call? Note that this likely took place when, recently converted, he visited Jerusalem (9:26). What surprised Paul in this encounter with Jesus about his call?
- v22-23: Did the Jewish crowd receive his defense well?
- v24-30: How did Paul escape further beatings? (Roman law forbade flogging a Roman citizen without a hearing or a formal sentence.)

APPLY

- Paul's testimony is so remarkable that the book of Acts retells it 3 times (Acts 9, 22 and 26). Why do you think personal accounts of coming to faith are so powerful?
- Paul's Jesus-story has 3 components: 1) before coming to Jesus, 2) coming to Jesus, 3) after coming to Jesus. Take some time to tell your Jesus-story, perhaps using this outline.
- Each time Paul's testimony is told with a new spin and some fresh information. For example the details of verses 1-5 and 14-21 are not in earlier telling. Next time you tell your Jesus-story make sure you adapt it to the people you're speaking to.

PRAY

- Ask God for an opportunity to share your Jesus-story soon. Ask him to help you adapt it to the person or situation at hand.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now...

DAY 23: GOD'S PROTECTION

PREPARE

"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' 'Because he loves me,' says the Lord, 'I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.' " – Psalm 91:1-2, 14-15

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." – Paul (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

In our reading of Acts, just when it seems like Paul was about to die, God intervenes to spare him. Ten years later, in AD 67, God did allow him to be martyred. But today we learn that we are immortal until we fulfill the purpose God has for us...

OPEN ACTS 23

DISCOVER

- v1-5: Having addressed a Jewish mob (Acts 22), Paul was then brought before the Jewish 'high council' (also known as the 'Sanhedrin'). What Old Testament law did the high priest break? And Paul (unwittingly)?
- v6-10: How did Paul evade a formal accusation?
- v11: Up until this point, Paul was unsure whether he would even survive his imprisonment in Jerusalem (see 21:13). What new remarkable promise (that implies Paul's survival in Israel) did God give Paul on this evening? How do you think Paul felt?
- v12-22: In light of his promise to Paul in verse 11, and as an immediate example of God's sustaining power, how was Paul rescued from an assassination plot?
- v23-35: How does God now turn events so that Paul is far from the dangers of Jerusalem, closer to Rome, and able to testify for Jesus to the Roman governor?

APPLY

- Paul, it seems, made a mistake in his attempt to witness to the high council. Have you made mistakes when you tried to share your faith with others?
- How have you experienced, if at all, God's sustaining and protecting hand in your life?
- Have you received one or more personal promises from Jesus that shone a light into your life when things seemed dark?

PRAY

- Ask God to help you discern his hand in the circumstances of your life. Pray his protection over your life and family.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 24: GOD'S DELAYS PREPARE

PREPARE

"Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day." – Winnie the Pooh

"You don't live in a random world ruled by chance but by the God of Exodus and Easter. He will do things in you and for you that you never supposed possible, but very often with timings and situations you deemed undesirable." – Eugene Peterson

Paul has stood before a Jerusalem crowd (Acts 22), the high council (Acts 23), but today we see him standing before the Roman governor, Felix, who in the end deals him an agonizing card ... a long delay.

OPEN ACTS 24:1-25:12

DISCOVER

- v1-9: How did the high priest set up Paul's hearing by the Roman governor?
- v10-23: What does Paul say about the charges (v10-13)? About his convictions (v14-16)? About what really happened some days before (v17-21)? What did Felix decide (v22-23)?
- v24-26: On which 3 subjects did Paul speak with Felix about? Why? (Clue: Felix already knew the message of God's forgiveness in verse 22, but he didn't seem convinced that he needed it.)
- v26: How could Paul have gotten out of imprisonment?
- v27: How long was Paul in the Caesarean prison?

APPLY

- Sometimes God makes things move fast. In the first 12 days after coming to Jerusalem (v11), Paul experienced some suffering, but there was still much happening: he spoke to many different audiences in two cities, was delivered from martyrdom twice, and heard God's personal promise to him about going to Rome. Can you think of a short intensive season in your life where much was happening by the hand of God?
- Sometimes God slows things right down. Just when Paul was sure that his life was moving rapidly towards Rome (in accordance with the 23:11 promise from God), he is left in prison for two whole years (v27)! Can you think of seasons in your life when God brought about delays? Why do you think God did this in Paul's life? And in yours?
- Paul refused to manipulate the circumstances of his life through impatient and unethical means (v26). Have you been tempted to take shortcuts or manipulate your future?

PRAY

- Re-affirm your trust and patience in God, regardless of the pace at which his promises come to pass.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 25: GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

PREPARE

"Faith involves waiting in the future promises of God and waiting for their fulfillment. The future is as bright as these promises." – RC Sproul

"Without weakening in his faith, Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead - since he was about a hundred years old - and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was... fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.' - Paul (Romans 4:19-21)

The year is AD 59. Twenty years before, God had promised Paul via a prophetic word that he would testify before kings (9:15). Though he had preached to some pretty important people, no king had listened to his message yet. And two years before, God had promised Paul directly by the Spirit (23:11) that he would survive the persecution in Israel, and testify in Rome. However, Paul was still in prison in Israel, his life still in danger. It might appear that God has forgotten his promise to Paul. Had God forgotten his promises? Were the delays actually God's denials? Today we find out...

OPEN ACTS 25

DISCOVER

- v1-5: What new Roman governor comes into power? How does God foil a death trap for Paul once again?
- v6-12: Why does Festus suggest that Paul go back to Jerusalem to be on trial? What happens that brings the promise of God in 23:11 to near fulfillment?
- v13-27: What promise from twenty years before (9:15) is finally fulfilled?

APPLY

- What are the promises God has made to you – mainly in Scripture, but also in prophetic words or whispers from the Spirit – that have come to pass?
- Praying over God's promises has the power to replace your anxiety with faith, your impatience with joyful perseverance. Have you memorized any promises in God's Word? If so, which ones do you quote most in prayer? Here are ideas of Scriptures to memorize: If you are anxious about not having what it takes (Phil 4:13), not having enough money (Phil 4:19), a strong temptation (1 Cor 10:13), your guilt (1 John 1:9), being rejected (Ps 27:10), dying (John 11:25), troubles (Ps 34:19), someone trying to ruin your life (Rom 8:31), a decision to be made (James 1:5), a situation beyond your control (Ps 46:10), feeling too weak to carry on (Isa 40:31), the final decades of your life (Isa 46:4), or God giving up on you (Phil 1:6).

PRAY

- Thank God for promises fulfilled. Identify the points of anxiety and impatience in your life, and pray God's promises back to him in these areas.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 26: A REASONABLE HOPE

PREPARE

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." – Peter (1 Peter 3:15)

Today, Paul shows us how to explain the reason for our hope...

OPEN ACTS 26

DISCOVER

- v1-8: What do we learn about Agrippa (v3)? Once again Paul tells his testimony, and once again he bends it according to the situation at hand. Let's hone in on the bits of information not included in the Acts 9 and Acts 22 versions. Notice Paul makes two immediate claims: that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Messianic promises in the Old Testament (v6-7), and that Jesus rose from the dead (v8).
- v9-23: Most of the ideas in these verses we have already read in Acts so far. But verses 17-18, which articulates the wonder of personal salvation, is new. What five benefits are there to being saved by Jesus?
- v24-25: How does Festus respond to Paul's message?
- v26-30: How does Agrippa, who knows much about the historical facts of Jesus and who knows the Old Testament (v27), respond?
- v31-32: After all these hearings, what is Festus and Agrippa's final decision on Paul?

APPLY

- Paul claims that what he says is 'reasonable' (v25). He gives the reasons for his hope: the way Jesus fulfilled prophecies (v7), the historical fact of the resurrection (v8), personal experience of Jesus (v15), the reality of God's help in his troubles (v22) and the historicity of Jesus (v26). What are your reasons for believing?
- Festus deemed the gospel and its messengers to be foolish (v24). There are many possible reasons he thought this of Paul: Though in chains, Paul said he was happy (v2). He believed in a historical resurrection (v8, 23). He experienced a vision and changed his life as a result (v14-19). He was more concerned about other's salvations than his own freedom (22). He believed in a hope of eternity and redemption for all people (v23). Do any people think you're crazy to believe in and spread the gospel?
- One reason people are touched by the gospel, yet refuse it is because of their fear of what people will think. Though Paul addressed Agrippa very directly (v26-29), we must not overlook that Bernice his wife was on one side of him, and Festus (who had just called Paul mad) was on the other. Do you know some people who have come really close to trusting in Jesus, but haven't? What do you think stopped them?

PRAY

- Paul prayed openly for the salvation of people (v29). Spend some time praying, by name, for the salvation of some people you know.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

DAY 27: AGENTS OF HOPE

PREPARE

"If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs... If you can wait and not be tired by waiting... If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two impostors just the same... If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, or walk with kings and not lose the common touch... If you can hold on when there is nothing in you, except the will which says to others: 'Hold on!'... Then yours is the earth and everything that's in it." – Rudyard Kipling

"May you ... overflow with hope by the Spirit's power." – Paul (Romans 15:13)

Today's chapter recounts a harrowing storm and shipwreck in AD 60. In it Paul shows us how to be agents of hope in whatever situation we find ourselves...

OPEN ACTS 27

DISCOVER

- v1-5: Where was Paul, the prisoner, heading? Who was taking him there? Which friend joined him on this trip? (Clue: notice the word 'we' in verse 1). What do you think it implies about Paul that he was allowed to see his friends (v3)?
- v6-12: The voyage on the second boat was taking longer than planned, and they were now heading towards Winter (the 'Day of Atonement' (v9) is late Autumn), with the danger of storms. Did Paul agree with the majority (v12)?
- v13-20: The ship and its crew of 276 people (v37) were in serious peril! What description most fascinates you? What was the mood on the boat (v20)?
- v21-26: How does Paul provide hope?
- v27-36: What two moments of guidance did Paul bring? What effect did the first have (v32)? And the second (v36)?
- v37-44: How did God bring Paul's prophetic word to fulfillment?

APPLY

- Paul is a master influencer. Not just in evangelizing and discipling people, and starting new churches, but also in being an agent of hope in whatever group of people he finds himself with (especially when hardly any of them believe the gospel). **We learn 8 things from him:** 1) *Be diplomatic in your requests (v3).* 2) *Speak up and respectfully offer your perspective based on your life experience (v10). Remember that with three missionary journeys behind him, Paul was a seasoned sea traveller.* 3) *Do not be immune to the strains and suffering around you, but rather empathize with it (v20).* 4) *Seek God in prayer and receive fresh encouragement from God, and if appropriate, share it with others (v22-25).* 5) *Believe that God has placed you here for the common good - because you're here, things will be better for everyone (v24).* 6) *Stay calm while others are panicking (v31-32).* 7) *Discern what people need practically and offer suggestions along those lines (v33-37).* 8) *Serve so diligently that you are deemed indispensable to the people you serve (v42-43).*

PRAY

- Ask God to help you apply these insights in your own life and situation.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now...

DAY 28: THE JOY OF IT

PREPARE

"I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained." – Paul (2 Timothy 2:9)

The book of Acts starts with a note of anticipation, and ends with a note of triumph and joy. Today we see 3 things in particular that bring us joy: the joy of community, the joy of God's promises fulfilled, and the joy of seeing God's work go forward...

OPEN ACTS 28

DISCOVER

- v1-10: Shipwreck island turns out to be inhabited by people. Paul and the crew had suffered for over two weeks (27:33) in the storm. How does God compensate for the recent suffering (v1, 7)? What two miracles take place (v3-6, 8)?
- v11-15: How long did they stay on Malta (v11)? How did Paul respond to the warm reception of the believers in Rome (v14-15)?
- v16-22: Paul, though chained to a Roman soldier, was still afforded some freedom (v16, 20). What was the first thing Paul did in Rome? How did the Jews initially receive him?
- v23-28: What were the various responses amongst the Jews to Paul's message? Notice that, as he did throughout his missionary journeys, Paul always first gave the Jews a chance to hear the gospel (v28, Rom 1:16).
- v29-30: Paul was in an open prison from AD 60-62. How does the last verse summarize the whole book of Acts?

APPLY

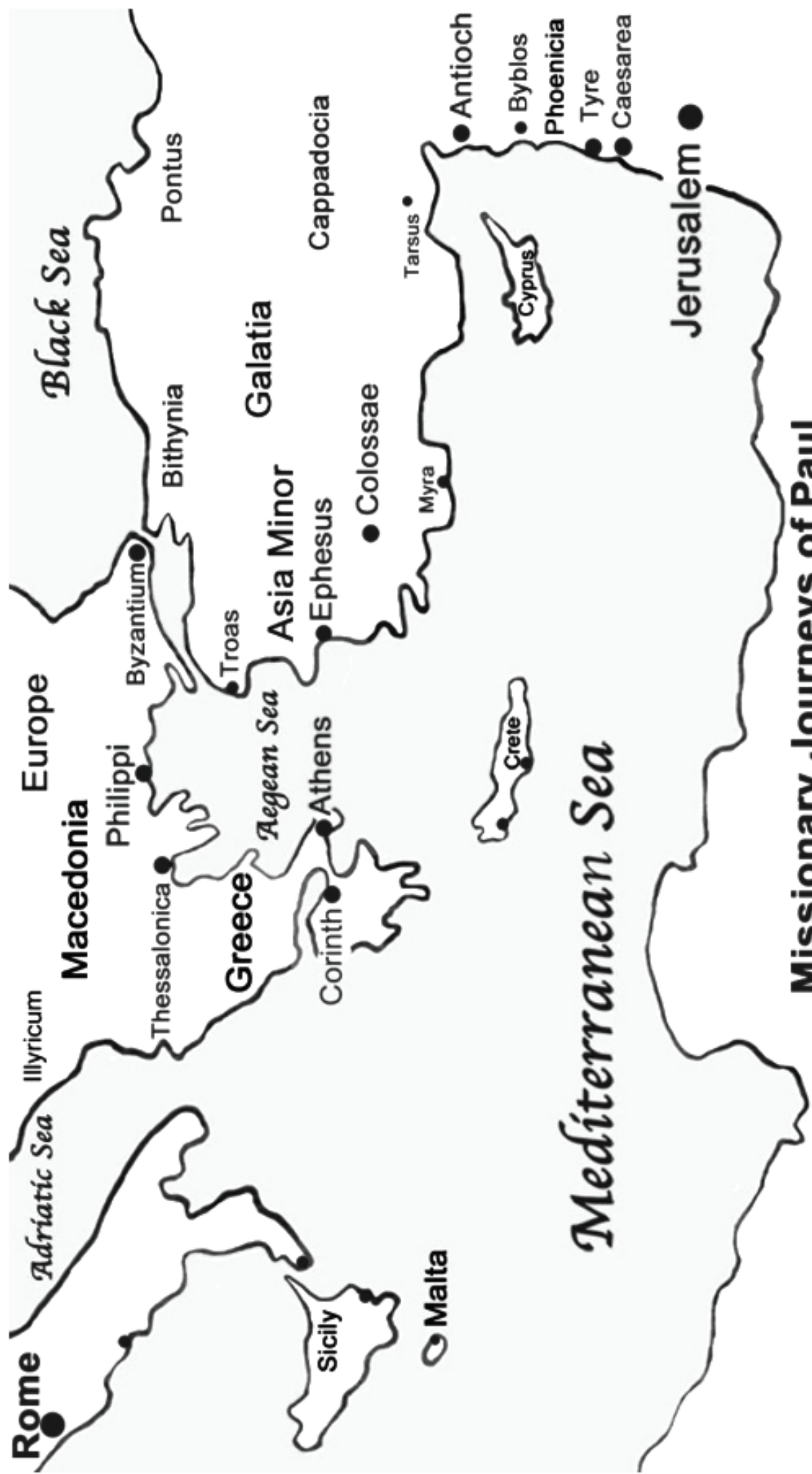
- **Do you know the joy of community?** In community we open our lives and homes to each other. Publius, though not yet a believer, demonstrated the kind of hospitality that should be normal amongst believers (1 Pet 4:9). Paul, though receiving some help from a few believers, had largely been cut off from Christian community for years. What a joy it must have been to be welcomed in by 'brothers and sisters' (v15) in Rome.
- **Do you know the joy of God's promises coming to pass?** Finally, God's promise comes to pass. Paul had always yearned to get to Rome. Ten years before he had declared, 'I must get to Rome' (19:21). Then God had twice promised him that it would be so, both in times when it seemed he would not survive much longer – in the midst of the threat of the fury of people (23:11) and nature (27:24). But God's promise prevailed. The longer the wait, the sweeter the arrival.
- **Do you know the joy of seeing God's word and work advance?** Acts ends in a note of triumph. Paul may be in a prison from AD 60-62, awaiting trial by Caesar, but he is the apostle of the heart set free. He is chained, but God and his gospel are not! The most heinous attempts to kill him have only resulted in Paul being able to preach the gospel in the world's leading city!

PRAY

- Praise God for his goodness to you in these above three areas.
- Write down the one verse, insight or intention you believe God wants you to take with you into the next 24 hours, and pray it deeper into your life now.

*This book is authored by Terran Williams, who leads the preaching team of Common Ground Church.
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All biblical quotes use the New International Version of 2011.



Missionary Journeys of Paul

- Acts 13:4 - 14:26** First Journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor
- Acts 15:40 - 18:22** Second Journey to Macedonia and Greece
- Acts 18:23 - 21:15** Third to Ephesus, Europe, and Asia Minor
- Acts 27:1 - 28:16** Fourth Journey to Malta and Rome

