

THE DAILY QUIET TIME REFLECTIONS SERIES

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Reflections on the Book of Acts

Eugene Han

To the Ends of the Earth: Reflections on the Book of Acts

Copyright © 2026 by Eugene Han

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

The Introduction draws on the introductory notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable, used with gratitude for his lay-accessible scholarship on the text of Scripture.

First Edition

ISBN: [to be assigned]

Published by Eugene Han

dailyqt.org

This book is part of *The Daily Quiet Time Reflections Series*.

How to Use This Book

Reading, Reflecting, Together

Reading, Reflecting, Together

This book was not written to be read in a single sitting. It follows the same daily rhythm as every volume in this series: one reading, one reflection, one day at a time. Each chapter corresponds to a portion of Scripture from the Bible Reading Plan included as an appendix, so that this book can be read alongside your own Bible in the same unhurried pace in which it was first written — as a daily discipline of Quiet Time, not a book to be consumed in a weekend.

Each chapter grew out of years of daily reflections shared by fellow readers working through the same passage on the same day, together with notes drawn from Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas. What you are holding, then, is not a technical commentary but a companion for your own reading — written by fellow travelers, not experts, who have simply tried to sit with the text long enough to let it speak.

We encourage you to read the day's passage first, in your own Bible, before turning to the corresponding chapter here. Let Scripture have the first word. Then let this book help you listen more closely to what God has already said.

At the end of each chapter you will find a handful of reflection and discussion questions, suitable for personal journaling or group study. Take your time. Acts is not a book to be hurried through — its twenty-eight chapters trace thirty years of the Spirit's work through very ordinary people, and its central conviction, that the same Spirit who

filled the apostles fills every believer still, is one best absorbed a little at a time.

Contents

Introduction 6

1. Chapter One — Acts 1–3 10

2. Chapter Two — Acts 4–6 15

3. Chapter Three — Acts 7–8 20

4. Chapter Four — Acts 9–10 25

5. Chapter Five — Acts 11–13 30

6. Chapter Six — Acts 14–15 35

7. Chapter Seven — Acts 16–17 40

8. Chapter Eight — Acts 18–20 45

9. Chapter Nine — Acts 21–23 50

10. Chapter Ten — Acts 24–26 54

11. Chapter Eleven — Acts 27–28 58

Conclusion 62

Appendix: Daily Bible Reading Plan 64

Introduction

The book we call Acts carries the oldest title on record for it, dating back at least to the last quarter of the second century: the Acts of the Apostles. The name is a little misleading. Of the original twelve, only Peter gets any sustained attention, and even he disappears from the story after chapter twelve. James is martyred in a single verse. The book's real center of gravity, for its second half, is a man who was not one of the Twelve at all — a former persecutor named Saul, who becomes Paul. What Luke actually wrote is less a biography of the apostles than the story of how a small, frightened, mostly Jewish prayer meeting in an upper room in Jerusalem became, within thirty years, a Gentile-majority movement with a foothold in the capital of the empire. If the book needed a more accurate title, it might be “The Acts of the Holy Spirit, Through the Apostles” — because the Spirit, not any human strategist, is the one who keeps deciding where this story goes next.

Luke wrote both this book and the Gospel that bears his name, and both are addressed to the same man, Theophilus. Luke was a physician, a Gentile, and for long stretches of Acts a firsthand companion of Paul's — the “we” sections of the narrative (16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16) shift without explanation from third person to first, and the most natural explanation has always been that Luke was simply there, writing what he had seen. He likely finished the book in the early sixties, while Paul was still under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial, since Acts ends there and never mentions the outcome, never mentions Paul's death, never mentions the burning of Rome or the temple's destruction — events Luke, writing about a movement so concerned with Rome and Jerusalem, would almost certainly have referenced had they already happened.

Acts covers about thirty years, from the ascension of Jesus around A.D. 33 to the end of Paul's two-year confinement in Rome around A.D. 62. It is the hinge of the New Testament. Without it, the Gospels end at the ascension and the epistles begin already addressed to fully formed churches scattered across the Roman world, with no explanation of how those churches came to exist or how a Jewish sect became a movement Paul could describe, without apology, as belonging equally to Jew and Gentile. Acts fills that gap. It is also, not incidentally, the only reliable window we have into the circumstances behind half of Paul's letters — Corinth's founding, Ephesus's riot, Thessalonica's persecution all happen on this book's pages before Paul ever picks up a pen to write to those same churches.

Scholars have long noted that Luke wrote Acts in a genre recognizable to any first-century reader: a work of ancient history, on a par with the Greek and Roman historiography of his day, though shaped throughout by a theological purpose no purely secular historian would have shared. Luke was not merely recording facts. He was showing how the risen Christ, through His Spirit, was building a church He had promised even the gates of Hades could not overcome (Matthew 16:18). He was also, quite plausibly, writing something Paul's Roman jailers or judges might eventually read — a account in which not one Roman official, across dozens of encounters, is ever shown condemning Christianity itself, only the false charges brought against it by its enemies. Kerygmatic, apologetic, and pastoral purposes sit comfortably together in the same book, because Luke never separated the truth of the gospel from its defense or its application.

The book's own structure gives us its best outline. Jesus tells the disciples in the first chapter that they will be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8), and that single

verse becomes the map for everything that follows. The gospel begins in Jerusalem (chapters 1–7), spreads into Judea and Samaria (chapters 8–12), and then, through Paul’s three missionary journeys and his final appeal to Caesar, reaches “the ends of the earth” — which for Luke’s first readers meant Rome itself, the center of the world they knew (chapters 13–28). Six times along the way, Luke pauses to summarize the church’s progress — “the word of God spread... the number of disciples increased rapidly” (6:7); “the church... was strengthened... it grew in numbers” (9:31); “the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (19:20) — as though he wants us to see the geography and the growth as two sides of the same fact. The gospel does not merely travel. It multiplies as it goes.

We have arranged this volume around the eleven daily readings of the Bible Reading Plan included as an appendix, each chapter corresponding to two or three chapters of Acts at a time. We have not tried to write a technical commentary — footnoted, exhaustive, addressed to scholars. We have tried to do what the book itself models: to sit with an ordinary, unfinished, sometimes messy community of believers long enough to see the Spirit’s fingerprints on all of it, and to ask, honestly, what it would look like for that same Spirit to work with the same freedom in us.

One caution before we begin, which the book itself all but insists on. Acts is, first and mostly, description rather than prescription. It tells us what the earliest church did — cast lots to choose an apostle, held their possessions in common for a season, spoke in tongues at Pentecost — without always telling us that every church in every age must do the same. Where Acts and the epistles agree, we can build with confidence. Where Acts simply reports what happened, without commanding it as a pattern for all time, we do well to read it the way we would read the

historical books of the Old Testament: as the record of a real and Spirit-filled people, from whom we can learn a great deal, without assuming every detail of their experience was meant to be our rule.

The thread that holds the whole book together, from the upper room in chapter one to the rented house in chapter twenty-eight, is not the cleverness of the apostles or the soundness of their strategy. It is the sovereign, sometimes disruptive, always faithful work of the Holy Spirit, who takes ordinary and frightened people — fishermen, tentmakers, a former persecutor of the church — and makes of them witnesses to the ends of the earth. We are the ends of the earth that verse was written toward. The same Spirit who filled that upper room is still, today, doing the same work in us.

CHAPTER ONE

You Will Be My Witnesses

Acts 1–3

Luke opens his second volume the way any careful historian opens a sequel: by picking up exactly where the first one left off. His Gospel ended with the risen Christ; Acts begins with forty more days of His appearing to the apostles, “giving many convincing proofs that he was alive” (1:3), before He is taken up before their eyes and a cloud hides Him from sight. Two angels ask the obvious question — why are you standing here staring at the sky? — and give the disciples the only itinerary they will need for the next thirty years: “This same Jesus... will come back in the same way you have seen him go” (1:11). The ascension is not a disappearance. It is a departure with a promised return already attached to it.

Between that promise and its fulfillment, Jesus gives the disciples one command and one enabling. The command is to wait in Jerusalem. The enabling is the Holy Spirit, who will give them power to be His witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). That verse is easy to read quickly, but it functions as the outline for the entire book we are about to spend eleven chapters in. Everything from here to Rome is simply this sentence working itself out.

It is worth noticing what the disciples do, and do not do, while they wait. They do not draft a strategic plan. They do not appoint committees. They gather in an upper room — the apostles, some women, Jesus’ mother, His brothers — and devote themselves to prayer (1:14). Then, on their own initiative, they replace Judas with Matthias,

casting lots between two qualified candidates. Scripture never explicitly commends or condemns the decision, and it is worth asking why they didn't simply wait and pray about it the way they clearly knew how to do just verses earlier. Paul, after all, would later become the apostle history remembers as filling exactly this vacancy — not chosen by lot in an upper room, but personally confronted by the risen Christ on a road to Damascus. Perhaps the lesson here is a quiet one: even sincere, prayerful people can be a little too eager to solve by their own initiative what God intended to solve in His own time and His own way. It is not the last time Acts will show us well-meaning believers acting slightly ahead of the Spirit's timing.

Why did they have to wait at all? Because apart from the Spirit's power, their witness would have no power. Jesus had already told them, during His earthly ministry, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), and the ten days of waiting were the discipline of taking Him at His word. We should not assume the power promised in Acts 1:8 was chiefly about miracles, though miracles certainly followed. The men who cowered behind locked doors after the crucifixion, who denied even knowing Jesus under a servant girl's questioning, become within weeks the same men standing before the Sanhedrin and declaring, unflinching, "we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (4:20). If there is a single word for what changed in them between the upper room and the temple courts, it may simply be boldness. That, more than tongues of fire or the sound of rushing wind, may be the ordinary evidence of the Spirit's fullness — then, and now.

The wind and fire do come, on the day of Pentecost, and with them a sound that draws a crowd of Jews from a dozen nations, each hearing Galilean fishermen declare the wonders of God in their own native tongue. Peter stands to explain what onlookers have mistaken for

drunkenness: this is the fulfillment of Joel's ancient prophecy that God would pour out His Spirit on all people in the last days. Then Peter does something the crowd did not expect from a fisherman — he preaches Christ from their own Scriptures, arguing from Psalm 16 that David's prophecy of a Holy One who would not see decay could not have been about David himself, whose tomb everyone in Jerusalem could visit, but about great David's greater Son, raised and exalted to God's right hand. The crowd is cut to the heart. Three thousand are added to the church that day, and Pentecost becomes, in effect, the church's birthday — the moment the Spirit first baptizes believers into one body, uniting Jew and, eventually, Gentile in a way history had never seen before (1 Corinthians 12:13).

What follows in 2:42-47 reads almost like a snapshot rather than a blueprint. The new believers devote themselves — the Greek makes clear this was purposeful, not accidental — to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. They share their possessions so that no one among them is in need. They meet daily, glad and generous, and the Lord adds to their number every day. It is tempting to treat this paragraph as a command for every church in every century to replicate exactly, but Luke gives us description here, not legislation. There is no New Testament command to sell everything and hold all goods in common; there is a clear and repeated command to give generously, to gather regularly, to devote ourselves to the Word and to prayer. We do well to ask which of these practices are timeless obligations and which were simply how one particular, Spirit-filled community chose, in one particular season, to live out obligations that remain constant even when the specific form changes.

The chapter that follows gives us Luke's first extended example of what that Spirit-empowered witness looked like in practice. Peter and John,

on their way to the afternoon prayers, encounter a man lame from birth, begging at the temple gate. “Silver or gold I do not have,” Peter tells him, “but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (3:6). The man doesn’t merely walk — he leaps, and enters the temple courts praising God, and the crowd that gathers gives Peter a second congregation to preach to. His sermon this time is more pointed than his first: you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, he tells them, and asked for a murderer to be released instead; you killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead, and we are witnesses of it. It is not a gentle sermon. Peter does not begin with love before he names sin; he names both, in the same breath, because the gospel has always been a summons to repentance before it is an invitation to comfort. And once again, thousands respond.

We should notice, too, what Peter says about the nature of the healed man’s faith: “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man... was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him” (3:16). The lame man exercised faith, but the faith itself originated in Christ, not in the man’s own resolve. That small phrase — faith that “comes through him” — is worth sitting with. We speak naturally of “my faith,” as though it were something we generated ourselves. Scripture is more careful. Our believing is real and active, but its source is never in us. It is a gift, given by the same Lord who gives the healing that faith receives.

Three chapters into this book, then, we have already been shown the pattern that will recur for the next twenty-five: the Spirit falls, believers speak with unaccustomed boldness, a crowd hears the gospel preached from the Scriptures, some believe, and the church grows — usually in the same breath as opposition begins to gather. What began as eleven frightened men in an upper room has already become a movement the

temple authorities cannot ignore. We will spend the rest of this book watching that movement travel from Jerusalem, exactly as promised, toward the ends of the earth.

For Reflection

1. The disciples waited in prayer for the Spirit's power before they acted. Where in your own life have you been tempted to act before waiting on God, the way the apostles may have done in choosing Matthias?
2. Peter's sermons named both sin and grace in the same breath. Do you find it harder to speak the truth about sin, or to speak the comfort of grace? What would it look like to hold both together as Peter did?
3. The healed man's faith "came through" Christ rather than originating in himself. How does this shape the way you think about your own capacity to believe and to trust God?

CHAPTER TWO

We Must Obey God Rather Than Men

Acts 4–6

The healing of the lame man in chapter three does not go unnoticed by the temple authorities, and chapter four opens with Peter and John’s first arrest. It is worth pausing over who exactly objects. Luke tells us the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees were the ones “greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (4:2). The Sadducees, notably, did not believe in any resurrection at all (cf. Matthew 22:23). Their opposition to the apostles was not, at least at first, a matter of wounded pride or jealousy so much as a genuine theological collision — two irreconcilable claims about what happens after death, colliding in public, in front of a crowd that had just watched a lame man walk. It is a useful reminder that not all religious persecution through history has sprung from cynicism or hatred alone. A great deal of it, then and since, has come from people who sincerely believed one thing confronting people who sincerely proclaimed another, with no room left for both to be true.

Whatever the motive, the result is the same: Peter and John are hauled before the Sanhedrin, the very council that had condemned Jesus weeks earlier, and asked by what power or name they had healed the man. Peter, filled again with the Spirit, does not shrink. He tells them plainly that the healing came through the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth — “whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead” — and adds, quoting Psalm 118, that this Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Salvation is found in no

one else” (4:11-12). The council cannot deny the miracle standing in front of them, so they settle for command: stop speaking in this name altogether. Peter and John’s answer becomes one of the most quietly defiant lines in Scripture: “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (4:19-20).

Released, they go straight to the rest of the believers and pray — and what they pray for is instructive. Not safety. Not the removal of the threat. They ask, quoting Psalm 2 back to God, for boldness to keep speaking, and for God’s hand to stretch out in healing and signs through the name of Jesus. The place where they were gathered is shaken, and they are all filled with the Spirit and speak the word of God boldly (4:31). It is worth asking why they prayed this way rather than praying for the threat itself to lift. Perhaps because they understood something we are slow to learn: that prayer is not chiefly a mechanism for changing our circumstances, but for aligning our hearts with what God has already purposed. We so often pray to be delivered from hard things. The early church prayed, in the middle of a hard thing, simply to be given the courage to keep doing what God had called them to do.

What follows this prayer meeting is a striking picture of unity — believers united in heart and mind, holding their possessions loosely enough that “there was not a needy person among them” (4:34) — and then, immediately, a striking picture of its counterfeit. A Levite named Joseph sells a field and lays the whole proceeds at the apostles’ feet, so unreservedly generous that the church nicknames him Barnabas, “son of encouragement.” Ananias and Sapphira do something that looks identical on the surface — they too sell property and bring the proceeds — except they keep back a portion for themselves while claiming, implicitly, to have given it all. Peter’s rebuke makes clear that the sin was

never the withholding. No one had compelled them to sell anything, let alone give all of it away; the property and the money were theirs to keep or give as they wished. The sin was the lie — pretending to a generosity they had not actually practiced, and in doing so, Peter says, lying not merely to the apostles but to the Holy Spirit himself. Both husband and wife fall dead on the spot, and “great fear seized the whole church” (5:11).

It is a hard passage, and it is meant to be. Ananias and Sapphira wanted the reputation of sacrificial faith without its substance — and Scripture treats that particular counterfeit, the gap between how we present ourselves and what is actually true of us, with unusual severity. Jesus told a similar story in miniature: two men went up to the temple to pray, one confident in his own righteousness, the other unable even to lift his eyes, and it was the second man, not the first, who went home justified (Luke 18:9-14). Better, it seems, to be known as needier, weaker, less impressive than we would like — because that is closer to the truth — than to cultivate an image of holiness we have not earned. “He must increase, but I must decrease,” John the Baptist said of Christ (John 3:30), and there is no smaller, more searching test of whether we actually believe that than the question of how honestly we represent our own giving, our own faith, our own obedience, when no one but God is watching closely enough to know the difference.

Persecution escalates again in chapter five — this time all the apostles are arrested, miraculously freed by an angel in the night, and found the next morning right back in the temple courts, teaching exactly what they had been forbidden to teach. Brought before the council a second time, they give the same answer as before, only sharper: “We must obey God rather than human beings!” (5:29). The council, furious enough to consider killing them, is talked down by a respected Pharisee named Gamaliel,

who reasons that if this movement is merely human in origin it will collapse on its own, as other failed messianic movements already had; but if it is of God, “you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God” (5:39). It is sound, cautious advice, and history has more than vindicated it. The apostles are flogged and released, and Luke records their response in a single remarkable sentence: they left the Sanhedrin “rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (5:41).

The chapter’s persecution, its generosity, and its counterfeit generosity all set up the practical crisis that opens chapter six: a dispute over the daily distribution of food, in which the Greek-speaking widows were apparently being overlooked in favor of the Hebrew-speaking ones. The apostles’ solution is simple and unglamorous — appoint seven men, full of the Spirit and wisdom, to oversee the distribution, freeing the Twelve for prayer and the ministry of the word. Two of those seven, Stephen and Philip, will go on to occupy a startling amount of the book’s remaining chapters, doing far more than serving tables. It is a small, almost administrative decision that becomes, in the Spirit’s hands, the doorway to the next great expansion of the gospel. We are given no indication the apostles knew, when they made this decision, how much would come of it. That may be the point. Faithfulness in the small, practical, unglamorous task — waiting tables, keeping records, showing up for the mundane work no one applauds — is very often exactly where God does His largest work, in ways the person doing the small task rarely sees coming.

For Reflection

1. Peter and John prayed for boldness rather than for the threat against them to be removed. When you are afraid, is your first instinct to

pray for deliverance from the hard thing, or for courage to remain faithful within it?

2. Ananias and Sapphira's sin was misrepresentation rather than the amount they gave. Where might you be tempted to present a more generous, more faithful, or more spiritual image of yourself than is actually true?
3. Stephen and Philip were appointed to a task as ordinary as distributing food, yet God used them for far more. What "small" responsibility has God given you that you may be underestimating?

CHAPTER THREE

Scattered but Not Silenced

Acts 7-8

We have now watched the Sanhedrin confront the apostles three times, and each time the response has grown more severe: a warning (4:18), a flogging (5:40), and now, in chapter seven, a stoning. Stephen — one of the seven chosen just a chapter earlier to wait tables — is dragged before the same council that condemned Jesus, on the testimony of false witnesses who accuse him of speaking against the temple and the law. What he offers in his own defense is not really a defense at all. It is the longest speech in the entire book of Acts, a sweeping retelling of Israel's history from Abraham through Joseph, Moses, and David to Solomon's temple, building toward a single, devastating point: Israel has always resisted the very men God sent to save them. Joseph's own brothers did not recognize him. Moses was rejected by his own people before God used him to deliver them. "You stiff-necked people," Stephen finally says, "you always resist the Holy Spirit! Your ancestors did it, and now you have betrayed and murdered" the Righteous One whose coming the prophets foretold (7:51-52). It is not a speech calculated to save his life. It is a speech calculated to tell the truth regardless of what it costs him.

It costs him everything. The council, cut to the heart in fury rather than repentance, drags him out of the city and stones him while he prays — echoing, almost word for word, the prayers Jesus prayed from the cross: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit... Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:59-60). Luke adds a detail that will matter enormously in the chapters ahead: "the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul," who "approved of their killing him" (7:58; 8:1). We are meant to

feel the weight of that name before we ever meet the man himself. The most zealous enemy the early church will ever face is introduced to us standing over Stephen's murdered body, holding coats.

Stephen's death triggers "a great persecution... against the church at Jerusalem," and all except the apostles are scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1). It would be easy to read this as pure tragedy, and in one sense it was — a faithful man was murdered, and a fledgling church was violently uprooted from its home. But Luke, writing with the benefit of hindsight, shows us something else happening at the very same moment: "those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (8:4). The very persecution meant to crush the church becomes the mechanism God uses to fulfill the command Jesus gave in 1:8 — to carry the gospel beyond Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. Nobody planned this. No committee decided it was time for outreach beyond the city. The Spirit simply took the worst thing that had happened to this young church and turned it into the very expansion the church had been too comfortable, too settled, too Jerusalem-centered to pursue on its own.

This is not the first time Scripture has shown us this pattern, and it will not be the last. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery out of jealousy, and years later he could tell them, without irony or bitterness, "you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). Jesus' own death was, by every human measure, the most unjust and shameful event imaginable — and it became the means of salvation for the world. Later, Paul would beg God three times to remove a painful thorn in his flesh, only to be told, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). We should not read any of this as an excuse to minimize real suffering or to rush past grief toward

some tidy silver lining. Stephen's death was a genuine loss, mourned by devout men who buried him (8:2). But it is also true, and worth holding alongside the grief, that God has a long and consistent history of taking what looks like unmitigated loss and, in His own time, bringing forth from it something that could not otherwise have come to be.

Among those scattered is Philip — another of the seven originally chosen to serve tables, and, like Stephen, a man Luke describes as doing far more than his original assignment. Philip goes down to a city in Samaria and proclaims Christ there, and the response is immediate: crowds pay close attention, the sick are healed, and “there was great joy in that city” (8:8). Among his converts is Simon, a well-known local sorcerer who had, before Philip arrived, enjoyed the town's amazed attention himself. It is a small but telling detail that Luke places these two men side by side — Simon, who had built a following around his own supposed greatness, and Philip, who wanted nothing for himself and simply obeyed wherever the Spirit sent him next. When the apostles in Jerusalem hear that Samaria — historically despised by Jews as a mixed, half-pagan people — has received the word of God, they send Peter and John to confirm it, and the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit just as the Jerusalem believers had at Pentecost. Another wall, Jew against Samaritan, has just come down.

Simon's story takes a darker turn when he offers the apostles money for the ability to give the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands — wanting the power for his own reputation, not for God's glory, and drawing a sharp rebuke from Peter: “May your money perish with you... your heart is not right before God” (8:20-21). It is worth noticing the contrast Luke has built across two men doing similar-looking work. Stephen served tables and ended up defending the faith with his life. Philip served tables and ended up carrying the gospel to a whole city, unpretentiously,

without ever grasping for credit. Simon wanted the appearance of spiritual power without any interest in the God behind it. Two of these three receive the Spirit's blessing precisely because they wanted nothing for themselves. The third is rebuked for wanting everything for himself. Ambition dressed up as ministry rarely survives contact with the God whose glory it was secretly meant to steal.

The chapter closes with one more encounter, and it may be the most tender in the book so far. An angel sends Philip south, to a desert road, where he meets an Ethiopian court official — a eunuch, a foreigner, a man who had gone all the way to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home reading Isaiah 53 without understanding it. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asks. “How can I,” the man replies, “unless someone explains it to me?” (8:30-31). Philip climbs into the chariot and, “beginning with that very passage of Scripture,” tells him the good news about Jesus. The man believes, is baptized in whatever water they can find along the road, and goes on his way rejoicing — while Philip is swept away by the Spirit to preach in yet another town. Nothing about this encounter was Philip's idea. An angel sent him to a desert road; the Spirit told him to approach the chariot; the Spirit carried him away again the moment the work was finished. Philip's part, from beginning to end, was simply to go where he was told and to open his mouth when he got there. It turns out that is very often enough.

For Reflection

1. Stephen's death, meant to crush the church, became the occasion for the gospel's spread beyond Jerusalem. Where have you seen God bring good out of something that, at the time, felt like pure loss?

2. Philip and Simon both did visible, impressive spiritual work — but for very different reasons. How do you examine your own motives when you serve, teach, or lead?
3. Philip obeyed a sequence of specific, sometimes strange instructions — go to this road, approach this chariot — without knowing in advance what would come of it. What would it look like for you to obey the next small prompting, even without seeing the full plan?

CHAPTER FOUR

God Shows No Partiality

Acts 9–10

We left Saul holding coats at the edge of a murder. We meet him again in chapter nine “still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” (9:1), armed with letters from the high priest authorizing him to drag Christians in Damascus back to Jerusalem in chains. He is, by any reasonable measure, the last person anyone would have chosen to become the New Testament’s most influential missionary and the author of thirteen of its twenty-seven books. That is very nearly the point. On the road to Damascus, a light from heaven stops him cold, and a voice asks the question that will define the rest of his life: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (9:4). Blinded for three days, he is led by the hand into the very city he had come to terrorize, and there a reluctant disciple named Ananias — understandably terrified of the man’s reputation — lays hands on him at God’s own command, and Saul’s sight, along with something far more significant, is restored.

Why Saul, and not one of the Twelve, or Philip, or some other proven believer already serving faithfully? Paul himself would later suggest the answer had less to do with his qualifications than with God’s intention to make an example out of the least qualified candidate imaginable: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me... Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him” (1 Timothy 1:15-16). If Jesus could save the man who held the coats at Stephen’s stoning, no one reading this story has ever been too far gone to be reached. God also tells Ananias something

that should give every one of us pause about how we picture the Christian life once it begins: “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (9:16). Paul’s calling was never framed as a reward for finally getting things right. It was framed, from its very first hour, as a summons into suffering for the sake of a name he had spent years trying to erase.

Saul’s transformation is not merely emotional or private. Within days he is in the synagogues of Damascus, preaching the very Jesus he had come to arrest believers in the name of — to the astonishment of everyone who knew what he had been. The plot against his life that follows (believers lowering him over the city wall in a basket) is the first of many such escapes in the chapters ahead, a small foretaste of a pattern that will recur across the rest of the book: wherever Paul goes, both remarkable belief and violent opposition tend to follow closely behind, often on the very same day. Luke closes this section of the story with a brief note of peace: “the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace... and grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord” (9:31). It is one of the six summary statements that punctuate this book, and it functions almost like a chapter break — the persecution that began with Stephen has, for the moment, run its course, and Saul, its chief instigator, is now one of the persecuted.

Chapter ten turns from Saul’s story to a very different one, though both stories will converge, before the chapter is finished, on the same theological point. Peter, resting on a rooftop in Joppa, falls into a trance and sees a sheet lowered from heaven, filled with animals the Mosaic law forbade Jews to eat. A voice tells him three times, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (10:15). Peter is still puzzling over the vision’s meaning when messengers arrive at the door, sent by a Roman centurion named Cornelius — a Gentile, a man devout and God-fearing

but uncircumcised, entirely outside the boundary lines that had defined who could be considered ritually clean. The vision and the visitors arrive together, and only together do they make sense: the unclean animals were never really the point. The point was Cornelius, and every Gentile like him, whom generations of Jewish practice had learned to treat the way Peter had always treated those animals — as unclean, off-limits, not to be shared a table with.

Peter goes, against every instinct his upbringing had trained into him, and tells Cornelius's household plainly what the vision taught him: "God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean... I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (10:28, 34-35). While Peter is still speaking, the Holy Spirit falls on everyone listening — Gentiles, uncircumcised, previously "unclean" by every category Peter had inherited — and they begin speaking in tongues and praising God, exactly as the Jerusalem believers had at Pentecost. The Jewish believers who came with Peter are astonished. Peter's own conclusion is unambiguous: "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have" (10:47).

It would be easy to hear this story as evidence that God simply loves everyone equally and accepts everyone who is sincere in whatever they believe — a comforting but not quite accurate reading of what actually happens here. Cornelius was chosen; the passage never claims he was the only devout Gentile in the empire, and Scripture elsewhere is careful to describe God's mercy as generous but not indiscriminate — sovereign, freely given, but not owed to anyone on the basis of sincerity alone (cf. Romans 9). What Cornelius's story does establish, decisively and for the whole church going forward, is that the old dividing line — Jew on one

side of God's household, Gentile permanently on the other — has been dismantled by God Himself, not gradually worn away by shifting human sentiment, but abolished in a single unmistakable vision and a single unmistakable outpouring of the Spirit. Peter did not decide the Gentiles were now acceptable. God showed him they always had been, waiting only for the moment He chose to reveal it.

This will matter enormously for the rest of the book. Every missionary journey that follows, every synagogue Paul walks into and then walks out of toward the Gentiles instead, every argument at the Jerusalem council still several chapters away, rests on the foundation laid here in chapter ten: God shows no partiality, and the gospel was never meant to stop at the borders of any one nation, ethnicity, or bloodline. Two stories, a persecutor transformed and a Gentile welcomed, sit side by side in these two chapters because they are, at bottom, the same story told twice — of a God who reaches for the very people His own people had written off, and finds them, in every case, exactly where He intended to find them all along.

For Reflection

1. Saul was, by every human measure, the least likely candidate for the mission God gave him. Is there someone in your own life you have quietly written off as beyond reach?
2. Peter had to have his own inherited categories of “clean” and “unclean” directly challenged by God before he could see Cornelius rightly. What categories might you be holding onto that God wants to challenge?
3. God told Ananias that Saul's calling would involve suffering from its very first hour. How does this shape the way you think about

difficulty in your own walk with Christ — as evidence something has gone wrong, or as something God may have purposed from the beginning?

CHAPTER FIVE

Set Apart for the Work

Acts 11–13

News of what happened at Cornelius’s house travels back to Jerusalem faster than Peter does, and not everyone is pleased. “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them,” the circumcised believers charge him, the moment he arrives (11:3). Peter’s response is simply to tell the story again, step by step — the vision, the messengers, the Spirit falling on Gentiles exactly as it had fallen on Jews at Pentecost — and to ask the question that settles the matter: “who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” (11:17). It is a small but important model for how the church handled its first serious internal controversy: not by asserting authority, but by testifying honestly to what God had already done and letting that testimony carry its own weight. The critics are silenced and, remarkably, praise God: “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life!” (11:18).

Meanwhile, the persecution that scattered believers after Stephen’s death has been quietly doing its own work far from Jerusalem. Some who fled reached Antioch, a major Gentile city in Syria, and began telling Greeks there about the Lord Jesus, “and the Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed” (11:21). Jerusalem sends Barnabas — the same generous “son of encouragement” we met selling his field back in chapter four — to investigate, and he does something Luke clearly wants us to notice: rather than treating this unauthorized Gentile revival with suspicion, he “saw evidence of the grace of God and was glad” (11:23). Barnabas fetches Saul from Tarsus, and together they spend a full year teaching this new congregation, which becomes, almost

as an aside in Luke's telling, the place where believers were first called "Christians" (11:26). The name that would eventually spread across the whole world began, unglamorously, as a nickname given to a mixed, still-forming congregation of new converts in a Syrian city no one in Jerusalem had originally planned to evangelize.

Antioch's believers demonstrate their gratitude for the gospel in the most concrete way available to them. When a prophet named Agabus predicts a coming famine, the disciples — predominantly Gentile, recently taught by Jewish teachers, still very new in the faith — decide to send relief to their "poor Jewish brothers" in Judea, carried by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (11:27-30). It is worth pausing on this small detail. The very believers whose inclusion had just been controversial back in Jerusalem are the first to act sacrificially on behalf of the believers who had questioned that inclusion. Grace, received, tends to overflow into generosity rather than resentment — even generosity extended toward people who had not yet fully welcomed you.

Chapter twelve interrupts this story of expansion with one of persecution's darker turns. King Herod Agrippa I, eager to please the Jewish leadership, has the apostle James — the brother of John, one of Jesus' inner circle — put to death, and, seeing this pleased the people, arrests Peter as well, intending the same fate. Luke's account of what happens next hinges on a single sentence easy to read past too quickly: "the church was earnestly praying to God for him" (12:5). No such prayer is recorded for James. We are not told why one apostle was delivered and the other was not, and Scripture never offers us a formula that guarantees deliverance in exchange for enough faithful prayer. What we are given instead is Luke's careful notice that when the church prayed, in this instance, God answered in a way that stunned even the ones praying — an angel wakes Peter, his chains fall away, the iron gate

to the city opens on its own, and Peter, still half convinced he is dreaming, walks free. He arrives at the house where believers are praying for exactly this outcome, knocks, and the servant girl who answers is so astonished she runs back inside without letting him in, insisting to the disbelieving crowd that Peter is standing at the door (12:6-16). It is a strange comfort — that God can answer even the prayers we did not quite believe He would answer, offered by people who, like us, often pray with more hope than certainty.

Herod, humiliated, is struck down by an angel not long after — not, notably, for killing James or imprisoning Peter, but for accepting a crowd's flattering claim that he spoke "with the voice of a god, not of a man," and failing to give God the glory (12:21-23). It is a sober closing note to the chapter: God's patience with persecution is real, but His jealousy for His own glory has limits a king, however powerful, cannot presume upon.

With chapter thirteen, the book's center of gravity shifts decisively. Luke has spent twelve chapters largely following Peter; from here forward, with only occasional exceptions, the story belongs to Paul. It begins, fittingly, not with a strategic plan but with worship: prophets and teachers at Antioch are fasting and worshiping when the Holy Spirit speaks — we are not told exactly how — and says, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (13:2). The church responds with fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands, and sends them off. This is the moment the church's mission, until now largely reactive — scattering under persecution, following where the Spirit happened to send Philip — becomes deliberate and outward-facing for the first time. Notably, it is not human strategy that initiates the first missionary journey in church history. It is the Spirit speaking

into a room of people who were simply worshiping, with no agenda of their own beyond seeking God.

Barnabas and Saul, accompanied for now by Barnabas's cousin John Mark, sail first to Cyprus, where a Jewish sorcerer named Elymas opposes their message before the Roman proconsul, and Saul — called Paul from this point forward, using the Gentile name that will dominate the rest of the book — rebukes him and strikes him blind, leading the proconsul to believe. From Cyprus they sail to Pisidian Antioch, where Paul, in a synagogue address, does what Peter had done at Pentecost: traces Israel's history from Egypt through David to Jesus, arguing from Scripture — Psalm 2, Isaiah 55, Psalm 16 — that the crucified and risen Jesus fulfills every messianic promise, and that “through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you... a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses” (13:38-39). The response, once again, splits sharply: many Jews and God-fearing Gentiles believe, but jealousy at the size of the Gentile crowd the following Sabbath turns the synagogue leadership against Paul and Barnabas, who respond with words that will echo through the rest of the book: “since you reject [the word of God] and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles” (13:46).

We are only thirteen chapters in, and already the pattern that will define the remainder of Acts has fully emerged: the gospel preached, some believe with joy, opposition gathers, the missionaries move on rather than force the issue, and the word of God continues to spread regardless of how any single city receives it. Nothing about this pattern was planned by Barnabas or Paul in advance. It was set in motion, from its very first step, by a Spirit who spoke into an ordinary worship gathering and set two men apart for work they could not yet have imagined.

For Reflection

1. Barnabas responded to an unauthorized, unexpected move of God's grace among the Gentiles with gladness rather than suspicion. How do you tend to respond when God appears to be working outside your expectations or comfort?
2. The church prayed earnestly for Peter's release but left no similar recorded prayer for James, and God answered the two situations very differently. How do you hold together confident prayer and the reality that God does not always answer as we hope?
3. The first missionary journey began in a worship gathering with no agenda beyond seeking God, not in a strategic planning session. Where might God be waiting to speak into your own unhurried worship, rather than into your own plans?

CHAPTER SIX

A Door of Faith to the Gentiles

Acts 14–15

Driven from Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas travel on to Iconium, where the same pattern repeats almost exactly: a large number of Jews and Greeks believe, and unbelieving Jews stir up opposition until a plot to stone the missionaries forces them to flee to the neighboring cities of Lystra and Derbe. In Lystra, Paul heals a man lame from birth, and the crowd's response takes an unexpected turn — they conclude the gods have come down in human form, and begin preparing to offer sacrifices to Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes. Paul and Barnabas tear their clothes in horror and rush into the crowd insisting they are mere men, urging the people to turn instead from these worthless idols to “the living God, who made heaven and earth” (14:15). It is a jarring scene — the same city that nearly worships Paul as a god will, within the same chapter, stone him and drag him out of the city, having been turned against him by Jews who arrived from Antioch and Iconium (14:19). The crowd's adoration and the crowd's fury both prove equally fickle, equally quick to shift with whoever spoke to them last. Somehow Paul survives the stoning and, astonishingly, walks back into the very city that had just tried to kill him before leaving the next day for Derbe, where, unlike Lystra, “they won a large number of disciples” (14:21).

What follows is easy to miss, tucked between two more dramatic scenes, but it may be the chapter's most important detail. Rather than sailing straight home from Derbe, Paul and Barnabas backtrack through every city that had just persecuted them — Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch — “strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to

the faith,” and warning them plainly that “we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (14:22). They appoint elders in each church, commit them to the Lord with prayer and fasting, and only then sail home to Antioch, where they report “all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (14:27). Notice what they do not report: numbers, methods, strategies that worked. They report what God did — a small but consistent grammar throughout Acts, where the missionaries are always careful to credit the results to God’s initiative rather than their own competence.

It would be reasonable to expect the missionaries, freshly stoned and nearly killed, to have earned a season of rest. Instead they return, deliberately, to the very places that had rejected and nearly murdered them, to strengthen believers there. Difficulty, unexpected outcomes, persecution, unpredictable receptions — none of it derailed the mission, and none of it was treated by Luke, or apparently by Paul and Barnabas themselves, as evidence that something had gone wrong. Success and failure, by any worldly measure, were scattered unevenly across Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe in the same journey. What mattered to Paul and Barnabas was not the outcome in any one city but faithfulness to the calling itself — an idea worth sitting with for anyone tempted to measure their own obedience by whether it “worked.”

Chapter fifteen brings the young church’s most consequential internal dispute to a head. Some believers from Judea arrive in Antioch teaching that Gentile converts cannot be saved unless they are circumcised according to the custom of Moses — effectively requiring Gentiles to become culturally and ritually Jewish before they could be considered fully Christian. Paul and Barnabas sharply dispute this, and the church sends them, along with others, to Jerusalem to settle the question with the apostles and elders. It is worth noting how the early church handled

disagreement of this magnitude: not by quietly tolerating two incompatible gospels side by side in different cities, but by convening the recognized leadership, hearing both sides, and reaching a single, binding answer the whole church could unite around.

Peter speaks first, reminding the council of exactly the events we read in chapter ten — how God had already settled this question, giving the Holy Spirit to Cornelius’s household “just as he did to us,” making “no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith” (15:8-9). To insist now on circumcision and law-keeping, Peter argues, would be to “put God to the test by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear” (15:10). Paul and Barnabas add their own testimony of the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them, and finally James — the brother of Jesus, apparently the presiding elder of the Jerusalem church — closes the debate by tying the whole matter to the prophets, quoting Amos’s promise that “all the Gentiles who bear my name” would one day seek the Lord. His conclusion becomes the council’s official ruling, carried by letter back to Antioch: Gentile believers are not required to be circumcised or to keep the law of Moses, though for the sake of peace and unity with Jewish believers, they are asked to abstain from food associated with idol worship, from blood, from meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality (15:19-21).

It is worth being precise about what this council did and did not decide, because the distinction has mattered to the church in every generation since. It did not decide that good works are optional or that the moral law no longer matters — Peter and James, the two men most responsible for this decision, would both go on to write letters insisting that genuine faith always produces obedience, “for faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:26). What the council decided was narrower and, in some ways,

more radical: that no ritual observance, no keeping of the law, no cultural conformity to Jewish practice, could be added as a requirement for salvation alongside grace through faith in Christ. Salvation was, for both Jew and Gentile, entirely a matter of grace — “we believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (15:11). Legalism, properly defined, is not the teaching that believers should obey God; it is the teaching that obedience is what saves us, or what completes what Christ’s death left unfinished. The council closed that door decisively, and the letter carrying its verdict is received in Antioch “with joy” (15:31).

The chapter, and this section of Acts, closes on a smaller, more human note. Paul wants to revisit the churches from the first journey; Barnabas wants to bring John Mark, who had deserted them partway through that journey; Paul, apparently still stung by the desertion, disagrees sharply enough that the two missionary partners separate, Barnabas sailing for Cyprus with Mark, Paul choosing Silas and heading overland instead (15:36-41). Luke records the disagreement without editorializing, without assigning blame to either man. It is a small reminder that even the most Spirit-led partnerships in Scripture were not immune to genuine, sharp disagreement — and that God, in His own providence, used the split to send two missionary teams out instead of one rather than derailing the mission either way.

For Reflection

1. Paul and Barnabas returned to the very cities that had persecuted them, to strengthen believers there, rather than moving on immediately. What would it look like for you to return, in some form, to a place or relationship that has cost you something, for the sake of others’ good?

2. The Jerusalem council distinguished sharply between salvation by grace and the ongoing call to obedience. Where might you be tempted to blur that distinction — either by adding requirements to grace, or by using grace as an excuse to set obedience aside?
3. Paul and Barnabas's disagreement over John Mark was sharp enough to end their partnership, yet God used the split rather than being thwarted by it. Where have you seen God bring good even out of conflict or division among sincere believers?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Come Over and Help Us

Acts 16-17

Paul's second journey begins with a small but telling decision. In Lystra he meets a disciple named Timothy, "well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium" (16:2), and wants him as a traveling companion. Notice what guides the choice: no vision, no audible voice, no supernatural sign — simply Timothy's established reputation among people who already knew him well. Not every decision in the Christian life comes wrapped in unmistakable guidance. Sometimes discernment looks like paying attention to a person's character over time and trusting what that character has already demonstrated. Paul has Timothy circumcised before they set out — not because circumcision has any bearing on salvation, as the Jerusalem council had just settled definitively, but because Timothy's mother was Jewish and his uncircumcised state would needlessly hinder their ministry to the many Jews they would encounter along the way. Paul, ever practical about which battles were worth fighting, was willing to set aside a freedom he did not need to exercise for the sake of a wider hearing.

What follows is one of the more mysterious sequences in the whole book. Luke tells us, without elaboration, that the travelers were "kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia" and later "tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to" (16:6-7). We are given no explanation of how this guidance came, only that it came, and that it was negative — closed doors rather than open ones. It is a useful corrective for anyone who assumes the Spirit's leading always feels like clarity and forward motion. Sometimes

obedience looks like accepting that a door has been shut, without yet knowing which door will open next. That door opens that same night, in a vision: a man of Macedonia, pleading, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (16:9). Paul concludes God is calling them to preach there, and the missionaries — Luke among them now, as the narrative shifts abruptly into the first person “we” — cross from Asia into Europe for the first time in the history of this movement.

Philippi, their first stop in Macedonia, has no synagogue, so Paul goes instead to a riverside gathering of women at prayer, and there meets Lydia, a dealer in expensive purple cloth, whose heart the Lord “opened... to respond to Paul’s message” (16:14). It is a small but important phrase — even this eager, devout, God-fearing woman needed her heart opened by God before she could believe; her conversion, like every conversion in this book, was ultimately God’s initiative before it was ever her decision. Lydia’s household is baptized, and she insists the missionaries stay in her home. Not long after, a demon-possessed slave girl begins following the missionaries, shouting accurate but unwelcome endorsements of their message until Paul, “very much annoyed,” casts the spirit out in Jesus’ name — and the girl’s owners, furious at the sudden loss of her fortune-telling income, drag Paul and Silas before the magistrates and have them beaten and imprisoned.

What happens in that Philippian jail has become one of the most beloved scenes in Scripture, and it earns its place. At midnight, backs freshly torn open by rods, feet fastened in stocks, Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns while the other prisoners listen. An earthquake shakes the foundations, every door flies open, and every prisoner’s chains fall loose — and yet, remarkably, no one flees. The jailer, waking to find the doors open and assuming the worst, draws his

sword to kill himself rather than face the consequences of a mass escape, until Paul calls out that everyone is still there. The jailer's question, trembling, is the same question every genuine encounter with the gospel eventually provokes: "what must I do to be saved?" Paul's answer is as simple as any in Scripture: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household" (16:31). The jailer washes their wounds before the night is over; they baptize him and his household before the sun comes up. Three conversions in this one chapter — Lydia, the slave girl (implicitly), and the jailer — and Luke is careful to show each one as a supernatural act of God rather than a triumph of persuasive technique: a heart opened, a demon cast out, an earthquake that shook loose far more than prison chains.

Chapter seventeen moves the mission to Thessalonica, Berea, and finally Athens, and gives us three different pictures of how the gospel was received depending on where and to whom it was preached. In Thessalonica, Paul reasons from the Scriptures for three Sabbaths, and while some believe, jealous opponents form a mob and have to be answered with an accusation Rome would take seriously — that these men were "defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus" (17:7). In Berea, the reception is strikingly different: Luke calls the Bereans "more noble" than the Thessalonians, "for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (17:11). It is a small but pointed compliment, and a standing challenge to every reader of this book in every generation since — not to receive teaching, even good teaching, uncritically, but to test it daily against Scripture itself.

Athens gives us Paul at his most adaptive. Waiting alone for Silas and Timothy, he is "greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols" (17:16), and instead of simply denouncing the idolatry, he uses it as a

bridge. Standing before the Areopagus, the city's council of philosophers, he begins not with Moses or the prophets — an approach that would have meant nothing to this audience — but with an altar he had noticed in his walk through the city, inscribed “to an unknown god.” “What you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you,” he says, and goes on to describe the God who made the world, who does not live in temples built by human hands, who “is not far from any one of us,” quoting even the Athenians' own poets back to them before finally arriving at the resurrection of Christ (17:23-31). It is a masterclass in meeting people where they actually are rather than where we wish they already stood. In Thessalonica, among Scripture-literate Jews, Paul argued from the prophets. In Athens, among philosophers who had never opened a Hebrew Bible, he argued from creation, conscience, and the Athenians' own poetry. Some in the Areopagus sneer at the mention of resurrection; a few believe. Paul does not seem discouraged by the mixed result. He had adapted his method to his audience without ever adapting his message, and that distinction — flexible approach, unchanging content — will define his ministry for the rest of the book.

For Reflection

1. Paul's decision to bring Timothy relied on ordinary discernment — a reputation confirmed by people who knew him well — rather than a supernatural sign. How do you weigh ordinary wisdom against the desire for more dramatic guidance in your own decisions?
2. The Spirit's guidance in this chapter came first as closed doors, before it came as an open one. How do you respond when God

seems to be closing a door without yet showing you where He wants you to go instead?

3. Paul adapted his approach dramatically between the synagogue in Thessalonica and the Areopagus in Athens, without changing his actual message. Where might you need to adapt how you share your faith with someone whose starting point is very different from your own?

CHAPTER EIGHT

I Have Many People in This City

Acts 18–20

From Athens, Paul travels to Corinth — a wealthy, cosmopolitan port city with a reputation, even among pagans, for excess. There he meets Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish tentmakers recently expelled from Rome along with other Jews by the emperor Claudius, and moves in with them, working the trade they share while reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath. When Silas and Timothy finally rejoin him — likely bringing financial support from the Philippian believers, which freed him to preach full time — Paul devotes himself entirely to testifying that Jesus was the Messiah. A synagogue leader named Crispus believes, along with his household, and opposition from other Jews eventually pushes Paul toward the Gentiles, exactly as it had in city after city before this one. Brought before the Roman proconsul Gallio on trumped-up charges, Paul is spared any real trial at all — Gallio dismisses the case as an internal religious dispute beneath his concern, and refuses even to hear it.

What makes Paul's eighteen months in Corinth worth pausing over is a vision he receives partway through, easy to miss but strikingly reassuring: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city" (18:9-10). We know from Paul's own letters to this same church what kind of city, and what kind of congregation, Corinth actually was — divided, quarrelsome, tolerant of open immorality, confused about the resurrection, prone to lawsuits and spiritual pride and disorder at the Lord's table. Reading Acts eighteen

and then reading 1 Corinthians back to back can feel almost like reading about two different churches. But it is the same church, and Christ's own verdict on it, delivered before Paul had preached a single sermon there, was not "avoid this place" but "I have many people in this city." We should let that steady us whenever we are tempted to despair over the mess visible in any particular church, including our own. God's people are found in messy, imperfect, sometimes scandal-ridden congregations, because that is the only kind of congregation there has ever been. He is not surprised by the mess, and He has never stopped calling His own out from the middle of it.

Paul eventually sails for Syria, leaving Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, where they encounter Apollos — an eloquent, Scripture-versed teacher from Alexandria who knew "only the baptism of John" and preached accurately but incompletely about Jesus. Rather than publicly correcting him or dismissing him as unqualified, this tentmaking couple "invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (18:26), and Apollos goes on to become a significant help to believers across Achaia. It is a small, easily overlooked model of discipleship: not a platform correction, but a private, generous, patient conversation between people willing to teach and a person humble enough to be taught.

Chapter nineteen brings Paul back to Ephesus himself, and what he finds there illustrates just how incomplete some early believers' understanding still was. He meets a group of disciples who, like Apollos before Priscilla and Aquila's instruction, knew only John's baptism of repentance and had "not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (19:2). Paul explains that John's baptism pointed forward to one who was coming after him — Jesus — and when these disciples are baptized in Jesus' name and Paul lays hands on them, the Holy Spirit comes on them

as it had on believers at Pentecost and in Cornelius's household. For two years afterward Paul teaches daily in the lecture hall of a man named Tyrannus, and Luke tells us "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (19:10) — an entire region evangelized, in large part, from one rented hall in one city.

God confirms Paul's preaching in Ephesus with unusual displays of power — even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him are carried to the sick, and diseases and evil spirits leave. It is a reminder that the signs accompanying the apostles' ministry throughout this book were never meant to center attention on the apostles themselves, and Ephesus gives us a vivid warning against the opposite temptation: seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva try to use Jesus' name as a kind of formula, invoking "the Jesus whom Paul preaches" over a demon-possessed man without any actual relationship to Christ themselves — and the evil spirit answers, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" before the possessed man overpowers all seven of them (19:13-16). The episode spreads such fear and reverence through the city that many who had practiced sorcery bring their scrolls together and burn them publicly — a bonfire of books worth, by Luke's own estimate, fifty thousand silver coins (19:19). The gospel had begun to threaten not just individual souls but an entire local economy built on the occult.

That same economic threat resurfaces in the chapter's closing scene, this time aimed at Ephesus's massive silver trade in shrines to the goddess Artemis. A silversmith named Demetrius, seeing his livelihood endangered by Paul's preaching that "gods made by human hands are no gods at all" (19:26), whips up a riot that fills the city's theater with a confused, chanting crowd for nearly two hours before a local official finally calms them, warning that Rome would not look kindly on

unauthorized civil disorder. Paul narrowly avoids entering the theater himself, dissuaded by concerned friends, and the uproar dies down as quickly as it began. Once again, as in Philippi and Thessalonica before it, the fiercest opposition to the gospel in Ephesus came not chiefly from theological disagreement but from threatened commercial interests — a pattern worth remembering whenever we are tempted to assume resistance to the gospel is always, or even usually, primarily intellectual.

Chapter twenty finds Paul retracing familiar ground — through Macedonia, into Greece, and back through Troas, where, staying up late teaching a gathered congregation, a young man named Eutychus dozes off, falls three stories from an open window, and is picked up dead — until Paul, in an echo of Elijah and Elisha before him, throws himself on the boy and raises him back to life, “and everyone was greatly comforted” (20:10-12). The chapter closes with one of the most personally revealing speeches in the entire book: summoning the Ephesian elders to meet him at Miletus, Paul reminds them of his years of tearful, sacrificial ministry among them, warns that “savage wolves” will come among them once he is gone, and commends them to God and to His word of grace. “I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold,” he tells them, “these hands of mine have supplied my own needs... In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (20:33-35). It is Paul’s own summary of what faithful ministry looked like from the inside — declaring nothing profitable back, sparing no cost to himself, and leaving nothing behind but a church commended, ultimately, not to his own ongoing leadership but “to God and to the word of his grace” (20:32).

For Reflection

1. Christ told Paul, before he had preached a single sermon in Corinth, “I have many people in this city” — a church that would later prove deeply flawed. How does this shape the way you view the imperfections in your own church or in the wider church today?
2. The sons of Sceva tried to use Jesus’ name as a formula without any real relationship to Him, and were overpowered. Is there any area of your own faith where you rely more on familiar religious language than on genuine relationship with Christ?
3. Paul describes his ministry among the Ephesians as marked by tears, hard work, and a refusal to seek personal gain. What would it look like for your own service to others to be marked by that same combination of sacrifice and joy?

CHAPTER NINE

Ready to Die for the Name

Acts 21–23

Every step of Paul’s journey back toward Jerusalem in chapter twenty-one is accompanied by warning. In Tyre, disciples “through the Spirit” urge him not to go on (21:4). In Caesarea, staying with Philip the evangelist — the same Philip who once preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, now settled with four prophesying daughters — the prophet Agabus takes Paul’s own belt, binds his own hands and feet with it, and declares that this is exactly what the Jews in Jerusalem will do to the man who owns it. Everyone present, Luke included, begs Paul not to go. Paul’s answer is unwavering: “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (21:13). It raises a question worth sitting with honestly. If the Spirit revealed this suffering to Paul’s companions clearly enough that they felt compelled to warn him, why would obeying that same Spirit mean walking toward it anyway?

The answer, we think, lies in what the Spirit was actually confirming rather than commanding. Paul had already been told, back in chapter twenty, that he was “compelled by the Spirit” to go to Jerusalem, “not knowing what will happen to me there,” only that “the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me” (20:22-23). The warnings his friends received were not new instructions countermanding his call; they were confirmations of a hardship Paul already knew was coming and had already accepted. Jesus faced something similar when Peter, out of genuine love, tried to talk Him out of the road to the cross — “Get behind me, Satan!” Jesus told him. “You

are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (Matthew 16:23). Loving friends do not always have access to the whole picture, even when their concern is entirely sincere and their spiritual sensitivity entirely genuine. Paul had direct, personal confirmation of his calling; his companions had only their love for him and an accurate sense of the danger ahead. Both things were real. Only one of them was meant to determine his course.

In Jerusalem, Paul is welcomed by James and the elders, who share the encouraging news of Jewish believers coming to faith even while raising a delicate concern: rumors have spread that Paul is teaching diaspora Jews to abandon Moses altogether. To defuse the tension, James suggests Paul join four men completing a purification vow and pay their expenses — a gesture, consistent with the Jerusalem council’s own earlier ruling, meant to demonstrate that Paul had no quarrel with observant Jewish believers continuing to live as Jews, only with anyone insisting that Gentiles must become Jews to be saved. Paul agrees, and the gesture of peace becomes, almost immediately, the occasion for exactly the violence everyone had feared. Jews from the province of Asia spot him in the temple, falsely accuse him of defiling it by bringing Gentiles past its boundary, and a mob forms so quickly that Roman soldiers have to physically pull Paul out to save his life.

What Paul does next is remarkable given the circumstances. Rather than being hurried away in silence, he asks the Roman commander for permission to address the very crowd that had just been trying to kill him — and, speaking in Aramaic, tells them his own story: a zealous Pharisee, trained under the respected Gamaliel, who persecuted the Way to the death, until the risen Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus and commissioned him to take the gospel to the Gentiles. The crowd listens quietly until that last word — “Gentiles” — after

which they erupt again, demanding his death. It is a small, telling detail. A Jewish crowd could tolerate hearing that a zealous persecutor had encountered the risen Messiah. What they could not tolerate was the suggestion that this same Messiah had sent that man specifically to reach people outside their own nation. The gospel's offense, then as now, was never really about miracles or resurrection claims alone. It was, just as often, about who the gospel insisted on including.

Paul avoids a flogging by identifying himself as a Roman citizen — a status that entitled him to a trial rather than summary punishment, and one he had apparently kept quiet until the moment it mattered most. Brought before the Sanhedrin the next day, he does something almost tactically shrewd: knowing the council is split between Pharisees, who believe in the resurrection, and Sadducees, who do not, he declares himself on trial “because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead” (23:6), and the assembly immediately fractures into a shouting match between the two factions, with Pharisees now defending Paul rather than condemning him. It is difficult to say how much of this was calculated strategy and how much was simply Paul stating what was, in fact, the real issue at the heart of everything he had ever preached. Either way, the dispute grows violent enough that Roman soldiers have to rescue Paul from being torn apart by his own accusers.

That night, alone in the barracks, Paul receives the assurance that carries him through everything still ahead: “the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome’” (23:11). It is worth noticing what this assurance does not promise. It does not promise safety, or vindication, or an end to the plots against his life. It promises only that his testimony would continue, and that Rome — the empire's very capital, the “ends of the earth” toward which the whole book has been building since 1:8 — was

still ahead of him. Within a day, more than forty men bind themselves by oath to kill Paul before he can eat or drink again; Paul's own nephew overhears the plot and reports it, and the Roman commander, taking no chances, dispatches Paul to Caesarea under a heavy armed escort in the middle of the night. Every human plan aimed at silencing Paul in these three chapters — mob violence, a rigged council hearing, a forty-man assassination oath — fails, not because Paul was especially clever, though he sometimes was, but because Christ had already told him plainly what the outcome would be. He was not merely surviving these chapters. He was being carried, step by step, exactly where he had already been promised he would go.

For Reflection

1. Paul's friends warned him, through genuine spiritual sensitivity, not to go to Jerusalem — yet Paul went anyway, because he had his own direct confirmation of his calling. How do you weigh sincere counsel from others against a conviction you believe God has given you personally?
2. The crowd in the temple could tolerate Paul's testimony about meeting the risen Christ, but turned violent the moment he mentioned being sent to the Gentiles. Where might the truly offensive part of the gospel, for the people around you, be less about its claims and more about who it insists on including?
3. Christ's assurance to Paul promised continued testimony, not safety. How does this shape what you ask God for when you are afraid — deliverance from hardship, or faithfulness within it?

CHAPTER TEN

Hard to Kick Against the Goats

Acts 24–26

Paul spends the next two years of his life in Caesarea, passed between three successive rulers, none of whom can find any real basis for the charges against him and none of whom is willing to simply let him go. Felix, the first, hears the case from both the Jewish prosecutor Tertullus and from Paul himself, and is “well acquainted with the Way” (24:22) — familiar enough with Christianity to recognize the charges as flimsy, and interested enough, later, to send for Paul privately to hear him speak “about faith in Christ Jesus.” When Paul discusses “righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come,” Felix becomes afraid and sends him away, hoping — Luke tells us plainly — for a bribe that never comes, and leaves Paul in prison for two full years simply “to grant a favor to the Jews” (24:25-27). It is a portrait of a man genuinely curious about the truth, genuinely unsettled by it, and ultimately unwilling to let that unsettling encounter cost him anything. Curiosity about Christ, even fear provoked by His claims, is not the same thing as repentance. Felix heard Paul more than once and walked away each time no different than before.

Festus succeeds Felix, and under mounting pressure from Jewish leaders eager to have Paul tried — or ambushed — in Jerusalem, Paul exercises the one legal option available to a Roman citizen facing what he clearly recognizes as a rigged process: he appeals directly to Caesar. “I appeal to Caesar!” (25:11) is not merely a legal maneuver. It is, in its own way, the fulfillment of a promise made two chapters earlier — Christ had told Paul he would testify in Rome, and Paul’s appeal, whatever his

immediate motive, becomes the very mechanism God uses to get him there. Festus, uncertain how to write up formal charges for an emperor who would expect something more substantial than a religious dispute over “a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive” (25:19), arranges for Paul to make his case before King Agrippa, a Jewish client-king with genuine expertise in Jewish law and custom, hoping Agrippa can help him articulate charges that will actually make sense in Rome.

Paul’s defense before Agrippa is the third time in three chapters we have heard some version of his testimony, and each retelling adds detail the others omit. Here, for the first time, we learn what else Christ said to him on the Damascus road beyond “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” — “It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (26:14). A goad was a sharpened stick used to drive livestock, and an animal that kicked against it only injured itself further; the image suggests that God had been working on Saul, resisting and unaware, for some time before the Damascus road finally brought that resistance into the open. It is a striking claim to make about oneself — that even in the years of persecuting the church, God had already set him apart for this calling from before he was ever aware of it, exactly as Paul would later write to the Galatians: God “set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace” (Galatians 1:15). Paul’s conversion, on this reading, was less a sudden reversal than the moment a long, patient, largely invisible work finally broke through the surface.

Agrippa’s response to the whole speech has become one of the most quoted lines in the book, precisely because it captures something true about how many people actually respond to the gospel: “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” (26:28) — near enough to conviction to feel its pull, not near enough to act on it. Paul’s reply is warm rather than triumphant: “Short time or long —

I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains” (26:29). Agrippa, Festus, and the assembled officials confer afterward and agree the man is guilty of nothing deserving death or imprisonment — “this man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar” (26:32) — and yet the appeal stands, and to Rome Paul will go regardless.

It would be easy to read these chapters as two wasted years, Paul shuffled between indecisive officials more interested in political convenience than justice, kept from meaningful ministry by a legal process that never actually needed to happen. Luke does not present it that way. Every delay, every hearing, every official too cautious to simply release an innocent man, becomes another occasion for Paul to testify — to Felix, to Festus, to Agrippa, to Bernice, to the assembled dignitaries of Caesarea’s court, none of whom Paul would ever have had reason or opportunity to address had he simply been released after his arrest in Jerusalem. What looked, from the outside, like Paul’s ministry being stalled by bureaucracy and injustice was, from the inside of the story Luke is telling us, Paul’s ministry expanding into rooms the gospel would never otherwise have entered. We are given no indication that Paul resented the delay or the chains. We are given every indication he used them.

For Reflection

1. Felix heard Paul speak about faith in Christ more than once, was genuinely unsettled, and yet never changed course. Where in your own life might curiosity or discomfort about the truth be substituting for actual repentance?

2. Christ told Paul it had been “hard for him to kick against the goads” even before his conversion — suggesting God had been at work in him long before he was aware of it. Can you identify ways God may have been working in your own life before you recognized or responded to Him?
3. What looked like two wasted years in prison became, in Luke’s telling, an expanding platform for testimony to officials who otherwise would never have heard Paul at all. Where might a season you’ve experienced as delay or setback actually be opening doors you can’t yet see?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Boldly and Without Hindrance

Acts 27–28

The book’s final two chapters take Paul, at last, on the actual journey Christ had promised him back in chapter twenty-three — to Rome — and it is anything but a smooth passage. Bad weather turns to violent storm, the ship is battered for two weeks without sight of sun or stars, and Luke tells us plainly that “we finally gave up all hope of being saved” (27:20). In the middle of that despair, an angel appears to Paul — a prisoner, technically the least powerful person on board — with a message that will steady not only Paul but everyone traveling with him: “Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you” (27:24). Paul relays this to the ship’s crew and passengers with a confidence none of them can muster on their own, urging them to eat, to keep their courage, insisting “not one of you will lose a single hair from his head” (27:34). The ship runs aground on Malta and breaks apart in the surf, but exactly as promised, every single person on board reaches shore alive.

It is worth noticing what steadied Paul through fourteen days most of his fellow travelers spent in despair. He had no more control over the storm than anyone else on that ship. What he had was a promise, delivered by an angel, that he clung to even while the visible evidence — mountainous waves, a ship coming apart beam by beam, sailors who had given up hope entirely — argued against it. His calm was not a personality trait or a talent for staying composed under pressure. It was the direct, practical fruit of believing something God had told him was

true, regardless of how the circumstances in front of him looked in the moment.

On Malta, the islanders' hospitality is interrupted by a viper that fastens itself onto Paul's hand as he gathers firewood, and the watching crowd's assumption shifts within moments from "this man must be a murderer" whom justice has finally caught, to "he is a god," once Paul simply shakes the snake into the fire and suffers no harm at all (28:3-6). Both reactions say more about the islanders' assumptions than about Paul, and Luke seems content to let the irony stand without comment: the same crowd that had already decided Paul must be guilty of something, based on nothing but a snakebite, is equally ready to decide he must be divine, based on nothing but the absence of one. Paul goes on to heal the sick father of the island's chief official, and then many others besides, and the islanders send the shipwrecked travelers on their way loaded with supplies.

Throughout this entire voyage — the storm, the shipwreck, the snakebite, the winter stopover — Luke records Paul receiving favor from an unusual variety of people: from Julius, the centurion guarding him, who treats him with unusual kindness and later saves his life from soldiers wanting to kill all the prisoners rather than risk their escape (27:42-43); from the islanders of Malta; from the local governor Publius; and eventually from Roman believers who walk out as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns just to meet him on the road into the city, "at the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged" (28:15). It is easy to read Acts twenty-seven and twenty-eight as a story about Paul's endurance. It may be more accurate to read it as a story about how consistently God provided favor and protection for Paul at every single stage of a journey that, by any human calculation, should have killed him several times over.

Once in Rome, Paul does what he has done in nearly every city since chapter thirteen: he seeks out the local Jewish leaders first, and spends a full day explaining and testifying about the kingdom of God, trying to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the Prophets. The response, once more, is divided — some are convinced, others refuse to believe — and Paul closes with words from Isaiah that have echoed through the whole book: this people’s hearts have grown calloused, their ears hard of hearing, and so, Paul says, “God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” (28:28). It is the same pattern we have watched unfold since Pisidian Antioch fourteen chapters earlier — the gospel offered first to Israel, met with a mixed response, and the door consequently opening wider to the nations. Rome is not the exception to that pattern. It is its final, fitting example.

And there Luke leaves us. Not with Paul’s trial, not with a verdict, not even with an account of what became of him — only with two remarkable years in a rented house, at his own expense, under guard but not silenced, welcoming everyone who came to him, “boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ” (28:31). It is, by any conventional measure, an unfinished ending — no resolution to the legal case that has occupied the last several chapters, no report of Paul’s death or release, nothing tied off. But it may be the only truly fitting way this particular book could end. Acts was never really the story of Paul’s trial. It was the story of the gospel’s unstoppable advance from a locked upper room in Jerusalem to the very center of the world’s greatest empire — and that advance, Luke seems determined to remind us in his final sentence, was still going, still boldly, still without hindrance, the very day he stopped writing. It has not stopped since.

For Reflection

1. Paul's calm during the storm came not from his own composure but from clinging to a specific promise God had given him, even while the visible evidence argued otherwise. What promise from God do you need to hold onto right now, regardless of what your circumstances seem to be telling you?
2. The islanders on Malta swung from assuming Paul was a murderer to assuming he was a god, based on very little actual evidence either way. Where might you be tempted to make snap judgments about people based on their circumstances rather than getting to know them?
3. Luke ends the book without resolving Paul's legal case, choosing instead to end on the ongoing, unhindered advance of the gospel. What would it look like for you to measure your own life less by whether your personal circumstances are "resolved," and more by whether the gospel is still advancing through you?

Conclusion

Acts opens with eleven frightened men in an upper room, still uncertain enough of what was coming that they filled the waiting with a decision — replacing Judas — that may have been a little ahead of God’s own timing. It closes with a former persecutor of the church, chained to a Roman guard in a rented house, still “boldly and without hindrance” preaching the very kingdom those eleven men had once huddled together and prayed to understand. Between those two pictures lies the story of how the gospel actually spreads — not through better strategy, not through a movement’s founders getting everything right, but through the patient, sometimes disruptive, always sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, carrying an ordinary and often unimpressive collection of people to the ends of the earth exactly as Christ had promised in the very first chapter.

We titled this volume *To the Ends of the Earth* because Acts 1:8 supplies more than a memorable phrase — it supplies the actual shape of everything that follows. Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, then Rome: the geography of this book is the geography of a promise being kept, one difficult, unglamorous mile at a time. Stephen’s murder scatters the church precisely into the mission it had been too comfortable to pursue on its own. Saul’s conversion turns the gospel’s fiercest enemy into its farthest-traveling herald. Peter’s rooftop vision dismantles, in a single afternoon, a wall between Jew and Gentile that centuries of religious practice had built. None of these turning points were engineered by the apostles. Each was initiated by God, often against the apostles’ own expectations, and received — eventually, imperfectly, but genuinely — by people willing to follow where the Spirit had already gone ahead of them.

If there is a single question this book puts to every reader in every generation since, it may be this: are we willing to follow the Spirit's initiative even when it disrupts our own comfortable arrangement of things? The Jerusalem believers had to be convinced, twice, that Gentiles belonged fully in the church. Paul and Barnabas had to separate over a genuine disagreement neither one was entirely wrong about. Peter had to have his own inherited categories of clean and unclean directly overturned before he could see Cornelius rightly. The Spirit in this book rarely moves in the direction anyone expected, and almost never moves at the pace anyone would have chosen. What He consistently does is keep His promise — Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to Rome — regardless of how ready or unready His people felt to go there.

We are, in a very real sense, still living inside the last verse of this book. The gospel that reached Rome in a rented house under armed guard has, in the two thousand years since, reached nearly every nation on earth — not because the church has always gotten its strategy right, but because the same Spirit who filled that upper room has never stopped filling ordinary people with a boldness not their own. May we, like the apostles before us, be willing to wait for that same Spirit, to follow Him even into discomfort, and to say with our own lives what Paul said with his: whatever chains we may find ourselves in, may the word of God among us never be chained (2 Timothy 2:9).

Appendix

Daily Bible Reading Plan

A one-year plan through the whole Bible, following the same daily rhythm used throughout this series.

January

1/10	Genesis 1-3	1/11	Genesis 4-7
1/12	Genesis 8-11	1/13	Genesis 12-15
1/14	Genesis 16-18	1/15	Genesis 19-21
1/16	Genesis 22-24	1/17	Genesis 25-26
1/18	Genesis 27-29	1/19	Genesis 30-31
1/20	Genesis 32-34	1/21	Genesis 35-37
1/22	Genesis 38-40	1/23	Genesis 41-42
1/24	Genesis 43-45	1/25	Genesis 46-47
1/26	Genesis 48-50	1/27	Exodus 1-3
1/28	Exodus 4-6	1/29	Exodus 7-9
1/30	Exodus 10-12	1/31	Exodus 13-15

February

2/1	Exodus 16-18	2/2	Exodus 19-21
2/3	Exodus 22-24	2/4	Exodus 25-27
2/5	Exodus 28-29	2/6	Exodus 30-32
2/7	Exodus 33-35	2/8	Exodus 36-38
2/9	Exodus 39-40	2/10	Leviticus 1-4
2/11	Leviticus 5-7	2/12	Leviticus 8-10
2/13	Leviticus 11-13	2/14	Leviticus 14-15
2/15	Leviticus 16-18	2/16	Leviticus 19-21
2/17	Leviticus 22-23	2/18	Leviticus 24-25
2/19	Leviticus 26-27	2/20	Numbers 1-2
2/21	Numbers 3-4	2/22	Numbers 5-6
2/23	Numbers 7	2/24	Numbers 8-10
2/25	Numbers 11-13	2/26	Numbers 14-15

2/27	Numbers 16-17	2/28	Numbers 18-20
-------------	---------------	-------------	---------------

March

3/1	Numbers 21-22	3/2	Numbers 23-25
3/3	Numbers 26-27	3/4	Numbers 28-30
3/5	Numbers 31-32	3/6	Numbers 33-34
3/7	Numbers 35-36	3/8	Deuteronomy 1-2
3/9	Deuteronomy 3-4	3/10	Deuteronomy 5-7
3/11	Deuteronomy 8-10	3/12	Deuteronomy 11-13
3/13	Deuteronomy 14-16	3/14	Deuteronomy 17-20
3/15	Deuteronomy 21-23	3/16	Deuteronomy 24-27
3/17	Deuteronomy 28-29	3/18	Deuteronomy 30-31
3/19	Deuteronomy 32-34	3/20	Joshua 1-4
3/21	Joshua 5-8	3/22	Joshua 9-11
3/23	Joshua 12-15	3/24	Joshua 16-18
3/25	Joshua 19-21	3/26	Joshua 22-24
3/27	Judges 1-2	3/28	Judges 3-5
3/29	Judges 6-7	3/30	Judges 8-9
3/31	Judges 10-12		

April

4/1	Judges 13-15	4/2	Judges 16-18
4/3	Judges 19-21	4/4	Ruth 1-4
4/5	1 Samuel 1-3	4/6	1 Samuel 4-8
4/7	1 Samuel 9-12	4/8	1 Samuel 13-14
4/9	1 Samuel 15-17	4/10	1 Samuel 18-20
4/11	1 Samuel 21-24	4/12	1 Samuel 25-27
4/13	1 Samuel 28-31	4/14	2 Samuel 1-3
4/15	2 Samuel 4-7	4/16	2 Samuel 8-12
4/17	2 Samuel 13-15	4/18	2 Samuel 16-18
4/19	2 Samuel 19-21	4/20	2 Samuel 22-24
4/21	1 Kings 1-2	4/22	1 Kings 3-5

4/23	1 Kings 6-7	4/24	1 Kings 8-9
4/25	1 Kings 10-11	4/26	1 Kings 12-14
4/27	1 Kings 15-17	4/28	1 Kings 18-20
4/29	1 Kings 21-22	4/30	2 Kings 1-3

May

5/1	2 Kings 4-5	5/2	2 Kings 6-8
5/3	2 Kings 9-11	5/4	2 Kings 12-14
5/5	2 Kings 15-17	5/6	2 Kings 18-19
5/7	2 Kings 20-22	5/8	2 Kings 23-25
5/9	1 Chronicles 1-2	5/10	1 Chronicles 3-5
5/11	1 Chronicles 6	5/12	1 Chronicles 7-8
5/13	1 Chronicles 9-11	5/14	1 Chronicles 12-14
5/15	1 Chronicles 15-17	5/16	1 Chronicles 18-21
5/17	1 Chronicles 22-24	5/18	1 Chronicles 25-27
5/19	1 Chronicles 28-2 Chronicles 1	5/20	2 Chronicles 2-5
5/21	2 Chronicles 6-8	5/22	2 Chronicles 9-12
5/23	2 Chronicles 13-17	5/24	2 Chronicles 18-20
5/25	2 Chronicles 21-24	5/26	2 Chronicles 25-27
5/27	2 Chronicles 28-31	5/28	2 Chronicles 32-34
5/29	2 Chronicles 35-36	5/30	Ezra 1-3
5/31	Ezra 4-7		

June

6/1	Ezra 8-10	6/2	Nehemiah 1-3
6/3	Nehemiah 4-6	6/4	Nehemiah 7
6/5	Nehemiah 8-9	6/6	Nehemiah 10-11
6/7	Nehemiah 12-13	6/8	Esther 1-5
6/9	Esther 6-10	6/10	Job 1-4
6/11	Job 5-7	6/12	Job 8-10
6/13	Job 11-13	6/14	Job 14-16
6/15	Job 17-20	6/16	Job 21-23

6/17	Job 24-28	6/18	Job 29-31
6/19	Job 32-34	6/20	Job 35-37
6/21	Job 38-39	6/22	Job 40-42
6/23	Psalms 1-8	6/24	Psalms 9-16
6/25	Psalms 17-20	6/26	Psalms 21-25
6/27	Psalms 26-31	6/28	Psalms 32-35
6/29	Psalms 36-39	6/30	Psalms 40-45

July

7/1	Psalms 46-50	7/2	Psalms 51-57
7/3	Psalms 58-65	7/4	Psalms 66-69
7/5	Psalms 70-73	7/6	Psalms 74-77
7/7	Psalms 78-79	7/8	Psalms 80-85
7/9	Psalms 86-89	7/10	Psalms 90-95
7/11	Psalms 96-102	7/12	Psalms 103-105
7/13	Psalms 106-107	7/14	Psalms 108-114
7/15	Psalms 115-118	7/16	Psalms 119:1-88
7/17	Psalms 119:89-176	7/18	Psalms 120-132
7/19	Psalms 133-139	7/20	Psalms 140-145
7/21	Psalms 146-150	7/22	Proverbs 1-3
7/23	Proverbs 4-6	7/24	Proverbs 7-9
7/25	Proverbs 10-12	7/26	Proverbs 13-15
7/27	Proverbs 16-18	7/28	Proverbs 19-21
7/29	Proverbs 22-23	7/30	Proverbs 24-26
7/31	Proverbs 27-29		

August

8/1	Proverbs 30-31	8/2	Ecclesiastes 1-4
8/3	Ecclesiastes 5-8	8/4	Ecclesiastes 9-12
8/5	Song of Songs 1-8	8/6	Isaiah 1-4
8/7	Isaiah 5-8	8/8	Isaiah 9-12
8/9	Isaiah 13-17	8/10	Isaiah 18-22

8/11	Isaiah 23-27	8/12	Isaiah 28-30
8/13	Isaiah 31-35	8/14	Isaiah 36-41
8/15	Isaiah 42-44	8/16	Isaiah 45-48
8/17	Isaiah 49-53	8/18	Isaiah 54-58
8/19	Isaiah 59-63	8/20	Isaiah 64-66
8/21	Jeremiah 1-3	8/22	Jeremiah 4-6
8/23	Jeremiah 7-9	8/24	Jeremiah 10-13
8/25	Jeremiah 14-17	8/26	Jeremiah 18-22
8/27	Jeremiah 23-25	8/28	Jeremiah 26-29
8/29	Jeremiah 30-31	8/30	Jeremiah 32-34
8/31	Jeremiah 35-37		

September

9/1	Jeremiah 38-41	9/2	Jeremiah 42-45
9/3	Jeremiah 46-48	9/4	Jeremiah 49-50
9/5	Jeremiah 51-52	9/6	Lamentations 1:1-3:36
9/7	Lamentations 3:37-5:22	9/8	Ezekiel 1-4
9/9	Ezekiel 5-8	9/10	Ezekiel 9-12
9/11	Ezekiel 13-15	9/12	Ezekiel 16-17
9/13	Ezekiel 18-20	9/14	Ezekiel 21-22
9/15	Ezekiel 23-24	9/16	Ezekiel 25-27
9/17	Ezekiel 28-30	9/18	Ezekiel 31-33
9/19	Ezekiel 34-36	9/20	Ezekiel 37-39
9/21	Ezekiel 40-42	9/22	Ezekiel 43-45
9/23	Ezekiel 46-48	9/24	Daniel 1-3
9/25	Daniel 4-6	9/26	Daniel 7-9
9/27	Daniel 10-12	9/28	Hosea 1-7
9/29	Hosea 8-14	9/30	Joel 1-3

October

10/1	Amos 1-5	10/2	Amos 6-9
10/3	Obadiah 1, Jonah 1-4	10/4	Micah 1-7

10/5	Nahum 1-3	10/6	Habakkuk 1-3,Zephaniah 1-3
10/7	Haggai 1-2	10/8	Zechariah 1-7
10/9	Zechariah 8-14	10/10	Malachi 1-4
10/11	Matthew 1-4	10/12	Matthew 5-6
10/13	Matthew 7-8	10/14	Matthew 9-10
10/15	Matthew 11-12	10/16	Matthew 13-14
10/17	Matthew 15-17	10/18	Matthew 18-19
10/19	Matthew 20-21	10/20	Matthew 22-23
10/21	Matthew 24-25	10/22	Matthew 26
10/23	Matthew 27-28	10/24	Mark 1-3
10/25	Mark 4-5	10/26	Mark 6-7
10/27	Mark 8-9	10/28	Mark 10-11
10/29	Mark 12-13	10/30	Mark 14
10/31	Mark 15-16		

November

11/1	Luke 1	11/2	Luke 2-3
11/3	Luke 4-5	11/4	Luke 6-7
11/5	Luke 8-9	11/6	Luke 10-11
11/7	Luke 12-13	11/8	Luke 14-16
11/9	Luke 17-18	11/10	Luke 19-20
11/11	Luke 21-22	11/12	Luke 23-24
11/13	John 1-2	11/14	John 3-4
11/15	John 5-6	11/16	John 7-8
11/17	John 9-10	11/18	John 11-12
11/19	John 13-15	11/20	John 16-18
11/21	John 19-21	11/22	Acts 1-3
11/23	Acts 4-6	11/24	Acts 7-8
11/25	Acts 9-10	11/26	Acts 11-13
11/27	Acts 14-15	11/28	Acts 16-17
11/29	Acts 18-20	11/30	Acts 21-23

December

12/1	Acts 24-26	12/2	Acts 27-28
12/3	Romans 1-3	12/4	Romans 4-7
12/5	Romans 8-10	12/6	Romans 11-13
12/7	Romans 14-16	12/8	1 Corinthians 1-4
12/9	1 Corinthians 5-8	12/10	1 Corinthians 9-11
12/11	1 Corinthians 12-14	12/12	1 Corinthians 15-16
12/13	2 Corinthians 1-4	12/14	2 Corinthians 5-9
12/15	2 Corinthians 10-13	12/16	Galatians 1-3
12/17	Galatians 4-6	12/18	Ephesians 1-3
12/19	Ephesians 4-6	12/20	Philippians 1-4
12/21	Colossians 1-4	12/22	1 Thessalonians 1-5
12/23	2 Thessalonians 1-3	12/24	1 Timothy 1-6
12/25	2 Timothy 1-4	12/26	Titus 1-3, Philemon 1
12/27	Hebrews 1-6	12/28	Hebrews 7-10
12/29	Hebrews 11-13	12/30	James 1-5
12/31	1 Peter 1-5		

January

1/1	2 Peter 1-3	1/2	1 John 1-5
1/3	2 John 1, 3 John 1, Jude 1	1/4	Revelation 1-3
1/5	Revelation 4-8	1/6	Revelation 9-12
1/7	Revelation 13-16	1/8	Revelation 17-19
1/9	Revelation 20-22		