

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY • ACTS

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Paul's Journeys in the Book of Acts

An Exegetical, Historical, and Reformed Study Guide

The risen Christ advances his Word through the Spirit, the church, faithful preaching, ordered ministry, and suffering witness.

Seminary-level depth • Tenth-grade vocabulary • Historical Reformed viewpoint

Contents at a Glance

The guide follows Paul's movements from Damascus to Rome. Use Word's Navigation Pane to move among styled headings.

Part I - The Missionary and the Mission

1. Acts as Inspired Missionary History
2. Conversion, Calling, and Preparation

Part II - The First Missionary Journey

3. Commissioned by the Spirit and the Church
4. Pisidian Antioch: Promise, Resurrection, and Justification
5. Through Tribulation: Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Return

Part III - The Jerusalem Council

6. One Gospel and One People: Acts 15:1-35

Part IV - The Second Missionary Journey

7. The Spirit Directs the Mission: Acts 15:36-16:10
8. Philippi: Sovereign Grace, Spiritual Conflict, and Public Justice
9. Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens: Scripture and Public Reason
10. Corinth: Weakness, Election, and Persevering Ministry

Part V - The Third Missionary Journey

11. Ephesus and the Triumph of the Word
12. Troas and Miletus: Worship, Shepherding, and Perseverance
13. The Road to Jerusalem: Guidance, Warning, and Resolve

Part VI - The Prisoner's Journey to Rome

14. Jerusalem: Arrest and Witness
15. Caesarea: The Gospel Before Governors and a King
16. Storm, Shipwreck, and Sovereign Preservation
17. Malta and Rome: The Unbound Word

Part VII - A Theology of Pauline Mission in Acts

18. Ten Governing Doctrines
19. Reformed Confessional Guide
20. Major Interpretive Questions
21. Final Teaching and Ministry Applications

Appendix A - Journey-by-Journey Review Sheets

Appendix B - Glossary

Appendix C - Select Bibliography

Preface

This guide studies Paul's movements from his conversion near Damascus to his witness in Rome. The three missionary journeys receive full treatment, but the study also includes Paul's early years and his final journey as a prisoner. Luke did not write a modern biography. He selected events that show how the risen Jesus continued to act through the Holy Spirit and carried the gospel from Jerusalem toward "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The level of interpretation is intended to be comparable to an introductory seminary course, but the vocabulary is kept near a tenth-grade reading level. Technical words are defined when they first appear. Greek terms are used only when they clarify the text. Scripture references are more important than quotations; brief quotations are the writer's own close rendering unless otherwise stated.

This is written from the broad historical Reformed tradition reflected in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Standards, the Canons of Dort, and the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689. That viewpoint emphasizes God's sovereignty, salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, the effective work of the Holy Spirit, the ordinary means of grace, the central place of the local church, and God's providential rule over both suffering and success. Where faithful Reformed interpreters disagree, the disagreement is identified rather than hidden.

How to Use This Guide

- Read the assigned passage in Acts before reading the lesson.
- Trace the route in the itinerary table. Geography often explains the pressure, opportunity, or sequence in the narrative.
- Mark repeated words: Spirit, word, witness, believe, church, kingdom, grace, and name.
- Separate observation from inference. "Luke says" should be reserved for the text; "probably" or "likely" should mark reconstruction.
- Use the doctrinal synthesis to connect the passage with the whole Bible and with Reformed theology.
- End with the discussion questions and teaching outline. The goal is worship, obedience, and mission, not information alone.

Scope and Chronology

Dates in Pauline chronology are approximate. Gallio's proconsulship provides the strongest fixed point for Paul's stay in Corinth (Acts 18:12), but several earlier and later dates must be estimated. This guide uses a common chronology without treating every date as certain.

Phase	Acts	Approximate Date	Main Centers
Conversion and early ministry	9:1-31; 11:25-30; 12:25	AD 33-46	Damascus, Jerusalem, Tarsus, Antioch
First missionary journey	13:1-14:28	AD 46-48	Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe
Jerusalem Council	15:1-35	AD 48-49	Antioch and Jerusalem
Second missionary journey	15:36-18:22	AD 49-52	Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth
Third missionary journey	18:23-21:17	AD 52-57	Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece, Troas, Miletus
Arrest, trials, and journey to Rome	21:18-28:31	AD 57-62	Jerusalem, Caesarea, Malta, Rome

Part I - The Missionary and the Mission

1. Acts as Inspired Missionary History

1.1 The Risen Christ Remains the Main Actor

Acts begins by referring to what Jesus “began to do and teach” in Luke’s Gospel (Acts 1:1). The wording implies continuation. Jesus ascends, but he does not become absent or inactive. He pours out the Spirit (2:33), confronts Saul (9:4-6), opens mission doors (14:27), directs witnesses (16:6-10), strengthens Paul (18:9-10), and guarantees testimony in Rome (23:11). Paul is important, but Christ is central.

This protects the study from hero worship. Paul’s courage, reasoning, endurance, and leadership matter, yet each depends on grace. The persecutor becomes an apostle because Christ arrests him. Churches arise because God opens hearts and grants faith. Mission advances because the Lord adds, sends, protects, and preserves.

1.2 Acts 1:8 as the Narrative Program

Acts 1:8 gives a geographic and theological outline: Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth. The movement is not a simple straight line. The church returns to Jerusalem for major decisions, and witnesses revisit earlier fields. Still, the overall expansion is clear. By Acts 28 the gospel is publicly proclaimed in the imperial capital.

The “end of the earth” echoes Isaiah’s servant mission (Isa. 49:6). Luke therefore presents Gentile mission as fulfillment, not as God’s emergency response to Israel’s unbelief. The inclusion of the nations was promised in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:3; 22:18), the Psalms (Ps. 67; 117), and the prophets (Isa. 2:2-4; 42:6; 49:6; Amos 9:11-12).

1.3 Word, Spirit, and Church

Three realities repeatedly travel together. First, the Word advances. Luke sometimes summarizes growth by saying that “the word of God increased” (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20). Second, the Spirit empowers and guides. Third, visible churches are formed with recognized elders, teaching, prayer, worship, discipline, and mutual care. Acts does not support a choice between spiritual dependence and careful doctrine, or between evangelism and church order. The Spirit advances the Word by forming churches.

1.4 Descriptive and Normative Material

“Descriptive” reports what happened. “Normative” teaches what should ordinarily guide the church. Every narrative is profitable, but not every unusual event is a command. Paul’s apostolic signs authenticate a unique redemptive-historical office (2 Cor. 12:12). His willingness to suffer, commitment to preach Christ, appointment of elders, dependence on prayer, and concern for sound doctrine clearly instruct later churches. Sound interpretation asks how Luke’s narrative fits Christ’s commands and the apostles’ teaching in the Epistles.

REFORMED LENS: The Spirit is free and sovereign, but he is not opposed to order. He ordinarily works through appointed means: Scripture, preaching, sacraments, prayer, fellowship, and disciplined church life (Acts 2:42; 13:1-3; 14:21-23; 20:17-38).

1.5 Questions for Study

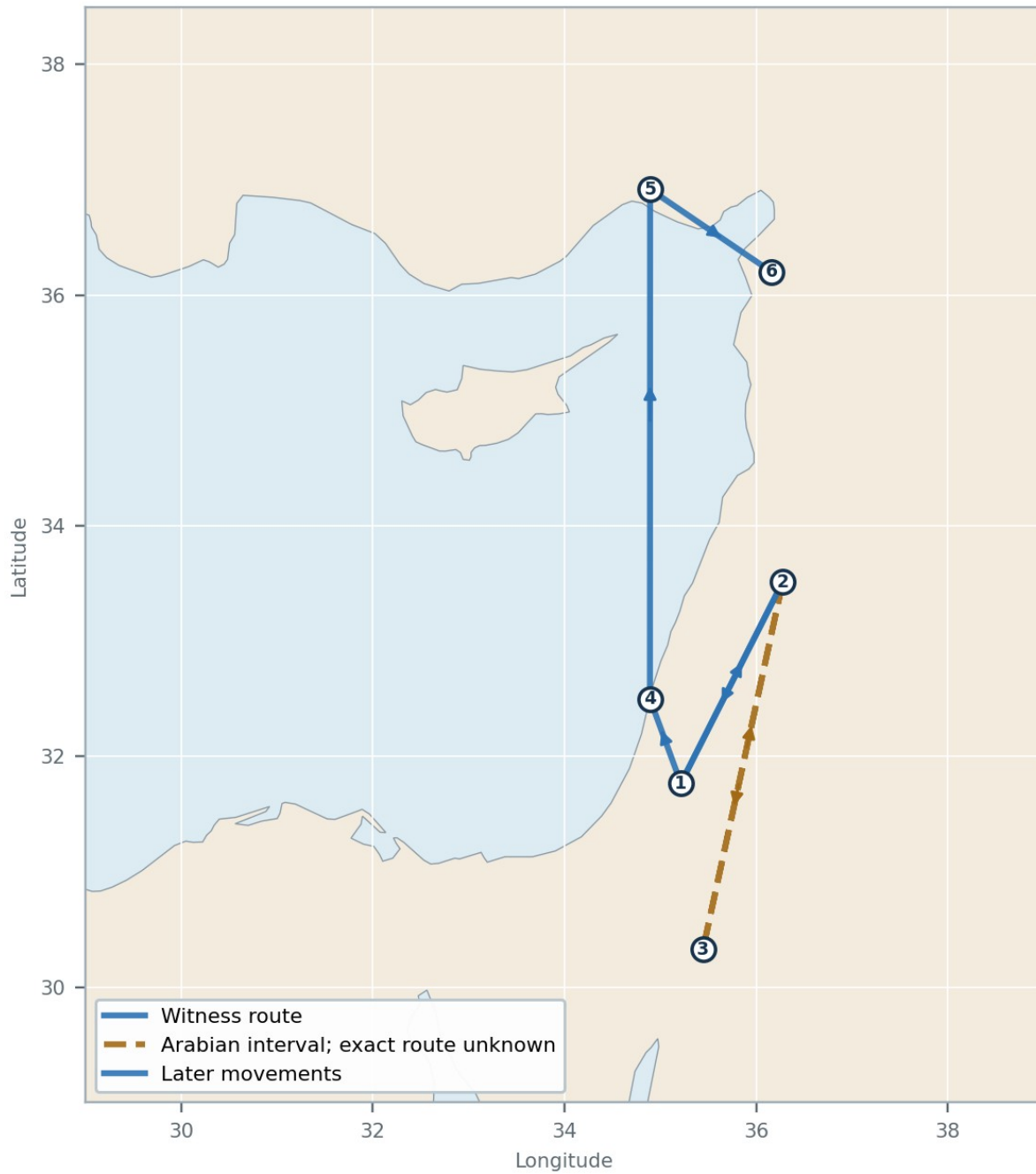
1. How does Acts correct the idea that mission depends mainly on gifted personalities?
2. Why must Acts 1:8 be read against the background of Isaiah 49:6?
3. Which practices in Acts appear ordinary and repeatable, and which belong especially to the apostolic age?
4. How do Word, Spirit, and church order support rather than compete with one another?

2. Conversion, Calling, and Preparation

Route Overview

Stage	Passage	Movement	Importance
Persecution	8:1-3; 9:1-2	Jerusalem toward Damascus	Saul seeks to destroy the church
Conversion and call	9:3-19	Near Damascus and in the city	Christ conquers and commissions his enemy
Early witness	9:20-25	Damascus	Saul immediately proclaims Jesus as God's Son
Arabia and return	Gal. 1:15-17	Arabia, then Damascus	Luke omits this interval; Paul supplies it
First Jerusalem visit	Acts 9:26-30; Gal. 1:18-20	Damascus to Jerusalem	Barnabas introduces Saul; opposition follows
Tarsus and Antioch	9:30; 11:25-30	Caesarea, Tarsus, Antioch	Hidden preparation gives way to church ministry

Paul's Conversion and Early Movements



Paul's Conversion and Early Movements. Arabia denotes Nabataean territory; Paul's exact route and activities there are not stated (Gal. 1:15-18).

Numbered sites: 1. Jerusalem; 2. Damascus; 3. Arabia (Nabataea); 4. Caesarea; 5. Tarsus; 6. Antioch

Extended Narrative: From Persecutor to Missionary

The Road on Which Saul Was Conquered

Luke first places Saul at the death of Stephen. The witnesses lay their garments at his feet, and Saul approves the execution (Acts 7:58; 8:1). He then moves from approval to active violence. He enters houses, arrests men and women, and tries to destroy the church. This is important for understanding what happens on the Damascus road. Saul is not confused about which side he has chosen. He believes that loyalty to Israel's God requires him to silence the followers of Jesus.

Damascus lay well beyond Jerusalem, so Saul's request for letters shows the reach of his purpose. He is willing to travel in order to bring disciples back in chains. Yet before Saul can enter the city as its feared investigator, the risen Jesus stops him. The heavenly light, the fall to the ground, and the voice from heaven turn the hunter into the helpless man. The question, "Why are you persecuting me?" reveals both Saul's guilt and Christ's glory. Jesus is not dead, as Saul assumed. He reigns from heaven and is so united to his people that their wounds are counted as attacks upon him.

Saul asks, "Who are you, Lord?" The answer identifies the center of his error: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). Everything Saul believed about Jesus must now be reconsidered. If the crucified Jesus speaks from heavenly glory, then the judgment against him was false, his resurrection is real, and his followers are not blasphemers. Saul enters Damascus blind and dependent, led by the hand rather than carrying prisoners under his authority. For three days he neither eats nor drinks. Luke does not record every thought, but the scene presents a complete reversal of power. Christ has not negotiated with Saul. He has confronted, humbled, and claimed him.

Ananias Enters the House of an Enemy

The narrative then shifts to Ananias, a disciple living in Damascus. When the Lord tells him to visit Saul, Ananias gives the obvious objection: this man has harmed the saints and has authority to arrest believers. The Lord does not rebuke Ananias for stating the danger. Instead, he answers fear with his sovereign purpose. Saul is a chosen instrument who will bear Christ's name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel, and he will learn how much he must suffer for that name (Acts 9:15-16).

Ananias obeys and addresses Saul as "Brother." That word does not excuse Saul's crimes. It announces that Christ's grace has created a new relation. The persecutor is received through the ministry of one of the people he intended to arrest. Saul regains sight, is baptized, takes food, and is strengthened. The Lord who could have restored him without help chooses to use a frightened but obedient disciple. From the beginning, Paul's ministry is surrounded by the church's ordinary care.

Saul soon proclaims in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God (9:20). His hearers are amazed because they know his former purpose. His early preaching also provokes a plot against his life. The man

who came to bind disciples now escapes through an opening in the wall, lowered in a basket by disciples (9:23-25). His first experiences of ministry already contain the pattern that will govern the journeys: bold proclamation, real fruit, fierce opposition, and preservation through humble means.

Hidden Years and Patient Preparation

Luke moves quickly, but Galatians 1:15-24 tells us that Saul also went into Arabia, returned to Damascus, and visited Jerusalem after three years. Scripture does not say exactly where he traveled in Arabia or what he did throughout the entire period. It is safest to describe these as partly hidden years of preaching, reflection, and preparation rather than to invent a detailed retreat. Paul insists that his gospel came through revelation from Jesus Christ, not through dependence on the Jerusalem apostles. At the same time, he later visits Peter and meets James. Divine revelation and church fellowship are not enemies.

When Saul first arrives in Jerusalem, the disciples are afraid to receive him. Their caution is understandable. Barnabas then explains Saul's encounter with Christ and his bold witness in Damascus (Acts 9:26-27). Once again, God uses another believer to open a door for Paul. Saul preaches and debates, opposition rises, and the brothers send him toward Tarsus for safety. Acts then says the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoys peace and increases (9:31). Saul's removal from the center does not stop Christ's work. The Lord does not depend on one servant, even a chosen apostle.

The years around Tarsus are mostly silent in Acts. That silence teaches restraint and patience. We cannot reconstruct every journey, hardship, or ministry. We can say that the apostle later known for tireless labor passed through a season in which the inspired narrative does not follow him. Public usefulness often rests on years of hidden formation. Providence works when a servant is visible and when he is forgotten by the wider world.

Antioch Becomes a Missionary Center

The story turns when scattered believers preach to Gentiles in Antioch and the hand of the Lord is with them (Acts 11:19-21). Jerusalem sends Barnabas, who recognizes the grace of God and encourages the church. The work grows beyond what one leader can carry, so Barnabas goes to Tarsus to find Saul. He does not merely remember Saul; he seeks him and brings him into a field where his gifts can serve an expanding Gentile congregation.

Barnabas and Saul teach in Antioch for a full year. The first large Gentile center of the Pauline mission is therefore built through sustained instruction, not through a brief burst of excitement. The disciples are called Christians there, and they respond to famine prophecy by sending relief to Judean believers. The church that will send missionaries first learns doctrine, receives a shared identity in Christ, and practices costly generosity.

By Acts 13, Saul has been conquered by Christ, received by disciples, tested through opposition, prepared in relative obscurity, and established as a teacher within a local church. His call is extraordinary, but Luke does not present him as an isolated genius. Christ prepares his apostle through the Word, the Spirit, suffering, time, and the communion of saints. The missionary journeys begin only after this long work of grace.

2.1 Saul the Persecutor

Saul's conversion cannot be explained as a gentle development of religious interest. He approved Stephen's death, ravaged the church, entered homes, and dragged believers to prison (7:58-8:3). In Acts 9 he carries authority to arrest disciples in Damascus. Luke describes an enemy acting with purpose, not a seeker moving toward Christianity.

This historical setting gives theological force to grace. Paul later interprets his own history as a display of mercy (1 Tim. 1:12-16). Reformed theology calls this sovereign or effective grace: God's saving call does not merely offer a possibility to a morally neutral person. It changes the hostile sinner and brings him willingly to Christ (John 6:37, 44; Rom. 8:30; Eph. 2:1-10).

2.2 "Why Are You Persecuting Me?"

Jesus identifies himself with his suffering people: to attack the church is to persecute Christ (Acts 9:4-5). This does not erase the difference between Christ and believers, but it reveals their union. The exalted Lord regards the church as his body (compare 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22-23).

Union with Christ is one of the richest themes in Pauline theology. Believers are chosen in Christ, justified in him, raised with him, and destined to share his glory. Acts 9 gives the lived foundation for that language. Saul learns that Jesus is alive and that Jesus is bound to his people.

2.3 Instrument and Sufferer

The Lord tells Ananias that Saul is a "chosen instrument" who will carry Christ's name before Gentiles, kings, and Israel, and that he will suffer for that name (9:15-16). Election, mission, and suffering appear together. Divine choice does not produce ease. It appoints a servant to costly usefulness.

The phrase "chosen instrument" describes vocation, but it rests within Saul's saving encounter with Christ. Reformed interpretation should neither reduce the passage to bare vocational election nor use it alone as a complete doctrine of individual election. The whole canon supplies that doctrine (Rom. 9; Eph. 1), while Acts 9 vividly displays its transforming power.

2.4 The Ministry of Ananias and Barnabas

Christ could restore Saul without human aid, yet he sends Ananias. Later Barnabas brings Saul to the apostles and then recruits him for Antioch (9:27; 11:25-26). God's sovereignty does not make human service unnecessary. It makes faithful service meaningful because God has ordained both the end and the means.

Ananias obeys while honestly naming his fear. Barnabas risks his reputation to receive a former persecutor. Both display ordinary courage. Paul's world-changing public ministry is supported by believers whose ministries receive far less narrative space.

2.5 Damascus, Arabia, Jerusalem, and Tarsus

Galatians 1 adds an Arabian period between Paul's conversion and later Jerusalem visit. "Arabia" probably refers to Nabataean territory, though Paul does not explain his exact route or activity. We should not claim that he spent three uninterrupted years alone, because the text does not say that. The combined evidence shows both early preaching and a period largely hidden from Luke's account.

Paul's years in Tarsus are also mostly hidden. By the time Barnabas finds him, he is ready for sustained ministry in Antioch. Scripture regularly joins sudden calling to long preparation: Moses, David, and even the disciples experienced delay and formation. Hidden years are not wasted years under providence.

2.6 Antioch: The Sending Church

Antioch becomes the main Gentile mission center. Barnabas and Saul teach there for a year, believers are first called Christians there, and the church sends famine relief to Judea (11:26-30). Doctrine, identity, generosity, and mission mature together.

This church is ethnically and socially diverse (13:1). Its leaders worship, fast, hear the Spirit's direction, and send workers. Paul does not function as an independent religious entrepreneur. His extraordinary apostolic commission is recognized and supported in a churchly setting.

Doctrinal Synthesis

- Regeneration: Saul does not repair his old hostility; Christ creates a willing servant.
- Union with Christ: The Lord is personally identified with his persecuted body.
- Providence: Threat, blindness, Ananias's obedience, Barnabas's advocacy, and hidden preparation serve one purpose.
- Vocation: Grace saves Paul and assigns him work. Salvation is never earned by service, but saving grace produces service.
- Church: Individual calling is confirmed and cultivated within the communion of saints.

Confessional Connections

- Westminster Confession 10 and Second London Baptist Confession 10: effectual calling.
- Canons of Dort III/IV: regeneration is God's powerful, gracious work, not coercion that destroys the will.
- Heidelberg Catechism 54-55: Christ gathers his church and believers share in his gifts.
- Belgic Confession 27-29: the church is gathered, preserved, and known by its biblical marks.

Teaching Outline

1. The enemy Christ confronts (Acts 9:1-5).
2. The sinner Christ humbles and restores (9:6-19).
3. The witness Christ appoints (9:15-30).
4. The church Christ uses (11:19-30; 13:1-3).
5. The pattern: sovereign grace creates courageous mission.

Discussion Questions

1. What details make Saul's conversion a strong picture of sovereign grace?
2. How does union with Christ change the way a church should respond to persecuted Christians?
3. What can be learned from the quiet service of Ananias and Barnabas?
4. How should a church test and support a person's sense of calling?
5. Why are hidden years difficult, and how does providence give them meaning?

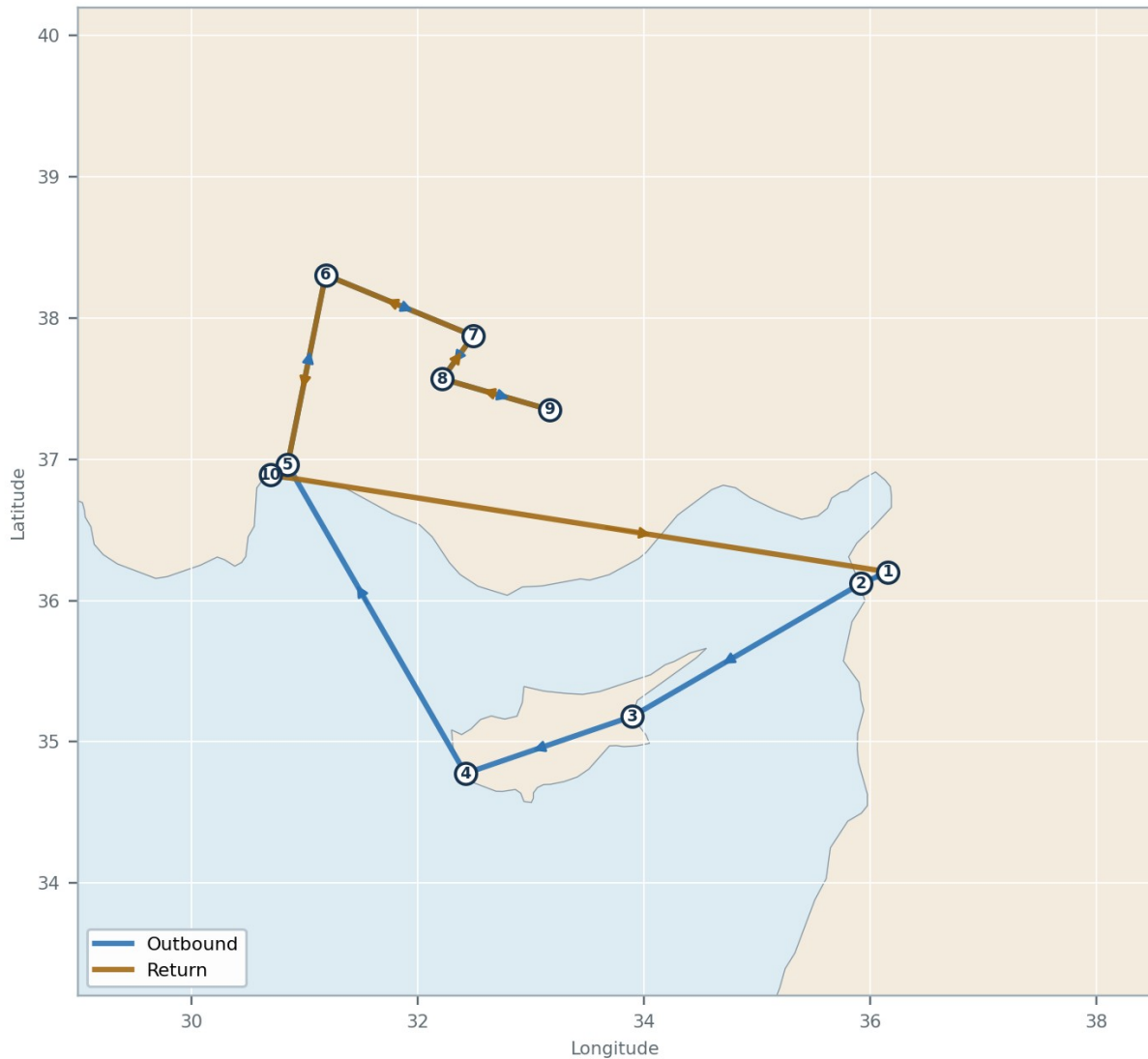
Part II - The First Missionary Journey

3. Commissioned by the Spirit and the Church

Complete Itinerary: Acts 13:1-14:28

Order	Location	Key Passage	Main Event
1	Antioch in Syria	13:1-3	Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul
2	Seleucia	13:4	Departure port
3	Salamis, Cyprus	13:5	Word proclaimed in synagogues
4	Paphos, Cyprus	13:6-12	Elymas opposed; Sergius Paulus believes
5	Perga, Pamphylia	13:13	John Mark leaves the team
6	Pisidian Antioch	13:14-52	Major synagogue sermon; Gentile response
7	Iconium	14:1-7	Belief, division, signs, and threat
8	Lystra	14:8-20	Healing, pagan worship, stoning
9	Derbe	14:20-21	Many disciples made
10	Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch	14:21-23	Churches strengthened; elders appointed
11	Perga and Attalia	14:24-26	Word preached in Perga; departure from Attalia
12	Antioch in Syria	14:27-28	Church hears what God had done

The First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14)



The First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14). Lines show the narrative sequence, not a claim about every ancient road or sailing track.

Numbered sites: 1. Antioch; 2. Seleucia; 3. Salamis; 4. Paphos; 5. Perga; 6. Pisidian Antioch; 7. Iconium; 8. Lystra; 9. Derbe; 10. Attalia

Extended Narrative Walkthrough of the First Journey

From Antioch's Worship to the Harbors of Cyprus

The first journey begins in a worship service, not in a planning office. Antioch's prophets and teachers are ministering to the Lord and fasting when the Holy Spirit speaks (Acts 13:1-2). The church does not invent Paul's call, because the Spirit says that Barnabas and Saul have already been called to the work. Yet the church truly participates. Its leaders fast and pray again, lay hands on the two men, and send

them away. Luke can therefore say both that the church sent them and that they were sent by the Holy Spirit (13:3-4). Divine sovereignty and responsible church action describe the same departure.

They travel down to Seleucia, Antioch's port, and sail to Cyprus. Barnabas was from Cyprus, so the route begins in a region already connected to the team. At Salamis they proclaim the Word in Jewish synagogues, with John Mark serving as helper. This pattern respects Israel's place in the history of promise and uses an existing setting in which Scripture is read. It also brings the gospel near Gentiles who had attached themselves in some measure to synagogue life.

The team crosses the island to Paphos, the seat of Roman administration. There the gospel encounters both political power and spiritual fraud. Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, summons the missionaries because he wants to hear the Word of God. Elymas the magician resists them and seeks to turn the official away from faith. The conflict is not between equal spiritual forces. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, exposes Elymas and announces temporary blindness. The official believes, but Luke says he is astonished at the teaching of the Lord (13:12). The miracle clears the obstruction; the doctrine commands his attention.

Perga, Loss, and the Climb into Galatia

From Paphos the group sails north to Perga in Pamphylia. At this point John Mark leaves and returns to Jerusalem (13:13). Luke gives no explanation, which should keep interpreters from turning a possibility into fact. Whatever the reason, Paul later regards the departure as a serious failure. The mission moves forward with a smaller team.

From the coastal plain, Paul and Barnabas travel inland to Pisidian Antioch. This movement likely required a difficult climb through the Taurus region and travel along roads exposed to ordinary dangers. Luke does not describe the hardships here, so they should not be dramatized beyond the evidence. Still, the geography reminds readers that the simple phrase "they came to Antioch" represents real exertion. Apostolic mission was conducted through human bodies, uncertain travel, and the limits of ancient transportation.

On the Sabbath they enter the synagogue and sit down. After readings from the Law and Prophets, the rulers invite them to speak. Paul rises and addresses both Israelites and God-fearers. His sermon retells the story of Israel with God as the leading actor. God chose, delivered, bore with, gave, raised up, and promised. The sermon does not offer Jesus as a break from this story. Jesus is the promised offspring of David and the Savior to whom the story was moving.

Paul then confronts the scandal of the cross. Jerusalem's rulers failed to recognize Jesus and fulfilled the prophetic words by condemning him. Human guilt and divine purpose meet without canceling one another. Jesus was killed and laid in a tomb, "but God raised him from the dead" (13:30). The

resurrection transforms the apparent defeat into royal victory and proves that Jesus is the promised Holy One who did not see decay.

The sermon reaches its hearers with an announcement and a warning. Through Jesus forgiveness is proclaimed, and everyone who believes is justified from what the Mosaic law could not accomplish for sinners (13:38-39). The law is not defective as God's law; guilty people are defective as law keepers. They need a righteousness and sacrifice they cannot supply. The risen Christ is therefore not merely an example or teacher. He is the ground of a right standing before God.

A City Gathers, Divides, and Sends the Word Outward

The initial response is strong. Many follow Paul and Barnabas, who urge them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathers to hear the Word (13:44). The scale of interest provokes jealousy among some Jewish leaders. They contradict and insult the missionaries. Paul and Barnabas answer that the Word was rightly spoken first to them, but their rejection now brings a local turning toward the Gentiles.

Isaiah 49:6 governs this movement. God's servant is appointed as light to the nations so salvation may reach the ends of the earth. Jesus fulfills the servant mission in his own person, and his witnesses carry his light by proclaiming him. Gentile hearers rejoice and honor the Word of the Lord. Luke adds that all who were appointed to eternal life believed (13:48). The sentence places the deepest cause of faith in God's gracious purpose while preserving the public preaching through which they believe.

The Word spreads through the region, but the opponents stir influential citizens and drive the missionaries out. Paul and Barnabas shake the dust from their feet and go to Iconium. The new disciples remain filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. The missionaries' expulsion does not mean the mission failed. A church now exists where no church had stood, and the Spirit remains with the believers after the traveling preachers leave.

Iconium and the Cost of a Dividing Word

At Iconium the missionaries again enter the synagogue and speak in a way that leads many Jews and Greeks to believe (14:1). Luke does not oppose careful speech to divine grace. God uses intelligible, persuasive proclamation. At the same time, unbelieving leaders poison minds against the brothers. Paul and Barnabas respond by remaining for a long time and speaking boldly. Courage here is not mere temperament; it is trust in the Lord who bears witness to the Word of his grace.

Signs and wonders confirm apostolic testimony, but they do not remove division. The city separates into opposing groups, and a violent plan eventually forms. The missionaries learn of it and flee toward Lystra and Derbe. Their movement is strategic obedience. They do not have to remain until murdered in every city. By moving, they continue preaching in the surrounding region.

Lystra: Misunderstood Power and Sudden Violence

Lystra brings the most dramatic reversal of the journey. Paul sees a man lame from birth who is listening. He commands him to stand, and the man leaps and walks (14:8-10). The crowd interprets the healing through its own pagan story. They call Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes, and the priest of Zeus prepares sacrifices. The missionaries rush into the crowd with torn garments, insisting that they are ordinary men and commanding the people to turn from vain gods to the living Creator.

Paul's brief message starts farther back than his synagogue sermon. The crowd does not share Israel's Scriptures, so he begins with creation and providence. God made all things and has given rain, fruitful seasons, food, and gladness. These gifts are witnesses to divine goodness, yet the crowd has misread them within an idolatrous world. Natural revelation makes worship necessary and idolatry guilty, but it does not identify the crucified and risen Savior with gospel clarity. For that, proclamation is still required.

The crowd is scarcely restrained from sacrifice. Then opponents arrive from Antioch and Iconium and persuade the same population to stone Paul. Luke moves from attempted worship to attempted murder in only a few verses. Fallen admiration is unstable because it loves its own interpretation of power. When Paul rejects the role the crowd assigns him, wonder becomes hostility.

Paul is dragged outside the city and left for dead. The disciples gather around him, he rises, and he enters the city again. Luke gives no speech explaining his thoughts, and the reader should feel the force of the action itself. The apostle will later tell these churches that entrance into the kingdom comes through many tribulations. He teaches what his scarred body has already displayed.

Derbe, the Return Road, and the Formation of Churches

Paul and Barnabas go to Derbe and make many disciples. At this point they could have continued east toward Paul's home region, but they turn back through the cities where they faced threats and violence. The return journey reveals the goal of apostolic mission. They are not counting quick decisions and leaving isolated converts. They strengthen the disciples, urge them to remain in the faith, teach a theology of suffering, and appoint elders in every church (14:21-23).

The churches are young, but they are not treated as permanent children under distant missionaries. Recognized local shepherds will teach, guard, and care for them. Prayer and fasting surround these appointments, and the congregations are commended to the Lord in whom they have believed. Paul and Barnabas trust Christ to preserve churches they cannot personally control.

They pass through Pisidia and Pamphylia, preach in Perga, descend to Attalia, and sail back to Syrian Antioch. The church that commended them to God's grace gathers to hear the report. The missionaries describe all that God had done with them and how he opened a door of faith to the Gentiles (14:27).

The grammar of mission is complete: God acts, servants labor, churches send, sinners believe, opposition rises, and grace receives the glory.

The first journey therefore ends where it began, in the life of the sending church. It has moved through Jewish synagogues, a Roman official's court, pagan crowds, hostile streets, and newly formed congregations. It has also raised the question that will dominate Acts 15: Must Gentile believers take on the covenant badge and ceremonial identity of Jews in order to be fully saved and fully included? The missionary success of Acts 13-14 makes the Jerusalem Council necessary.

3.1 Worship, Fasting, and Sending

Acts 13:1-3 begins with a local church at worship. The Greek verb can describe public service to God. While the leaders minister to the Lord and fast, the Holy Spirit commands that Barnabas and Saul be set apart for the work to which he has called them. The church then fasts, prays, lays hands on them, and sends them.

The Spirit's command is sovereign, but the church's action is real. Laying on of hands does not give Paul his apostleship; Christ had already called him. It publicly identifies the missionaries with the sending church and commends them to God's grace (14:26). Mission begins in worship because God's worth, not human adventure, is its final reason.

The leadership list in 13:1 reflects remarkable diversity: Barnabas from Cyprus, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen connected to Herod's court, and Saul of Tarsus. The gospel forms one worshipping body from different histories and social locations.

3.2 Cyprus: Word and Spiritual Opposition

Barnabas and Saul begin in Cyprus, Barnabas's home region (4:36). In Salamis they preach in Jewish synagogues, establishing a pattern: Israel receives the announcement that its Messiah has come, and God-fearing Gentiles nearby also hear.

At Paphos, Bar-Jesus or Elymas opposes their witness to the proconsul Sergius Paulus. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, exposes the magician's deceit and announces temporary blindness. The sign fits the offense: the man who makes straight paths crooked is unable to see the path. The proconsul believes, and Luke emphasizes his amazement at "the teaching of the Lord," not merely the miracle (13:12).

This scene must not justify reckless claims of authority by later ministers. Paul acts as Christ's apostle, under immediate inspiration. The enduring principle is that gospel ministry confronts spiritual deception through truth, dependence on the Spirit, and confidence in Christ's authority.

3.3 Saul Becomes Paul

Acts 13:9 introduces “Saul, who was also called Paul.” Luke does not describe a miraculous name change. A Jewish person in the Roman world could use a Semitic name and a Roman name. From this point, the Roman name fits Paul’s widening Gentile mission. The change in Luke’s usage marks narrative focus, not a second conversion.

3.4 John Mark’s Departure

John Mark leaves at Perga (13:13), but Luke does not state his reason. Illness, fear, disagreement, homesickness, or concern about Gentile mission are possible, not certain. Paul later judges the departure serious enough to refuse Mark on the next trip (15:36-40). Barnabas disagrees. Still later, Paul calls Mark useful (2 Tim. 4:11). The complete canonical picture allows both honest accountability and real restoration.

PASTORAL PRINCIPLE: Grace does not require leaders to pretend failure is unimportant. Grace does require that failure not be treated as the final word when God produces repentance, maturity, and renewed usefulness.

4. Pisidian Antioch: Promise, Resurrection, and Justification

4.1 The Setting and Shape of the Sermon

In Pisidian Antioch, Paul addresses Israelites and God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue (13:16). His sermon moves through Israel’s history to David, from David to Jesus, from Jesus’ death to resurrection, and from resurrection to a call for faith. Paul reasons from shared Scripture, but the sermon is centered on God’s action.

The repeated subject is God: God chose the fathers, exalted the people, led them out, bore with them, gave them the land, raised David, brought the Savior, and raised Jesus from the dead. Biblical history is not a record of humanity climbing toward God. It is the record of God keeping covenant promises through weak and sinful people.

4.2 David’s Son and the Promised Savior

Paul connects Jesus to David (13:22-23). The promise of an enduring Davidic king (2 Sam. 7:12-16) reaches its fulfillment in the risen Christ. John the Baptist’s humble witness further identifies Jesus as the greater one whose sandals John was unworthy to untie.

The rulers in Jerusalem fulfill the prophets by condemning Jesus, though they do not understand those prophets (13:27). This is concurrence: God’s sovereign plan and responsible human action occur in the

same event. The rulers act ignorantly and wickedly; God fulfills his saving purpose without becoming the author of their sin (compare Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).

4.3 Resurrection as Fulfillment and Enthronement

God raises Jesus and supplies witnesses (13:30-31). Paul cites Psalms 2 and 16 and Isaiah 55. Psalm 16 cannot finally refer to David, whose body decayed. Jesus, the Holy One, sees no corruption. Psalm 2 identifies him as the royal Son. The resurrection both vindicates Jesus and publicly declares the arrival of the promised reign.

“Today I have begotten you” in Psalm 2 does not mean the eternal Son began to exist at the resurrection. Paul uses royal enthronement language. The one who is eternally Son is installed and declared in his messianic kingship through resurrection (compare Rom. 1:3-4).

4.4 Forgiveness and Justification

Acts 13:38-39 is the sermon’s saving announcement: through Jesus forgiveness is proclaimed, and everyone who believes is justified from what the law of Moses could not justify. “Justify” means to declare righteous in God’s court. The law can reveal sin and condemn the lawbreaker; it cannot supply the perfect righteousness or atoning death sinners need.

Paul does not oppose the law as God’s revelation. He opposes using the law as the ground of acceptance before God. The crucified and risen Christ provides what the law could not provide to guilty people. Faith receives Christ; it does not earn him. This anticipates the fuller argument of Romans and Galatians.

Reformed theology distinguishes justification from sanctification without separating them. Justification is God’s once-for-all legal declaration based on Christ’s righteousness. Sanctification is the Spirit’s continuing work that makes believers holy. Acts 13 emphasizes the first, while the changed lives and organized churches of Acts display the second.

4.5 Human Rejection and Divine Appointment

Many Gentiles rejoice, while some Jewish leaders oppose the message (13:45-48). Paul and Barnabas say that those rejecting the word judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. Luke then says that as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Both truths must stand. The opponents really reject and remain responsible. The believers believe because God’s gracious appointment reaches its intended result. The text does not say that God noticed who would believe and then appointed them. The appointment is presented as the reason the group believes.

This is not fatalism. Fatalism imagines an impersonal outcome that makes means pointless. Biblical election guarantees the success of God's appointed means. Because God has a people, missionaries preach; through preaching, the appointed believe (Rom. 10:14-17; 2 Tim. 2:10).

4.6 Turning to the Gentiles

Paul cites Isaiah 49:6: God has appointed the servant as a light for the nations. In Isaiah, the servant's mission belongs supremely to the Messiah. In Acts, the Messiah carries out that mission through his witnesses. The church does not replace Christ; it participates in Christ's servant mission by union with him and obedience to his commission.

The turning to Gentiles is not a claim that Paul will never again preach to Jews. He repeatedly enters synagogues afterward. It announces judgment in that location and the widening movement of salvation promised by Scripture.

Doctrinal Synthesis of Acts 13

- Scripture: Christian preaching shows that Jesus fulfills the unified Old Testament story.
- Providence and concurrence: Wicked choices can fulfill God's holy plan without excusing the sinner.
- Christology: Jesus is David's promised Son, crucified Messiah, risen Holy One, and reigning King.
- Justification: Forgiveness and a right standing with God come through faith in Christ, not law-keeping.
- Election and means: God's appointment produces faith through public preaching.
- Mission: The risen Servant brings light to the nations through his commissioned church.

Interpretive Errors to Avoid

1. Treating Paul's sermon as a collection of isolated proof texts rather than a unified biblical story.
2. Saying election removes responsibility; Luke places rejection and appointment side by side.
3. Saying the church has replaced Israel in a simple or hostile sense. The text presents fulfillment in Israel's Messiah and an expanded people that includes believing Jews and Gentiles.
4. Confusing justification with moral improvement.
5. Assuming Paul abandoned Jewish evangelism after Acts 13.

5. Through Tribulation: Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Return

5.1 Word Confirmed, City Divided

At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas speak so that many Jews and Greeks believe (14:1). Their bold witness is accompanied by signs that testify to the “word of his grace” (14:3). The signs serve the message; the message does not serve the signs. The city divides, and an attempted attack forces the team to flee.

Flight is not necessarily cowardice. Jesus permitted his disciples to flee persecution from one town to another (Matt. 10:23). Paul can flee in Iconium and later reenter danger in Lystra. Faithfulness is not measured by always choosing the most dangerous option; it is measured by obedience to one’s calling.

5.2 Lystra and Natural Revelation

In Lystra, a man unable to walk is healed. The crowd interprets the miracle through pagan categories and calls Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes. The missionaries tear their clothes and urgently reject worship.

Because this audience lacks synagogue background, Paul begins with the living Creator rather than Israel’s detailed history (14:15-17). God made heaven, earth, sea, and all within them. He allowed nations to walk in their ways, yet did not leave himself without witness: rain, fruitful seasons, food, and gladness testify to kindness.

This is natural revelation - God’s disclosure of himself through creation and providence (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-21). It gives real knowledge of God but not the saving clarity of the gospel. Paul uses it as a point of contact while calling the crowd to turn from idols. He does not affirm pagan worship as an alternate path to God.

5.3 From Worship to Stoning

The crowd barely stops its sacrifice. Soon opponents arrive, persuade the people, and Paul is stoned and left for dead (14:19). Popular approval is unstable when it is not grounded in truth. A minister who builds identity on applause will be ruled by fear when applause becomes hostility.

Paul rises, returns to the city, and then goes to Derbe. Luke does not say he was resurrected. The natural reading is severe injury followed by remarkable preservation. The passage displays courage without encouraging speculation beyond the text.

5.4 Strengthening Churches on the Dangerous Road

After making disciples in Derbe, the missionaries return through Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch - the very places of opposition. They strengthen souls, encourage perseverance, and teach that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (14:22).

The “must” reflects divine necessity. Suffering is not accidental debris outside God’s plan. Believers do not earn the kingdom through pain, but union with the rejected King means sharing his path before sharing his glory (Luke 24:26; Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 3:12).

5.5 Elders in Every Church

Paul and Barnabas appoint elders in each church with prayer and fasting (14:23). These congregations are young, yet the missionaries do not leave them as informal gatherings dependent on traveling founders. Local, qualified shepherds are part of apostolic mission.

Acts uses “elders” in the plural for each church in this summary. Reformed and Baptist traditions often see a normal pattern of plural pastoral oversight, while recognizing that church size and circumstance may affect immediate practice. The passage clearly teaches recognized leadership, dependence on God, and commending churches to the Lord.

5.6 Reporting to Antioch

Back in Antioch, the missionaries gather the church and report “all that God had done with them” and how he opened a door of faith to the Gentiles (14:27). They neither erase their labor nor take ultimate credit. God works with and through servants. Mission reports should produce worship, informed prayer, and shared responsibility.

First Journey: Reformed Theological Summary

- God calls and sends through the worshiping church.
- The Word of grace is central; signs authenticate apostolic witness.
- Christ fulfills Israel’s Scriptures and reigns as David’s risen Son.
- Justification comes through faith apart from the law as a ground of acceptance.
- Election assures missionary fruit while preserving human responsibility.
- Common grace and natural revelation provide contact with pagan hearers but cannot replace the gospel.
- Tribulation belongs to the path into the kingdom.
- Evangelism aims at disciples and ordered local churches, not decisions detached from lifelong care.

First Journey Discussion Questions

1. What does Antioch teach about the relation between local worship and global mission?
2. How does Paul adapt his starting point in a synagogue and in a pagan setting without changing the message's truth?
3. In Acts 13:38-48, how do justification, faith, responsibility, and election fit together?
4. Why do Paul and Barnabas return through dangerous cities?
5. What would change if a modern missions strategy treated church planting and elder formation as necessary goals?

Ninety-Minute Teaching Plan

1. Route and historical setting - 10 minutes.
2. Antioch's worship and commissioning - 15 minutes.
3. Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch - 25 minutes.
4. Lystra: natural revelation and idolatry - 15 minutes.
5. Suffering, perseverance, and elders - 15 minutes.
6. Discussion and prayer for missions - 10 minutes.

First Journey in Retrospect

Luke's account begins with named teachers worshipping in Antioch and ends with a gathered church hearing what God has done. Between those scenes, Paul and Barnabas cross the sea, confront deception, lose a coworker, climb inland, preach Christ from Israel's Scriptures, face expulsion, flee a murder plot, reject worship, and survive stoning. The outward route looks unstable. The theological direction is steady because the risen Christ governs it.

The first journey also shows the full shape of missionary fruit. The proconsul believes, Gentiles rejoice, a lame man walks, and many disciples are made. Yet Luke does not let visible success define the work. Crowds misunderstand, leaders contradict, and converts must be taught to expect tribulation. Churches need strengthening and elders. The measure of the mission is therefore not excitement alone, but the creation of persevering congregations under the Word of grace.

The return to Antioch prevents Paul's calling from becoming a private story. The sending church shares the report and is prepared to face the doctrinal question created by Gentile conversion. Mission and theology cannot be separated. When grace gathers unexpected people, the church must confess clearly whether Christ is sufficient to save them.

Part III - The Jerusalem Council

6. One Gospel and One People: Acts 15:1-35

Extended Narrative: The Gospel Brought to a Public Test

The joy at the end of the first journey is followed by a direct threat to the meaning of that success. Men arrive in Antioch from Judea and teach the brothers that unless they are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, they cannot be saved (Acts 15:1). They are not merely asking Gentile Christians to respect Jewish neighbors. They are placing circumcision between the sinner and salvation. The dispute therefore reaches the foundation of the gospel.

Paul and Barnabas strongly oppose the teaching. Antioch then appoints them and others to go to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. As the delegation travels through Phoenicia and Samaria, it reports Gentile conversions, bringing great joy to the churches. Luke places that joy beside the controversy. The disputed mission is already producing recognizable fruit among believers, but experience alone will not settle the doctrine. The church must understand the fruit through God's revealed Word.

In Jerusalem, believers from the party of the Pharisees argue that Gentile converts must be circumcised and commanded to keep the law of Moses (15:5). The apostles and elders gather, and Luke openly says there is much debate. The presence of debate does not mean the Spirit has abandoned the church. Serious truth may require patient public reasoning. Unity is not protected by avoiding the disputed claim; it is protected by bringing the claim under apostolic testimony and Scripture.

Peter recalls the conversion of Cornelius. God chose that Gentiles should hear the gospel from Peter, and God himself bore witness by giving them the Holy Spirit. He made no distinction, cleansing their hearts by faith (15:7-9). The demanded yoke would therefore test God by refusing to accept those whom God had accepted. Peter's conclusion is striking: "We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (15:11). Jewish believers are not the saving pattern to which Gentiles add themselves. Jews and Gentiles stand together as debtors to the same grace.

The assembly listens as Barnabas and Paul describe the signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles. James then gives the scriptural judgment by citing Amos 9. The rebuilding of David's fallen tent leads to the nations bearing the Lord's name. Gentile inclusion is not a modern adjustment forced upon an unprepared church. It belongs to the prophetic hope fulfilled by David's risen Son.

James judges that Gentile believers should not be troubled with circumcision. The council instead sends a letter requiring separation from idolatry, sexual immorality, blood, and strangled meat. These

commands protect holiness and fellowship; they do not become a second ground of justification. The letter explicitly rejects the unauthorized teachers who unsettled souls, honors Barnabas and Paul as men who risked their lives for Christ, and sends Judas and Silas to confirm the decision in person.

When the letter is read at Antioch, the congregation rejoices because of its encouragement (15:31). A doctrinal judgment that excludes works from the ground of salvation does not produce moral carelessness. It produces comfort, unity, and strengthened faith. The council protects both the sufficiency of Christ and the visible fellowship of Christ's people.

The next scene is painfully human. Paul wants to revisit the churches, Barnabas wants to bring Mark, and Paul refuses because Mark withdrew in Pamphylia. The disagreement becomes sharp enough that the two long-time partners separate. Barnabas sails to Cyprus with Mark; Paul chooses Silas and travels through Syria and Cilicia. Luke does not hide the wound or turn it into a simple moral lesson. God multiplies the teams, yet the later usefulness of Mark shows that failure and conflict need not have the final word. The gospel defended in the council is a gospel strong enough to restore servants as well as save nations.

6.1 The Crisis

Teachers from Judea insist that Gentiles must be circumcised according to Moses in order to be saved (15:1). The issue is not a minor preference. If circumcision and Torah identity are required as conditions of justification, Christ is not sufficient and grace is no longer grace (compare Gal. 2:15-21; 5:2-6).

Paul and Barnabas dispute the teaching, and the Antioch church sends them to Jerusalem. The apostles and elders meet, debate, hear testimony, and judge from Scripture. Conciliar action - churches seeking a shared biblical judgment - can protect unity, but the council has unique apostolic authority. Later assemblies are ministerial, not inspired: they serve under Scripture and can err.

6.2 Peter: Hearts Cleansed by Faith

Peter recalls Cornelius (Acts 10-11). God chose that Gentiles should hear and believe, gave them the Spirit, made no distinction, and cleansed their hearts by faith (15:7-9). Circumcision did not cause their cleansing. God's gift publicly demonstrated their full reception.

Peter calls the demanded yoke unbearable and says Jews and Gentiles are saved in the same way: through the grace of the Lord Jesus (15:10-11). This reverses any idea that Gentiles are an appendix to a Jewish way of salvation. There has always been only one saving grace, now revealed in its new-covenant fullness.

6.3 James: The Prophets Agree

James cites Amos 9:11-12. The restoration of David's fallen tent results in the nations seeking the Lord. The wording follows the Greek Old Testament closely. James's point is that Gentile inclusion as Gentiles agrees with the prophets; they do not need to become ethnic Jews to belong to the restored messianic people.

Interpreters debate how Acts 15 relates to future promises concerning ethnic Israel. The passage clearly teaches present fulfillment in Christ's reign and the multinational church. It does not require the claim that every Old Testament promise has been exhausted, nor does it permit separating Gentile salvation from David's Messiah.

6.4 The Four Requirements

The council tells Gentile believers to abstain from idol pollution, sexual immorality, strangled meat, and blood (15:20, 29). These are not additional works required for justification; that would contradict the council's decision. They call believers away from idolatrous and immoral pagan life and protect table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Some connect all four commands mainly to Leviticus 17-18, where requirements apply to resident aliens. Others see a mix of permanent moral commands and temporary fellowship concerns. In either view, the decree serves holiness and unity, not merit.

6.5 Paul and Barnabas Separate

After the council, Paul proposes revisiting the churches. Barnabas wants Mark; Paul refuses because Mark deserted the earlier work. Their sharp disagreement produces two teams (15:36-41). Luke neither calls the dispute sinful nor tells readers which man was completely right.

Providence brings wider ministry from painful conflict, but a good result does not automatically justify every attitude or word used in reaching it. Scripture later shows restored usefulness and affection involving Mark (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). The church should hold together prudence, accountability, patience, and hope.

Doctrinal Synthesis

- Sola gratia: all are saved by the grace of Christ, not ethnic badges or ceremonial works.
- Sola fide: God cleanses hearts by faith.
- Catholicity: the one church includes Jews and Gentiles without requiring cultural sameness.
- Scripture and councils: testimony is tested and interpreted by the prophetic Word.
- Christian liberty: freedom from ceremonial obligation is governed by holiness and love.

- Providence: God can advance his work even through unresolved human weakness.

Confessional Connections

- Westminster Confession 11 and Second London Baptist Confession 11: justification by faith.
- Westminster Confession 20 and Second London Baptist Confession 21: Christian liberty and liberty of conscience.
- Belgic Confession 7: Scripture's sufficiency over human regulations imposed as necessary for salvation.
- Heidelberg Catechism 21 and 60-64: true faith and justification by grace.

Discussion Questions

1. Why would adding circumcision as necessary for salvation destroy the gospel?
2. How does the council use experience, apostolic testimony, and Scripture?
3. How can churches protect doctrine without confusing every disagreement with a gospel crisis?
4. How should Christian liberty be limited by holiness and love?
5. What does the later recovery of Mark teach about judging ministry failure?

Part IV - The Second Missionary Journey

7. The Spirit Directs the Mission: Acts 15:36-16:10

Complete Itinerary: Acts 15:36-18:22

Order	Location	Passage	Main Event
1	Syrian Antioch	15:36-40	Paul chooses Silas after separation from Barnabas
2	Syria and Cilicia	15:41	Churches strengthened
3	Derbe and Lystra	16:1-5	Timothy joins; council decision delivered
4	Phrygia and Galatian region	16:6	Spirit forbids preaching in Asia at that time
5	Mysia and Troas	16:7-10	Bithynia blocked; Macedonian vision
6	Samothrace and Neapolis	16:11	Sea crossing to Macedonia
7	Philippi	16:12-40	Lydia, slave girl, prison, jailer, magistrates
8	Thessalonica	17:1-9	Messiah preached; opposition and public charge
9	Berea	17:10-15	Scriptures examined; persecution follows
10	Athens	17:16-34	Areopagus address
11	Corinth	18:1-17	Eighteen-month ministry; Gallio hearing
12	Cenchrea and Ephesus	18:18-21	Brief stop; Priscilla and Aquila remain
13	Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch	18:22	Journey concludes

The Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)



The Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22). Acts 18:22 says Paul 'went up and greeted the church'; Jerusalem is the common, but not explicit, identification.

Numbered sites: 1. Antioch; 2. Tarsus; 3. Derbe; 4. Lystra; 5. Phrygia-Galatia; 6. Troas; 7. Samothrace; 8. Neapolis; 9. Philippi; 10. Amphipolis; 11. Apollonia; 12. Thessalonica; 13. Berea; 14. Athens; 15. Corinth; 16. Cenchrea; 17. Ephesus; 18. Caesarea; 19. Jerusalem

Extended Narrative Walkthrough of the Second Journey

Revisiting the Churches with a New Team

The second journey begins with continuity and change. Paul's purpose is pastoral: "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are" (Acts 15:36). Missionary concern does not end when a church is planted. Paul wants to know whether disciples are standing, growing, and living under faithful care. Yet Barnabas is no longer beside him. Silas, a respected leader and prophet who helped carry the Jerusalem letter, becomes Paul's partner.

The team passes through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening churches. At Derbe and Lystra, Paul meets Timothy, a disciple with a Jewish mother and Greek father. The local brothers speak well of him. Timothy therefore joins through both personal willingness and public recognition. Paul has him circumcised, not as a condition of salvation but as a missionary accommodation. Immediately afterward the team delivers the council's decrees, which deny that circumcision is required for Gentile salvation. Luke places these events together so readers can distinguish gospel principle from flexible practice.

The churches are strengthened in the faith and increase in number daily (16:5). The sentence joins quality and quantity. Numerical growth is not despised, but it occurs alongside doctrinal strengthening. The missionary team does not have to choose between evangelistic fruit and theological stability.

Closed Roads and the Crossing into Macedonia

Paul's likely plans then meet repeated restraint. The team travels through the Phrygian and Galatian region because the Holy Spirit forbids them to speak the Word in the province of Asia at that time. When they approach Mysia and attempt to enter Bithynia, the Spirit of Jesus does not allow them (16:6-7). Luke does not explain the means of restraint. The silence is useful. It prevents the church from turning one unusual guidance event into a guaranteed technique.

They pass by Mysia and arrive at Troas on the Aegean coast. During the night Paul sees a Macedonian man pleading for help. The group concludes that God has called them to preach the gospel in Macedonia. The conclusion is corporate: "we sought to go," because "God had called us" (16:10). The first "we" wording also indicates that Luke has joined the travelers. What felt like a sequence of blocked opportunities is now seen as divine direction toward a field they had not first chosen.

They sail by Samothrace to Neapolis and then travel inland to Philippi, a leading city and Roman colony. A colony carried Roman civic identity into the provinces. Latin influence, Roman law, military history, and pride in citizenship shaped the city. This background makes the later beating of Roman citizens and Paul's demand for public accountability especially significant.

Philippi: Three Lives Under Different Kinds of Bondage

On the Sabbath the missionaries go outside the gate to a riverside place of prayer. There they speak to women who have gathered. Lydia is a businesswoman from Thyatira and a worshiper of God. Luke states the hidden cause of her response: the Lord opens her heart to attend to what Paul says (16:14). Grace does not bypass the sermon. It opens the hearer through the sermon. Lydia's baptism and hospitality establish a home from which the young church can receive care.

The next person highlighted has neither Lydia's freedom nor her standing. An enslaved girl brings profit to her owners through a spirit of divination. She follows Paul's company and speaks words that sound supportive, but the source is unclean and the continuing disruption is not accepted. Paul commands the

spirit in the name of Jesus Christ, and it leaves her (16:18). The name of Jesus liberates the girl spiritually, but her owners see only the loss of income.

The owners drag Paul and Silas before the magistrates and use cultural prejudice to gather support. They speak of “these Jews” disturbing “our city” and promoting customs unlawful for Romans. The accusation hides the real financial complaint. The crowd joins the attack, the magistrates order beatings without a proper hearing, and Paul and Silas are placed in the inner prison with their feet secured.

At midnight the wounded missionaries pray and sing while other prisoners listen. An earthquake opens the doors and loosens the bonds. The jailer, responsible for the prisoners, assumes escape and is ready to kill himself. Paul cries out that everyone remains. The man who held them is now protected by the prisoners he feared losing. Trembling, he asks what he must do to be saved.

Paul and Silas answer with faith in the Lord Jesus and then speak the Word to the household. The jailer washes their wounds; he and his household are baptized; he brings them into his home, sets food before them, and rejoices in believing God. Within one chapter, the church in Philippi includes a merchant woman, her household, a jailer and his household, and likely others gathered around Lydia’s home. The gospel crosses social boundaries without pretending those boundaries do not exist.

The magistrates send orders for release, but Paul refuses to leave secretly. He identifies Paul and Silas as Roman citizens who were publicly beaten without conviction. The magistrates become afraid, apologize, and escort them out. Paul then returns to Lydia’s house, encourages the brothers, and departs. His appeal is not a demand for comfort, since he leaves the city. It is a public correction that may protect the congregation from being dismissed as the criminal product of lawless founders.

Thessalonica and Berea: The Scriptures Opened and Resisted

Traveling along the main road through Amphipolis and Apollonia, the team comes to Thessalonica. Paul enters the synagogue over three Sabbaths and reasons from the Scriptures. He explains that the Messiah had to suffer and rise and identifies Jesus as that Messiah (17:2-3). The argument requires his hearers to revise a view of victory that has no place for a crucified King.

Some Jews, many devout Greeks, and leading women believe. Other leaders become jealous and gather a mob. Unable to find Paul and Silas, they drag Jason and other believers before city officials. The charge says that the missionaries proclaim another king, Jesus. The gospel does not call the church to violent revolt, yet the confession “Jesus is Lord” does deny that Caesar or any state possesses final authority.

The brothers send Paul and Silas to Berea by night. There the synagogue hearers receive the message eagerly and examine the Scriptures each day (17:11). Their nobility lies in neither easy acceptance nor automatic rejection. They listen and test. Many believe, including prominent Greek women and men.

Opposition from Thessalonica follows Paul even there, forcing him toward the coast, while Silas and Timothy remain for a time.

Athens: The Living God Before an Idolatrous City

Paul reaches Athens alone and waits for his coworkers. The city's artistic and intellectual reputation does not make him spiritually neutral. He is provoked by its idols. He reasons in the synagogue and marketplace every day, speaking with Epicurean and Stoic thinkers among others. Some dismiss him as a seed-picker, while others think he proclaims foreign divinities because he preaches Jesus and the resurrection (17:18).

Before the Areopagus, Paul begins with what he has observed: the Athenians are deeply religious, and one altar is dedicated to an unknown god. He does not treat the altar as sufficient worship. He announces the God they do not know. This God made the world, rules heaven and earth, cannot be contained in temples, and does not depend on human service. He is the giver of life and breath.

Paul then explains humanity's unity and God's providential rule over nations, times, and boundaries. People ought to seek God, yet their nearness to him as creatures does not excuse idolatry. Paul even uses lines familiar from Greek poets, but he turns them against images of gold, silver, and stone. If humans are God's offspring in the creaturely sense, the divine being cannot be a product of human art.

The address moves from creation to command. God now commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day of judgment and appointed the Judge. The resurrection of Jesus gives public assurance of that coming judgment. Some mock, some postpone, and some believe, including Dionysius and Damaris. Luke does not describe a mass response, but the truth has been announced at a center of pagan thought. Faithfulness is not measured only by crowd size.

Corinth: Fear Answered by Election and Promise

Paul arrives in Corinth after Athens. Corinth is commercially active, socially mixed, and morally troubled. There he meets Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish tentmakers recently displaced from Rome by an imperial order. Paul works with them and reasons in the synagogue each Sabbath. When Silas and Timothy arrive, he gives concentrated attention to the Word, testifying that Jesus is the Christ (18:1-5).

Opposition becomes abusive, and Paul turns toward Gentile ministry in that setting. Yet the move is not far from the synagogue. He teaches next door in the house of Titius Justus, and Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believes with his household. Many Corinthians hear, believe, and are baptized. The physical closeness of the new meeting place to the synagogue reflects the theological complexity of the mission: rejection and fulfillment, continuity and widening inclusion.

The Lord speaks to Paul in a night vision: “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking,” because Christ is with him, no one will successfully destroy him there, and the Lord has many people in the city (18:9-10). The command shows that Paul experiences fear. Apostolic courage is not the absence of weakness; it is obedience sustained by Christ’s presence and promise. The statement about Christ’s people refers to those whom the Lord intends to call through Paul’s continued preaching. Election supplies the reason to stay and speak.

Paul remains eighteen months, teaching the Word of God. When Gallio becomes proconsul, Jewish opponents bring Paul to the tribunal, accusing him of unlawful worship. Gallio refuses to judge the case as a violation of Roman law and drives them away. His decision is not Christian conversion, but providence uses a pagan magistrate’s limited ruling to restrain persecution and give the church space.

Paul later sails from Cenchrea, stops briefly in Ephesus, and leaves Priscilla and Aquila there. Though asked to remain longer, he departs with the stated intention of returning if God wills. He travels through Caesarea and likely greets the Jerusalem church before returning to Antioch. The second journey ends with churches planted in Macedonia and Achaia, a ministry foothold in Ephesus, and a wider team of coworkers. The route was shaped by disagreement, closed doors, public injustice, Scripture, philosophical encounter, manual work, fear, and divine promise. Through all of it, the risen Christ gathers his people by the Word.

7.1 Timothy and Contextual Freedom

Timothy has a Jewish mother and Greek father. Paul circumcises him because local Jews know his background (16:1-3). This does not contradict the Jerusalem Council. Titus, a Gentile, was not compelled to be circumcised when gospel truth was at stake (Gal. 2:3-5). Timothy’s circumcision is not required for salvation; it removes an avoidable barrier to synagogue ministry.

Christian freedom can refuse a demand that corrupts justification and voluntarily accept a burden that serves love. The same outward act can carry different theological meaning in different settings. Wisdom asks not only, “May I?” but also, “What will this action communicate?”

7.2 Forbidden and Called

The Spirit prevents the team from speaking in Asia and does not allow entry into Bithynia (16:6-7). “Asia” here is the Roman province in western Asia Minor, not the modern continent. The prohibition is temporary; Paul later conducts extensive ministry in Ephesus.

Luke does not tell how the Spirit blocks these plans. Illness, prophecy, circumstance, or inward direction are possible, but certainty is impossible. The Macedonian vision at Troas gives positive direction. The

team concludes together that God has called them to preach in Macedonia (16:10). The first “we” section begins, suggesting Luke joined the company.

Providence includes closed doors as well as open ones. A closed door is not proof that a goal was foolish or sinful. Paul’s intended fields were legitimate. God directs time and sequence, not only right and wrong.

DISCERNMENT RULE: Acts 16 should deepen prayerful dependence, not create a method in which impressions replace Scripture. God’s moral will is known in Scripture. Particular decisions require wisdom, prayer, counsel, providential circumstances, and freedom from claiming revelation God has not promised.

8. Philippi: Sovereign Grace, Spiritual Conflict, and Public Justice

8.1 Lydia: The Lord Opens the Heart

Philippi appears to lack a synagogue, so Paul goes to a place of prayer by the river. Lydia, a seller of purple cloth from Thyatira, listens, and “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention” to Paul’s message (16:14).

Luke joins divine action and human response without tension. Lydia truly listens; the Lord opens her heart. This is a clear narrative picture of effectual calling. The external call comes through Paul’s preaching; the internal work of God enables a receptive response. The result is not forced resistance but willing faith.

Lydia and her household are baptized, and her home becomes a center of hospitality. Paedobaptist and Baptist Reformed interpreters disagree over whether household baptisms support infant baptism. This text does not list the household members or explicitly state their ages. It should not carry more weight than its details allow. Both traditions agree that baptism marks visible reception into the covenant community and that Lydia’s faith bears fruit in hospitality.

8.2 The Enslaved Girl and the Name of Jesus

A slave girl with a spirit of divination follows the missionaries. Her owners profit from her exploitation. Her words are broadly true, but Paul refuses demonic publicity and commands the spirit to leave in Jesus Christ’s name (16:16-18).

The gospel confronts spiritual and economic bondage. When the owners lose profit, they do not celebrate the girl’s freedom. They stir ethnic prejudice and accuse the missionaries before the magistrates. Idolatrous systems often appear tolerant until the gospel threatens money, power, or status.

8.3 Songs at Midnight and the Jailer's Question

Paul and Silas are beaten, placed in the inner prison, and secured in stocks. At midnight they pray and sing hymns while prisoners listen (16:25). Their worship is not denial of pain; it is confession that God remains worthy in pain.

An earthquake opens doors and loosens bonds. The jailer assumes escape and prepares to kill himself, but Paul stops him. After trembling before them, he asks what he must do to be saved. The answer is direct: believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (16:31). The promise is then explained as the word of the Lord to everyone in his house. The household hears, receives care, is baptized, and rejoices in faith.

"You and your household" reflects God's ordinary use of household relationships; it is not salvation by another person's faith. Luke explicitly connects the word and rejoicing faith with the household. Again, baptismal traditions draw different conclusions about membership, but none should teach inherited regeneration.

8.4 Paul's Citizenship and Public Vindication

Paul refuses a secret release after the magistrates beat Roman citizens without trial (16:35-39). He is not demanding personal revenge. A public acknowledgment protects the new church from the charge that its founders were proven criminals and holds rulers to their own law.

Christians may waive rights for love (1 Cor. 9) and may appeal to lawful rights for justice and the church's good (Acts 22:25; 25:11). Submission to authorities is not passive approval of illegal conduct. Reformed political thought has often emphasized that magistrates are under God's moral rule and that lawful offices have defined limits.

Philippi Theological Synthesis

- The Lord opens hearts through the preached Word.
- The name of Jesus has authority over unclean powers.
- Conversion produces a new household of hospitality, care, joy, and worship.
- Suffering witnesses to the worth of God when praise continues without visible relief.
- Civil rights may be used in service of justice and the church, not merely self-protection.

9. Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens: Scripture and Public Reason

9.1 Thessalonica: Explaining and Proving

For three Sabbaths, Paul reasons from the Scriptures, explaining and setting forth that the Messiah had to suffer and rise, and that Jesus is that Messiah (17:2-3). The verbs suggest careful argument, not emotional pressure. Christian faith rests on public events interpreted by God's written revelation.

Opponents accuse the missionaries of saying there is another king, Jesus (17:7). The charge twists their intent but touches a truth: Jesus is Lord. His kingdom is not a revolutionary state advanced by violence, yet it places every ruler under the judgment of the risen King. The gospel is politically relevant without being reducible to a political program.

9.2 Berea: Noble Examination

The Bereans receive the word eagerly and examine the Scriptures daily to see whether Paul's teaching is so (17:11). Their nobility combines openness and testing. Skepticism that refuses to hear is not wisdom; enthusiasm that refuses to test is not faithfulness.

The apostles possess Christ-given authority, yet Paul's message can be examined by the prior written Word. How much more must later teachers be tested. *Sola Scriptura* does not mean no teachers, creeds, or councils. It means Scripture alone is the final, infallible rule that judges them all.

9.3 Athens: Provoked by Idolatry

Athens is intellectually famous and religiously crowded. Paul's spirit is provoked because the city is full of idols (17:16). His engagement begins in holy grief, not admiration for cleverness. He reasons in synagogue and marketplace, then speaks before the Areopagus.

Paul begins with the Athenians' religiosity and an altar to an unknown god. He does not say their worship is saving. He announces the God they worship in ignorance. Contextualization means communicating revealed truth intelligibly within a culture; syncretism mixes the gospel with false worship until its meaning changes.

9.4 Creator, Lord, and Giver

Paul declares one Creator who made the world, rules heaven and earth, does not live in man-made temples, and is not served as though needy (17:24-25). This attacks both idolatry and any view of God as dependent on creation. God gives life and breath to all.

This is the doctrine of aseity: God has life in himself and needs nothing outside himself (Ex. 3:14; John 5:26). Human worship adds nothing God lacks. Worship is our grateful response to the fullness he freely shares.

9.5 Providence, Human Unity, and the Search for God

God made every nation from one and determined their times and boundaries (17:26). Human unity defeats racial pride; providential diversity defeats the idea that history is uncontrolled. God's purpose is that people should seek him, yet fallen searching does not naturally reach saving truth. Paul describes God as near and then commands repentance because former ignorance cannot excuse idolatry forever.

Paul quotes pagan poets to expose truths their own culture partly recognizes. He does not treat those poets as inspired Scripture. All truth belongs to God, and a missionary may use accurate statements from unbelieving sources while correcting the worldview around them.

9.6 Resurrection and Judgment

The address reaches its climax in repentance, a fixed day of judgment, the appointed Man, and resurrection (17:30-31). Some mock the resurrection; others want to hear more; some believe. Paul does not omit offense to gain respectability.

Some have claimed the Areopagus address was a failed philosophical experiment because it does not name Jesus in Luke's summary and gains few converts. Acts gives no such criticism. The speech is saturated with biblical creation theology and ends with resurrection and judgment. The mixed response follows the pattern elsewhere.

Athens Interpretive Debate

Reformed apologists differ over Paul's method. Evidential approaches emphasize his appeal to public facts and shared observations. Presuppositional approaches emphasize his challenge to the pagan worldview and dependence on revealed truth. The speech contains both contact and confrontation. Paul uses what hearers know in creation while exposing how idolatry suppresses that knowledge (compare Rom. 1:18-32).

10. Corinth: Weakness, Election, and Persevering Ministry

10.1 Tentmaking and Partnership

In Corinth Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla, Jews recently displaced from Rome by Claudius's decree (18:1-3). They share a trade commonly translated tentmaking, possibly involving leatherwork. Paul sometimes

supports himself and elsewhere receives gifts (Phil. 4:10-18). He defends both the right of ministers to support and the freedom to surrender that right when the gospel's credibility requires it (1 Cor. 9).

This resists two errors: treating financial support as unspiritual, and treating ministry as a path to luxury. The controlling question is gospel service.

10.2 "I Have Many People in This City"

After opposition, the Lord tells Paul in a vision not to fear but to continue speaking: Christ is with him, no one will destroy him, and "I have many people in this city" (18:9-10). Paul then remains eighteen months teaching God's Word.

The statement most naturally refers to people Christ intends to gather, including some not yet converted. Election therefore motivates perseverance. Paul does not reason, "God has people, so preaching is unnecessary." He reasons, in effect, "God has people, so the preaching will not finally be empty." Divine sovereignty establishes hope for difficult fields.

10.3 Gallio and Common Restraint

Jewish opponents bring Paul before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, but Gallio dismisses the dispute as an internal question of words and Jewish law (18:12-16). His indifference is not Christian virtue, yet providence uses the ruling to prevent the gospel from being treated as an illegal crime at that moment.

Civil authorities can unintentionally serve the church by maintaining ordinary legal boundaries. Reformed theology calls this common grace or providential restraint: God limits evil and preserves social goods even through people who do not savingly know him.

Second Journey: Reformed Theological Summary

- Christian liberty serves gospel truth and neighbor love.
- The Spirit directs mission by both restraint and positive guidance.
- Effectual calling is pictured when the Lord opens Lydia's heart.
- The gospel liberates from spiritual bondage and challenges economic idolatry.
- Scripture is the final test of teaching.
- Natural revelation supplies genuine knowledge but also grounds accountability.
- God's aseity and providence expose pagan religion.
- Christ's electing purpose sustains preaching in resistant places.
- Lawful civil rights may be used for justice and mission.

Second Journey Discussion Questions

1. Why can Timothy's circumcision be wise while forcing Titus's circumcision would deny the gospel?
2. What may and may not be concluded from closed doors in Acts 16?
3. Compare the conversions of Lydia, the slave girl's deliverance, and the jailer. What stays constant, and what differs?
4. How does Paul communicate differently in Thessalonica and Athens?
5. Does election weaken evangelism in Acts 18, or does it strengthen it? Explain from the passage.
6. What can Christians learn from Paul's use of citizenship and Gallio's ruling?

Ninety-Minute Teaching Plan

1. Route and team changes - 10 minutes.
2. Spirit guidance and the Macedonian call - 15 minutes.
3. Three encounters in Philippi - 25 minutes.
4. Scripture in Thessalonica and Berea - 15 minutes.
5. Athens: creation, providence, repentance, judgment - 15 minutes.
6. Corinth: election and endurance - 10 minutes.

Second Journey in Retrospect

The second journey repeatedly joins human uncertainty to divine direction. Paul begins with a reasonable plan to revisit churches. Conflict changes his team, the Spirit closes desired fields, and a vision points toward Macedonia. None of these changes means the mission lacks purpose. Luke presents providence as active within decisions, disappointments, counsel, and unexpected openings.

The people gathered on this journey could hardly be reduced to one social type. Lydia is a merchant able to offer hospitality. The enslaved girl is exploited for profit. The jailer represents Roman custody and suddenly becomes a trembling hearer. Thessalonian converts face civic accusation, Bereans test the message through Scripture, Athenian philosophers hear the Creator's claim, and Corinthians receive a promise that Christ has many people in their city. One gospel addresses different hearers without becoming a different gospel.

The journey also joins sovereignty and persuasion. The Lord opens Lydia's heart, yet Paul speaks. Christ has people in Corinth, so Paul remains and teaches. The Spirit guides the route, while the missionaries still reason and act. Reformed doctrine does not flatten these human means. It explains their lasting hope: the God who commands them also makes them fruitful.

Part V - The Third Missionary Journey

11. Ephesus and the Triumph of the Word

Complete Itinerary: Acts 18:23-21:17

Order	Location	Passage	Main Event
1	Antioch, Galatian region, Phrygia	18:23	Disciples strengthened
2	Ephesus	18:24-19:41	Apollos instructed; disciples taught; extended ministry; riot
3	Macedonia	20:1-2	Churches encouraged
4	Greece, probably Corinth	20:2-3	Three-month stay; plot changes travel plan
5	Return through Macedonia	20:3-6	Delegates accompany Paul
6	Troas	20:6-12	Lord's Day gathering; Eutychus restored
7	Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos	20:13-15	Coastal travel
8	Miletus	20:16-38	Farewell to Ephesian elders
9	Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre	21:1-6	Voyage and disciples' warnings
10	Ptolemais and Caesarea	21:7-14	Philip; Agabus predicts imprisonment
11	Jerusalem	21:15-17	Journey concludes

The Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23-21:17)



The Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23-21:17). Acts compresses parts of the land route; plotted lines are a geographic reconstruction of the named sequence.

Numbered sites: 1. Antioch; 2. Tarsus; 3. Phrygia-Galatia; 4. Ephesus; 5. Philippi; 6. Corinth; 7. Troas; 8. Assos; 9. Mitylene; 10. Chios; 11. Samos; 12. Miletus; 13. Cos; 14. Rhodes; 15. Patara; 16. Tyre; 17. Ptolemais; 18. Caesarea; 19. Jerusalem

Extended Narrative Walkthrough of the Third Journey

Strengthening Earlier Fields and Preparing Ephesus

After spending time in Antioch, Paul leaves again and travels through the Galatian and Phrygian regions, strengthening all the disciples (Acts 18:23). Luke summarizes many miles in one sentence. The brevity does not mean the work is unimportant. Repeated visitation is part of Paul's missionary pattern because churches need confirmation in truth, encouragement in suffering, and correction as new questions appear.

Meanwhile, Luke turns to Ephesus and introduces Apollos. He is an eloquent Alexandrian Jew, powerful in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, and accurate in what he teaches about Jesus, yet he knows only John's baptism (18:24-25). His knowledge is real but incomplete. Priscilla and Aquila hear him in the synagogue, take him aside, and explain the way of God more accurately. Their correction is private, respectful, and effective. Apollos then goes to Achaia with the church's recommendation and powerfully shows from Scripture that Jesus is the Christ.

The scene prepares the reader for Paul's arrival in Ephesus. It also shows that the mission is larger than Paul. A married couple instructs a gifted preacher; churches commend a teacher across regions; and Apollos strengthens work Paul began. Christ distributes gifts through the body rather than placing every ministry in one personality.

The Twelve, the Spirit, and the New-Covenant Moment

When Paul reaches Ephesus, he meets about twelve men described as disciples. Their answers reveal that their understanding has not moved beyond John's preparatory baptism. They have not even heard that the Holy Spirit has been given in the promised new-covenant way. Paul explains that John baptized with a baptism of repentance while pointing people toward the coming Jesus (19:1-4).

The men are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul lays hands on them, the Holy Spirit comes upon them, and they speak in tongues and prophesy. This scene resembles Pentecost and the Samaritan reception of the Spirit. It marks a group moving from an old, preparatory stage into the fulfilled work of Christ. Luke does not present the event as proof that every Christian must pass through two fixed stages of conversion and later Spirit baptism. Rather, the expanding church is publicly joined to the one apostolic gospel and the one new-covenant gift.

From Synagogue Dispute to Daily Public Teaching

Paul spends three months reasoning boldly in the synagogue about the kingdom of God. As resistance hardens and some publicly speak evil of the Way, he withdraws the disciples and begins daily discussions in the hall of Tyrannus (19:8-9). Withdrawal here is not surrender. It is a change of setting that protects disciples and creates a sustained teaching center.

Luke says this continues for two years, so that residents of Asia hear the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks (19:10). This does not require Paul to have personally preached in every town. Students, coworkers, travelers, and new believers carry the message outward. The churches later addressed in Revelation 2-3 stand within this wider regional setting. Intensive local teaching becomes a means of broad missionary multiplication.

Paul's own summary in Acts 20 expands the picture. He serves with humility and tears, teaches publicly and from house to house, and declares repentance toward God and faith in Jesus. He also reminds the

Ephesian elders that his work continued for three years with continual warning. Luke's narrative summary and Paul's farewell speech together show a ministry that is doctrinal, relational, emotionally costly, and patient.

Power That Cannot Be Bought or Controlled

God performs extraordinary miracles through Paul. Even cloths associated with his work are used in healings and deliverance (19:11-12). Luke calls these miracles extraordinary, warning readers not to treat them as the ordinary possession of every minister. The power belongs to God and supports the unique apostolic advance of the Word.

The seven sons of Sceva try to use the name of Jesus as a magical formula. They speak of "Jesus whom Paul proclaims," but they do not belong to Jesus or serve under his authority. The evil spirit answers that it knows Jesus and recognizes Paul, but asks who they are. The possessed man overpowers them, and they flee wounded and exposed (19:13-16). The event separates Christian authority from technique. The name of Jesus is not a verbal tool controlled by religious professionals.

Fear falls upon the city, the name of Jesus is honored, and many believers confess former practices. Those involved in magic bring books and burn them publicly. The value is enormous. Repentance is not presented as regret while keeping access to the old power. The believers destroy what would invite return and accept a real financial loss. Luke then gives one of his major summaries: the Word of the Lord grows and prevails mightily (19:20). The Word triumphs not because Christians learn a stronger magic, but because Christ frees them from the need for magic.

Artemis, Commerce, and Civic Disorder

The gospel's effect eventually reaches Ephesus's economy. Demetrius, a silversmith who makes shrines of Artemis, gathers craftsmen and explains the threat. His speech begins with income and then rises to religious and civic honor. Paul has persuaded many that gods made with hands are not gods. If that message continues, their trade may lose respect and the temple of Artemis may be discredited (19:23-27).

Demetrius understands a consequence that modern readers sometimes miss: repentance changes spending. When people abandon idols, industries that depend on idolatry feel the loss. The gospel is not a political riot, yet it challenges the beliefs that support economic and civic systems. The craftsmen respond with a shouted defense of Artemis, and confusion spreads through the city.

Paul wants to enter the assembly, but the disciples and even some friendly provincial officials urge him not to risk himself. Courage does not require rejecting every warning. In the theater, many people do not know why they have gathered. For about two hours the crowd shouts, "Great is Artemis of the

Ephesians!” The city clerk finally quiets them by appealing to lawful courts and warning that Rome may charge the city with rioting.

No Christian army, mob, or government decree defeats Artemis in this chapter. The Word works through proclamation and conversion, and pagan civil procedure restrains the crowd. The church wins no public vote, yet the idol's defenders have exposed their fear that the gospel can change an entire way of life.

Macedonia, Greece, and the Collection for the Saints

After the disturbance, Paul encourages the disciples, says farewell, and travels through Macedonia. Luke compresses this stage, but Paul's letters reveal heavy burdens, including conflict, anxiety over Corinth, and the joy of reunion with Titus. Acts says Paul gives the churches much encouragement before arriving in Greece, where he stays three months (20:1-3).

A Jewish plot changes his return plan. Instead of sailing directly to Syria, Paul goes back through Macedonia. A large group of representatives accompanies him, including men connected with Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, Asia, and likely other regions. They are not random travelers. Paul is carrying a collection from Gentile churches for poor believers in Jerusalem, and the diverse company helps display unity and financial accountability.

The gift has theological meaning. Gentile Christians have received spiritual blessing through Israel's Messiah and now share material aid with Jewish saints. The collection does not purchase unity, but it visibly expresses the one body created by grace. Paul's careful handling also shows that confidence in personal integrity does not remove the need for accountable procedures.

Troas: The Gathered Church and the Restored Young Man

At Troas the believers gather on the first day of the week to break bread, and Paul speaks because he plans to leave the next day (20:7). His message continues until midnight. A young man named Eutychus sits in a window, falls asleep, and drops from the third story. Luke, a physician, states that he is taken up dead.

Paul goes down, embraces him, and announces that his life is in him. The believers return upstairs, break bread, converse until daybreak, and are greatly comforted when the young man is brought alive (20:10-12). The scene should not become a joke about long sermons. Luke presents death invading a Christian gathering and apostolic power bringing restoration. The church's comfort comes from receiving the young man alive.

Paul then travels partly by land while companions sail. At Miletus he summons the Ephesian elders because he wants to reach Jerusalem without another lengthy stay in Ephesus. The route is hurried, but he refuses to pass the region without a final pastoral charge.

Miletus: A Ministry Interpreted Before Suffering

Paul's address to the elders is the only major speech in Acts directed to Christian church leaders. He begins with his manner of life among them: humility, tears, trials, public teaching, and house-to-house instruction (20:18-21). Doctrine and example belong together. He did not hold back what was profitable, and his message to Jews and Greeks was repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.

He is now constrained by the Spirit toward Jerusalem, not knowing each event but knowing that imprisonment and afflictions await. Paul does not measure the value of life by self-preservation. He wants to finish his course and testify to the gospel of God's grace (20:22-24). This is not contempt for life. It is a judgment that life finds its purpose in faithful service to Christ.

Paul declares that he is innocent of their blood because he did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God. The language echoes the watchman of Ezekiel 33. Faithful ministry cannot select only comforting doctrines or popular themes. It must teach the full saving purpose of God with patience and proportion.

The elders must pay careful attention first to themselves and then to the flock. The Holy Spirit has made them overseers to shepherd the church of God, obtained with precious blood (20:28). The exact textual form has a known manuscript question, but every major reading makes the church infinitely precious because of Christ's saving death. Elders do not own the flock. They serve a people purchased by another.

Danger will come from outside as savage wolves and from inside as teachers twisting truth to gain followers. Paul therefore commends the elders to God and to the Word of his grace, which is able to build them up and give the inheritance (20:32). The departing apostle entrusts the church to the same divine grace that created it. He also points to his freedom from greed, his manual labor, and his care for the weak. The final scene is prayer, tears, embraces, and grief because they expect not to see him again.

The Final Road to Jerusalem

The company sails through a series of ports and comes to Tyre, where the ship unloads cargo. The disciples, through the Spirit, warn Paul about Jerusalem (21:4). At Caesarea, the prophet Agabus binds his own hands and feet with Paul's belt and predicts Paul's arrest and delivery to Gentiles. Paul's companions beg him not to go.

Paul answers that he is ready not only for imprisonment but also for death for the name of the Lord Jesus (21:13). Earlier he said the Spirit constrained him to go, while the warnings identify the suffering ahead. The narrative does not directly condemn his decision. The most coherent reading is that the Spirit reveals the cost, while loving friends urge avoidance. Their plea is understandable, but Paul believes obedience requires the road toward chains.

When he will not be persuaded, the group says, “The will of the Lord be done” (21:14). That confession is not passive despair. It releases Paul into the providence of God. The third journey ends not with safe retirement but with arrival in Jerusalem, carrying aid, surrounded by representatives of Gentile churches, and prepared to suffer. The teaching mission of Ephesus now gives way to a witnessing mission through arrest and trial.

11.1 Apollos: Accurate Yet Incomplete

Apollos is eloquent, competent in Scripture, fervent, and accurate concerning Jesus, yet he knows only John’s baptism (18:24-25). Priscilla and Aquila take him aside and explain the way more accurately. Their correction is private, respectful, and effective. Apollos then becomes a powerful public defender of the faith.

Knowledge and teachability must remain together. Gift without humility becomes dangerous; correction without gentleness can destroy useful servants. Priscilla’s named role also demonstrates meaningful theological service by a woman. The passage does not by itself settle every question about the pastoral office, but it forbids the idea that women cannot possess or communicate serious doctrine.

11.2 The Twelve and John’s Baptism

In Ephesus, Paul meets about twelve disciples who have not heard that the Holy Spirit has been given. Their experience is transitional: they know John’s baptism but need the fulfilled message of Jesus. They are baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus, Paul lays hands on them, and they speak in tongues and prophesy (19:1-7).

This scene should be read within Acts’ movement from old-covenant expectation to new-covenant fulfillment. It is weak support for a universal two-stage rule that every Christian must receive a later Spirit baptism proved by tongues. The Epistles teach that all who belong to Christ have the Spirit (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). Acts records visible signs at key boundary crossings under apostolic oversight.

11.3 The Hall of Tyrannus and Daily Teaching

After three months of synagogue reasoning, hardened opposition leads Paul to withdraw the disciples and teach daily in the hall of Tyrannus for two years (19:8-10). Luke summarizes the result: all residents of Asia heard the word, Jews and Greeks.

The claim need not mean Paul personally preached to every resident. Ephesus functions as a training and sending center. The daily formation of disciples multiplies witness throughout the province. Churches named in Revelation 2-3 likely arose within this wider movement.

The episode dignifies patient theological education. Revival and doctrinal depth are not enemies. Extended teaching can be a missionary strategy because trained believers carry the truth farther than one teacher can travel.

11.4 Extraordinary Miracles and Counterfeit Power

God performs extraordinary miracles through Paul, even through cloths associated with him (19:11-12). Luke calls them extraordinary, warning readers against making them ordinary technique. The power belongs to God, not to objects or formulas.

The sons of Sceva try to use Jesus' name as magic: "Jesus whom Paul preaches." The evil spirit exposes their lack of authority and overpowers them (19:13-16). Jesus' name is not a verbal tool controlled by unbelief. True authority rests in Christ and is exercised according to his will.

Fear falls upon the city, Christ's name is honored, and believers confess practices. Those involved in magic burn costly books (19:17-19). Repentance becomes concrete and expensive. They do not resell destructive materials to recover their investment. The word grows and prevails (19:20).

11.5 Artemis and the Economic Cost of Repentance

Demetrius, a silversmith, recognizes that Paul's preaching threatens the trade in Artemis shrines (19:23-27). He mixes financial fear with civic and religious pride. A crowd fills the theater and shouts for Artemis.

Paul's message that handmade gods are not gods has public consequences. The church does not need to seize the economy by force. When people repent, spending, work, entertainment, and loyalties change. Faithful preaching can therefore disturb settled systems of profit.

The city clerk calms the crowd and notes the missionaries are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers in a legally chargeable sense. Paul attacks idolatry's truth claims without encouraging theft or uncontrolled insult. Courage and public restraint belong together.

11.6 “The Word of the Lord Grew Mightily”

Luke frames the Ephesian ministry as a triumph of the Word, not Paul’s charisma. The Word advances through reasoning, daily instruction, public power, exposed counterfeits, confession, costly repentance, and endurance under opposition. Reformed ministry should expect the Spirit to honor Scripture while refusing to reduce his work to technique.

12. Troas and Miletus: Worship, Shepherding, and Perseverance

12.1 The Collection and Paul’s Companions

Acts 20 lists representatives from several regions traveling with Paul. They likely relate to the collection for poor believers in Jerusalem (see Rom. 15:25-28; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9). The gift expresses unity between Gentile churches and Jewish believers.

Financial administration includes accountability. Multiple representatives protect trust and embody shared ownership. Spiritual zeal does not remove the need for transparent stewardship.

12.2 The First Day and Eutychus

At Troas, believers gather on the first day of the week to break bread, and Paul speaks until midnight (20:7). This is important evidence for early Lord’s Day gathering, though the passage is narrative rather than a full theology of Sabbath and Lord’s Day.

Eutychus falls from a third-story window and is taken up dead. Paul embraces him, and his life is restored (20:9-12). The event echoes Elijah and Elisha and confirms apostolic witness. Luke’s calm report keeps focus on God’s preserving power and the church’s comfort.

12.3 The Farewell Address: Whole Counsel

At Miletus, Paul summons the Ephesian elders. He reviews his ministry: humility, tears, trials, public and house-to-house teaching, and testimony to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in Jesus (20:17-21). Method changes by setting; message does not.

Paul says he did not shrink from declaring anything profitable and later speaks of “the whole counsel of God” (20:20, 27). Whole-counsel ministry teaches the range and proportion of biblical truth. It does not mean every sermon says everything. Over time, pastors must not hide doctrines because they are unpopular or difficult.

12.4 Bound by the Spirit, Ready to Suffer

Paul goes toward Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing exact details except that imprisonment and afflictions await (20:22-23). He values completing Christ's ministry above preserving his life (20:24). Christian courage is not lack of fear or love of pain. It is assigning greater value to Christ's calling than to safety.

12.5 Elders Made Overseers to Shepherd

Paul addresses the same leaders as elders, overseers, and shepherds (20:17, 28). These terms describe one pastoral office from different angles: maturity and recognized status, watchful oversight, and feeding care. Some church traditions structure offices differently, but Acts 20 strongly connects the terms.

The Holy Spirit makes them overseers, and they must watch themselves and all the flock. Pastoral vigilance begins with the pastor's own doctrine and life. The church belongs to God and was obtained at the cost of Christ's blood (20:28). Leaders are stewards, not owners.

12.6 Wolves from Outside and Distortion from Within

Fierce wolves will enter, and men from among the elders will speak twisted things to draw disciples after themselves (20:29-30). Danger is external and internal. False teaching often seeks followers for the teacher, not worshipers for Christ.

Paul's answer is watchfulness, remembered apostolic instruction, and confidence in "God and the word of his grace" (20:31-32). Succession is doctrinal before it is institutional. The church is preserved as leaders remain under the apostolic Word now given in Scripture.

12.7 Money, Work, and the Weak

Paul covets no one's silver, gold, or clothing. His hands support his needs and companions, providing an example of labor and help for the weak (20:33-35). This does not cancel ministerial support, which Paul teaches elsewhere. It condemns greed and models self-denial when circumstances call for it.

The farewell ends in kneeling prayer, tears, embraces, and grief (20:36-38). Deep doctrine has produced deep affection. Biblical shepherding is neither cold professionalism nor affection detached from truth.

13. The Road to Jerusalem: Guidance, Warning, and Resolve

13.1 Warnings at Tyre and Caesarea

At Tyre, disciples “through the Spirit” tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem (21:4). At Caesarea, Agabus binds himself with Paul’s belt and predicts that Paul will be bound and delivered to Gentiles (21:10-11). The company begs Paul not to go, but he is ready for imprisonment and death. They finally say, “The Lord’s will be done” (21:14).

The difficult question is whether Paul disobeys the Spirit. Earlier, Paul says he is constrained by the Spirit to go (20:22), and the Lord later approves the direction of his witness and promises Rome (23:11). The best synthesis is that the Spirit reveals suffering, while disciples infer that Paul should avoid it. Their prophecy is true; their application is mistaken or reflects loving warning rather than divine prohibition.

Some interpreters think Paul acted unwisely. The narrative permits examination of his decisions, but it never directly rebukes him for going. His willingness to suffer matches his commission and Christ’s path.

13.2 Providence and Human Plans

Paul changes routes because of plots (20:3), hurries to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (20:16), receives warnings, and relies on companions. Providence does not cancel planning. It governs through planning, interruption, counsel, danger, and revised decisions.

Third Journey: Reformed Theological Summary

- The new covenant fulfills John’s preparatory ministry and gives the Spirit to all who belong to Christ.
- Sustained teaching multiplies missionary influence.
- Apostolic miracles authenticate the Word and cannot be reduced to commercial technique.
- Repentance renounces occult power and accepts material cost.
- Gospel change reaches economic and civic life without using mob power.
- Churches express catholic unity through generosity and accountable stewardship.
- Pastors must teach the whole counsel, guard themselves, shepherd God’s flock, and resist greed.
- God preserves the church through the Word of grace.
- Spirit-given warnings prepare servants for obedience; they do not always command escape.

Third Journey Discussion Questions

1. What does the correction of Apollos teach both teachers and those who correct them?

2. Why should Acts 19:1-7 be read as a transitional event rather than an automatic pattern for every believer?
3. How does Luke distinguish God's power from magic and religious commerce?
4. What parts of Paul's ministry in Acts 20 should shape pastoral ministry today?
5. Why must elders watch themselves before watching the flock?
6. How should Acts 20-21 shape Christian thinking about risk, counsel, and suffering?

Ninety-Minute Teaching Plan

1. Route and Ephesian setting - 10 minutes.
2. Apollos and the twelve disciples - 15 minutes.
3. Word, miracles, magic, and repentance - 20 minutes.
4. Artemis, economics, and public witness - 15 minutes.
5. Miletus and the pastoral office - 20 minutes.
6. Jerusalem warnings and closing prayer - 10 minutes.

Third Journey in Retrospect

The third journey is less a rapid tour of new cities than a long labor of teaching and consolidation. Ephesus becomes a center from which the Word reaches a wider region. Apollos is corrected and commended, disciples are brought into the clarity of new-covenant fulfillment, false spiritual power is exposed, and repentance becomes visible in the destruction of costly magical books. The Word grows by changing belief, worship, habits, and loyalties.

Luke also shows that lasting gospel work creates structures of care. Paul teaches daily, works with coworkers, receives representatives from many churches, carries relief for Jerusalem, and summons elders for a final charge. The church is not preserved by continual excitement. Christ guards it through truth, qualified shepherds, watchfulness, generosity, and the Word of grace.

The journey ends under the shadow of Jerusalem. Paul knows that affliction awaits, and those who love him plead for another road. His decision gathers the journey's themes into one final act: the servant who taught the whole counsel of God now entrusts his own future to God's will. The gospel's triumph in Acts is never a promise that its witnesses will avoid the cross-shaped path.

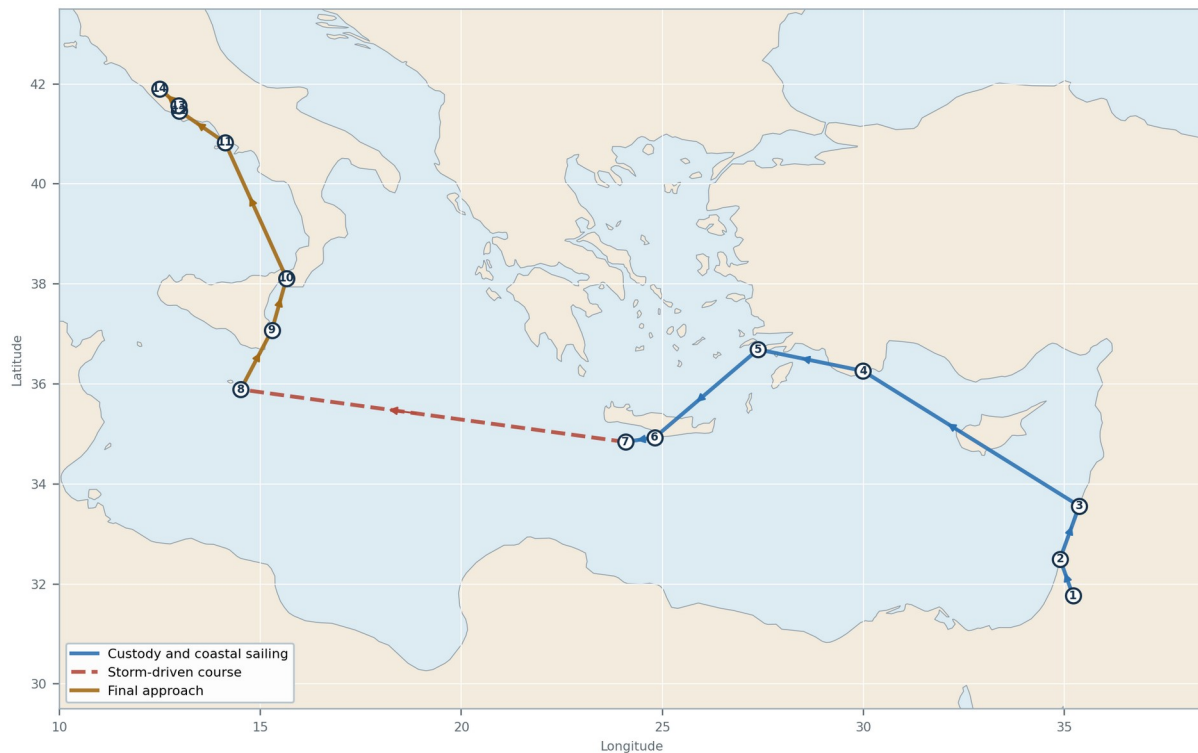
Part VI - The Prisoner's Journey to Rome

14. Jerusalem: Arrest and Witness

Route Overview: Acts 21:18-28:31

Phase	Locations	Passage	Theological Function
Jerusalem arrest	Temple, barracks, council	21:18-23:35	Paul witnesses to crowd and leaders; Rome destination promised
Caesarean custody	Herod's praetorium	24:1-26:32	Gospel heard by Felix, Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice
Voyage	Sidon, Myra, Cnidus, Fair Havens, sea	27:1-44	Providence preserves all aboard through storm and shipwreck
Malta	Island hospitality	28:1-10	Paul survives snakebite and heals the sick
Italy and Rome	Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, Rome	28:11-31	Paul proclaims kingdom and Christ under guard

The Prisoner's Journey to Rome (Acts 21-28)



The Prisoner's Journey to Rome (Acts 21-28). The storm track is schematic; Acts names the departure, drift region, and landing but not a precise line across the sea.

Numbered sites: 1. Jerusalem; 2. Caesarea; 3. Sidon; 4. Myra; 5. Cnidus; 6. Fair Havens; 7. Cauda; 8. Malta; 9. Syracuse; 10. Rhegium; 11. Puteoli; 12. Forum of Appius; 13. Three Taverns; 14. Rome

Extended Narrative Walkthrough of the Prisoner's Journey

Jerusalem Receives the Mission Report

Paul arrives in Jerusalem and is gladly received by the brothers. The next day he meets James and the elders and gives a detailed report of what God has done among the Gentiles through his ministry (Acts 21:17-19). The leaders glorify God. Their first response is neither suspicion nor rivalry but worship. The worldwide mission is one work of divine grace shared by Jewish and Gentile believers.

The elders also describe a tense situation. Many Jewish believers remain zealous for the law, and rumors claim that Paul teaches Jews living among Gentiles to abandon Moses, circumcision, and ancestral customs. Paul's letters reject circumcision as necessary for justification and reject imposing it on Gentiles. That is different from forbidding Jewish Christians to practice lawful customs as matters of culture and conscience.

The leaders propose that Paul join four men in purification and help pay their expenses. Paul agrees. His action fits the flexibility he describes in 1 Corinthians 9: he can live as a Jew among Jews when the gospel itself is not compromised. The plan is meant to correct misunderstanding and promote peace. It does not succeed, reminding readers that wise and lawful actions do not guarantee the response we seek.

The Temple Riot and a Testimony Rejected

Jews from Asia see Paul in the temple and accuse him of teaching against the people, the law, and the holy place. They also assume he brought a Gentile into the restricted area, though Luke explains that they had only seen Trophimus with him in the city (21:27-29). A false inference becomes a public charge. The city is stirred, Paul is seized, and the temple doors are shut.

The crowd is beating Paul when news reaches the Roman commander. Soldiers run down and stop the violence. The commander arrests Paul and orders him bound with two chains, unknowingly fulfilling Agabus's enacted prophecy. Because the crowd shouts conflicting claims, the commander cannot learn the truth and orders Paul into the barracks. The violence becomes so great that soldiers carry him on the stairs.

Paul then asks permission to address the crowd. He speaks in the Hebrew or Aramaic language, gaining silence by identifying with his hearers. He recounts his Jewish education, zeal, persecution of the Way,

and authorization from leaders. His former life gives the crowd no reason to dismiss him as someone ignorant of Jewish conviction.

The turning point of the testimony is not a private change of taste. The risen Jesus appears, names himself, and sends Ananias. Paul emphasizes that Ananias is devout according to the law and respected by local Jews. He also describes a later temple vision in which the Lord sends him far away to the Gentiles (22:17-21). The crowd listens until the word “Gentiles,” then calls for his death. The reaction exposes a refusal to allow Israel’s God to extend messianic mercy on his own terms.

The commander prepares to examine Paul by flogging, but Paul asks whether it is lawful to flog an uncondemned Roman citizen. The question stops the procedure. Paul’s citizenship is not an obstacle to spiritual trust; it is one of the means providence uses to preserve him. The commander, who purchased citizenship, becomes afraid when he learns Paul was born with it.

The Council, the Plot, and the Promise of Rome

Before the Jewish council, Paul declares that he has lived before God in good conscience. The high priest orders him struck. Paul responds sharply, then acknowledges the command not to speak evil of a ruler when told that Ananias is high priest. The exchange is difficult, and interpreters debate whether Paul did not recognize the high priest, spoke ironically, or quickly corrected himself. Luke does not pause to settle every motive.

Paul identifies the deepest issue as the hope of resurrection. Pharisees affirm resurrection while Sadducees deny it, and the council divides. The statement is strategically wise, but it is not a distraction. Paul’s entire gospel stands on the resurrection of Jesus and the promised resurrection of his people. Roman soldiers again remove him from danger.

That night the Lord stands by Paul and tells him to take courage. As he has testified in Jerusalem, he must also testify in Rome (23:11). This promise governs every later chapter. It does not say the route will be painless. It says the purpose will not fail.

More than forty men form a plot and bind themselves by oath not to eat until Paul is killed. Paul’s nephew hears of it, reports it, and is brought to the commander. The commander responds with a large military escort and transfers Paul by night to Caesarea. The scale of protection is almost ironic: an imperial force guards the apostle because one young relative carried a report. Providence joins family knowledge, courage, military procedure, and Roman fear of disorder to fulfill Christ’s word.

Felix: Truth Heard and Postponed

In Caesarea, the attorney Tertullus accuses Paul before Felix of stirring riots, leading the Nazarene sect, and attempting to profane the temple. Paul answers by pointing to the lack of evidence. He had been in

Jerusalem only a short time, was not found arguing with crowds, and came to bring alms and offerings. He freely confesses that he worships according to the Way, believing the Law and Prophets and hoping in the resurrection of both just and unjust (24:10-21).

Felix delays the decision. Later he and Drusilla hear Paul speak about faith in Christ Jesus. Paul reasons about righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment. These subjects press closely upon a ruler known to possess power but not moral innocence. Felix becomes frightened and dismisses Paul until a more convenient time. He also hopes for a bribe and repeatedly speaks with him.

For two years Paul remains confined while Felix balances curiosity, greed, and political favor. The delay may look like wasted missionary time, but the gospel is repeatedly spoken within a governor's residence, and Paul's later letters show that imprisonment cannot make ministry empty. Luke's focus is sobering: hearing often is not the same as repenting. A disturbed conscience may still choose postponement.

Festus, Caesar, and Agrippa

When Festus replaces Felix, Jewish leaders again seek Paul's transfer to Jerusalem while planning an ambush. Paul stands trial in Caesarea and denies offenses against Jewish law, the temple, or Caesar. Festus, wishing to gain favor, asks whether Paul will go to Jerusalem for judgment. Paul appeals to Caesar (25:10-11).

As a Roman citizen, Paul has the right to seek the emperor's tribunal. The appeal removes his case from local manipulation and creates the legal road to Rome promised by Christ. It also places Paul under the dangerous power of Nero's government. Providence does not always lead through institutions because those institutions are righteous. God can use limited legal protections within an unjust world.

Festus then presents the case to King Agrippa because he needs a coherent charge to send with the prisoner. In a formal audience filled with display, the chained Paul becomes the one who speaks with the greatest moral freedom. He tells of his strict Pharisaic life, the hope of God's promise, his persecution of Christians, and the heavenly vision that commissioned him to open Gentile eyes and turn them from darkness to light.

Paul summarizes his ministry as preaching repentance, a turning to God, and deeds worthy of repentance. He insists that his message says nothing beyond Moses and the prophets: the Messiah would suffer, rise first from the dead, and proclaim light to Israel and Gentiles (26:22-23). Festus calls him mad, but Paul answers calmly that his words are true and reasonable. He appeals to Agrippa's knowledge of the prophets and openly desires that all who hear him become Christians, except for his chains.

Agrippa, Festus, and Bernice agree that Paul has done nothing deserving death or imprisonment. Agrippa says he could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar. Luke leaves the tension in place. Humanly, the appeal extends confinement. Providentially, it is the route by which testimony will move toward Rome.

Under Sail Toward the Promise

Paul and other prisoners are delivered to Julius, a centurion of the Augustan cohort. They board a coastal vessel, stop at Sidon, and sail under the shelter of Cyprus because winds are contrary. At Myra they transfer to an Alexandrian grain ship bound for Italy. Luke's repeated nautical details give the account the texture of eyewitness travel.

Progress becomes slow. The ship reaches Fair Havens on Crete after dangerous sailing, and the season is now late. Paul warns that continuing will bring severe loss. The centurion trusts the pilot and shipowner, and most of the company prefers a more suitable harbor for winter. A gentle south wind seems to confirm the decision, but a violent northeaster soon drives the ship away from land (27:9-15).

The crew takes emergency measures: securing the small boat, reinforcing the ship, lowering gear, and throwing cargo and tackle overboard. For many days neither sun nor stars appears, removing the normal means of navigation. Luke says all hope of being saved is finally abandoned. The narrative brings every human confidence to exhaustion before reporting the divine promise.

Paul tells the company that an angel of the God to whom he belongs and whom he serves has stood by him. He must stand before Caesar, and God has graciously given him all who sail with him (27:23-24). Paul therefore urges courage: "I believe God that it will be exactly as I have been told." Faith here is not confidence in a pleasant outcome. The ship will be lost, they will run aground on an island, and the ordeal will continue. Faith rests on the specific word of God within the loss.

Certain Preservation Through Necessary Means

On the fourteenth night, sailors sense land and take soundings. Fearing rocks, they lower anchors and wait for day. Some attempt to escape in the boat under the pretense of laying anchors. Paul tells the centurion and soldiers that unless these men remain in the ship, the others cannot be saved (27:31). The soldiers cut the boat loose.

The episode gives a clear picture of means within providence. God has certainly promised every life. Yet the sailors' presence remains necessary. The promise does not make skill, warning, courage, and obedience irrelevant. It guarantees that God will use them successfully. Reformed theology applies the same structure carefully elsewhere: God's decree establishes the reality and effectiveness of means rather than turning them into illusions.

Before daylight Paul urges everyone to eat. He takes bread, gives thanks to God in front of all, breaks it, and begins to eat. The company takes courage and eats. Luke records 276 persons aboard, underscoring the scope of the promise. After eating, they lighten the ship by throwing grain into the sea.

At daylight the sailors see a bay and attempt to run the ship ashore. It strikes a reef or sandbar and begins to break apart. Soldiers plan to kill the prisoners to prevent escape, but Julius stops them because he wants to save Paul. Those who can swim go first; others follow on boards and pieces of the ship. Everyone reaches land safely. God's word is fulfilled through the wreckage of the very vessel that is destroyed.

Malta, Fellowship, and Arrival in Rome

The survivors learn that the island is Malta. Local people show unusual kindness and kindle a fire because of cold rain. When a snake fastens to Paul's hand, the observers first interpret it as divine punishment and then, when he remains unharmed, as proof that he is a god. Their opposite conclusions share the same error: providence is being read without revelation. Paul is neither a condemned murderer nor a deity.

Publius, the leading man of the island, receives the company. His father lies sick, and Paul prays, lays hands on him, and heals him. Others also come for healing. After three months the travelers leave on another Alexandrian ship. Luke records no church planting on Malta, so the reader should not supply what the text withholds. The signs display mercy and apostolic authority during an unplanned delay.

The route continues through Syracuse, Rhegium, and Puteoli. At Puteoli Paul finds believers and spends seven days with them. Christians from Rome then travel south to meet him at the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns. When Paul sees them, he thanks God and takes courage (28:15). The apostle who has encouraged many churches is himself strengthened by ordinary believers who come to stand beside him.

In Rome, Paul is allowed to live under guard. He first calls Jewish leaders, explains his situation, and says that he is bound because of the hope of Israel. On an appointed day, many come to his lodging. From morning until evening he explains the kingdom of God and seeks to persuade them about Jesus from Moses and the Prophets (28:23). His method in Rome remains what it was in Pisidian Antioch, Thessalonica, and Berea: Israel's Scriptures reach their saving center in the crucified and risen Messiah.

Some are persuaded and others disbelieve. Paul applies Isaiah 6 as a warning of judicial hardening and announces that God's salvation has gone to the Gentiles, who will listen. This is not a declaration that no Jew can be saved. Paul is Jewish, some of the hearers believe, and the gospel remains the hope of Israel. It is a judgment against hearing without faith and a declaration that the nations will not be excluded by unbelief.

Acts closes after two years of Paul welcoming all who come, proclaiming the kingdom of God, and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with boldness and without hindrance. Paul remains guarded, his legal outcome is unstated, and Rome still belongs to Caesar. Yet Luke's final emphasis falls on the freedom of the Word. Jesus promised testimony in Rome, and Rome hears. The messenger's chain becomes part of the road by which the gospel reaches the imperial center.

14.1 James, the Elders, and the Temple Plan

Paul reports what God has done among Gentiles, and Jerusalem leaders glorify God (21:18-20). They also describe rumors that Paul teaches Jews to abandon Moses. They propose that he join purification rites to show he is not hostile to Jewish customs.

Paul's letters reject circumcision and law observance as necessary for justification, but he can practice Jewish customs voluntarily for mission and peace (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Participation does not necessarily deny grace. Still, the plan does not prevent conflict. Wisdom can be faithful without guaranteeing success.

14.2 The Arrest and the Pattern of Jesus

Jews from Asia accuse Paul, the crowd seizes him, and Roman soldiers intervene. Luke's account increasingly parallels Jesus' final journey: movement toward Jerusalem, warnings of suffering, hostile crowds, appearances before Jewish and Roman authorities, and declared innocence despite continued custody.

Paul does not repeat Christ's atoning work. Christ alone dies as substitute and rises as Lord. The parallel shows the servant following the Master's path and bearing witness through unjust suffering.

14.3 Paul's Testimony to the Crowd

Paul speaks in the people's language and tells his story: Jewish formation, zeal, persecution, encounter with Jesus, Ananias's role, and commission (22:1-21). Testimony is useful because it displays Christ's work, but its authority rests on the gospel's objective truth. A dramatic story without true doctrine cannot save.

The crowd listens until Paul mentions being sent to the Gentiles. The reaction reveals how ethnic pride can resist grace. Grace offends not only because it declares us guilty, but because it gives God freedom to show mercy beyond our preferred boundaries.

14.4 Citizenship, Conscience, and the Council

Paul again appeals to Roman citizenship to avoid illegal flogging (22:25-29). Before the council, he states that he has lived in good conscience, though conscience does not mean sinlessness. A conscience can be misinformed, as Paul's former persecution proves. It must be governed by God's Word.

Paul identifies the resurrection as the central hope and divides Pharisees from Sadducees (23:6-10). This is more than a clever escape. His trial truly concerns the resurrection of Jesus and the promised resurrection of the dead.

14.5 "You Must Testify Also in Rome"

The Lord stands by Paul and commands courage: as he testified in Jerusalem, so he must testify in Rome (23:11). This promise becomes the theological anchor for the remaining narrative. Plots, corrupt rulers, storms, soldiers, and shipwreck cannot cancel the divine "must."

Providence does not mean Paul avoids danger. It means danger cannot prevent God's appointed end. God preserves Paul through a nephew's report, a Roman commander, hundreds of soldiers, legal process, and eventually a ship's debris. Extraordinary promise works through ordinary means.

15. Caesarea: The Gospel Before Governors and a King

15.1 Felix: Righteousness, Self-Control, and Judgment

Before Felix, Paul denies charges of sedition and explains that he worships according to "the Way," believes the Law and Prophets, and hopes in the resurrection of just and unjust (24:10-21). Christianity is not a rejection of Israel's Scripture but its messianic fulfillment.

Later Paul reasons with Felix about faith in Christ Jesus, righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment (24:24-25). Felix becomes afraid but delays. Gospel presentation to a ruler includes moral accountability. Paul does not flatter power or reduce faith to private comfort.

Felix hopes for a bribe and leaves Paul imprisoned to gain favor (24:26-27). Delay is not neutrality. The convenient future time never appears in Luke's account.

15.2 Festus and the Appeal to Caesar

Festus considers sending Paul to Jerusalem, where a plot awaits. Paul appeals to Caesar as a Roman citizen (25:10-12). This is not distrust of providence. The promise of Rome is fulfilled through legal appeal. Trust in God and use of lawful procedure are compatible.

15.3 Agrippa: Promise and Prophets

Before Agrippa, Paul again tells his conversion and commission. He describes his preaching as calling people to repent, turn to God, and perform deeds consistent with repentance (26:20). Such deeds do not earn pardon; they show repentance is living rather than verbal.

Paul says he has testified to both small and great, saying nothing beyond Moses and the prophets: the Messiah would suffer and, by rising, proclaim light to Israel and Gentiles (26:22-23). The gospel is new in fulfillment, not new as a contradiction of Scripture.

Festus calls Paul mad. Paul answers with controlled respect and appeals to public knowledge. Agrippa cannot easily dismiss the prophets he claims to believe. Paul seeks the conversion of everyone present, though he remains the prisoner (26:29). The chained man is spiritually free; the powerful hearers remain morally pressed by truth.

15.4 Repeated Declarations of Innocence

Roman authorities repeatedly find no crime worthy of death or imprisonment (23:29; 25:25; 26:31-32; 28:18). Luke defends Christianity against the charge of political criminality. Yet legal innocence does not mean the gospel is harmless to idols. Christians confess another Lord and must obey God above man when commands conflict.

16. Storm, Shipwreck, and Sovereign Preservation

16.1 The Voyage Begins

Paul and other prisoners are placed under the centurion Julius. The route uses coastal and grain ships and struggles against seasonal winds. At Myra the company transfers to an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy. Travel becomes dangerous after the Fast, likely the Day of Atonement in autumn (27:9).

Paul warns against departure from Fair Havens, but the centurion trusts the pilot and owner. Luke presents Paul as experienced and wise, though his first warning includes loss of life that does not occur. Later God grants a specific promise that all lives will be spared (27:22-24). The difference reminds readers not to confuse prudent human judgment with divine revelation.

16.2 God's Promise in the Storm

A violent northeaster drives the ship. Cargo and tackle are thrown overboard, and all hope of being saved disappears (27:14-20). Paul then reports an angelic message: he must stand before Caesar, and

God has granted him all those sailing with him. He urges courage because he believes God, though the ship will be lost.

Faith is not confidence that preferred circumstances will survive. The ship is destroyed. Faith trusts the exact promise God has given. Paul's "I believe God" rests on revealed speech, not optimism.

The gift of the passengers' lives shows a form of covenantal or representative blessing: people connected to God's servant receive temporal mercy for the sake of God's purpose through him. This is not proof that every passenger is eternally saved.

16.3 Means Are Necessary Because God Ordains Them

Sailors attempt to escape in the boat. Paul tells the centurion that unless they remain in the ship, "you cannot be saved" (27:31). Soldiers cut the boat away. There is no conflict between God's certain promise and necessary means. God ordains both preservation and the actions through which preservation occurs.

This is a classic picture of Reformed providence. Certainty does not make warnings pointless. The warning is one means God uses to secure the promised end. The same logic applies to perseverance: God preserves believers, and therefore they heed warnings, continue in faith, and use the means of grace.

16.4 Food, Thanksgiving, and Leadership

Paul urges everyone to eat, takes bread, gives thanks to God before all, breaks it, and begins eating (27:33-36). The language resembles a meal blessing but does not require that this is the Lord's Supper shared with unbelievers. It is a public act of gratitude and confidence.

Paul has no official command of the ship, yet he becomes its moral leader through truth, courage, care, and trust in God. Biblical leadership is not identical with title.

16.5 Every Life Preserved

The soldiers plan to kill prisoners to prevent escape, but the centurion saves Paul and stops them. All 276 persons reach land, some swimming and others on planks. God's promise is fulfilled through sailors' skill, soldiers' action, physical strength, floating wreckage, and the centurion's favor.

"Sovereign" does not mean "without means." It means no creature, event, or means operates outside God's rule.

17. Malta and Rome: The Unbound Word

17.1 Malta, the Snake, and Healing

The islanders show unusual kindness. A viper fastens to Paul's hand, and observers first call him a murderer punished by Justice, then a god when he survives (28:1-6). Both conclusions are pagan misreadings of providence. Suffering is not automatic proof of personal guilt, and deliverance is not proof of deity.

Paul heals Publius's father, and others come and are healed. These acts continue the signs of apostolic mission and create favor, but Luke does not record a sermon or church foundation on Malta. We should affirm what is written without inventing results.

17.2 Brothers on the Road

At Puteoli Paul finds believers. Roman Christians meet him at the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns. Seeing them, Paul thanks God and takes courage (28:14-15). Even an apostle needs encouragement from ordinary saints. Providence strengthens servants through presence and fellowship.

17.3 The Kingdom and the Hope of Israel

In Rome, Paul explains his case to Jewish leaders and says he wears a chain because of "the hope of Israel" (28:20). He later testifies about the kingdom of God and tries to persuade them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the Prophets (28:23).

The kingdom is God's saving reign fulfilled in the Messiah. It is already present because Jesus is enthroned and the Spirit is given, yet it awaits public completion in resurrection and judgment. Reformed amillennial and historic premillennial interpreters agree on this already/not-yet structure, though they differ over the sequence of final events and the future role of ethnic Israel.

17.4 Isaiah 6 and Judicial Hardening

Some Jewish hearers are persuaded and others disbelieve. Paul cites Isaiah 6:9-10 concerning hearing without understanding and seeing without perceiving (28:24-27). Hardening is both judgment and human refusal. People close eyes and become dull; God's prophetic word declares the judicial consequence.

Paul then announces that God's salvation has been sent to Gentiles and that they will listen (28:28). This does not erase Jewish hope: Paul himself, the first Roman Jewish hearers who believe, and Romans 9-11 forbid contempt. It does show that ethnic privilege cannot replace faith in Messiah.

17.5 The Open Ending

Acts ends with Paul under house arrest for two years, welcoming all, proclaiming the kingdom, and teaching about Jesus Christ “with all boldness and without hindrance” (28:30-31). Luke does not satisfy curiosity about Paul’s trial or death. The narrative goal is theological: the messenger is chained, but the Word is not.

“Without hindrance” is the final word in Greek and a fitting summary. Opposition has included councils, mobs, demons, prison, government delay, storm, shipwreck, and chains. None can stop Christ’s witness from reaching the place he appointed.

Prisoner Journey: Reformed Theological Summary

- Christian freedom permits cultural accommodation but never works-righteousness.
- The servant follows the suffering pattern of the Master without repeating Christ’s unique atonement.
- Testimony joins personal experience to objective resurrection truth.
- Providence fulfills God’s promise through law, soldiers, family reports, sailors, warnings, meals, and wreckage.
- Divine certainty establishes rather than removes the necessity of means.
- Rulers remain accountable to righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment.
- Repentance produces fitting deeds but is not justified by them.
- The kingdom fulfills Israel’s hope in the risen Jesus and advances among all nations.
- Judicial hardening is a fearful response to rejected revelation.
- The Word remains unbound even when its messenger is confined.

Prisoner Journey Discussion Questions

1. When is cultural accommodation faithful, and when does it become compromise?
2. How do Paul’s defenses combine testimony, Scripture, resurrection, and moral appeal?
3. List the ordinary means God uses to fulfill the promise of Acts 23:11.
4. Why does the promise in Acts 27 not make the sailors, warnings, food, or swimming unnecessary?
5. What does Felix teach about delayed repentance?
6. Why does Acts end with Paul still confined?
7. How should Isaiah 6 warn regular hearers of Scripture?

Ninety-Minute Teaching Plan

1. Jerusalem arrest and witness - 15 minutes.
2. Felix, Festus, and Agrippa - 20 minutes.

3. The promise of Rome and the storm - 25 minutes.
4. Malta and fellowship on the Italian road - 10 minutes.
5. Kingdom, hardening, and the open ending - 15 minutes.
6. Prayer for bold, unhindered witness - 5 minutes.

The Prisoner's Journey in Retrospect

Paul's final movement in Acts is not introduced as a missionary campaign. He does not select the route, control the schedule, or travel with the freedom of earlier journeys. A crowd seizes him, soldiers bind him, governors delay him, a legal appeal transfers him, and a storm drives his ship. Yet the loss of ordinary control does not remove him from Christ's mission. His chains become the appointed setting for witness.

The Lord's promise in Acts 23:11 gives the narrative its certainty: Paul must testify in Rome. The rest of the story shows what that certainty does and does not mean. It does not prevent a murder plot, two years of confinement, a dangerous voyage, hunger, shipwreck, or another period under guard. It does prevent every danger from defeating the appointed testimony. God's decree is not a shortcut around history. It is the sovereign purpose carried through history.

The means of preservation are strikingly ordinary and diverse. Paul's nephew hears a conversation. A commander takes a threat seriously. Soldiers escort a prisoner. Roman citizenship supplies an appeal. Sailors take soundings. Paul gives a warning. Men eat food, cut away a boat, swim, and cling to wreckage. Believers walk south from Rome to encourage an apostle. Providence is visible not because these actions are unreal, but because each real action serves a promise no single participant can control.

The journey also brings the gospel before people who would not have entered a synagogue to hear Paul voluntarily. Commanders, governors, a king, soldiers, sailors, islanders, and members of Caesar's world encounter his presence or witness. Paul reasons about righteousness and judgment before Felix, resurrection before Agrippa, and God's faithfulness in the storm. His confinement becomes a pulpit moving toward the imperial capital.

Acts finally leaves Paul preaching from a rented house. The book does not conclude with the apostle's death, acquittal, or later travels because Luke's central subject is larger than Paul. The gospel has moved from Jerusalem to Rome, the kingdom is proclaimed from Israel's Scriptures, Gentiles hear, and no opposing power has gained the final word. Paul is hindered in body, but the Word is unhindered.

Part VII - A Theology of Pauline Mission in Acts

18. Ten Governing Doctrines

18.1 The Triune God Sends

The Father's promise structures the mission (1:4-8). The Son rules, calls, appears, protects, and receives witness. The Spirit empowers, fills, directs, appoints, and gives gifts. Mission is not first the church's plan for God; it is the Triune God's work in and through the church.

This gives both humility and confidence. The church cannot create spiritual life, but it can preach, pray, send, baptize, teach, organize, and suffer in reliance on the God who does.

18.2 Scripture Governs the Message

Paul's sermons repeatedly move from Israel's Scriptures to Jesus. In pagan settings, he begins with creation but still moves to repentance, resurrection, and judgment. His message is flexible in entry point and fixed in content.

Seminary-level study should imitate Paul's canonical reasoning: read individual texts within the Bible's unified story of creation, fall, promise, Israel, Christ, church, and new creation. Christ-centered reading must arise from the text's covenantal and historical shape, not from imaginative word association.

18.3 Christ Is the Substance

Paul proclaims Jesus as Son of God, Davidic King, suffering Messiah, risen Lord, appointed Judge, and the one through whom forgiveness and justification come. Christ is not a helpful addition to a general message about morality. He is the message's center.

18.4 Grace Creates Faith and Repentance

Acts calls hearers to repent and believe while showing God opening hearts, granting repentance, appointing to life, and drawing a people through the Word. Reformed theology refuses to weaken either side. The gospel must be offered freely to all hearers. Those who reject are responsible. Those who come give all saving credit to grace.

18.5 Election Fuels Mission

Acts 13:48 and 18:10 connect God's purpose with missionary fruit. Election does not identify people in advance so the church can avoid preaching to others. The church does not know the elect by secret

access to God's decree. It preaches Christ indiscriminately, trusting God to call his people through that proclamation.

18.6 The Spirit Uses the Word

Acts knows visions, prophecy, signs, and striking guidance. Yet Luke's major growth summaries emphasize the Word. The Spirit who inspired Scripture does not lead the church away from Scripture. Claims of guidance must never contradict revealed doctrine or create new binding law for another person's conscience.

18.7 Mission Plants and Strengthens Churches

Paul makes disciples, revisits them, appoints elders, delivers doctrinal judgments, trains teachers, raises financial aid, and warns leaders. A mission strategy focused only on initial professions of faith falls short of the apostolic pattern. The intended fruit is worshiping, ordered, holy, reproducing churches.

18.8 Providence Includes Suffering

Acts does not promise that obedience produces safety. Paul is beaten, stoned, slandered, imprisoned, threatened, and shipwrecked. Providence means every trial is bounded and directed by God's wise fatherly rule. It does not make evil good or remove grief. It ensures that evil cannot defeat God's holy purpose.

The Heidelberg Catechism's language is fitting: all things come not by chance but by the Father's hand. The believer can therefore be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and confident for the future.

18.9 Public Truth Confronts Idols

The gospel addresses private guilt and public worship, economics, racial pride, government, sexuality, magic, and power. It does not advance through coercive mobs. It advances through truth, holy lives, suffering witness, lawful appeal, and Spirit-given courage.

18.10 The Kingdom Advances Through the Cross

The pattern of Jesus shapes Paul: witness, rejection, suffering, vindication, and continuing advance. The kingdom is powerful, but its power often appears through weakness. This is not failure. The crucified Messiah reigns, and his servants bear the dying of Jesus as life works in others (2 Cor. 4:7-12).

19. Reformed Confessional Guide

Theme in Acts	Reformed Doctrine	Representative Confessional Sections
Christ confronts and converts Saul	Effectual calling and regeneration	WCF 10; 2LBCF 10; Canons of Dort III/IV
God appoints to eternal life	Election	WCF 3; 2LBCF 3; Canons of Dort I
Forgiveness and justification through faith	Justification	WCF 11; 2LBCF 11; Heidelberg 60-64
God directs routes, rulers, storms, and means	Providence	WCF 5; 2LBCF 5; Heidelberg 27-28
Word preached in the Spirit's power	Means of grace and Scripture	WCF 1, 14; 2LBCF 1, 14; Belgic 3-7
Elders shepherd local churches	Church and ministry	WCF 25, 30; 2LBCF 26; Belgic 27-32
Gentiles received without ceremonial law	Christian liberty	WCF 20; 2LBCF 21; Belgic 25
Believers endure tribulation	Perseverance	WCF 17; 2LBCF 17; Canons of Dort V
Resurrection and final judgment	Last things	WCF 32-33; 2LBCF 31-32; Heidelberg 57-58

Confessions possess real but subordinate authority. They summarize what churches judge Scripture to teach. Acts 17:11 remains the rule: even respected teaching is tested by God's Word.

20. Major Interpretive Questions

20.1 Were Paul's Journeys a Planned Strategy?

Paul displays strategy: major cities, synagogues, trade routes, coworkers, return visits, long teaching centers, and elder appointment. Yet Acts also highlights interruptions, persecution, visions, illness possibilities, changed routes, and imprisonment. The best answer is planned obedience under active providence. Strategy is a servant, not a sovereign.

20.2 Did Paul Preach One Message to Jews and Another to Gentiles?

No. His starting point changes. With synagogue hearers he begins with covenant history and promise. With pagans he begins with Creator and providence. Both paths expose idolatry and sin and lead to Jesus, resurrection, repentance, faith, and judgment.

20.3 Does Acts Teach a Second Spirit Baptism?

Acts records unusual sequences as the gospel crosses major covenant and people-group boundaries. The Epistles interpret ordinary Christian identity: all believers are baptized by one Spirit into one body and anyone without the Spirit does not belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). Christians should seek repeated filling, holiness, courage, and gifts without dividing believers into Spirit-having and Spirit-lacking classes.

20.4 Does Household Baptism Settle the Infant-Baptism Debate?

No individual household account supplies every detail needed to settle the debate. Paedobaptists place the accounts within covenant continuity and household inclusion. Baptists emphasize explicit profession and new-covenant membership. Both should interpret the narratives with the teaching passages, avoid claiming unrecorded details, and treat one another as fellow heirs of Reformed soteriology where the gospel is shared.

20.5 Does Paul's Appeal to Caesar Endorse Every Use of Political Power?

No. It shows that lawful rights and procedures can serve justice and mission. Paul never treats the state as savior or uses force to compel faith. The magistrate has a real but limited office under God.

20.6 Did Israel's Story End When Paul Turned to Gentiles?

Acts presents Jesus as Israel's Messiah and the church's multinational expansion as prophetic fulfillment. Jewish rejection brings real judgment, but a Jewish remnant believes throughout Acts. Any complete view must also reckon with Romans 9-11. Reformed traditions differ on the form of future Jewish conversion, but anti-Jewish pride directly contradicts Paul's warning in Romans 11:18-20.

21. Final Teaching and Ministry Applications

For Preachers and Teachers

- Preach Christ from the whole counsel of Scripture, not isolated religious advice.

- Explain, reason, persuade, and apply; dependence on the Spirit is not an excuse for poor preparation.
- Distinguish the gospel's necessary offense from offense caused by pride or carelessness.
- Teach difficult doctrines in their biblical setting and pastoral purpose.
- Measure fruit not only by immediate response but by enduring disciples and healthy churches.

For Elders and Churches

- Pray, fast, recognize gifts, and send workers with real support.
- Build leadership teams marked by doctrine, holiness, affection, and accountability.
- Guard against greed, celebrity culture, and teachers who draw disciples after themselves.
- Practice generosity across cultural and regional boundaries.
- Prepare believers for suffering without treating suffering as evidence that God has lost control.

For Missionaries and Evangelists

- Learn the hearer's language, beliefs, fears, and idols.
- Change the point of entry without changing the truth about God, sin, Christ, resurrection, repentance, and faith.
- Trust election as a reason for hope, never as a reason to limit the free offer of Christ.
- Receive closed doors as providential direction without pretending to know more than God has revealed.
- Form churches, train leaders, revisit disciples, and plan for ministry beyond one personality.

For Every Christian

- Ordinary believers like Ananias, Lydia, Jason, Priscilla, Aquila, Paul's nephew, and the Roman brothers matter in God's mission.
- Hospitality, courage, accurate doctrine, lawful action, financial integrity, and presence with suffering saints are missionary acts.
- The final confidence of Acts is not that Paul is unstoppable. It is that the risen Christ's Word is unhindered.

FINAL SUMMARY: Paul's routes are the visible path of an invisible providence. The Father keeps his promise, the Son gathers his people, and the Spirit drives the Word forward. The church goes by preaching, prayer, sacraments, suffering, order, and love. Servants may be chained, but Christ's kingdom cannot be stopped.

Appendix A - Journey-by-Journey Review Sheets

First Journey Review

Key Texts

- Acts 13:1-3 - Spirit and sending church.
- Acts 13:16-41 - promise, David, resurrection, forgiveness, justification.
- Acts 13:44-49 - rejection, election, and Gentile mission.
- Acts 14:8-18 - Creator, common grace, and repentance from idols.
- Acts 14:21-28 - tribulation, elders, and mission reporting.

Three Claims to Remember

1. Mission begins in God's call and the church's worship.
2. Justification is through faith in the risen Christ, not law-keeping.
3. Evangelism aims at strengthened churches with shepherds.

Second Journey Review

Key Texts

- Acts 16:6-10 - Spirit-directed routes.
- Acts 16:11-40 - Lydia, deliverance, jailer, and citizenship.
- Acts 17:1-15 - Messiah from Scripture and Berean examination.
- Acts 17:16-34 - Creator, providence, repentance, resurrection, judgment.
- Acts 18:9-11 - election and persevering preaching.

Three Claims to Remember

1. God directs both open and closed doors.
2. The same gospel addresses different hearers through wise points of contact.
3. Christ's hidden people give missionaries reason to keep speaking.

Third Journey Review

Key Texts

- Acts 19:1-10 - covenant transition and sustained teaching.

- Acts 19:11-20 - true power, counterfeit power, and costly repentance.
- Acts 19:21-41 - gospel effects on idolatry and commerce.
- Acts 20:17-38 - whole counsel and pastoral oversight.
- Acts 21:1-14 - warnings, counsel, and readiness to suffer.

Three Claims to Remember

1. The Word grows through patient teaching and Spirit-given power.
2. Repentance changes practices, possessions, and loyalties.
3. Pastors guard Christ's purchased flock under the Word of grace.

Journey to Rome Review

Key Texts

- Acts 22:1-21 - testimony and Gentile commission.
- Acts 23:11 - the promise of witness in Rome.
- Acts 24:24-25 - righteousness, self-control, and judgment.
- Acts 26:12-23 - conversion, commission, repentance, and prophetic fulfillment.
- Acts 27:21-44 - promise, means, and preservation.
- Acts 28:23-31 - kingdom, hardening, Gentile hearing, unhindered proclamation.

Three Claims to Remember

1. God's promise rules over rulers, plots, storms, and chains.
2. Certain preservation includes necessary warnings and means.
3. The book ends with a confined messenger and an unconfined Word.

Appendix B - Glossary

Term	Plain Definition
Aseity	God has life in himself and depends on nothing he created.
Apostolic	Relating to Christ's authorized apostles and their foundational witness.
Calling	God's summons; in salvation, the Spirit makes the gospel call effective.
Catholicity	The worldwide unity of Christ's church across nations and cultures.
Common grace	God's non-saving kindness and restraint of evil in the world.
Concurrence	God's sovereign action and creaturely action occurring in the same event without making God the author of sin.

Term	Plain Definition
Contextualization	Communicating unchanged biblical truth in forms hearers can understand.
Covenant	A solemn, God-established relationship with promises and obligations.
Effectual calling	The Spirit's work through the gospel that brings the elect willingly to Christ.
Election	God's gracious choice of a people in Christ, not based on foreseen merit.
Eschatology	The doctrine of last things: Christ's return, resurrection, judgment, and final state.
General revelation	Knowledge of God given through creation and providence to all people.
Justification	God's legal declaration that a believer is righteous because of Christ, received through faith alone.
Means of grace	God-appointed instruments such as Word, sacraments, and prayer through which he strengthens faith.
Providence	God's holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of all creatures and events.
Regeneration	The Spirit's giving of spiritual life, producing faith and repentance.
Sanctification	The Spirit's continuing work of making believers holy in life.
Sola fide	"Faith alone": justification is received through faith apart from works.
Sola gratia	"Grace alone": salvation begins, continues, and is completed by God's undeserved favor.
Sola Scriptura	Scripture alone is the final, infallible rule for faith and obedience.
Syncretism	Mixing Christianity with false religion so that the gospel's meaning is corrupted.
Union with Christ	The Spirit-created bond by which believers share in Christ and his saving benefits.

Appendix C - Select Bibliography

Primary and Confessional Sources

- The Holy Bible: Acts, Luke, Romans, Galatians, the Corinthian letters, and related Old Testament texts.
- The Belgic Confession.
- The Canons of Dort.
- The Heidelberg Catechism.
- The Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms.
- The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1677/1689).

Commentaries and Studies

- Alexander, J. A. *The Acts of the Apostles*.
- Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics*.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts*.
- Calvin, John. *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Clowney, Edmund P. *The Church*.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B. *The Holy Spirit*.
- Gaffin, Richard B., Jr. *Perspectives on Pentecost*.
- Keener, Craig S. *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *The Acts of the Apostles*.
- Peterson, David G. *The Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ridderbos, Herman. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*.
- Schnabel, Eckhard J. *Acts and Early Christian Mission*.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Acts*.
- Thomas, Derek W. H. *Acts*.
- Witherington, Ben, III. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*.

Note on Use

The bibliography includes writers from within and outside the Reformed tradition. Inclusion does not imply agreement with every conclusion. Historical and exegetical claims should be tested by Scripture, and doctrinal synthesis should be judged according to the whole counsel of God.

The route maps are schematic reconstructions plotted from modern geographic coordinates. Ancient site identifications and exact road or sea paths sometimes remain uncertain. Coastline geometry is derived from Natural Earth data through the public *world-atlas* dataset; modern coastlines are used only as geographic reference and do not imply modern political boundaries.

Map Reading Key

- Numbered circles identify the places listed beside each map.
- Blue lines show the outward or westward movement; gold lines show the return or final approach.
- Dashed lines mark a route whose exact course is not stated in Acts.
- Route lines follow the narrative order and do not claim to reproduce every ancient road or sailing track.
- Modern coastline geometry is used for geographic orientation; modern national borders are intentionally omitted.