



From Fire to Glow

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Chapter 1

From Fire to Glow – Preparing for the Future

When we examine what Jesus did and read the various accounts of miracles, signs, healing, and guidance, we also observe the conflicts between different societal groups that arose as the Master moved through the land given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even thousands of years later, it becomes apparent that human emotional, humanitarian, and spiritual development has advanced only gradually.

God is not in a hurry. In Psalm 90:4, Moses writes that God has been our refuge from generation to generation, and that a thousand years in His sight are like a day gone by. Similarly, Peter reflects in his second epistle (2 Peter 3:1–13) on the return of Christ and the question of “when?” He reminds believers that while times of struggle are significant, we should trust in the Lord, for His timing differs from ours. A day to God is like a thousand years to humans. God shows patience, desiring that none should be lost and that all have time to repent.

The disciples were well-versed in the Scriptures, which provided a solid foundation when Jesus called them at the Sea of Galilee. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said to Peter, who was sitting by the shore preparing his nets (Mark 1:17). Immediately, he left his nets and followed.

Peter is a central figure in the New Testament, and it is not surprising that he gradually understood the course of his own life—a life that would be completely transformed. He knew the Scriptures from synagogue visits, where he had heard about the young girl Mary and rumours surrounding Joseph the carpenter. Simon Peter received no formal higher education but inherited his father Jonah’s (John) occupation. Alongside his brother Andrew, it was natural for him to become a fisherman.

When Jesus called Simon, He gave him the name Peter (Matt 4:18): “I will make you fishers of men.” Together with his brother Andrew, Peter began developing in his mission even before Jesus delivered His first public teaching—the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)—which became their foundational instruction about Jesus and His message.

The Prophetic Message

The prophets of the Old Testament guided the people, communicating God’s works in the past and His promises for the future. The Israelites were accustomed to hearing these texts read in synagogues during festivals, particularly on the Sabbath. Many of these passages were memorized and discussed during private gatherings on long, dark evenings.

When they encountered the Prophet Daniel and his vision of the coming Son of Man, comprehension was difficult. In the vision, Daniel saw one “like a son of man” coming

down from heaven to approach the Ancient One. All dominion, glory, and kingship were given to him, and all peoples, nations, and languages would serve him; his rule would be eternal and indestructible (Daniel 7:13–14).

The term “Son of Man” derives from Hebrew *ben-adam* and Aramaic *bar enash*, meaning “a human being” or “son of humanity.” It appears over eighty times in Scripture, especially in the New Testament. Jesus uses it in multiple contexts, such as Matthew 8:20: “The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head,” and Mark 2:10: “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” The title reflects a dual nature—both divine and human—and conveys humility and kingship. He became human to save and will one day reign eternally.

Promises of the Holy Spirit

The promises regarding the Holy Spirit form a continuous thread throughout all four Gospels, demonstrating how Jesus prepared the disciples for the Spirit’s coming. The following is an overview:

Gospel of Matthew – Spirit as Power and Presence

- Matthew 3:11 – John the Baptist: “I baptize you with water for repentance. But he who comes after me... will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”
Promise of a coming baptism in the Spirit.
- Matthew 10:19–20 – Jesus: “...it is not you who speak, but your Father’s Spirit speaking through you.”
Spirit as guidance and inspiration for witnessing.
- Matthew 28:20 – Great Commission: “I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
Jesus’ presence through the Spirit.

Gospel of Mark – Spirit as Power for Service

- Mark 1:8 – John the Baptist: “I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”
Promise emphasizing empowerment for service.
- Mark 13:11 – Persecution: “...it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.”
Spirit’s guidance in times of difficulty.

Gospel of Luke – Spirit as Power, Guidance, and Joy

- Luke 3:16 – John the Baptist: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”
- Luke 11:13 – Jesus: “How much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”
Promise of the Spirit for all who pray.

- Luke 12:11–12 – Spirit provides words in witness.
- Luke 24:49 – After resurrection: “I am sending what my Father promised... you will be clothed with power from on high.”
Direct promise of Pentecost.

Gospel of John – Spirit as Helper (Paraclete) and Presence of Christ

- John 3:5–8 – Spirit brings new birth.
- John 4:14, 24 – Spirit as living water and truth.
- John 7:37–39 – “Rivers of living water will flow from within.”
- John 14:16–17 – Spirit remains with and in believers.
- John 14:26 – Spirit teaches and reminds of Jesus’ words.
- John 15:26 – Spirit testifies about Christ.
- John 16:7–13 – Spirit convicts, guides, and reveals truth.
- John 20:22 – Jesus breathes on them: “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

The Gospels establish the foundation for the Acts of the Apostles and the apostles’ teaching, miracles, signs, and missionary journeys in the first century. The birth of Christianity in history thus stems directly from Jesus’ teaching, His promises of the Spirit, and the apostles’ obedience in mission.

Gospel of John – Focus: The Spirit as Helper (Paraclete) and the Presence of Jesus in Believers

- **John 3:5–8** – “Born of the Spirit.” The Spirit gives new life.
- **John 4:14, 24** – The Spirit as living water and the source of truth.
- **John 7:37–39** – “Whoever believes in me... rivers of living water will flow from within him.”
Promise of the Spirit as internal life.
- **John 14:16–17** – “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper... the Spirit of truth.”
The Spirit will dwell with and within believers.
- **John 14:26** – “The Helper, the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said.”
- **John 15:26** – “When the Helper comes... he will testify about me.”

- **John 16:7–13** – “It is for your advantage that I go away... then the Helper will come.”
The Spirit convicts, guides, and reveals truth.
- **John 20:22** – “He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”
A foretaste of Pentecost.

The Gospels provide the foundation for the Acts of the Apostles, the teaching of the apostles, the signs and wonders they performed, and the missionary journeys of the first century. This is the historical basis for the birth of Christianity. How does contemporary ministry reflect these foundations today?

Prophecy from the Book of Joel

- “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; even on the servants and handmaids in those days I will pour out my Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth: blood, fire, and pillars of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. But everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:28 ff.).

When Peter addressed the eleven, he emphasized what the prophet Joel had received from God. Joel (Hebrew: Yo’el) means “The Lord is God” or “Yahweh is God.” Joel likely prophesied during the Babylonian captivity, around 600–500 BCE, a time when the Israelites were exiled from the land given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was also the era of Daniel and the Assyrian rule under King Nebuchadnezzar.

The people were displaced and gathered in the new eastern territories. Yet God remained with His people, communicating through prophetic messages.

Jesus, now buried and resurrected, lived with the disciples in his post-resurrection form and commanded them to go to Jerusalem, all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for what the Father has promised, which you have heard from me. John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:4–5).

The disciples were still uncertain and questioned what would happen next: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6)

Jesus replied: “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:7–8).

Here we see a continuity with Jesus’ message in Matthew 28:16 ff., commonly referred to as the Great Commission.

Jesus was then lifted into the sky, and a cloud took him out of the disciples' sight. Two men in white garments appeared and encouraged the disciples, saying that Jesus would return in the same manner as He had departed.

Matthew 24 also speaks of the Son of Man's return; in verse 40, two men deliver a message regarding who will witness His coming.

In the Revelation of John, we observe the parallel:

“Behold, he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, even those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him” (Revelation 1:7).

The Church in Jerusalem Awaits

After some time, Peter stood up and suggested that either Justus or Matthias should replace Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed Jesus. Judas had died tragically and was buried in his field, Akeldama, meaning “Field of Blood.” This field never produced another crop; it remained desolate and empty.

A lot was cast to determine who would replace Judas, and it fell to Matthias. He was then counted among the twelve apostles. This casting of lots was the only and final official decision made by the disciples in this manner.

Ten days later, after Christ's ascension and leading up to Pentecost, a major transformation in Christian history occurred. The prayer meeting in the Upper Room concluded, and people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. In Jewish tradition, gatherings always occurred during this time, which coincided with the festival of Shavuot, originally a harvest festival. Shavuot always took place fifty days after Passover (Pesach). The festival commemorates the time when the Jewish people received the Torah—the Law—on Mount Sinai. In Christianity, Pentecost is often called the “Birthday of the Church” because the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples.

The Birthday of the Church

The disciples, together with the 120 believers, were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Shavuot. Then something unexpected happened.

Suddenly, a powerful sound came from heaven, like a mighty wind. The entire house was filled with the Spirit, and tongues of fire rested on each of them. They began to speak in various languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

The assembled crowd was astonished, amazed that they could hear their own native languages spoken by these Galilean men and women. The people present had come from different parts of the world, particularly nearby regions and islands, including Crete, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Libya, Egypt, and Italy.

Here is a modern mapping of the locations mentioned in Acts 2:9–11:

Biblical Location	Approximate Modern Equivalent	Notes
Parthians	Iran	Lived in northeastern Iran (Parthia)
Medes	Iran	Ancient people of western/northwestern Iran
Elamites	Iran	Region in southwestern Iran (around Susa)
Mesopotamia	Iraq (partly Syria)	Land between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers
Judea	Israel/Palestine	Region around Jerusalem
Cappadocia	Turkey	Central Anatolia (interior Turkey)
Pontus	Turkey	Northeastern Turkey, near the Black Sea
Asia (province)	Turkey	Western Turkey (e.g., Ephesus)
Phrygia	Turkey	Central and western Turkey
Pamphylia	Turkey	Southern coast of Turkey (around Antalya)
Egypt	Egypt	Same as today
Cyrene	Libya	Northeastern Libya (around the city of Cyrene)
Residents from Rome	Italy	Jews living in Rome
Cretans	Greece	From the island of Crete
Arabs	Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria)	Arab peoples from eastern and southern parts of the region

Summary:

The peoples mentioned in Acts 2 cover nearly the entire known world around the Mediterranean and the Middle East at that time—from Italy in the west to Iran in the east, and from Turkey in the north to Egypt and Arabia in the south.



Turmoil in Jerusalem

The crowd in Jerusalem became unsettled. At that moment, Peter stepped forward and addressed them with a sermon about the fulfilment of God's promise. Those gathered were familiar with the prophetic words, particularly from the prophet Joel.

Peter, unhesitant, referred to Joel when the crowd accused the disciples and other believers of being drunk. Peter pointed out that it was only nine in the morning and began to quote Joel 2:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”

Peter then referred to King David and the genealogy of God's own Son, in order to help the people understand what had happened. Jesus, whom they had crucified, was the Messiah, the promised Anointed One.

The effect was immediate. Peter urged the people to repent, make amends, and confess their sins:

“If you repent, you will also experience the power of the Holy Spirit, a promise for all generations.”

The fruit of Peter's sermon was swift: about three thousand people were baptized that day (Acts 2:41).

The Early Church in Jerusalem

The mission in Jerusalem began with the sharing of food, clothing, and love. Each day became an experience of prayer, service, and joyful gatherings in the church. No religious burden was imposed; cultural backgrounds were respected. The congregation grew daily as more believers confessed their faith.

Peter and John led by example, attending the three o'clock prayer hour. This practice became more prominent after Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus' words on the cross—“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”—coincided with this hour, marking a shift from tradition to personal experience and confession. At this time, the veil of the Holy of Holies was torn, opening a new era of prayer and gratitude toward God, closely followed by the disciples and believers.

The Gates Around Jerusalem

In the first century CE, Jerusalem had several gates in the city wall, especially the so-called Second Wall and the extensions built by Herod the Great. Archaeological and historical sources, primarily the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, give us insight into these gates. The exact number varied depending on the period and interpretation. Here is a summary of the main gates of Jerusalem during Jesus' time:

Key Gates in Jerusalem

1. Golden Gate (Eastern Gate)

- Located on the eastern side of the Temple complex, facing the Mount of Olives.
- According to tradition, the Messiah will enter Jerusalem through this gate.
- Sometimes called "the Beautiful Gate" (Acts 3:2), where Peter and John healed the lame man.

2. Sheep Gate

- Near the northeastern corner of the Temple complex.
- Animals for sacrifice were brought in through this gate (Nehemiah 3:1).

3. Fish Gate

- On the northern side, used by fish merchants bringing fish from the Sea of Galilee (Nehemiah 3:3).

4. Old Gate (Ephraim Gate / The Old Gate)

- A northern gate leading to the oldest part of the city (David's City).
- Often identified with Ephraim Gate.

5. Valley Gate

- On the western side, leading to the Valley of Hinnom (Nehemiah 2:13).

6. Dung Gate (Garbage Gate)

- Also on the southwest side, where the city's refuse was removed (Nehemiah 2:13–14).

7. Water Gate

- Near the Kidron Valley, southeast of the Temple (Nehemiah 3:26).

8. Horse Gate

- Near the king's palace on the eastern side (Nehemiah 3:28).

9. Dung Gate / Zion Gate (Southern Gate)

- Led toward Mount Zion (southern part of the city).
- Later called Zion Gate.

During Jesus' time, Jerusalem had approximately 7–9 gates, depending on how one counted and which wall segment is considered. The most historically and religiously significant were:

- Golden Gate (Eastern Gate)
- Sheep Gate
- Fish Gate
- Zion Gate (Southern)
- Valley Gate / Dung Gate (West/Southwest)

Context: The Beautiful Gate

Acts 3:1–10 records:

“Peter and John went up together to the temple at the time of prayer, the ninth hour. Now a man lame from birth was carried daily to the gate of the temple called Beautiful, to beg from those entering the temple.”

Where was the Beautiful Gate?

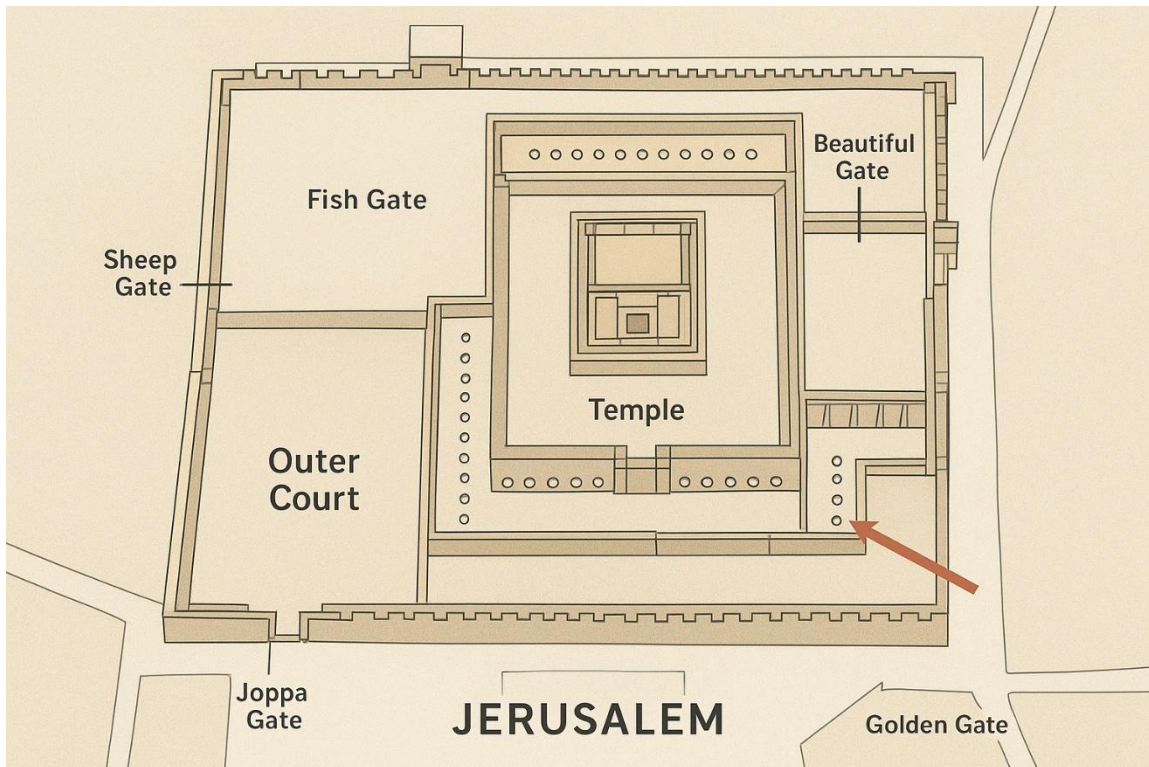
There is no gate in the city wall called the “Beautiful Gate”—it was a gate into the Temple complex itself, not the city. Scholars have proposed two main candidates based on Josephus and archaeology:

1. Nicanor Gate (most widely accepted theory)

- Between the Court of the Women (outer court) and the Inner Court (Court of Israel).
- Made of Corinthian bronze, described by Josephus as so beautiful it surpassed gates of gold and silver—hence called the “Beautiful Gate.”
- Used by Jews entering the Temple for prayer, perfectly matching the location in Acts 3.
- → This is the most likely location.
- Location: Eastern side of the Temple building, between the inner and outer courts.

2. Eastern Gate (Golden Gate)

- Some older interpretations suggest the “Beautiful Gate” could refer to the eastern gate of the outer Temple wall facing the Mount of Olives.
- This would be the same gate later called the Golden Gate.
- However, Acts 3 indicates the man begged **inside** the Temple, where Peter and John entered to pray—not outside the city wall.
- Therefore, this interpretation is less probable



Summary

Possible Gate	Location	Likely Identity	Comment
Nicanor Gate	Between the Court of the Women and the Court of Israel	Most likely	Described in detail by Josephus as “magnificent” and “beautiful”
Golden Gate (Eastern Gate)	Eastern wall of the Temple complex	Possible but unlikely	Too far outside the location where Peter and John entered

The Beautiful Gate in Acts 3 was most likely the **Nicanor Gate**, the beautiful bronze gate that led from the Court of the Women into the inner Temple court.

The Miracle at the Beautiful Gate

Peter and John were on their way to the Temple for prayer when they saw a man in need sitting and waiting for alms from those entering the Temple. The beggar noticed Peter and looked at him pleadingly, and this interaction led to a conversation.

- “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”

Peter took him by the hand and helped him up, and the man was overjoyed—he leapt up and began to walk and even sing.

The man followed Peter and John into the Temple, where the people recognized him and were amazed at what had happened.

All the people gathered in Solomon’s Colonnade now became aware of the miracle. Peter quickly explained to them that it was not by his own power, but through the Holy Spirit that God had revealed to them.

Among the listeners were men of tradition, Temple guards, Pharisees, and Sadducees. Peter and John were arrested but released the following day.

The result of Peter’s sermon in Solomon’s Colonnade was extraordinary: about five thousand men came to faith.

However, the problem with Peter and John had not ended, for the Sanhedrin summoned them for questioning and asked by what power or name they had acted.

When Peter was about to explain to the teachers of the Law and the elders of the city, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. The result was their astonishment at the knowledge and power of God demonstrated through two uneducated men who had walked with Jesus for three years.

“What we have seen, learned, and experienced is more valuable than book knowledge,” Peter said. The Sanhedrin could only agree when Peter insisted that they must obey God rather than humans, because the forty-year-old man at the Beautiful Gate had been healed. Signs of God’s power convinced the authorities, and Peter and John were released. They returned to the believers to report the accusations of the chief priests (Acts 4).

Times changed, and the believers in Jerusalem felt persecuted by the traditionalists and experienced a strong need to pray. They reflected on the words of King David, questioning why the Gentile nations rage and the people plot in vain. “The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and His Anointed” (Acts 4:25 ff), as the Holy Spirit had spoken through David, His servant. They prayed for God’s help to witness signs and wonders in Jesus’ name.

After they prayed, the place where they had gathered was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly proclaiming God’s Word (Acts 4:31).

The fellowship among the believers grew stronger, and the mission advanced through preaching and community. No one suffered from need, as people sold land and property to share with the community, including Joseph from Cyprus, called Barnabas (“Son of Encouragement”), who gave his proceeds to the apostles.

However, Ananias and Sapphira withheld part of the proceeds from a sale, lying to the Holy Spirit, which resulted in their deaths—demonstrating that lying before God is punished (Acts 5).

The church in Jerusalem continued to grow through Peter’s preaching in Solomon’s Colonnade. Many miracles and signs occurred: the sick were carried into the streets so that at least Peter’s shadow might touch them. People came from near and far, and even those possessed by unclean spirits were healed.

The Apostles before the Sanhedrin

A sickness had infected the chief priests and Sadducees: **jealousy**. The apostles were put in public custody, but an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, enabling them to continue preaching the Word at the angel’s command:

- “Go stand in the Temple and tell the people all about the life you have experienced in faith.”

When the Sanhedrin convened to question the imprisoned apostles, they were not in the prison. Someone reported that the apostles were teaching the people in the Colonnade. On order, the apostles were brought back before the Sanhedrin to explain what had happened (Acts 5).

Peter boldly declared that they must obey God rather than men. Gamaliel, a respected teacher in the council, advised that the apostles should be released, though they were flogged and forbidden to speak in Jesus’ name.

The First Deacons: Servants of the Church

Acts 6 describes how the twelve apostles selected seven men to serve the congregation, specifically to oversee the daily distribution of food to widows. These men are often called “**the Seven**” or **church servants**, sometimes considered the first deacons.

The seven named in Acts 6:5 are:

- **Stephen**, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit
- **Philip**
- **Procorus**

- **Nicanor**
- **Timon**
- **Parmenas**
- **Nicholas**, a proselyte from Antioch

Brief details:

1. **Stephen** – the first martyr (Acts 7), a skilled and powerful preacher who performed miracles and testified to Jesus. He became the first Christian martyr, stoned to death after his witness.
2. **Philip** – an evangelist who later preached in Samaria (Acts 8). Known for his encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch and settled in Caesarea, where his daughters prophesied (Acts 21:8).
3. **Procures** – according to tradition, a disciple of John.
4. **Nicanor** – mentioned only here; possibly martyred in Jerusalem.
5. **Timon** – mentioned only here; tradition says he became bishop in Bostra (modern Syria) and likely martyred.
6. **Parmenas** – mentioned only here; preached in Macedonia and died a martyr in Philippi.
7. **Nicholas** – a proselyte from Antioch; possibly connected to the “Nicolaitans” in Revelation (Rev 2:6–15), representing the early church’s outreach to Gentiles.

1. Stephen’s Death and the Early Church

Stephen’s death marked a turning point in the early church, and Saul (later Paul) was present. He exemplified faithfulness and courage—the one who “loses his life for Jesus’ sake” (Matt 10:39).

2. Philip

After the persecution in Jerusalem, Philip went to **Samaria** to preach.

- Also known as **Philip the Evangelist** (Acts 8:5–8).
- He brought many people to faith and is best known for his encounter with the **Ethiopian eunuch** (Acts 8:26–39).
- He later settled in **Caesarea**, where his four daughters prophesied (Acts 21:8).

- Philip serves as a model of **mission work and obedience to the Holy Spirit**, following the Spirit step by step.

3. Procorus

- Mentioned only in Acts 6:5, but tradition says he became a companion of **John the Apostle** and later **bishop of Nicomedia** (modern-day Turkey).
- A faithful servant behind the scenes, trusted and reliable.

4. Nicanor

- Only mentioned in Acts 6:5, possibly martyred in Jerusalem, though this is uncertain.
- His name means “**victorious**” (from Greek *nikē* = victory).
- Worked quietly but was known by God.

5. Timon

- Like Nicanor, only mentioned in Acts 6:5.
- Likely became **bishop in Bostra** (modern Syria) and was martyred.
- His name means “**honoured**”, reminding us that every service in God’s kingdom, great or small, is honourable before Him.

6. Parmenas

- Also mentioned only in Acts 6:5.
- Tradition says he preached in **Macedonia** and was martyred in **Philippi**.
- His name means “**faithful**” or “**steadfast**”, exemplifying endurance in service.

7. Nicholas of Antioch

- A **proselyte**—a non-Jew who converted to Judaism before coming to faith in Christ.
- Revelation mentions the “**doctrine of the Nicolaitans**” (Rev 2:6, 2:14–15), possibly linked to him.
- Represented the church’s outreach to the Gentiles—an early sign of the gospel’s universal reach.

Jesus commended the church in Ephesus for hating the Nicolaitans’ deeds but rebuked Pergamum for tolerating them. True grace leads to holiness, not carelessness.

Summary of the Seven Servants

The seven first deacons were **“men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom”** (Acts 6:3).

- Chosen for practical service (diakonia), but several also had spiritual responsibilities.
- Their work allowed the apostles to focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word.
- They demonstrate that service is foundational in God’s kingdom.

The appointment of the deacons had a **positive effect**: the church in Jerusalem grew, and many priests began to obey the faith (Acts 6:7).

Stephen

Stephen stood out among the seven:

- **“A man full of grace and power, performing great wonders among the people”** (Acts 6:8).
- Accused by “the Freedmen” in the synagogue, they began to debate with him, but his power, given by the Holy Spirit, could not be contested.
- They then brought Stephen before the **Sanhedrin**, hiring false witnesses to accuse him (Acts 6:12–13).

When questioned, Stephen addressed them:

- **“Brothers and fathers, listen to me.”**
- He reviewed the history of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, reminded the council of Joseph and Moses, and concluded with King David and Solomon’s temple. God had been with them all.

Stephen ended with a **rebuke**:

- **“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 7:51–52).

The Sanhedrin became furious, but Stephen, strong in spirit, looked toward heaven and saw Jesus standing at God’s right hand:

- **“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God”** (Acts 7:56).

Despite the drama, Stephen remained faithful, trusting God’s promises. As they stoned him, he knelt and cried:

- **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them. Receive my spirit.”**

Saul was present at his death and later went house to house seeking followers, following the plan of the religious leaders to destroy Jesus' followers.

Stephen's story parallels **Jesus' own ministry and crucifixion**, though Jesus worked for three years with teaching, miracles, and signs. Stephen accomplished similar work but within hours or days. God had a unique plan, preparing for Saul's eventual encounter with the Master.

Joy in Persecution

Opposition and persecution empowered the apostles to fulfil the mission Jesus gave them.

- **Philip** fled to Samaria and preached Christ, and many received the message due to the **miracles and signs** he performed.

Samaria (Sychar/Sikhem, modern Nablus) was about 40–75 km from Jerusalem—a journey of about three days through mountainous, arid terrain.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard of the Spirit's work in Samaria, they sent **Peter and John** to confirm that the Samaritan believers had received the Holy Spirit. Upon laying hands on them, the Samaritans experienced **the baptism of the Holy Spirit**, affirming that God's salvation was also for Gentiles.

The Ethiopian Eunuch

- In Samaria, Philip encountered **Simon the magician**, who tried to buy the Holy Spirit. Peter rebuked him:
- **“May your money perish with you!”**
- Simon repented and asked Peter to pray for him, humbling himself in prayer.

Later, Philip received an angelic command to travel south along the **road from Jerusalem to Gaza**, described as a desert path.

- Philip obeyed and met an **Ethiopian eunuch**, a high official serving Queen Candace of Ethiopia.
- The eunuch had travelled to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, reading **Isaiah** aloud.

Philip asked:

- **“Do you understand what you are reading?”**

The eunuch replied humbly:

- **“How can I, unless someone guides me?”**

He invited Philip to sit in his chariot. The passage read was **Isaiah 53:7–8**, about a suffering servant led like a lamb to slaughter.

The eunuch asked:

- **“Who is the prophet speaking about? Himself or someone else?”**

Philip explained the gospel: that the suffering servant was **Jesus**.

The eunuch saw water and asked:

- **“What prevents me from being baptized?”**

Philip baptized him immediately. (Some manuscripts include Acts 8:37, where the eunuch confesses: **“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”**)

After baptism, the Spirit of the Lord **caught Philip away**, and the eunuch went on his journey rejoicing.

Philip continued preaching, eventually reaching **Azotus** and then **Caesarea**, spreading the gospel in every town along the way.

This encounter was a **turning point**, showing the gospel reaching the ends of the earth. The eunuch, an African (Ethiopia/Kush), fulfilled Jesus’ promise in Acts 1:8: **“You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.”**

It demonstrates how God leads missions **through personal, direct encounters**, not only mass revivals. The eunuch was already God-fearing and seeking but needed guidance to understand Scripture. This event reminds us that **God’s message is universal**, intended for all peoples.

According to tradition, the **Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church** traces its origins to this eunuch, who began preaching the gospel in Ethiopia during the first century AD.

Christianity in Ethiopia

Although most historians believe that Christianity had its major, official breakthrough in Ethiopia (the Kingdom of Aksum) only in the 4th century through the missionary Frumentius (who later became the first bishop), this does not exclude the possibility that the court official laid the initial foundation.

It is highly likely that a high-ranking person like him, returning full of joy and conviction, could not keep his faith to himself, but shared it with those around him. This could explain the early Christian presence in the region long before it became the state religion.

Although the Bible does not give the court official a name, some traditions call him Indich or Simeon.

In the Old Testament, Genesis 10:6–7 and Psalm 68:31–32 mention one of Ham’s sons and his descendants living in Africa, in Kush, which neighbored Egypt—i.e., southern Ethiopia or Sudan: “Princes shall come from Egypt, and Ethiopia (Kush) shall hasten to stretch out its hands to God.”

This is a prophetic image of African peoples turning to the Lord.

This is often seen as the beginning of Christianity in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia. Many Ethiopian Christians regard this event as the origin of their faith.

Simeon called Niger (Acts 13:1)

As mentioned earlier, Simeon Niger could very well have been a man of African origin (Niger = “black” in Latin).

He was a prophet and teacher in Antioch, demonstrating that the early church was multicultural and international from the beginning.

Some scholars suggest that Simeon Niger and Lucius of Cyrene (North Africa) both represented African leaders in the first missionary congregation.

Africa and the Early Church

After the New Testament period, Christianity spread rapidly in North Africa:

- Alexandria (Egypt) became one of the first major Christian centers.
- Church Fathers such as Athanasius, Origen, and Augustine were Africans.
- Ethiopia adopted Christianity as the state religion in the 4th century—one of the very first countries in the world to do so, before many parts of Europe.

Africa, and especially Ethiopia, holds a place of honor in salvation history.

It shows that the Gospel was not limited to one people, but was intended for all nations from the beginning.

Jesus said: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:19), and we see in Acts that this mission extends even to Africa.

Philip's Later Life and Ministry

Philip, one of the seven appointed deacons in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5), became a prominent evangelist.

After his mission in Samaria and his encounter with the Ethiopian court official, the Bible mentions Philip again at the end of Acts chapter 8:

“Philip was found at Azotus (modern-day Ashdod, south of Tel Aviv), and as he traveled, he preached the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.” (Acts 8:40)

It was in Caesarea, a major Roman port city on the Mediterranean, that Philip settled and continued his ministry for many years.

His family life was centred in Caesarea (Acts 21:8–9). The last biblical mention of Philip occurs about 20 years after his encounter with the court official. The apostle Paul and his companions (including Luke, the author of Acts) visited him during their final journey to Jerusalem:

“The next day we departed and went to Caesarea. We entered the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.” (Acts 21:8–9)

Here he is explicitly called “Philip the evangelist,” confirming his life’s work. His four daughters are noted for having the prophetic gift—a sign that the gifts of the Spirit were active in his household and in Caesarea.

That Paul and Luke stayed with him shows he was a respected leader in the early church.

After the Bible goes silent on Philip, various Christian traditions claim that he completed his life and ministry in Asia Minor.

A strong tradition, presented by early Church Fathers such as Papias (who lived close to Philip’s time), holds that Philip later moved to Hierapolis (modern-day Turkey), where he continued his ministry and was buried. This tradition is sometimes confused with the apostle Philip (one of the twelve). Some traditions also name him bishop of Tralles, Lydia.

Philip’s life is an excellent example of how a man who began as an administrator in Jerusalem became a powerful pioneer missionary. He preached in Samaria, converted an African leader, and became an established, respected church leader and evangelist in Caesarea, where his family also participated actively in ministry.

Obedience is a Virtue

The next step in the Spirit's guidance occurs when Jesus meets Saul on the road to Damascus. Saul was filled with hatred and murderous intent. The people of Damascus were about to experience a repeat of Stephen's story. With a letter in hand from the Sanhedrin and the high priest in Jerusalem, Saul was on his way to the synagogue. His plan was to read the letter and urge the arrest and execution of followers of Jesus in the city.

What Saul did not know was that God had a different plan for him. This is a reminder for us today: God has a plan for our lives, even when we plan otherwise.

God gave His Son, Jesus, a mission from the heavenly realm through the Holy Spirit, the Helper and Guide.

A light appeared to Saul along the road to Damascus:

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Saul heard the voice clearly but saw no one. The light blinded him.

"Who are you, Lord?" he asked, realizing someone was speaking to him.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the voice replied.

"Rise and enter the city, and you will be told what to do next," said Jesus.

The men accompanying Saul heard the voice but saw nothing. God's plan was entirely new to Saul, and one of the Lord's servants, Ananias, was given instructions to guide him.

Ananias was a trustworthy believer in Damascus, attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. He immediately responded to the call and received instructions to go to Straight Street, where he would meet Saul (Acts 9:11).

"Lay your hands on him, and he will regain his sight. He was blinded by the light when he encountered me."

Ananias feared going the same way as Stephen, as Saul's reputation was well known in Damascus. Hesitantly, Ananias obeyed the Spirit: "The Lord has chosen him as a vessel for His purpose."

Obedience was a virtue for Ananias, and he followed the Spirit's instruction.

Saul would suffer for the Lord's name, but Ananias understood he could not refuse the mission. He went to Straight Street and found Saul, who was praying in repentance, ready to fulfil the high priests' orders.

"Brother Saul," said Ananias, laying his hands on his head.

Saul regained his sight and was baptized. Having not eaten for several days due to all that had happened, he ate and regained his strength.

Without rest, Saul began preaching in Damascus. The people asked if he was not the

one sent by the high priest to arrest all followers of Jesus. Saul, strengthened by his encounter with Jesus on the road, could confidently withstand questioning and continue proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah.

The Jews in Damascus sought to kill Saul, guarding his house day and night, but the disciples helped him escape by lowering him over the city wall at night. He then planned to return to Jerusalem.

When he returned to Jerusalem, people were suspicious: Was this not Saul, who had sat at Stephen's feet and guarded the garments of those who stoned him?

Barnabas, one of the disciples, took Saul under his protection and introduced him to the other disciples, explaining what had happened on the road to Damascus. All realized that Jesus had encountered Saul and transformed his life.

In Jerusalem, Saul now preached boldly about Jesus the Messiah. People listened but still tried to kill him. The disciples helped him escape to Caesarea and later to Tarsus. The congregations in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria were now peaceful and growing, strengthened by the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31).

Barnabas and Saul prayed and prepared for their first missionary journey.

Here's a complete English translation of the passage you provided:

Who Was Peter?

Let us return to Peter and see what he was doing after Saul's (Paul's) return to Jerusalem.

Peter travelled throughout the region and visited the congregation in Lydda. There he met a paralyzed man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years. Peter said to him, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, get up and make your bed." He immediately got up.

The people recognized that God's healing power was with Peter. The members of the congregations in Lydda and Sharon witnessed this miracle, and many were converted.

Peter then continued to Joppa (modern Jaffa), a day's journey of about 30 km from Lydda (Lod). There he met a devoted disciple named Tabitha, also called Dorcas in Greek, meaning "gazelle." She was a generous woman who had fallen ill and died. Her body had been prepared upstairs in the house. Two men came to Peter urging him to hurry to Joppa. When Peter arrived, he sent everyone out, knelt by Dorcas' body, and prayed:

"Tabitha, arise." She opened her eyes, sat up, and Peter took her hand. He then called the people in to see her alive. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time and lodged with Simon the tanner (Acts 9:40).

The Meeting with the Officer

In Caesarea lived a high-ranking officer of the Italian army named Cornelius. He feared God along with his entire family and was well regarded by the poor, to whom he gave gifts. During his daily prayer time, the Holy Spirit gave him a message. Alarmed, Cornelius asked, “What is it, Lord?”

The angel replied:

“Your prayers and gifts have come up as a memorial before God. Send some of your men to Joppa to find a man named Peter, who is staying at the house of Simon the tanner. The house is by the sea and easy to find.”

The next day, the men went to Simon’s house. They found Peter praying on the rooftop during his midday prayer.

At that moment, Peter received a vision about what is lawful to eat. His upbringing had instilled certain dietary restrictions, but God instructed him:

“What God has declared clean, do not call unclean.”

Peter heard this three times and understood the message.

The men sent by Cornelius had arrived and found the somewhat perplexed Peter. The vision God had given regarding his thoughts on what is edible or not was still in his mind. The Holy Spirit then spoke to Peter:

“Go down, meet the men; it is I, the Lord, who has sent them to you.”

The men said:

“Our officer Cornelius has sent us. He received a message from the Lord that you are a guest in Simon the tanner’s house. Come with us.”

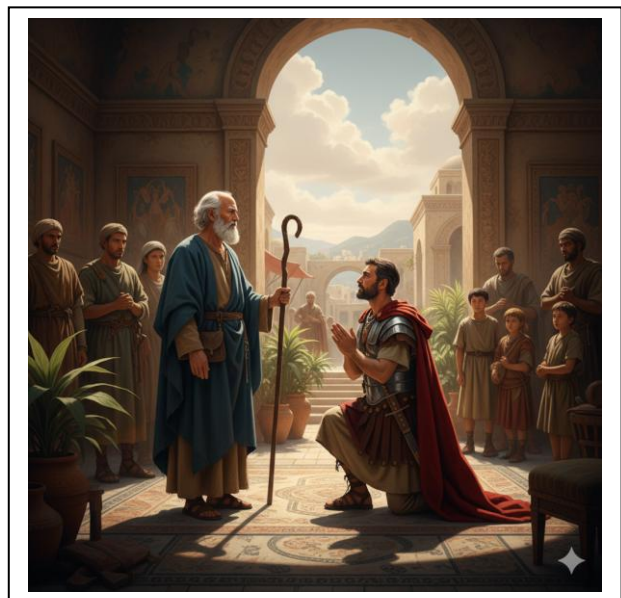
Peter invited them in, and they stayed as his guests.

The following day, Peter, accompanied by the men and some members of the Joppa congregation, travelled to Caesarea to meet Cornelius.

The entire household of Cornelius was gathered to meet Peter and his companions. Cornelius, a humble man, bowed before Peter, but Peter said:

“Stand up! I too am only a man.”

Many were assembled in the house, and Peter reminded them that Jewish law forbade a Jew from visiting a Gentile’s home.



“Before I left Joppa, God told me that everything is open for the message of Jesus. That is why I obeyed and came with your messengers. What do you want me to say?”

Cornelius replied:

“Four days ago, I saw a shining figure standing beside me, telling me to send for you to come to Simon the tanner’s house by the sea. You were there and were kind enough to come. Now we are all gathered to hear what the Lord has commanded you to say to us.”

Notice that it is God’s response to Cornelius that is enacted when Peter obeys the call. It is not Peter who initiates the outreach to the Gentiles; it is a non-Jew—a Gentile—who calls him.

Peter began to understand what God had shown him about the different animals and their meat. God makes no distinction between Jew and Greek; all are one in Jesus Christ.

This principle is later taught by Paul to the Galatian church:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

In God’s eyes, there are no social, linguistic, or cultural distinctions.

Peter continued to preach and emphasized that it is through the Holy Spirit, given by Jesus to his followers, that all things occur. The prophets had testified to what would happen after Jesus’ crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Those who believe in Him receive forgiveness of sins. God has entrusted this message to us to proclaim.

While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all who were listening, both Jews and Greeks. As a sign, they all began speaking in tongues and praising God.

Peter quickly said:

“Can anyone forbid these people from being baptized with water, since they have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

He then commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:48). Peter stayed in Cornelius’ house for several days.

The Gentiles were accepted. Peter and his companions then returned to Judea and to Jerusalem.

There, the circumcised believers began to criticize Peter for what had happened in Cornelius’ house—the Gentiles were baptized despite being uncircumcised.

Peter explained the entire event: how God had shown that all are equal before Him, how he was called to Cornelius’ house in Joppa, and what happened when the Holy Spirit fell on the household and they spoke in tongues.

God gave them the same gift as had been given to everyone in Jerusalem after the Lord’s

ascension.

When the believers heard this, they were quiet and praised God:

“Even to the Gentiles, God has granted repentance that leads to life,” concluded Peter.



After Stephen’s Martyrdom

After Stephen’s persecution and death, the apostles were scattered. Some went to Phoenicia and Cyprus. Phoenicia corresponds to modern-day Lebanon and Syria, in the eastern Mediterranean, including the ancient trading cities of Byblos, Tyre, and Sidon. The distance from Antioch (modern Antakya, Turkey) is just over 350 kilometres as the crow flies.

This is where Barnabas comes in. He sold a field and brought the money to the apostles. His original name was Joseph, but he was called Barnabas, “Son of Encouragement.” He was from Cyprus and a Levite (a priestly family) (Acts 4:36).

He was a respected, well-regarded man in the Jerusalem congregation. He was also the one who introduced Paul to the sceptical apostles in Jerusalem, who had not yet heard of Saul’s conversion and his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:26ff).

Barnabas, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith, was the first missionary sent to Antioch and later became Paul’s missionary companion.

It was in Antioch that the believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Barnabas was a crucial bridge between Paul and the original apostles, a pioneer in Christian missions between 46–48 AD. He travelled to Cyprus, where he had family roots, making it natural that Paul’s first missionary journey together began there.

Peter in Focus Again

It was a festival in Jerusalem. After James had been executed, King Herod Agrippa noticed that it pleased the city's religious leaders, so he also arrested Peter. The night before his trial, Peter was sleeping, chained between two soldiers, with additional guards at the gates. The congregation in Jerusalem prayed earnestly for him.

Suddenly, the prison cell was filled with a radiant light.

An angel of the Lord woke Peter, the chains fell off, and the angel said:

“Quick! Put on your sandals and cloak—follow me!”

They passed the first and second guards; the iron gate leading to the city opened on its own. Outside on the street, the angel disappeared, and Peter realized it was not a dream.

He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered in prayer for him. The servant girl Rhoda recognized his voice and was so overjoyed that she forgot to open the door. The others did not believe her at first. Once the door was opened, Peter told them how the Lord had delivered him and asked them to inform James and the others. Then he left to stay out of sight.

Why Was Peter Imprisoned?

Herod Agrippa wanted to gain political favour with the Jewish leaders, who opposed the young Jesus movement. He had already executed the apostle James and planned a public trial for Peter after Passover (Pesach) for maximum effect. Therefore, Peter was heavily guarded (multiple shifts, chains, and gates).

What happened next?

Herod interrogated the guards, who were severely punished for Peter's escape. Later, when Herod received divine-like praise in Caesarea, judgment came upon him and he died; meanwhile, God's Word continued to spread.

Herod Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great, and the following occurred:

In Caesarea, Herod gave a speech dressed in magnificent royal garments. The people shouted: “This is the voice of a god, not of a man!”

Because he did not give glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him. He was “eaten by worms” and died.

A contemporary historian, Josephus (Antiquities 19.343–361), describes the same event with some differences: Herod wore a silver-glittering robe during games in Caesarea; the people flattered him as a god. He suffered severe abdominal pain and died five days later, in 44 AD.

Both sources agree on the location (Caesarea), that he received divine-like praise, and that he suffered a sudden, fatal illness shortly afterward.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

Peter and the other apostles gathered for the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Here is a brief description of this feast, focusing on how the first Christians and apostles understood and interpreted it.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Hebrew: **Chag HaMatzot**) is one of the oldest Israelite feasts and a central part of Passover week.

In the New Testament, the feast takes on a deeper theological significance, as it is directly connected to Jesus' death, resurrection, and the life of the Christian church.

Original Meaning of the Feast – Background for NT Interpretation

In the Old Testament, unleavened bread symbolizes:

- The speed of the Exodus from Egypt
- Purity and separation
- Leaving behind old habits (leavened dough)

Leaven (sourdough) is often used as a symbol of the pervasive power of evil and sin (Exodus 12; 1 Corinthians 5:6).

This symbolism underlies the apostles' theological interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus Institutes the Lord's Supper During the Feast

According to the Gospels, Jesus' Last Supper took place during the preparations for or at the start of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This involves two important theological points:

1. Jesus uses unleavened bread as a symbol of His own sacrificial body.
2. When Jesus says, "This is my body" (Luke 22:19), He uses the purity and sanctity of unleavened bread to represent His own identity as the pure and perfect sacrifice.

The Feast's Sacrificial Tradition Points to Christ

The Passover lamb was slaughtered shortly before the feast began.

In the New Testament, Jesus Himself becomes God's Lamb (John 1:29), sacrificed for the sins of the world—directly in connection with the feast.

Jesus' death and resurrection occur within the framework of the feast.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread frames the greatest salvation event in Christian faith:

- Jesus dies on the cross while the Passover sacrifices are offered.
- He is in the tomb during the Sabbath and the feast.
- He rises on the “day of first fruits” (Leviticus 23:9–14), which Paul interprets theologically:

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The first fruits offered during the feast thus become a foreshadowing of Christ's resurrection.

The Apostles' Interpretation: Old Leaven and New Life

The apostle Paul makes the most direct theological connection between the feast and Christian life:

“Remove the old leaven... For our Passover Lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast—not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (1 Corinthians 5:7–8)

Here Paul interprets the feast: the old leaven represents sin, and the unleavened bread symbolizes purity, new life, and the victory of Christ.

Here's the English translation of your latest text:

Christ as the Ultimate Passover Lamb

Christ is the ultimate Passover Lamb, the Christian life becomes a continual feast, and “leaven” symbolizes sin, falsehood, and selfishness, while the unleavened bread represents holiness, truth, and purity.

The feast is no longer merely a historical memory; it becomes a spiritual reality in the believer's life.

Unleavened Bread and the Lord's Supper

In the early church, the symbols of the feast remained vivid: the bread of the Lord's Supper continues to carry the meaning of the unleavened feast:

- Christ is the pure bread from heaven (John 6:51).
- Receiving the bread becomes a union with Christ's purity and healing presence.

Thus, the feast takes on a sacramental dimension in Christian tradition: a tangible link between Jesus' sacrifice, His body, and the fellowship of the church.

Foreshadowing Eschatological Salvation

In the New Testament, the feast also points forward: just as Israel left Egypt in haste, God's people will one day be fully delivered through Christ's return. John describes the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21, with the vision of the New Jerusalem.

"He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' These words are faithful and true." (Rev. 21:5)

The themes of Passover and the unleavened bread—exodus, purification, and new beginnings—point toward ultimate salvation.

Christ as the Ultimate Exodus

In Luke 9:31, Jesus' coming "exodus" in Jerusalem—His death and resurrection—is mentioned.

This connects the events with the original Exodus and brings the feast's symbolism into Christian eschatology.

In the Christian church, the feast is not merely a historical tradition; it becomes a living theology, experienced through Jesus Christ, His work, and among His people, the church.

Church Growth

From twelve to 120, then another 3,000. The believers' fellowship, miracles, and signs—all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Growth continued with another 5,000 added to the congregations, especially in Jerusalem and Antioch.

The house church in Caesarea, hosted by the officer Cornelius, opened new paths for spreading the Gospel. Growth was remarkable despite persecution and executions.

The Jerusalem congregation now recognized the potential of Barnabas and Saul (Paul) and decided to send them to Cyprus. Another trusted member of the congregation was appointed: John, called Mark.

According to tradition, this is **John Mark**, the author of the shortest of the four Gospels in the New Testament. Acts mentions "John, who was called Mark" multiple times (Acts 12:12, 12:25; 13:5, 13; 15:37–39). He was also related to Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). Paul and Peter mention a Mark as a co-worker (Col. 4:10, 2 Tim. 4:11, 1 Pet. 5:13).

Mark was apparently also Peter's secretary and interpreter, recording his sermons, which later became the Gospel of Mark. Many scholars believe this is plausible, as the

combination of names (John/Mark) is unusual, and his Roman-Jewish background aligns with the style of the Gospel. Other scholars suggest it could have been another Mark, since the Gospel is technically anonymous and the connection was made later.

Missionary Sending from Antioch

In the Antioch congregation, trusted prophets and teachers were active. Simon, Lucius, and Manaen, during the congregation's prayer gathering, experienced the Lord's guidance through the Holy Spirit, instructing them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a mission.

With the laying on of hands and prayer, they were sent to Cyprus.

They departed from the port city of Seleucia on the Mediterranean coast, about thirty kilometres northwest of the mouth of the Orontes River, near the modern village of Samandağ in Turkey.



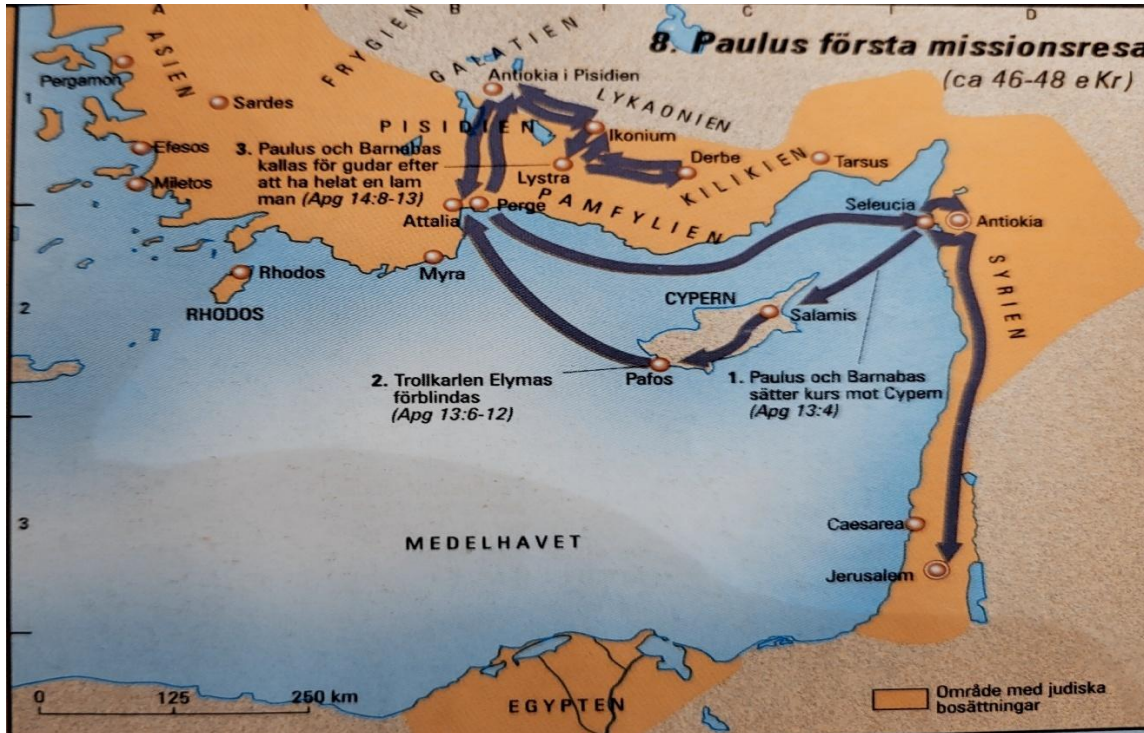
Missionary Work on Cyprus

On Cyprus, Barnabas and Paul preached in the synagogues on the eastern side of the island, in Salamis, and on the western side, in Paphos. There they encountered the proconsul of the city, Sergius Paulus. He was very interested in the gospel of Jesus Christ, but the missionaries also faced opposition from the sorcerer Bar-Jesus.

Paul confronted the sorcerer, and he was temporarily blinded. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on Bar-Jesus and said:

“You son of the devil, full of all deceit and trickery! Will you never stop perverting the straight ways of the Lord? You will be blind for a time and unable to see the sun.” (Acts 13:10–11)

When the proconsul saw this, he realized that the power of the Lord was near, and he came to faith. The text does not mention baptism, which usually followed the confession of faith, comparable, for example, to Peter's preaching in Cornelius' house.



From Cyprus to Pamphylia

Barnabas and Paul left Paphos, Cyprus, and sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, a region in southern Asia Minor—modern-day southern Turkey, roughly between Lycaonia and Cilicia, along the Mediterranean, about 30 kilometres from today's tourist city of Antalya.

Mark desired to return home to Jerusalem, later causing a controversy between the two, which eventually led to a split.

The missionary journey continued to **Antioch in Pisidia**. This city should not be confused with Antioch on the Orontes River (today's Antakya in Turkey), where believers were first called Christians. Antioch in Pisidia is near modern Yalvaç in Isparta Province, Turkey.

Before arriving, Paul and Barnabas had to travel at least 160 kilometres over rough terrain and dangerous roads. Paul later writes of such experiences in 2 Corinthians 11:26, mentioning dangers of various kinds—likely referring to journeys like this one from Perga.

The city they visited was the seat of the proconsul, a centre of Greek culture, Roman power, and Jewish religiosity. Naturally, they went to the synagogue, and after the reading, Paul asked if anyone had a message of encouragement to share with the people.

Paul's First Sermon in Pisidian Antioch

Paul spoke boldly and performed signs to show he had a message. He delivered a typical rabbinic-style sermon:

1. Israel's History and God's Plan (Acts 13:16–25)

- Paul addressed “men of Israel and you God-fearing men,” two categories of listeners.
- He recounted God's actions in Israel's history: the Exodus from Egypt, time in the wilderness, God's judges, and the monarchy, culminating in David.
- The point: God is not distant; He acts concretely in history, pointing forward to the Messiah.

2. Jesus as the Fulfilment and the People's Rejection (Acts 13:25–31)

- Paul identified Jesus as coming “to us,” historically from David's line, prepared by John the Baptist.
- Jesus preached and performed miracles, yet the people of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize Him and handed Him over to death.
- Central point: death was not the end—God raised Him, proving Jesus is the Messiah and fulfilling God's promises.

3. Resurrection and Prophetic Witness (Acts 13:26–37)

- Paul referenced prophetic writings (e.g., Psalms 2 and 16:10) to show the resurrection was foretold.
- The resurrection confirms Jesus as Lord and Messiah, demonstrating God's victory rather than a tragic death.

4. Forgiveness Offered and Warning Against Rejection (Acts 13:38–41)

- Through Jesus, forgiveness of sins is offered—not by the works of the law but through faith.
- Paul emphasized the contrast: the law reveals sin but cannot fully justify; Jesus provides true reconciliation.

This message led many to experience the power of God's conversion.

Reaction in Antioch of Pisidia

The following Sabbath, the people wanted Barnabas and Paul to continue teaching about Jesus as Savior. The Jews opposed this, mocking and disputing the message, but Paul and Barnabas boldly continued preaching. They warned that they would now turn to the Gentiles if the Jews rejected the message.

The Gentiles were delighted and praised the visiting brothers. In this way, God's Word about Jesus spread throughout the city. However, the Jews, dissatisfied, conspired with the devout women and leading men in the city to expel Paul and Barnabas.

Following Jesus' teaching, they shook the dust off their feet as a protest against the city's leadership and left. They left behind the message of Jesus with joy and spiritual power. Apostolic suffering often strengthened the courage and boldness of new Christians; even when alone and abandoned, the early believers received greater power from the Holy Spirit.

Continuing to Iconium

Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples left Antioch in Pisidia and travelled to **Iconium**, modern-day Konya in Turkey, one of the largest cities in the Anatolian region.

Perfect! Here's the continuation in English, covering **Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe**:

Missionary Work in Iconium

Paul and Barnabas entered **Iconium**, a major city in Lycaonia (modern Konya, Turkey). As in previous cities, they first went to the synagogue on the Sabbath.

- **Preaching and Signs:** Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly, explaining that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promises. They also performed signs and wonders, demonstrating God's power and confirming their message. Many Jews and Gentiles believed, and the city was divided.
- **Opposition Arises:** Some Jews opposed them, stirring up hostility among the people. They plotted to stone the missionaries, but Paul and Barnabas learned of the plot and fled to continue their mission elsewhere (Acts 14:1–6).

The pattern is clear: God’s Word spreads, miracles confirm the message, yet opposition follows. The early missionaries relied on the Spirit and courage, often escaping danger by God’s guidance.

Missionary Work in Lystra

Next, Paul and Barnabas travelled to **Lystra**, another city in Lycaonia. Here, several remarkable events occur:

1. Healing of a Lame Man:

- In Lystra, Paul saw a man who had been lame from birth. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul said:

“Stand up on your feet!” (Acts 14:10)

- The man immediately walked. The people were amazed and thought the missionaries were gods in human form. They called Barnabas “Zeus” and Paul “Hermes” because he was the chief speaker.

2. Clarifying the Gospel:

- Paul and Barnabas quickly corrected them, emphasizing that they were merely human servants of the living God. They directed the people to turn from idolatry to the one true God, who made heaven and earth (Acts 14:15–17).

3. Opposition and Persecution:

- Jews from Antioch and Iconium followed them to Lystra, inciting the crowd. Paul was stoned and left for dead, but God preserved his life. He and Barnabas continued their mission the next day.
- **Lessons:** The miraculous signs inspired faith, but human misunderstanding and hostility were constant. Paul and Barnabas’ courage and reliance on the Holy Spirit enabled them to persevere.

Missionary Work in Derbe

After leaving Lystra, they travelled to **Derbe**, the furthest city on this missionary route:

- **Preaching and Discipleship:** In Derbe, many people came to faith. Paul and Barnabas taught and strengthened the believers. This city became a model for early Christian growth, as the disciples were nurtured in faith and fellowship.

- **Returning Through the Cities:** After Derbe, Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia, encouraging new believers, appointing elders in each church, and strengthening the community in the faith (Acts 14:21–23).

Key Themes from This Missionary Journey

Spread of the Gospel:

- From Cyprus to Pamphylia, Lycaonia, and beyond, the message of Jesus reached Jews and Gentiles alike.
- Miracles and the Holy Spirit confirmed the truth of the message.

Opposition as a Constant:

- Wherever Paul and Barnabas went, there was resistance—from local Jews, city leaders, or misunderstanding by Gentiles.
- Despite persecution, the missionaries pressed forward, demonstrating courage and obedience to God.

The Role of the Holy Spirit:

- The Spirit guided them to the right cities, empowered their preaching, and performed miracles through them.
- Discipleship and community-building were Spirit-led, not solely human effort.

Discipleship and Leadership:

- They appointed elders in each church, showing the importance of leadership, spiritual care, and continuity in new congregations.
- This helped ensure that faith survived persecution and continued to grow.

The Trust of the Congregations

Because Silas represented Jerusalem, he was able to build bridges between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

Willingness to Suffer

Silas showed a readiness to suffer for the sake of the gospel (for example, the imprisonment in Philippi, Acts 16:19–25).

Ability to Work Together

After the conflict with Barnabas, Paul needed a reliable coworker, and Silas proved himself faithful.

Silas continued to be an important and close coworker to Paul during the second missionary journey. He is later mentioned in Paul's letters (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:19). Peter also refers to Silvanus as a faithful brother (1 Peter 5:12), which shows the broad trust he enjoyed in the early church.

In summary, we can understand why Paul chose Silas: he was spiritually mature, theologically trustworthy, recognized by the Jerusalem church, willing to suffer for the gospel, and a bridge-builder in a divided church.

Silas thus became a key figure as Paul continued his mission to “lose his life for the sake of the gospel”—a theme that harmonizes well with Jesus' words in Matthew 10:39.

We hear nothing more about Barnabas in the book of Acts after this conflict, but Paul does mention him in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:6), where Paul speaks about the freedom of the apostolic ministry.



Timothy Joins the Mission

The visits to Lystra and Derbe increased. Here Paul met his son in the faith, **Timothy**. Paul suggested that Timothy should accompany him on the journeys.

Timothy was a Jewish Christian whose mother was Eunice and whose grandmother was Lois (2 Tim 1:5), while his father was a Greek. Since the missionary journey would take place among Jews, Paul considered it best that Timothy be circumcised, which was done. Otherwise, they would not have been granted access to the synagogues they planned to visit.

Timothy's circumcision was necessary due to the circumstances they were facing. It did not mean that he was subjected to the rituals of the Mosaic Law; he was already justified through faith in Christ. The reason he had not been circumcised earlier, despite having a Jewish mother, may have been that his father was a Gentile Greek.

Their mission included informing the congregations about the decisions made by the church in Jerusalem.

Guidance by the Holy Spirit

It was crucial that the missionaries were fully guided by the Holy Spirit. When they did not receive clear direction, they travelled elsewhere, as happened when they planned to go to Asia—a Roman province. Instead, they travelled through Mysia to Troas. There, the Spirit revealed guidance during the night.

Paul did not see an angel, but he saw a man from **Macedonia**, urging them to come over and proclaim the gospel.

The text gives us an interesting insight here. Luke was certainly present in Troas, since he begins writing in the “we” form starting in Acts 16:10. Paul may have met Luke earlier in the church in Antioch and perhaps Luke had accompanied them all the way to Troas.

Journey to Europe – Philippi

The next mission was to travel from Troas to **Philippi** in Macedonia. They sailed first to Samothrace and then to Neapolis (“the new city,” modern-day Kavala), where they stayed for several days along the southern coastline with few harbours.

The journey took only two days, which indicates that they had favourable winds—God's wind, the wind of the Holy Spirit. The return journey, however, took five days (Acts 20:6). There is a spiritually instructive thought in this: the timing of the journey aligned with the Spirit's guidance and message.

They arrived on a Saturday. Since it was the Sabbath, they could not pass through the city gates. Paul and his companions followed a foreign religion and therefore gathered by the **Gangites River** west of the city for private Sabbath prayer.

In Philippi there were few Jews, and no synagogue, which they normally visited when entering a new city. Because there was no synagogue, the Gentile Christian Luke could participate. The Greek Orthodox Church has marked the prayer place by the river with a baptistery, which can still be visited today to celebrate a thanksgiving service marking the first arrival of the gospel in Europe.

Lydia and the Birth of the Church in Philippi

There were women gathered there, and the apostles began preaching to them and explaining their presence in the city. One of the women was **Lydia**, a businesswoman who dealt in purple cloth. She was likely from the neighbouring city of **Thyatira**, a well-known industrial city in Lydia in Asia Minor.

She was a God-fearer, and with an open heart she received the message about Jesus. Lydia and her household were baptized, and she invited the apostles to stay in her home.

A church was established in Philippi, which we later read about in the letter bearing that name. Luke apparently remained in the city when Paul moved on.

The Slave Girl and the Imprisonment

They continued to gather at the place of prayer, which everyone knew. A slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination brought great profit to her owners. She was possessed by the Python spirit associated with Delphi, which was considered a symbol of wisdom.

It was common that those possessed reacted strongly when encountering someone filled with the Holy Spirit, often crying out (Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7). The apostles recognized the unclean spirit.

What the girl said was true: “These men are servants of the Most High God.” She shouted this after Paul many times, until Paul became greatly disturbed and said to her, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!” The spirit obeyed and left her.

God’s power was manifested before the people as the girl became silent, turning her into a testimony of God’s power through the visiting apostles.

When the men who had profited from her divination realized that their income was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the city magistrates, accusing them of disturbing public order in Philippi.

The crowd attacked them, and they were flogged, stripped, and thrown into prison with their feet fastened in stocks and their hands bound. They were cast into the inner prison, where no light entered—it was cold and damp. Archaeological excavations in Philippi have uncovered the prison with its multiple cells and a residence for the jailer.

The Miracle in Prison

At midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Then a miracle occurred. God was with them, and a great earthquake shook the prison foundations. The doors opened, and the chains fell off Paul and Silas.

When the jailer saw what had happened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, knowing that Roman law required a jailer to suffer the punishment of escaped prisoners.

Paul cried out, “Do not harm yourself! We are all here!” The jailer then realized that these were God’s apostles whom he had imprisoned and cried out, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household,” Paul replied.

The jailer washed their wounds, and immediately his entire household was baptized.

Rejoicing, they went to inform the magistrates of what had happened. Paul and Silas demanded that the magistrates come themselves, since they had been beaten and imprisoned without trial—despite being Roman citizens.

When the magistrates learned that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. Roman law stated: *“To imprison a Roman citizen is a crime. To flog him is an outrage. To kill him—there are no words for it.”* This quote comes from Cicero, written centuries before Christ.

The officials were frightened and urged the brothers to leave the city.

Lessons from Philippi

Paul and Silas teach us important lessons:

- not to protest immediately,
- to sing praises and pray in times of distress,
- not to flee or seek revenge,
- but still to demand justice and restoration (Acts 16:37).

They then went to thank Lydia and her household for their hospitality before leaving the city.

Here it is clearly marked that the gospel had now been preached in **Europe**. Luke likely remained in Philippi as a servant and leader of the new church.

Acts 17



Paul, Silas, and Timothy now travelled on to Amphipolis, which lies by the River Strymon. They then continued about 50 kilometres to Apollonia, Berea, and finally the same distance again to their destination. They followed the Via Egnatia, the great Roman highway. Amphipolis and Apollonia were natural stopping points along the road, but there were no synagogues in these cities. Paul usually began his work in the synagogue, and if none existed, they may have chosen not to stay.

Their destination was Thessalonica, the capital and residence city of the Roman governor in Macedonia—a large and influential city where the gospel could gain wider spread.

Dust swirled around their sandals as they reached Thessalonica, a lively commercial city that had a synagogue. This was usually Paul's first place to visit, in order to make himself known and establish new contacts among the Jews. For three Sabbaths he reasoned with them, explaining the Scriptures. He showed that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and that Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for.

Some were persuaded—both Jews and many God-fearing Greeks, as well as several influential women. In Thessalonica, women also held an important position, just as Lydia and her household had in Philippi. It seems that many of those who “feared God” (1 Thess. 1:9) were Gentiles, and many were probably women. Leading women played a significant role in the congregation, and the freer status women had in Macedonia was greater than in many other places. Ordinary workers and craftsmen were also among the first Christians in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 4:11).

But not everyone listened with open hearts. Jealousy grew among some of the Jews, and they gathered a mob that stirred up unrest in the city. They accused Paul and his companions of “turning the world upside down” and of proclaiming another king instead of Caesar—namely, Jesus.

Paul and Silas managed to escape, but their host Jason was brought before the city authorities. To protect the brothers, the believers sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. Timothy took part in the work and strengthened the new believers.

In Berea they were received very differently. The people there were open and eager to listen, and they examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true. Many believed—both Jews and Greeks, women and men.

But trouble followed them. When the opponents in Thessalonica heard what was happening in Berea, they came there and stirred up the crowds. For Paul's safety, he was sent on toward the coast, while Silas and Timothy stayed behind to strengthen the new believers.

Paul in Athens

As Paul travelled through Greece, he came to the city of Athens, a place filled with culture, philosophy, and religion. Athens was known for its many temples, altars, and statues dedicated to various gods. As Paul walked through the city and saw how the people worshiped many different deities, he felt a deep distress in his spirit because they did not know the true God.

He began speaking in the synagogue with the Jews and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Soon philosophers began to debate with him, especially Epicureans and Stoics, who grew curious about him.

They wondered what this stranger had to say and brought him to the Areopagus, the city's council place, where new ideas were often discussed. There they questioned him: "What is this new teaching you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean."

Paul then addressed the men of Athens with respect but also with clarity. He said that he had noticed how very religious they were in every way. He had even found an altar with the inscription: "*To an unknown god.*"

Starting from this point, he explained that the God they worshiped without knowing Him was the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth. This God does not live in temples built by human hands, nor is He served as if He needed anything from us. He Himself gives life and breath to everyone.

Paul continued: God has determined the times and boundaries of all nations so that they might seek Him, perhaps grope for Him and find Him—though He is actually not far from any one of us. "For in Him we live and move and have our being." He even quoted some of their own poets, who had said, "We are also His offspring."

Paul explained that God has now revealed His will through a man whom He raised from the dead—Jesus Christ. Through Him, the world will one day be judged with righteousness.

When Paul mentioned the resurrection of the dead, some mocked him, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” Despite the mixed reactions, some believed, among them Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and several others.

Both Stoicism and Epicureanism were influential philosophical schools that arose in ancient Athens during the Hellenistic period (after Alexander the Great), roughly around the 3rd century BC. Both focused on how to achieve a good life or peace of soul, but they approached this goal in very different ways.

Stoicism was founded by Zeno of Citium (c. 333–262 BC). The name comes from the *Stoa Poikile*, a colonnade in Athens where Zeno taught. Its main principle was to live in harmony with nature and the rational order of the universe (*Logos*). The highest good was virtue—wisdom, justice, courage, and self-control—which alone was truly good. External circumstances such as wealth, health, or pain were considered indifferent (neither good nor bad in themselves). Inner peace was achieved through *apatheia*—freedom from destructive emotions such as anger, fear, and excessive desire—leading to calm and self-mastery. The goal was to control one’s own judgments and reactions, not external events.

Epicureanism was founded by Epicurus (341–270 BC). His school often met in his garden (*Kēpos*) in Athens. The main principle was that pleasure is the highest good—not in the sense of indulgence or excess (as the word “epicurean” later came to imply), but rather as freedom from physical pain (*aponia*) and freedom from mental distress (*ataraxia*). The highest good was peace of mind, achieved through a simple life, moderation, and reason. Epicureans strongly emphasized the value of friendship and community as essential sources of lasting joy. Their view of the gods and death was materialistic (atomistic): people should not fear the gods (who were thought not to concern themselves with human affairs) nor fear death (“when we exist, death is not; when death exists, we are not”).

The two schools were rivals in ancient Greece. In fact, the apostle Paul encountered philosophers from both schools when he preached in Athens.

From Corinth to Antioch

Paul’s next journey took him to Antioch, accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla. From the port city of Cenchreae, they sailed toward Syria. Paul had previously taken a Nazirite vow, which involved shaving his head, something he did there. The Nazirite vow is described in Numbers 6:1–21 and had to be completed before returning to Jerusalem.

When they came to Ephesus, Paul left Priscilla and Aquila there and went into the synagogue to reason with the Jews. Ephesus was a regional capital with nearly 400,000 inhabitants and was well known for the worship of Diana (Artemis). The Augusteum was a large sanctuary dedicated to emperor worship.

The people wanted Paul to stay longer in Ephesus, but he declined, saying he would return if it was God's will. He then travelled to Caesarea, greeted the church there, and went on to Antioch. How long Paul stayed in Antioch on this occasion is unknown.

We traditionally divide Paul's journeys into three missionary journeys. Toward the end of chapter 18 we come to the last of these. After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out again through Galatia (in modern-day Turkey, where Ankara is located) and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Paul then sensed that he should visit Ephesus again. The journey from Antioch to Ephesus was about 1,000 kilometres and likely took more than three weeks. In Ephesus, Paul encountered a learned man from Alexandria named Apollos. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and spoke with great fervor, teaching accurately about Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He preached boldly in the synagogue. Priscilla and Aquila heard him and explained the way of God more accurately to him.

Apollos wanted to cross over to Achaia, and with the encouragement of Priscilla and Aquila, he was received there. His powerful and convincing preaching was well received by the Jews.



Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19)

Paul now arrived in Ephesus by the inland route, a city already familiar to him. There he met about twelve disciples. His first important question to them was whether they had received the Holy Spirit when they came to faith. They replied that they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit but had only been baptized with John's baptism of repentance.

Paul instructed them, and they were baptized in the name of Jesus. Then Paul laid his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them. They spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Paul then went into the synagogue, where he spoke boldly for three months, reasoning with the people and persuading them about the kingdom of God. Some, however, became stubborn and spoke evil of the Way before the whole assembly. Paul withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. Even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and evil spirits left them. At the same time, some Jewish exorcists attempted to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed, but they failed.

The spiritual realm is not something to toy with. The flesh and the Spirit are always in conflict. This struggle was clearly manifested in Ephesus, but the Spirit of God proved stronger than the flesh.

When the people heard what had happened, fear fell upon them, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Those who practiced magic brought their books together and burned them publicly. The value of the books was equivalent to 150 years' wages. In this way, the word of the Lord spread powerfully and prevailed.

The Riot in Ephesus

The background to the riot in Ephesus can be traced to three main causes: power, religion, and economics.

Ephesus was one of the largest and most important cities in Asia Minor. It was a major religious center for the worship of Artemis (Diana), famous for its massive temple—one

of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The city's economy depended heavily on this cult, especially through the sale of small silver shrines and statues.

Paul had ministered in Ephesus for nearly three years, longer than in most other places. The gospel had made a strong impact: many people had converted, magic books were burned publicly, and idol worship was openly questioned. This created tension not only religiously, but economically.

Paul decided to travel on through Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem, and afterward to Rome. This marked a turning point in the narrative. Paul was preparing to leave, but before he did, a crisis erupted.

The craftsmen saw their livelihood threatened. A silversmith named Demetrius gathered his fellow workers. He made silver shrines of Artemis—souvenirs and cult objects. His argument was shrewd: “You know that we receive a good income from this business.” Paul was teaching that “gods made by human hands are no gods at all.”

The riot exploded (Acts 19:28–34). The people became furious and shouted, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” The city was filled with confusion, and the crowd rushed into the theatre, which likely held about 25,000 people.

Two of Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, were seized and dragged along. Paul himself wanted to enter and address the crowd, but the disciples restrained him. Even some Roman officials (Asiarchs) warned him not to risk his life. Most of the people in the crowd did not even know why they were there.

This demonstrates how mass hysteria and religious nationalism can easily take over.

A Jew named Alexander attempted to speak to the crowd, probably to distance the Jews from Paul. But as soon as they realized he was Jewish, they shouted for two hours, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

Eventually reason prevailed. The city clerk, a Roman administrative official (Acts 19:35–41), stepped forward and reminded the people that Artemis was not under threat—everyone knew that Ephesus was her city. Paul and his companions were not criminals and had neither robbed temples nor blasphemed the goddess. He warned the crowd that unlawful riots could result in severe punishment from Rome.

Lessons from the Riot in Ephesus

From the riot in Ephesus, we can draw several important lessons:

The gospel shakes societal structures. Christianity is not presented as violent, but it challenges values, economic systems, and power structures. Idols need to be defended—the living God does not. Artemis had to be defended with shouting and

violence. The gospel spreads through words, transformed lives, and truth. Economic interests are often disguised as piety; Demetrius spoke about religion but was driven by money.

God protects His work, even through unexpected people. It was not an apostle, but a pagan official, who brought the riot to an end.

Reflections for the Church Today

- What “idols” exist in our culture today?
- How does Paul’s way of acting differ from that of the crowd?
- How can we stand firm without becoming aggressive?
- What does the text teach us about God’s control during chaos?

Acts 20 – The Costly Way

After the riot in Ephesus, things grow quieter, but the seriousness deepens. Paul understands that his time there has come to an end. The gospel has taken root, but the resistance has shown how costly and dangerous the way can be.

Now the journey continues to Macedonia and Greece. Paul leaves Ephesus and travels north through Macedonia. He visits the churches there, encouraging, exhorting, and strengthening them. His words are many, and his presence matters. He knows that he may not return.

Eventually he reaches Greece, most likely Corinth, where he stays for three months. But the threat remains. A conspiracy forces him to change his plans. Instead of sailing directly, he returns by land through Macedonia. With him is a small group of men from different cities and peoples. The church is no longer a local movement; it has become a network of lives, languages, and cultures, united by the same Lord.

In the city of Troas, the believers gather on the first day of the week, Sunday, to break bread and share the Lord’s Supper. Paul speaks to them—and he speaks for a long time. He knows this will be his last visit. Lamps are burning in the upstairs room. The air is warm. A young man named Eutychus is sitting in the window. Weariness overtakes him. He falls asleep, falls from the third floor, and is picked up dead. Shock spreads through the gathering.

But Paul goes down to the young man, bends over him, embraces him, and says, “Do not be alarmed. He is alive.” And he truly is alive. The congregation goes back upstairs. They break bread again. Paul continues speaking until dawn. The night turns into life, and grief into comfort.

Paul then walks alone to Assos, while the others travel by ship. Perhaps he needed silence. Perhaps prayer. Perhaps preparation. He presses on, determined to reach Jerusalem before Pentecost.

Something awaits him there. He does not know exactly what, but he knows that suffering lies ahead—and still he goes.

In Miletus, Paul sends for the elders of the church in Ephesus. He dares not return there, but he will not leave them without a final word. He now speaks no longer as a missionary, but as a father taking farewell. He reminds them of his humility, his tears, his perseverance, and that he has proclaimed the whole will of God. He says, “My life is worth nothing to me, except that I may finish my course.”

He warns them that false teachers will come, even from among their own number. And he leaves them with his legacy:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

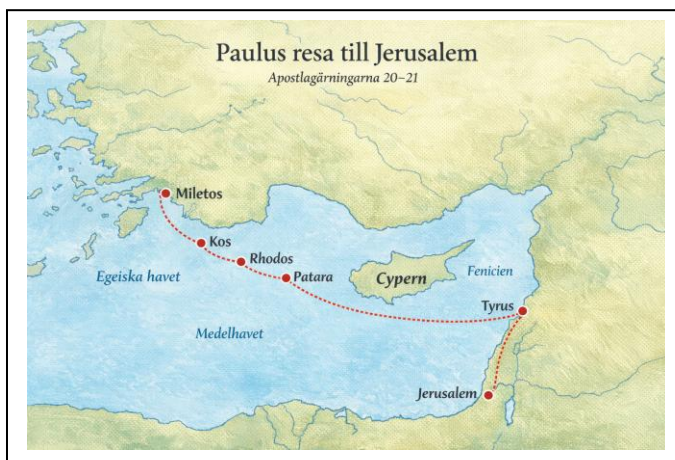
Tears, Knees, and a Final Farewell (Acts 20:36–38)

They kneel together. Paul prays with them. They all break down and weep, embracing Paul and kissing him. They know that they will never see his face again.

They accompany him to the ship. No one knows how the journey will end—but they know to whom they belong.

Acts 20 is not primarily about miracles. It is about faithfulness, relationships, perseverance, leadership that costs, and love that dares to let go. It is a chapter about moving forward when the heart longs to stay.

Toward Jerusalem



The voyage continued past Kos, Rhodes, Patara, Phoenicia, and on toward Syria, finally arriving at Tyre. Paul and his traveling companions sought out the disciples there and stayed in Tyre for seven days.

This forms the background to why Paul would later be brought before the Great Council (the Sanhedrin) in Jerusalem.

When Paul finally arrived in Jerusalem, he was at first received positively by the church (Acts 21:17–20). However, tension was high. Paul was well known for preaching to the

Gentiles, and rumours spread that he was teaching Jews to abandon the Law of Moses. At this time, Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims.

Despite precautions, a riot broke out in the temple. Jews from Asia accused Paul of teaching against the people, the Law, and the temple, and of bringing Gentiles into the temple—an accusation that was not true. The crowd attempted to kill him, but ironically it was Roman soldiers who saved his life.

Paul was granted permission to speak to the people, and he addressed them in Hebrew (Aramaic). He told them about his life as a Pharisee, his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, and the mission God had given him—to proclaim Jesus crucified, dead, and risen to the Gentiles.

Before the Sanhedrin – A Trial That Falls Apart (*Acts 22:30–23:10*)

Paul opened his defence boldly:

“Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.”

This provoked the high priest Ananias, who ordered that Paul be struck on the mouth.

Paul responded sharply, only to be reminded that he was speaking to the high priest.

Realizing who made up the council—Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, and Pharisees, who believed in it—Paul cried out:

“It is for the hope of the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial!”

The council immediately split, and a violent dispute broke out. Some Pharisees even defended Paul, saying, “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”

Once again, the Romans intervened and took Paul into protective custody.

God’s Word in the Night (*Acts 23:11*)

That night, the Lord Himself stood by Paul and said:

“Take courage. As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

This marked a turning point. God had not abandoned Paul. Imprisonment was not a failure. The journey must continue—toward Rome.

Lessons We Learn

Religious leadership can become blind power. The council, meant to guard the Law, violated it themselves. God even uses chaos—the division within the council saved Paul’s life.

Paul was not called to win a trial, but to bear witness. He defended himself without compromising his faith. God confirms His calling in dark moments. Jesus speaks not when everything is going well, but when Paul is alone and threatened.

Human justice fails, but God’s plan stands firm.

The Sanhedrin was meant to be legally, theologically, and morally guiding—but in Paul’s

case he was judged in advance, struck without trial, slandered, and silenced. Formal justice existed; true justice did not.

The Voice of Conscience Today – Paul as Our Example

Paul says, “I have lived before God with a good conscience.”

He says this before his enemies, without any guarantee of justice and without knowing the outcome.

Conscience is not the voice of the majority—it is the voice of God.

In our time, conscience is pressured to conform. “Do not offend” replaces “Is it true?”

Inner conviction is seen as a threat to unity. Paul teaches us that freedom of conscience is the right not to lie—even when it costs us.

Faith today is often accepted as a private feeling, but questioned when it shapes ethics, actions, and teaching. Religious freedom is hollowed out when belief is allowed to exist but not to influence life.

Paul is not condemned for a crime, but for disturbing religious order, challenging interpretations, and refusing to compromise on the resurrection.

In our time, faith becomes problematic when it cannot be controlled, does not follow dominant narratives, or insists on absolute truth.

Wisdom without cowardice becomes Paul’s strategy. He uses his Roman citizenship to divide the council lawfully, without denying his faith. This teaches us to stand up for our legal rights while never selling our convictions.

God’s word in the night gave Paul hope beyond Roman law. He was not promised freedom, but purpose. Christian freedom is greater than legal freedom.

Escort to Caesarea

After the commander rescued Paul from the mob that intended to kill him, Paul’s nephew learned of a deadly plot by the Jews to assassinate him. The commander arranged for Paul to be transferred to Caesarea under heavy guard: two hundred infantry soldiers, seventy cavalrymen, and two hundred spearmen—a total of 470 soldiers.

Under cover of darkness, the escort left Jerusalem at nine in the evening. This shows how serious the situation had become. Paul was provided with animals to ride so that he would not be harmed along the way. The journey from Jerusalem to Caesarea was about 120 kilometres. Several animals were included so they could be changed during the journey. Paul likely had baggage with him, and Luke may also have been part of the escort.

A letter accompanied Paul, explaining why he had been rescued from lynching—namely, that he was a Roman citizen. This was the last time Paul left Jerusalem.

The large escort stopped at Antipatris, about 40 kilometres from Caesarea. Such a strong guard was necessary because Paul was considered a political prisoner; the authorities feared riots in Jerusalem.

Before Felix in Caesarea (*Acts 24*)

Paul was delivered safely to the governor Felix. The first standard question was which province Paul came from. When Felix learned that he was from Cilicia, he said he would hear the case when the accusers arrived. Paul was placed under guard in Herod's palace.

Five days later, the high priest Ananias arrived with the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, who presented the charges against Paul—following the same legal procedure Jesus had faced before Pilate (Luke 23).

During Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, it was possible for members of the church to visit him. This was the place where Peter had earlier met the Roman officer Cornelius and where God, through the Holy Spirit, made it clear that no one should be excluded from the gospel—Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female—all are one in Christ Jesus.

Tertullus accused Paul on three counts: that he was a dangerous agitator, a threat to Jewish law and order, a leader of the sect of the Nazarenes, and that he attempted to desecrate the temple. The first accusation implied treason against Caesar; the others concerned Jewish matters. This is the only place in the New Testament where Christians are officially called "Nazarenes" (Acts 24:22).

Paul's Defence (*Acts 24:10–21*)

Paul spoke calmly and clearly. He acknowledged Felix's experience as a judge—without flattery. He presented facts: he had been in Jerusalem only twelve days, had not started riots, taught against the Law, or desecrated the temple. The accusations lacked evidence.

He openly confessed his faith in "the Way," affirming his belief in the Law and the Prophets and in the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. At the heart of his message was always the resurrection of Jesus.

This led him to strive for a clear conscience before God and people. Conscience is not infallible, but when illuminated by the Holy Spirit, it must be heeded.

Paul explained that he had come to Jerusalem to deliver gifts to the Jewish believers and to worship in the temple—gifts that symbolized unity between Gentile and Jewish Christians. He was there in purity and peace, not to incite unrest.

The true accusers—Jews from Asia—were not even present. Ultimately, the only charge was this: "It is for the hope of the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."

Felix postponed the verdict. Paul remained imprisoned but was given considerable freedom to receive visitors. Felix and his wife Drusilla later summoned Paul to hear him speak about faith in Christ, righteousness, and the coming judgment. Felix became frightened and dismissed him, secretly hoping for a bribe. This continued for two years. During this time, Luke likely wrote his Gospel while staying near Paul.

Appeal to Caesar (*Acts 25*)

Felix was eventually recalled to Rome after unrest in the province. His brother Pallas intervened to protect him from punishment. Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, who was regarded as a capable and just governor and was appointed by Emperor Nero around AD 60.

Festus travelled to Jerusalem to hear the charges against Paul. The chief priests wanted Paul transferred to Jerusalem, but Festus refused and insisted the trial take place in Caesarea.

When Paul was brought before the tribunal, Festus asked whether he wished to stand trial in Jerusalem. Paul answered:

“If I am guilty and have done anything deserving death, I am ready to die. But if the charges are false, no one has the right to hand me over. I appeal to Caesar.”

After consulting his council, Festus declared:

“You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you shall go.” (*Acts 25:12*)

1. Introduction

The work of the Holy Spirit forms the central thread throughout the history of Christianity, from the early disciples in Jerusalem to contemporary Pentecostal and charismatic movements. This chapter traces the development of Spirit-led mission, examining biblical foundations, early church praxis, historical expansions, and the transformative impact of Pentecostalism and charismatic renewal in the Nordic and global contexts.

It also engages critically with the theological and missiological implications of Spirit-empowered mission, considering both historical continuity and contemporary adaptation.

2. Biblical Foundations: The Holy Spirit in the Gospels and Acts

2.1 Promises of the Spirit in the Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels and John consistently highlight the role of the Spirit in Jesus' ministry and the preparation of disciples:

- Matthew: Emphasizes the Spirit as empowering presence (Matt 3:11; 10:19–20; 28:18–20).

- Mark: Focuses on Spirit-empowered service (Mark 1:8; 13:11).
- Luke: Emphasizes guidance, joy, and empowerment (Luke 3:16; 11:13; 24:49).
- John: Highlights the Spirit as Paraclete and sustaining presence (John 3:5–8; 14:16–17; 20:22).

These passages establish the theological framework for understanding the Spirit as both a guide and an enabler of mission.

2.2 Pentecost: The Birth of the Church

Acts 2 describes the culmination of Jesus' promises with the outpouring of the Spirit on the disciples during Shavuot (Pentecost). The event highlights:

- Multicultural witness: Disciples spoke in tongues corresponding to the native languages of the gathered crowd (Acts 2:9–11).
- Missional empowerment: Peter's sermon (Acts 2:14–36) interprets the events in light of Joel 2:28–32, linking prophetic fulfilment to Christ-centred mission.
- Community praxis: Converts were baptized, shared resources, and committed to prayer and teaching (Acts 2:41–47), modelling holistic mission.

3. The Early Jerusalem Congregation: Historical and Spatial Context

3.1 The Upper Room and Apostolic Leadership

The disciples returned to Jerusalem post-ascension, gathering in the Upper Room, where they awaited Spirit empowerment (Acts 1:12–15). Key aspects include:

- Selection of Matthias to replace Judas (Acts 1:23–26), demonstrating early apostolic discernment.
- Prayerful waiting, highlighting spiritual preparation as central to mission.

3.2 Jerusalem and Its Gates

Understanding the city's topography situates the early church within its historical and cultural context. Notable gates include:

- Golden Gate (Eastern Gate): Associated with Messianic expectation.
- Beautiful/Nicanor Gate: Likely location of Peter and John healing the lame man (Acts 3:1–10).
- Other gates (Sheep, Fish, Dung, Water, etc.) provided functional and ritual access, framing the disciples' mission within the sacred and civic space of Jerusalem.

4. Theological and Missiological Reflections

The Jerusalem church demonstrates critical principles of Spirit-led mission:

- Prayerful preparation: Mission is grounded in spiritual discernment and waiting for divine empowerment.
- Prophetic continuity: Pentecost fulfils Old Testament prophecy (Joel), linking Israel's story to the global mission of Christ.
- Cross-cultural witness: The early church modelled engagement across linguistic, ethnic, and regional boundaries.
- Community praxis: Teaching, baptism, and acts of charity illustrate holistic mission.

These elements offer enduring missiological insights for contemporary mission in pluralistic and globalized contexts.

5. Historical Development: Spirit-Led Movements Post-Apostolic Era

5.1 Early Church to Reformation

- Spirit empowerment and apostolic authority guided early Christianity, maintaining unity for approximately 200 years.
- Historical schisms (451, 1054, 1517) reflected theological, linguistic, political, and cultural tensions.
- Reformers emphasized Spirit-informed interpretation of Scripture, justification by faith, and the priesthood of all believers, continuing the theme of Spirit-enabled discipleship.

5.2 Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements

The modern Spirit movement originates in the 19th century, emphasizing personal conversion, holiness, and experiential knowledge of God:

- Early Pentecostalism: Topeka (1901) and Azusa Street (1906–1909) established global revival patterns.
- Charismatic renewal in historic churches: 1960s–1970s, including Episcopal and Catholic movements, demonstrating cross-denominational adoption of Spirit empowerment.
- Global expansion: Pentecostalism and charismatic movements now encompass over 650 million adherents worldwide, significantly shaping Christianity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

5.3 Nordic Contributions

Key leaders include:

- Norway: Thomas Ball Barratt, Emanuel Minos, Aril Edvardsen, Egil Svartdahl.
- Sweden: Lewi Pethrus, Sven Lidman, Ulf Ekman, Carl-Gustaf Severin.
- Finland: Frank Mangs, Niilo Yli-Vainio, Kalevi Lehtinen.
- Denmark: Jens Peter Larsen, Johannes Facius.

These figures illustrate the regional adaptation of Spirit-led mission and the continuity of experiential spirituality.

6. Critical Missiological Discussion

Analysing the trajectory from Jerusalem to global Pentecostalism, several patterns emerge:

1. Empowerment precedes mission: Both biblical and modern movements emphasize the Spirit's primacy in enabling effective witness.
2. Contextual adaptation: Missionary activity adapts to local culture, language, and societal structure, echoing the Acts 2 model.
3. Communal and individual dynamics: Holistic mission combines public proclamation, communal support, and personal spiritual experience.
4. Challenges of institutionalization: Growth introduces tensions between charismatic spontaneity and organizational structures, as seen historically in Nordic and global Pentecostal churches.

These insights highlight a dynamic interplay between theology, ecclesial practice, and global mission strategy.

7. Conclusion

From the Upper Room in Jerusalem to contemporary global Pentecostalism, Spirit-empowered mission has consistently shaped Christian praxis. The historical narrative affirms the continuity of Spirit guidance, cross-cultural engagement, and holistic community formation. Theologically, these movements remind scholars and practitioners that mission is not solely organizational or strategic, but fundamentally Spirit-centred, transcending temporal and geographical boundaries.

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Chapter X

The Early Jerusalem Church: Pentecost, Signs, and Apostolic Mission

1. The Likely Location of the Beautiful Gate

In Acts 3, Peter and John encounter a man lame from birth at the temple gate. Scholars have debated the identity of this “Beautiful Gate,” considering two main candidates:

Possible Gate	Location	Likely Identity	Comments
Nicanor Gate	Between the Court of the Women and the Inner Court	Most likely	Richly described by Josephus as “splendid” and “beautiful.”
Golden Gate (Eastern)	Eastern wall of the Temple precinct	Possible, less likely	Too far outside the location where Peter and John entered.

The Nicanor Gate, a magnificent bronze gate leading from the Court of the Women to the inner temple court, is the most probable location for the miracle described in Acts 3.

2. The Miracle at the Beautiful Gate

While walking to the temple for prayer, Peter and John noticed a man begging at the gate. This encounter resulted in the first recorded miracle of the early church:

“I have no silver or gold, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6, NIV).

Peter took the man by the hand, and he was immediately healed. Filled with joy, he entered the temple alongside Peter and John, astonishing the onlookers. Peter explained that the healing was not by his own power but through the Holy Spirit revealed by God. Among those present were teachers of the law, temple guards, Pharisees, and Sadducees.

The impact of the miracle was immediate: around five thousand men came to faith, illustrating the power of Spirit-led witness (Acts 4:4).

3. Confrontation with the Sanhedrin

The apostles’ activities provoked the authorities. Peter and John were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter boldly declared:

“We must obey God rather than human beings” (Acts 5:29).

This demonstration of Spirit-filled courage convinced Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee, to advocate for their release, though they were flogged and forbidden to speak in Jesus’ name.

4. Growth, Prayer, and Community Life

The early church in Jerusalem responded to persecution with prayer, unity, and generosity:

- Believers sold possessions and distributed proceeds to those in need (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37).
- Daily gatherings for prayer and worship strengthened communal bonds.
- Signs and miracles continued, with Peter’s shadow healing the sick, highlighting the centrality of divine power rather than human ability.

This period demonstrates holistic mission, integrating proclamation, healing, and communal care.

5. The Appointment of the First Deacons

Acts 6 describes the selection of seven men to serve the community, particularly in distributing food to widows. These men, often regarded as the first deacons, include:

1. Stephen (Stefanos) – Filled with faith and the Holy Spirit; the first Christian martyr (Acts 7).
2. Philip – Evangelist who preached in Samaria and guided the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:5–39).
3. Procorus – Assisted John the Apostle; later tradition suggests he became Bishop of Nicomedia.
4. Nicanor – Little is known; possibly martyred in Jerusalem.
5. Timon – Likely became a bishop in Bostra (modern Syria); possibly martyred.
6. Parmenas – Tradition places him in Macedonia; martyred in Philippi.
7. Nicholas of Antioch – A proselyte representing the inclusion of Gentiles; may have been associated with the later sect called the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6, 2:14–15).

The selection of these men illustrates the early church's emphasis on Spirit-led service, organizational structure, and the integration of diverse backgrounds for effective mission.

6. Theological and Missiological Reflections

Several key insights emerge from the Jerusalem church narrative:

1. Spirit Empowerment Precedes Mission: Healing, preaching, and community formation all depend on divine enablement.
2. Faith in Action: Bold proclamation and tangible care for the needy reinforce credibility and community trust.
3. Inclusivity and Expansion: Early inclusion of proselytes foreshadows the global reach of the gospel.
4. Confrontation with Tradition: Authority and institutional norms may resist Spirit-led initiatives, highlighting the tension between innovation and established structures.

These principles provide a model for contemporary Spirit-led mission and underscore the continuity of Pentecostal/charismatic practice with the apostolic church.

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The Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Lord’s Supper

In the early church, the symbols of the feast remained alive. The bread of the Lord’s Supper still carries the meaning of the unleavened feast:

Christ is the pure bread from heaven (John 6:51). To receive the bread becomes a union with Christ’s purity and healing presence. The feast thus takes on a sacramental dimension in Christian tradition:

a tangible connection between Jesus’ sacrifice, his body, and the fellowship of the congregation.

A Foreshadowing of Eschatological Salvation

In the New Testament, the feast also gains a future-oriented meaning. Just as Israel left Egypt in haste, God’s people will one day be fully liberated through Christ’s return. John writes in Revelation 21 about the new heaven and the new earth, using the image of the New Jerusalem.

“He who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ These words are trustworthy and true” (v. 5).

The themes of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread—exodus, purification, and new beginning—point toward final salvation.

Christ as the Ultimate Exodus

In Luke 9:31, Jesus’ coming “departure” (exodus) in Jerusalem is spoken of—his death and resurrection.

This connects the events with the original Exodus and brings the symbolism of the feast into Christian eschatology.

In the Christian church, the feast thus becomes not only a historical tradition but a living experiential theology of Jesus Christ, his work, and his presence among his believing people—the congregation.

Growth of the Church

From twelve to one hundred and twenty, and then another three thousand. The fellowship of believers, signs and wonders—all through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Growth was great, and another five thousand were added to the congregations, especially in Jerusalem and Antioch. The house church in Caesarea at the home of the centurion Cornelius showed new paths for the spread of the gospel.

Growth was great despite persecution and executions.

The church in Jerusalem now saw potential in Barnabas and Saul (Paul) and decided to send them to Cyprus. Another trusted member of the church was also appointed John, who was called Mark.

According to tradition, this is the Evangelist Mark, the author of the shortest of the four Gospels in the New Testament. Acts mentions “John who was called Mark” several times (Acts 12:12, 12:25; 13:5, 13; 15:37–39). He was also related to Barnabas (Col. 4:16). Paul and Peter also mention a Mark as a coworker (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13). Mark was apparently also a secretary and interpreter for Peter and wrote down his sermons, which later became the Gospel of Mark.

Many scholars believe this is plausible, since the name combination (John/Mark) is unusual and his Roman-Jewish background fits the style of the Gospel. Other modern biblical scholars argue that the author may have been another Mark, since the Gospel is anonymous and the connection was made later.

Antioch and the Missionary Sending

In the church at Antioch, trusted prophets and teachers were active. Simon, Lucius, and Manaen experienced, during a prayer gathering, the Lord’s call through the Holy Spirit to set apart Barnabas and Saul for missionary work. With the laying on of hands and prayer, they were sent out to Cyprus.

They departed from Antioch’s port city of Seleucia, located on the Mediterranean coast about thirty kilometres northwest of the mouth of the Orontes River, near today’s coastal village of Samandağ in Turkey.

Mission on Cyprus

On Cyprus, Barnabas and Paul preached in the synagogues on the eastern side of the island in Salamis and on the western side in Paphos. There they encountered the proconsul of the city, Sergius Paulus. He was very interested in the gospel of Jesus Christ, but the missionaries met resistance from the magician Bar-Jesus.

Paul spoke up and rebuked the magician, who was struck with temporary blindness. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on Bar-Jesus and said: “You son of the devil, full of all deceit and trickery—will you never stop perverting the straight ways of the Lord? You will now be blind for a time and will not see the sun shine.”

When the proconsul saw this, he understood that the power of the Lord was present, and he came to faith (Acts 13:10–12). However, nothing is said about baptism, which was usually a consequence of confession of faith—compare, for example, Peter’s sermon in the house of Cornelius.

From Cyprus to Asia Minor

Barnabas and Paul left Paphos and sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, a region in southern Asia Minor—present-day southern Turkey along the Mediterranean coast, about thirty kilometres from today’s tourist city of Antalya.

Mark longed to return home to Jerusalem, which later proved to be due to a controversy between the brothers. The conflict later developed into a separation between them.

The mission journey continued to Antioch in Pisidia. This city should not be confused with Antioch on the Orontes River (modern Antakya in Turkey), where believers were first called Christians.

Antioch in Pisidia is also located in present-day Turkey, near today’s Yalvaç in the province of Isparta.

Before reaching the city from Perga, they had to walk at least 160 kilometers through rough and dangerous terrain. Paul writes about his journeys in 2 Corinthians 11:26, where he describes being in danger of many kinds. This may refer in part to experiences on the road from Perga.

The city he visited was the seat of the proconsul, characterized by Greek culture, Roman power, and Jewish religiosity.

Naturally, they went to the synagogue in the city. After the reading, the synagogue leader asked, according to tradition, whether anyone had a word of encouragement for the people.

Paul showed boldness and gestured that he had something to say. What follows is Paul’s first sermon.

Paul’s First Sermon

Paul is given the floor and delivers a typical rabbinic speech: he begins with Israel’s history, moves through the promises to David, and then points to Jesus as the fulfillment

of God's plan—with particular emphasis on the resurrection and the offer of forgiveness of sins.

God's hand through Israel's history (Acts 13:16–25).

Paul begins by addressing “men of Israel and you who fear God,” two categories of listeners. This missionary sermon is likely the only one addressed to Jews in the diaspora. Paul briefly recounts God's work and plan for Israel's ancestors: the exodus from Egypt, the time in the wilderness, the judges given by God, and eventually the period of kingship. The point is that God is not distant or abstract. God has acted concretely in Israel's history, highlighting the promise of a saviour/leader and finally David. God gave promises that led toward the Messiah. Paul builds a historical-linear expectation—from promise to fulfilment.

Jesus as fulfilment and the people's rejection (vv. 25–31).

Paul identifies Jesus as one who came “to us”—that is, real, historical, from the line of David. He mentions John the Baptist as the forerunner. He states that Jesus preached, performed miracles, and that the people of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize him but handed him over to death.

But centrally: death was not the end. God raised him from the dead—the resurrection becomes the proof that Jesus is the Messiah and that God's promises are kept.

The resurrection and the prophetic witnesses (vv. 26–37).

Paul explain that the Lord gave the promise to the fathers and has fulfilled it by raising Jesus. He refers to prophetic Scriptures (citing psalms and prophets—commonly associated with Psalm 2 and Psalm 16:10 in traditional interpretation) to show that the resurrection was foretold. The key argument: the resurrection shows that Jesus is appointed by God as Lord and Messiah—it is not merely a tragic death but God's victory.

Forgiveness offered; a warning against rejection (vv. 38–41).

Paul draws a theological conclusion: through Jesus, forgiveness of sins is offered—not through the works of the Law but through faith. He emphasizes the tension: the Law gave knowledge of sin but could not ultimately justify people; Jesus provides true reconciliation. The sermon ends with a prophetic warning and God's offer of forgiveness of sins in Christ. This message leads to the transforming power of repentance coming upon the people.

Opposition and Expansion

The following Sabbath, the people in Antioch in Pisidia wanted Barnabas and Paul to continue speaking about Jesus as Savior. The Jews opposed this and tried to prevent them from sharing more of their experiences of Jesus. They mocked and contradicted the brothers, but Paul and Barnabas continued boldly to proclaim the Lord and warned that they would turn to the Gentiles instead of the Jewish population of the city.

The Gentiles were very glad and praised the visiting brothers. In this way, the word of God about Jesus spread throughout the city. The Jews, however, were not satisfied and contacted the God-fearing women and the leading men of the city, who drove the brothers out of the city.

They then did as Jesus had taught them:

they shook the dust from their feet and left the city—a protest against its rulers. They left behind the message of Jesus with joy and spiritual power.

It is possible that the apostles' suffering gave the new believers greater strength and boldness, even though they were left alone and abandoned. We see that in every time of persecution, Christians have received greater power from the Holy Spirit.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples left Antioch in Pisidia and went to Iconium—today's Konya in Turkey, one of the largest cities in the Anatolian region.

Summary of the Theological Theme in Paul's First Sermon

1. **Historical–chronological argumentation:** Paul uses Israel's history as a background to demonstrate the continuity of Christianity with God's promises.
2. **Jesus as a descendant of David:** The messianic expectation connected to the house of David is central—Paul shows that Jesus is the fulfilment.
3. **The resurrection as decisive proof:** The resurrection is not a side note but the core of the argument—it legitimizes Jesus as the Messiah.
4. **Forgiveness through faith:** Paul contrasts the function of the Law with God's offer of forgiveness of sins in Christ.
5. **Prophetic authority:** Paul reads Scripture (the Old Testament) as pointing toward Jesus and interprets the Scriptures messianically.

Iconium and Lystra

Lystra was a city in ancient Lycaonia. Today, the site of ancient Lystra lies near the modern village of Hatunsaray in Turkey, about 30 kilometres southwest of the city of Konya (Iconium).

Paul and Barnabas' visit to Iconium followed a similar pattern as in Antioch in Pisidia. The message was well received by both Jews and Greeks, but some Jews rejected it and stirred up the Gentiles. Despite opposition, the apostles remained in the city for some time, and the people experienced signs and wonders. Here they are first called *apostles*, meaning "sent ones," since they had been sent out by the church in Antioch. At this time,

there were also false apostles (2 Cor. 8:23). Being an apostle was not an official authority title but a form of service to Jesus Christ.

The people of Iconium became divided—one group believed, while another planned to mistreat and stone the apostles. When Paul and Barnabas learned of the persecution plans, they fled to Lystra.

Events in Lystra

Normally, Paul and Barnabas sought out the synagogue in the cities they visited, but this does not seem to have been the case in Lystra. Instead, they encountered a man who was crippled and had never walked. The man listened to Paul's preaching, and there was mutual eye contact between them. Faith was present in the crippled man, and Paul said in a loud voice, "*Stand upright on your feet!*"

The author Luke, who was also a physician, understood that this was not a human act but a miracle of God—similar to the healing at the Beautiful Gate in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1). The man was well known in Lystra, having sat along the road for many years. The city was thrown into dramatic excitement. People began shouting that the gods had come down to them and called Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes. They shouted in Lycaonian, a Greek dialect the apostles did not understand.

After some time, the apostles realized what was happening and cried out to the people that they were not gods but servants of Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, people from Antioch and Iconium arrived in Lystra intending to kill the apostles. Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city, believed to be dead. The disciples gathered around him, but Paul rose up and went back into the city.

Derbe and the Return Journey

Derbe became the next day's journey. The apostles now followed the old Roman roads in the province of Lycaonia (Galatia) in present-day Turkey. The journey to Derbe was about 100 kilometres, showing that Paul had not been severely injured after the stoning in Lystra.

In Derbe, they had great success in preaching and won many disciples. The visit appears to have been brief, as Paul and Barnabas soon returned to the congregations in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to strengthen them spiritually and appoint elders—presbyters, overseers, or bishops—those whom the Spirit had chosen through prayer, fasting, and the laying on of hands. The apostles then entrusted the congregations to the Lord.

On the way to the port city of Attalia, they visited and preached the gospel in the church at Perga before sailing to Antioch in Syria. Perga in Pamphylia lay about 25 kilometers from the harbour city.

Upon arriving back at the church in Antioch, they reported all that God had done through encounters, protection, and ministry in the various congregations. The total distance travelled was about 2,400 kilometres from Antioch, which had sent them out. The church was eager to hear about the journey since they were responsible for sending them. Paul described the mission as “*a door of faith.*” Luke had heard Paul use this phrase many times, where a “door” symbolizes both openness and restriction (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). Humanly speaking, they had faced closed doors, but God continually opened opportunities for ministry.

They remained in Antioch for a longer time.

The Jerusalem Council (AD 49)

Believers from Judea came to Antioch teaching that the uncircumcised could not be considered saved because the Law of Moses prescribed circumcision. Paul and Barnabas disagreed, and a dispute arose. It was decided that the apostles should go up to Jerusalem to meet with the other apostles and elders to discuss the matter.

They were warmly received by the leadership of the Jerusalem church. In Paul’s letter to the Galatians (2:2–5), he describes how false brothers had secretly infiltrated the congregations, undermining the gospel—teaching that Paul could not accept. Paul had previous experience with Pharisees and conflict. He had now been absent from Jerusalem for fourteen years, placing the meeting around AD 49.

Jerusalem lay bathed in late spring sunlight as apostles and elders gathered. The city buzzed with pilgrims, merchants, and disciples along narrow streets. Yet in an upper room of an old courtyard building, a heavy silence prevailed. This was the day a conflict dividing young churches would be resolved.

Paul and Barnabas described how Gentiles had embraced faith with joy and power. Yet some insisted, “*Unless they are circumcised according to the law of Moses, they cannot be saved.*”

Peter stood and testified how God had chosen him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles and how the Holy Spirit fell upon them before they obeyed any law. “*God makes no distinction... We are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are.*”

James, the brother of Jesus, concluded that Gentiles should not be burdened but only asked to abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, meat with blood, and meat from strangled animals.

The decision shaped Christianity for centuries. Paul later summarized this unity in Galatians 3:28:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

The Conflict Between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:39)

After some time, Paul wanted to revisit the churches in Asia Minor. Barnabas suggested bringing his cousin John Mark, but Paul objected, and they parted ways. Barnabas sailed to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas—a trusted prophet from Jerusalem.

Silas (also called Silvanus) was a respected leader, prophet, and bridge-builder between Jewish and Gentile Christians. He proved faithful even in suffering (e.g., imprisonment in Philippi, Acts 16).

Timothy and the Macedonian Call

During further visits to Lystra and Derbe, Paul met Timothy, his “son in the faith.” Timothy’s mother Eunice and grandmother Lois were believers, while his father was Greek (2 Tim. 1:5). For mission among Jews, Paul had Timothy circumcised—not as submission to the Law, but to avoid unnecessary obstacles in synagogue ministry.

Their mission was guided entirely by the Holy Spirit. When prevented from entering Asia, Paul received a vision of a Macedonian man calling them to come and help. Luke appears to have joined them at Troas, as the narrative shifts to “we.”

They travelled by sea to Neapolis (modern Kavala) and then to Philippi, arriving swiftly with favourable winds. Since there was no synagogue, they gathered by the river on the Sabbath, where women were praying. Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira, believed and was baptized with her household, hosting the missionaries.

Philippi: Prison and Praise

A slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination followed Paul and Silas. Though she spoke truth, Paul commanded the spirit to leave her in Jesus’ name. When her owners lost income, Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned.

At midnight, they prayed and sang hymns. An earthquake opened the prison doors. The jailer, fearing punishment, was about to kill himself, but Paul stopped him. The jailer asked, “*What must I do to be saved?*” Paul replied, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.*” The jailer and his family were baptized.

When the authorities learned Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed and asked them to leave the city.

Paul and Silas visited Lydia once more before departing. The gospel had now reached Europe. Luke likely remained in Philippi to serve the new church.

Bible Study

Bible Study: Paul's Mission, the Gospel, and the Growth of the Early Church

1. Paul's First Sermon – The Heart of the Gospel (Acts 13)

Key Theological Themes

Read: Acts 13:16–41

1. **God at work in history**

Paul begins with Israel's story to show that God has always been active and faithful. Christianity is not a new religion but the fulfilment of God's promises.

2. **Jesus, the Son of David**

The Messiah was promised through David's line. Paul shows that Jesus fulfills these promises.

3. **The Resurrection as proof**

The resurrection is the decisive evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. Without it, the message collapses.

4. **Forgiveness through faith**

The Law reveals sin but cannot save. Forgiveness and justification come through faith in Jesus Christ.

5. **Scripture points to Christ**

Paul interprets the Old Testament as pointing forward to Jesus, reading it with a messianic lens.

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Paul begins with Israel's history?
- Why is the resurrection central to Christian faith?
- How does forgiveness through faith differ from salvation by law?

2. Iconium and Lystra – Faith, Opposition, and Miracles (Acts 14:1–20)

In Iconium

- The gospel is received by both Jews and Gentiles.
- Opposition arises, but God confirms the message through signs and wonders.
- The people are divided—belief always brings decision.

Reflection:

Faith in Christ often brings both acceptance and resistance. Obedience does not guarantee comfort.

In Lystra

Read: Acts 14:8–18

- A man crippled from birth is healed through faith.
- The crowd mistakes the apostles for gods.
- Paul and Barnabas refuse glory and point people to the living God.

Key Truth:

God’s power is displayed not to exalt people, but to reveal Christ.

Discussion Questions

- Why do miracles sometimes cause misunderstanding?
- How can Christians avoid taking God’s glory for themselves?

3. Suffering and Perseverance (Acts 14:19–28)

- Paul is stoned and left for dead—but rises and continues the mission.
- The apostles strengthen churches and appoint elders.
- They teach that “*we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*”

Reflection:

Suffering is not a sign of failure but often a sign of faithfulness.

Discussion Question

- How does Paul’s response to suffering challenge our view of hardship?

4. The Jerusalem Council – Grace Alone (Acts 15)

The Issue

Some taught that Gentile believers must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved.

The Decision

Read: Acts 15:6–11, 19–21

- Salvation is by grace, not by the Law.
- God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile.
- Faith in Christ is sufficient.

Key Verse:

“We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved.” (Acts 15:11)

Discussion Questions

- Why was this decision so important for the future of Christianity?
- What “extra requirements” do we sometimes place on faith today?

5. Conflict and calling – Paul, Barnabas, and Silas (Acts 15:36–41)

- Paul and Barnabas disagree over John Mark.
- They separate but both continue serving God.
- God uses imperfect people and even conflict for His purposes.

Reflection:

Disagreement does not mean God’s work stops.

6. Timothy and the Leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:1–10)

- Timothy joins Paul and is circumcised for mission—not for salvation.
- The Holy Spirit redirects their plans.
- God’s guidance may close doors to open better ones.

Discussion Question

- How do we discern between God’s guidance and our own plans?

7. The Gospel Comes to Europe – Philippi (Acts 16:11–40)

Lydia’s Conversion

- The first European convert.
- God opens her heart.
- Faith leads to hospitality and community.

Prison and Praise

- Paul and Silas pray and sing in prison.
- God intervenes.
- The jailer and his household are saved and baptized.

Key Truth:

God can use suffering to bring salvation to others.

Final Reflection Questions

- How does worship change difficult circumstances?
- What does this story teach us about trust in God?

Closing Scripture

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

— Galatians 3:28

Macedonia (Acts 17)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy now travelled on to Amphipolis, which lies by the river Strymon. They then continued about 50 kilometres to Apollonia, Berea, and finally the same distance again to their destination. They followed the Via Egnatia, the great Roman highway. Amphipolis and Apollonia lay as natural stopping points along the road, but there were no synagogues in these cities. Paul usually began his work in the synagogue, and if none existed, they may have chosen not to stay.

Their goal was Thessalonica, the capital and residence city of the Roman governor in Macedonia, a large and influential city where the gospel could spread more widely. Dust swirled around their sandals as they reached Thessalonica, a lively commercial city that had a synagogue. Paul customarily visited the synagogue first to make himself known and establish contacts among the Jews.

For three Sabbaths he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and that Jesus was the Messiah

they had been waiting for. Some were persuaded: both Jews and many God-fearing Greeks, as well as several influential women.

In Thessalonica, women played an important role, just as Lydia and her household had in Philippi. It seems that many of those who “turned to God” (1 Thess. 1:9) were Gentiles, and many were likely women. Leading women had significant influence in the congregation, reflecting the freer social position women had in Macedonia compared to many other regions. Ordinary workers and craftsmen were also among the first Christians in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 4:11).

However, not everyone listened with open hearts. Jealousy grew among certain Jews, and they gathered a mob that caused unrest in the city. They accused Paul and his companions of “turning the world upside down” and proclaiming another king besides Caesar—namely, Jesus. Paul and Silas managed to escape, but their host Jason was dragged before the city authorities. To protect the brothers, the congregation sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. Timothy participated in the work and strengthened the new believers.

In Berea they received a very different response. The people were open and eager to listen, and they examined the Scriptures daily to see whether what Paul said was true. Many believed—both Jews and Greeks, women and men. But opposition followed them. When the agitators from Thessalonica heard what was happening in Berea, they came there and stirred up the crowd. For Paul’s safety, he was sent on toward the coast, while Silas and Timothy stayed behind to strengthen the new believers.

Paul in Corinth

Paul then travelled from Athens to Corinth. He had good social standing and contacted several Jews in the city, including Aquila and his wife Priscilla. Like Paul, they were newcomers, having been ordered to leave Rome. They were tentmakers by trade, making tents for travellers. The Roman emperor Claudius ruled from AD 41–54 and ordered all Jews to leave Rome in AD 49, according to the historian Suetonius, due to disturbances among Jews and Christians.

Aquila and Paul, both tentmakers, found common ground and met in the synagogue, where they spoke about Christ to both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia to Corinth, Paul was deeply engaged in preaching and was interrupted by the brothers. A conflict arose between them, concerning a debt Paul had incurred since his visit to the Macedonian congregations. Paul responded sharply, saying that their blood would be on their own heads if they hindered his mission.

The “debt” may have referred to financial support Paul had received from the Macedonian churches, as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:9. Perhaps Silas and Timothy

were jealous or had been assigned by the churches to verify Paul's ministry. Paul left them and went to the house of Titus Justus, a God-fearing man who lived next to the synagogue. Crispus, the synagogue leader, believed the message about Jesus, and many Corinthians believed and were baptized.

Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, possibly because one night he received a vision in which he was encouraged by the Lord. During this time, Paul was brought before the court when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia. The Jews accused him, saying, "This man persuades people to worship God in ways contrary to the law." This was an attempt to have Christianity declared illegal under Roman law. But Gallio refused to hear the case, seeing it as an internal Jewish religious dispute rather than a violation of Roman law. Paul was dismissed without defending himself, and Gallio's decision gave Christianity indirect legal protection as a permitted form within Judaism.

Something unusual then occurred: the synagogue leader Sosthenes was seized and beaten in front of the tribunal. This may have been because he failed to prosecute Paul, or perhaps because this same Sosthenes later became a Christian and a leader in the church in Achaia (1 Corinthians 1:1).

Paul's next journey was to Antioch, taking Aquila and Priscilla with him. From the port city of Cenchreae in Corinth, they sailed toward Syria. Paul had previously taken a Nazirite vow, which involved shaving his head, as described in Numbers 6:1–21. This vow had to be completed before returning to Jerusalem.

When they arrived in Ephesus, Paul left Priscilla and Aquila there and went into the synagogue to reason with the Jews. Ephesus was a regional capital with nearly 400,000 inhabitants and was famous for the worship of Diana (Artemis). The Augusteum was a major sanctuary dedicated to emperor worship. The people wanted Paul to stay longer in Ephesus, but he declined, saying he would return if it was God's will.

Paul then travelled to Caesarea, greeted the church there, and went on to Antioch. How long he stayed in Antioch is unknown. We traditionally divide Paul's journeys into three missionary journeys, and the final one begins at the end of chapter 18. After some time in Antioch, Paul travelled through Galatia (modern-day Turkey, including the area of Ankara) and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Paul then felt compelled to visit Ephesus again. The journey from Antioch to Ephesus was about 1,000 kilometres and likely took more than three weeks. In Ephesus, Paul met a learned man from Alexandria named Apollos. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and spoke with great fervour, teaching accurately about Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He preached boldly in the synagogue.

Priscilla and Aquila heard him and explained the way of God more accurately to him. Apollos then wished to cross over to Achaia, where he was warmly received following

the recommendation of Priscilla and Aquila. His powerful and convincing preaching was well received by the Jews.

Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19)

Paul now came to Ephesus, a city well known to him. He travelled by the inland route. There he met about a dozen disciples. A crucial question at their first meeting was whether they had received the Holy Spirit when they came to faith. Their answer was that they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit; they had only received a baptism of repentance, according to John the Baptist.

Paul instructed them, and they were baptized in the name of Jesus. Then Paul laid his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them. They spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Paul's next step was to visit the synagogue, where he spoke boldly for three months. He reasoned with them and tried to persuade them about the kingdom of God. Some, however, hardened their hearts and spoke evil of "the Way" before the whole assembly. Paul left them and took the disciples with him, holding discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.

Paul performed extraordinary miracles. Handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and evil spirits left them. At the same time, there were Jewish exorcists who attempted to drive out evil spirits in the name of the Lord Jesus, but without success.

The spiritual realm is not something to play with. The flesh and the Spirit are always in conflict. This struggle became evident in Ephesus, but God's Spirit proved stronger than the flesh.

When the people heard what had happened, fear fell upon them, and the name of the Lord Jesus was highly honoured. Those who practiced magic brought their books together and burned them publicly. The value of the books amounted to fifty thousand silver coins—about 150 years' wages. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

The Riot in Ephesus

The background of the riot in Ephesus can be traced to three causes: power, religion, and economy.

Ephesus was one of the largest and most important cities in Asia Minor. It was a religious centre for the worship of Artemis (Diana), famous for its massive Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The city was economically dependent on

this cult, particularly through the production and sale of small silver shrines and statues.

Paul had ministered in Ephesus for about three years—longer than in most other places. The gospel had made a deep impact: many people had repented, magic books had been burned publicly, and idol worship was openly challenged. This created tension not only on a religious level, but also economically.

Paul decided to travel on through Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem, and afterward to Rome. This marked a turning point in the narrative. Paul was preparing to leave, but before he did, the crisis erupted.

The people—especially the craftsmen—saw their livelihoods threatened. A silversmith named Demetrius gathered his fellow craftsmen. He made silver shrines of Artemis—souvenirs and cult objects. His argument was shrewd and revealing: “You know that we receive our wealth from this business.” Paul, he said, was teaching that “gods made by human hands are no gods at all.”

The riot exploded (Acts 19:28–34). The crowd became furious and began shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” The whole city was filled with confusion, and the people rushed into the theatre, which likely held about 25,000 spectators.

Two of Paul’s companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, were seized and dragged along. Paul himself wanted to enter and address the crowd, but the disciples restrained him. Even some Roman officials (Asiarchs) warned him not to risk it. Most of the people in the crowd did not even know why they were there.

This shows how easily mass hysteria and religious nationalism can take over.

A Jew named Alexander tried to speak to the crowd, likely to distance the Jews from Paul. But as soon as they realized he was a Jew, they shouted for two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

Eventually reason returned. A city clerk, a Roman administrative official (Acts 19:35–41), stepped forward and calmed the crowd. He reminded them that Artemis was not under threat—everyone knew that Ephesus was her city—and that Paul and his companions were not criminals and had not desecrated the temple. He also warned them of Roman law: unlawful riots could result in severe punishment from Rome.

From the riot in Ephesus, several lessons emerge:

The gospel shakes societal structures. Christian faith is not violent, but it challenges values, economics, and power. Idols need to be defended—the living God does not. Artemis had to be protected with shouting and violence. The gospel spreads through words, transformed lives, and truth. Economic interests are often disguised as piety;

Demetrius spoke of religion but was driven by money. God protects His work, even through unexpected people—not an apostle, but a pagan official, stopped the riot.

Some reflections for today's churches:

- What “idols” exist in our culture today?
- How does Paul's way of acting differ from that of the crowd?
- How can we stand firm without becoming aggressive?
- What does this text teach us about God's control in the midst of chaos?

Acts 20 – The Costly Way

After the riot in Ephesus, the narrative becomes quieter, but the seriousness deepens. Paul understands that his time there has come to an end. The gospel has taken root, but the opposition has revealed how costly and dangerous the path can be.

Paul continues his journey to Macedonia and Greece. He leaves Ephesus and travels north through Macedonia, visiting the churches, encouraging, exhorting, and strengthening them. His words are many, and his presence matters deeply. He knows he may never return.

Eventually he reaches Greece, likely Corinth, where he stays for three months. But danger remains. A plot against him forces a change of plans. Instead of sailing directly, he travels back by land through Macedonia. With him is a small group of men from different cities and backgrounds. The church is no longer a local movement—it has become a network of lives, languages, and cultures united by the same Lord.

In the city of Troas, the believers gather on the first day of the week—Sunday—to break bread and share the Lord's Supper. Paul speaks, and he speaks for a long time. He knows this is his last visit. Lamps are burning in the upper room. The air is warm. A young man named Eutychus is sitting in a window. Overcome by sleep, he falls from the third floor and is found dead.

The people are shocked, but Paul goes down, bends over him, embraces him, and says, “Do not be alarmed. He is alive.” And indeed, he lives. The congregation goes back upstairs. They break bread. Paul continues speaking until dawn. Night turns into life, and grief into comfort.

Paul then walks alone to Assos, while the others go by ship. Perhaps he needed silence. Perhaps prayer. Perhaps preparation. He presses on, eager to reach Jerusalem before Pentecost. Something awaits him there. He does not know exactly what, but he knows suffering lies ahead—yet he goes.

In Miletus, Paul sends for the elders of the church in Ephesus. He dares not return there, but he does not want to leave them without a final word. He no longer speaks as a

missionary, but as a father taking farewell. He reminds them of his humility, his tears, his perseverance, and that he has proclaimed the whole will of God. He says, “I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race.”

He warns them that false teachers will arise, even from among themselves, and he entrusts them with his legacy:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Tears, Knees, and a Final Farewell (Acts 20:36–38)

They kneel together. Paul prays with them. They all weep openly, embrace him, and kiss him. They know they will never see his face again. They accompany him to the ship.

No one knows how the journey will end, but they know to whom they belong.

Acts 20 is not primarily about miracles, but about faithfulness, relationships, endurance, leadership that costs, and love that dares to let go. It is a chapter about moving forward when the heart wants to stay.

Här är en **trogen, sammanhängande och språkligt bearbetad översättning till engelska** av din text om **Paulus väg till Jerusalem och rättegångarna i Caesarea (Apg 21–25)**. Innehållet är bevarat, tonen är teologisk och undervisande, men språket är naturligt och tydligt på engelska.

To Jerusalem

The sea voyage continued toward Kos, Rhodes, Patara, Phoenicia, and Syria, until they arrived at Tyre. Paul and his traveling companions sought out the disciples there and stayed in Tyre for seven days.

This forms the background to why Paul would later be brought before the Jewish High Council (the Sanhedrin) in Jerusalem.

When Paul finally arrived in Jerusalem, he was at first warmly received by the church (Acts 21:17–20). However, the tension was high. Paul was well known for preaching to the Gentiles, and rumours spread that he taught Jews to abandon the Law of Moses. At this time, Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims.

Despite precautionary measures, a riot broke out in the temple. Jews from Asia accused Paul of teaching against the people, the Law, and the temple, and of bringing Gentiles into the temple—an accusation that was untrue. The mob tried to kill him, but ironically it was Roman soldiers who saved his life.

Paul was allowed to speak to the people, and he addressed them in Hebrew/Aramaic. He told them about his life as a Pharisee, his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, and the mission God had given him—to proclaim Jesus crucified, dead, and risen to the Gentiles.

Before the Sanhedrin – A Trial That Spirals Out of Control (Acts 22:30–23:10)

Paul opened his defence boldly:

“Brothers, I have lived before God with a clear conscience to this day.”

This provoked the high priest Ananias, who ordered that Paul be struck on the mouth. Paul responded sharply, only to be reminded that he was speaking to the high priest.

Paul then realized who was present in the council: Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, and Pharisees, who believed in it. He cried out:

“It is because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial!”

The council was immediately divided, and a violent dispute broke out. Some Pharisees defended Paul, saying:

“Perhaps a spirit or an angel has spoken to him.”

Once again, the Romans intervened and took Paul into protective custody.

That night, in the midst of the chaos, the word of the Lord came to Paul (Acts 23:11). The Lord Himself stood by him and said:

“Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

This marked a turning point for Paul. God had not abandoned him. His imprisonment was not a failure. The journey had to continue—to Rome.

Lessons to Be Learned

Religious leadership can become blinded by power. The council that was meant to guard the Law violated it themselves. God even uses chaos—the division within the council saved Paul’s life.

Paul was not called to win a trial, but to bear witness. He defended himself without compromising his faith. God confirms His calling in dark moments. Jesus speaks not when everything goes well, but when Paul is alone and threatened.

Human justice fails, but God’s plan stands firm.

The Sanhedrin was meant to provide legal, theological, and moral guidance. Instead, Paul was judged in advance, struck without trial, slandered, and silenced. Formal justice existed, but true justice was absent.

The Voice of Conscience for Today – Paul as an Example

Paul says:

“I have lived before God with a clear conscience.”

He says this before his enemies, without any guarantee of justice and without knowing the outcome. Conscience is not the voice of the majority, but the voice of God.

In our time, conscience is pressured to conform. “Do not offend” replaces “Is it true?” Inner conviction is seen as a threat to unity. Paul teaches us that freedom of conscience is the right not to lie—even when it costs.

Today, tension often exists between faith and truth. Faith is accepted as a personal feeling but questioned when it shapes ethics, actions, and teaching. Religious freedom is weakened when faith is allowed to exist but not to influence.

Paul is not condemned for a crime, but for disturbing the religious order, challenging interpretations, and refusing to compromise on the resurrection.

In our time, faith becomes problematic when it cannot be controlled, does not follow prevailing narratives, and holds to absolute truth.

Wisdom without cowardice becomes Paul’s strategy. He uses his Roman citizenship to divide the council factually, without denying his faith. This teaches us that Christians may use legal means and speak wisely and strategically—but must never surrender their conscience.

God’s word at night gave Paul hope beyond Roman law. When all human systems fail, the Lord says, “Take courage.” Paul is not promised freedom, but purpose. Christian freedom is greater than legal freedom.

The Transfer to Caesarea

After the commander rescued Paul from the mob that wanted to kill him, Paul's nephew revealed a plot by the Jews to assassinate him. The commander sent Paul to Caesarea under heavy guard: two hundred infantry soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen—470 men in total. Under cover of night, at nine o'clock in the evening, the escort left Jerusalem.

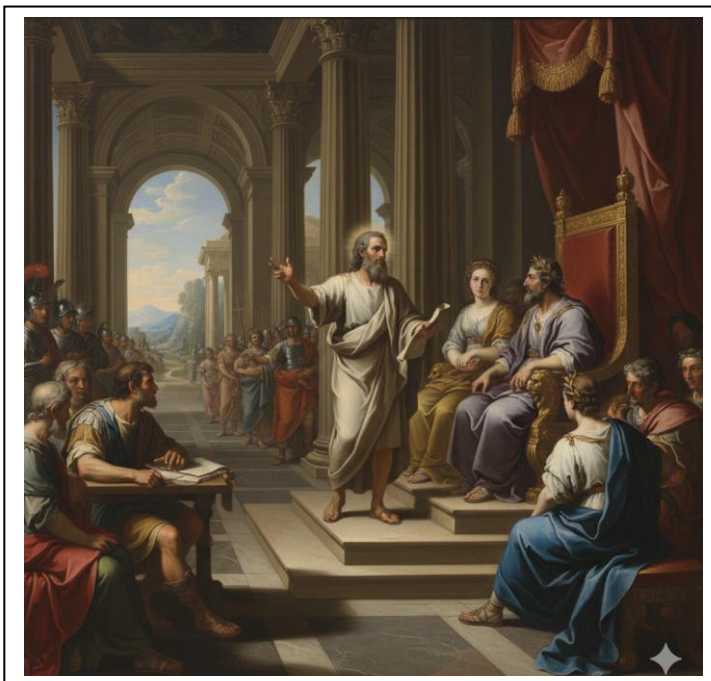
This shows how serious the situation had become. Paul was provided with mounts so that he would not be harmed along the way. The distance from Jerusalem to Caesarea was about 120 kilometres. Several animals were likely used along the journey. Paul probably had baggage with him, and it is possible that Luke accompanied the transport.

A letter explaining the situation was sent with Paul to Governor Felix, explaining why Paul had been rescued from lynching—because he was a Roman citizen. This was the last time Paul would leave Jerusalem.

The escort stopped at Antipatris, about 40 kilometres from Caesarea. Paul was considered a political prisoner, as the authorities feared unrest in Jerusalem.

They arrived safely in Caesarea and delivered both Paul and the letter to the governor. Felix's first question was which province Paul came from. Upon learning that he was from Cilicia, Felix said he would hear the case when the accusers arrived. Paul was placed under guard in Herod's palace.

Paul Before Felix (Acts 24)



Five days later, the high priest Ananias arrived with the elders and an attorney named Tertullus, who presented the charges against Paul. This formal procedure mirrors the process Jesus faced before Pilate (Luke 23).

During Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, he was allowed visits from believers. This was the city where Peter had met the Roman officer Cornelius and his household, and where God made it clear that the gospel

was for both Jews and Gentiles:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female—you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Roman law required that both the accused and the accusers be present. Tertullus presented three charges:

1. Paul was a dangerous agitator.
2. He was a leader of the Nazarene sect.
3. He attempted to desecrate the temple.

The first charge implied treason against Caesar; the other two concerned Jewish matters. This is the only place in the New Testament where Christians are formally referred to as a “sect” called the Nazarenes (Acts 24:22).

Paul’s Defence (Acts 24:10–21)

Paul spoke calmly and rationally. He acknowledged Felix’s experience as judge, without flattery. He presented facts: he had been in Jerusalem only twelve days, had caused no riots, taught nothing against the Law, and had not desecrated the temple. The accusations lacked evidence.

He openly confessed his faith in “the Way,” affirming belief in the Law, the Prophets, and the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. His central message remained that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

This led him to strive for a clear conscience before both God and people. Conscience itself is not infallible, but when enlightened by the Holy Spirit, it must be heeded.

Paul explained that he had come to Jerusalem to bring gifts to the Jewish believers and to worship in the temple. These gifts symbolized unity between Gentile and Jewish Christians. He was present in purity and peace, not stirring unrest.

The real accusers—Jews from Asia—were not even present. Ultimately, the only charge was:

“It is because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”

Felix postponed the verdict. Paul remained imprisoned but was granted considerable freedom, including visits and care from believers. Felix and his wife Drusilla later summoned Paul to hear him speak about faith in Christ, righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. Felix became afraid and dismissed him, hoping instead for a bribe.

For two years, Felix repeatedly summoned Paul with the same hope. When no money came, Paul remained imprisoned. Eventually, Felix was recalled to Rome due to unrest in the province. Through his brother Pallas, he avoided punishment.

It is believed that during these years in Caesarea, Luke wrote his Gospel.



Festus and the Appeal to Caesar (Acts 25)

A new governor, Porcius Festus, was appointed around AD 60 by Emperor Nero. Festus was considered an upright administrator. The historian Josephus regarded him as one of the best governors Judea had known.

Festus travelled to Jerusalem to hear the charges against Paul. The chief priests wanted Paul transferred to Jerusalem, but Festus refused and ordered that the case be heard in Caesarea.

After eight to ten days, Festus returned to Caesarea and convened the court. He asked Paul if he wished to stand trial in Jerusalem. Paul declined, stating that as a Roman citizen, he had the right to appeal to Caesar.

Paul said: “If I am guilty and have done anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die.”

After consulting his council, Festus declared: “You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you shall go.” (Acts 25:12)

Here's a full English translation of your text. I've aimed to preserve the narrative style and historical context while making it readable in English:

He struck the ground and heard a voice: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" The hall was completely silent.

— It was Jesus of Nazareth. The one who was crucified. The risen one.

Festus waved his hand.

— Paul, you are insane! All your learning has driven you to madness!

Paul turned slowly toward him.

— I am not insane, noble Festus. I speak the truth and reason.

Then he turned to Agrippa. His gaze was steady, almost heartfelt.

— King Agrippa, you know the prophets. You know what they said. Do you believe them?

Agrippa fell silent. A faint smile crossed his lips, as if trying to resist.

— You are very persuasive, Paul, almost enough to make me a Christian, Agrippa replied.

Paul tugged at his chains. The sound echoed through the hall.

— I pray to God, he said, that not only you, but all who hear me today, might become like me—except for these chains.

No one laughed now. As they rose and withdrew, their muted voices could be heard behind the marble pillars. Finally, Agrippa said quietly to Festus:

— This man has done nothing deserving of death.

Festus nodded heavily.

— He could have been released if he had not appealed to the emperor.

Paul remained in the hall, still in chains. But his gaze was free. He knew that the road now led to Rome—not as a defeated prisoner, but as a witness, called to speak even where the emperor ruled. And the chains around his wrists felt lighter than ever.

Paul's journey was already determined. The next step would be the voyage to Rome.

A summary of Paul's speeches during his imprisonment:

- Before the people in Jerusalem – Acts 22:1–21
- Before the Sanhedrin – Revealing the real conflict, focusing on the resurrection – Acts 23:1–10
- Before Governor Felix – Acts 24:10–21
- Before King Agrippa and Festus – Summary of his life and calling, focusing on the resurrection and fulfilment of prophecies – Acts 26:1–23



Paul's journey to Rome

After the trial and meeting with King Agrippa, under the officer Julius's command, all prisoners in Caesarea were ordered to accompany Paul to Rome. Onboard were also soldiers, sailors, and merchants. Luke was certainly on the journey, as was Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica and Paul's co-worker in the Ephesian church. He had also accompanied Paul to Corinth (Acts 20:4). They were not prisoners but faithful friends of Paul.

Autumn was well advanced when the ship left port. The sea lay heavy and dark, as if carrying a secret. They sailed from Adramyttium, Caesarea's port city, located opposite today's Greek island of Lesbos. The voyage followed the coast of Asia Minor to Sidon and Tyre, where Paul and his companions' visited congregations, he had previously served.

The next leg was on a grain ship sailing north of Cyprus, delayed by adverse winds. Autumn westerly winds made the journey longer than the direct northwest route across the sea from Sidon.

They travelled along the coast of Pamphylia to the port city of Myra in Lycia, where they met a ship's captain from Alexandria in Egypt, carrying wheat to Italy. Large ships always struggled with headwinds and heavy loads. With light winds in the sails, progress was slow, stopping at ports such as Cnidus in Caria—not far from congregations Paul had

previously visited. The same congregations that John received the revelations of Jesus in Revelation chapters 2–3.

When the winds became more favourable, they sailed south along Crete to Cape Salome. The coast was difficult, with cliffs to navigate, but they reached a port called “Fair Havens,” near Lasea. This city served as a landmark for sailors navigating Crete’s waters. Here Paul and the crew likely took the opportunity to resupply.

Before departing from Crete, Paul warned the crew:

“Men,” he said seriously, “this voyage will end in disaster—not only for the ship and cargo but for our lives.”

But who listens to a prisoner when the captain and first mate say otherwise? The sails were hoisted, and the ship set off. Paul, experienced in previous voyages, trusted God’s Spirit and understood that the officers’ decision was wrong. He had been present in three other shipwrecks (2 Corinthians 11:25).

When the storm broke

Suddenly, the wind struck—not an ordinary wind, but a furious storm, Euroclydon, which tossed the ship like a toy.

The word “Euroclydon” combines the Greek word *euros* (east wind) and the Latin *quilo* (north wind). These winds blow from Crete’s mountains, 2,500 meters high. Sudden storms are common in the area, like typhoons. A similar story appears in Jonah 1:4: “A mighty storm arose on the sea, and the ship was about to be broken.”

The sky vanished behind dark clouds. The sun was unseen for days, the stars gone. Hope was fading.

They threw the cargo overboard, then the ship’s equipment. Eventually, no one had strength to eat. Fear weighed heavily on the deck. Then Paul rose:

“You should have listened to me,” he said—not accusingly, but to encourage.

“Now listen: None of you will perish. Tonight an angel of God stood beside me and said, ‘Paul, do not be afraid. You will stand before the emperor, and God has granted you all who sail with you.’”

His words spread warmth through the cold. Hope returned.

After fourteen days in the storm, the sailors heard the waves hitting land. Land in darkness. Rescue—or destruction.

When some tried to escape in the lifeboat, Paul shouted to the officer:

“If they do not stay on the ship, you cannot be saved!”

The soldiers cut the ropes, and the lifeboat drifted away.

At dawn, Paul took bread, gave thanks to God in front of everyone, and broke it.
“Eat now. You need strength.”

Shortly after, the ship struck a reef. The hull broke. Waves rushed in. The ship was lost.
“Swim!” shouted someone.
“Grab planks!” yelled another.

The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners, fearing escape. Under Roman law, the soldiers were responsible for the prisoners and would be executed if they fled. Paul stopped them and urged everyone to swim ashore or cling to debris.

Luke uses “we,” showing that he was among the 276 survivors (Acts 27:37). The locals of Malta accommodated them generously.

On Malta

Crawling onto the shore—soaked and shivering but alive—they were welcomed by strangers with fires. Paul gathered wood. Suddenly, a poisonous snake bit his hand. He shook it off, and the people waited for him to swell and die.

Jesus had promised the disciples they could handle snakes without harm (Mark 16:18). This was fulfilled, and God’s power was manifest before the people.

The people gasped:

“He must be a murderer. Justice has caught him.” Nothing happened. Then, in fear, they whispered:

“He is a god.”

Paul did not smile; he pointed to God and continued to serve, heal, and speak about Jesus.

One of the healed was the father of Publius, the chief man of the island, sick with fever and severe dysentery. Paul laid hands on him, and he was healed. Paul’s teaching on spiritual gifts, including healing (1 Corinthians 12), emphasized laying hands on the sick and sometimes anointing with oil.

Paul stayed on Malta for several months. The Maltese came to faith and witnessed many miracles. Grateful, they provided provisions for the next leg to Italy and Rome.

Three months later, they sailed from Malta. Malta, an old island mentioned by Phoenician colonists, was taken over by the Romans in the 200s BCE. In Paul’s time, it was linked to the province of Sicily. They stopped three days in Syracuse—likely to unload goods at one of the archipelago’s major ports.

Luke notes images of twin gods, common protective figures on Egyptian ships from Alexandria, named Castor and Pollux, regarded in Greek mythology as twins of Zeus and Leda.

The voyage continued from Syracuse to Rhegium via the Strait of Messina. With favourable south winds, they reached Puteoli near Naples, where they stayed seven days with Christian friends. The officer had become favourably disposed toward Paul, perhaps coming to faith himself.

Arrival in Rome

The congregation met Paul and his companions at Forum Appii, about 65 km from Rome, and at Tres Tabernae closer to the city center. Seeing them, Paul thanked God. They received renewed courage. He was allowed to stay in a rented house with a guard. Note that in Acts 28:16, “we” is used for the last time, showing Luke accompanied him. Paul was not left alone, and Luke likely assisted in writing the letters from Rome to Philemon and the Colossians.

Previously, Paul had written to the Roman church via the Epistle to the Romans. All the brothers hurried to meet him. He travelled along the famous road, Porta Capena. Via Appia, a major Roman road in southern Italy, was named after Appius Claudius, planned and built in the 4th century BCE.

Over the next three days, Paul met with Christian and Jewish leaders in Rome. He explained:

“My brothers, I have done nothing wrong against our people or our fathers’ laws, yet I was delivered into the hands of the Romans and taken as a prisoner.”

It was the high priests in the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem who accused him of breaking the law. Both the commander Lysias, Governors Felix and Festus, and King Agrippa had examined Paul and found nothing deserving punishment or death. They would have preferred to release him, but the Jews opposed it. Paul had no accusation against them; he only wished to defend himself, knowing the Romans had poor communication with the Jews in Jerusalem.

The proclamation of Jesus was not opposed to the Jewish faith but part of the fulfilment through Jesus, the Messiah. The Jewish audience had not received a letter about Paul or a representative from Jerusalem. Paul was given the opportunity to speak to the Jewish group about Jesus and the resurrection.

The Jewish community considered Christianity a sect or new party within Judaism. They were surprised that Paul identified Christianity with the hope of the awaited Messiah. Rome had about two million inhabitants at the time, many of whom were Christians, including many Jews—likely around 6,000. Many came to Paul’s residence, and he shared his Damascus Road experience. Hence, Acts 28:23 notes that he preached from

morning to evening. He showed that Moses' law prophesied the Messiah, which Jesus explained on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27). Paul continually emphasized the fulfilment of the Old Testament in Jesus' ministry. Many believed; others rejected it.

Paul quotes Isaiah:

“Go to this people and say, You shall hear but not understand, see but not perceive, for the heart of this people is hardened.”

Gentiles hear and see, but not their own people.

Paul had cited many Old Testament passages and warned the audience not to reject the message of Jesus as the risen Messiah. He preached the same message in marketplaces and synagogues, e.g., in Antioch of Pisidia, Athens, and Corinth. There, the gospel was received differently by Jews and called “God's salvation.” Paul never judged Jews or Gentiles but sought their repentance.

Paul stayed in Rome for two years, welcoming visitors, preaching about God's kingdom, and teaching about Jesus Christ boldly without hindrance. He likely did not live in the same place as during imprisonment, as he had rented the house. The gospel had now reached the world's capital.

After imprisonment and release

We read about Paul in 1 Clement 5:5–7, written in 95 CE to the Corinthians. Through envy and conflict, Paul demonstrated the price of perseverance. Seven times he was imprisoned, beaten, stoned; he preached east and west, gaining a noble reputation for his faith.

He taught the world in righteousness and reached the westernmost boundaries (possibly Spain). After testifying before rulers, he passed away, joining the holy, becoming an enduring example of perseverance. Many gathered around him, shining examples through suffering and trials.

Traditionally, Paul may have travelled back to the eastern Mediterranean (Macedonia, Asia Minor, Crete), possibly reaching Spain, as he expressed in Romans 15:24—though this is not certain. He may have faced a second imprisonment in Rome, likely under Emperor Nero during the persecution of Christians after the fire of Rome in 64 CE. This time, the prison conditions were harsher (cf. 2 Timothy).

Paul, the Early Church, and the Work of the Holy Spirit: A Narrative

Paul's Trial and Journey to Rome

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No one laughed. As the officials withdrew, Agrippa whispered to Festus, "This man has done nothing deserving of death." Festus nodded, "He could have been released if he had not appealed to the emperor."

Paul remained in the hall, still in chains, but his gaze was free. He knew that the road ahead would lead to Rome—not as a defeated prisoner, but as a witness, called to proclaim the gospel even in the emperor's presence. And strangely, the chains felt lighter than ever.

The Voyage to Rome

Under the command of the officer Julius, Paul, along with other prisoners, soldiers, sailors, and faithful companions like Luke and Aristarchus, set sail from Caesarea. Autumn winds delayed their journey, and the seas seemed dark and secretive. They

stopped at ports along the coast of Asia Minor, including Sidon and Tyre, revisiting congregations Paul had nurtured.

Eventually, they sailed on a grain ship north of Cyprus, slowed by adverse winds, and continued along the coast of Pamphylia to Myra in Lycia. There they boarded a larger ship from Alexandria, loaded with wheat for Italy. Navigating headwinds and heavy cargo made the journey slow, but they stopped at ports along the way, including Knidus in Caria and later along the coast of Crete, finally reaching “Fair Havens,” near Lasea, where they resupplied.

Before setting sail again, Paul warned the crew, “Men, this voyage will end in disaster—not only for the ship and cargo, but for our lives.” But as a prisoner, few heeded him. The sails were hoisted, and the ship pushed on. Paul, experienced in shipwrecks, trusted God’s Spirit to guide them.

Suddenly, a violent storm—Euroclydon—struck, tossing the ship like a toy. Waves crashed, the sun disappeared, and hope seemed lost. They threw cargo and equipment overboard. Finally, fear silenced all, until Paul stood and said, “You should have listened to me, but hear this: None of you will perish. Tonight an angel of God told me, ‘Paul, do not be afraid. You will stand before the emperor, and God has granted you all who sail with you.’”

After fourteen days in the storm, they sighted land. Some attempted to escape in a lifeboat, but Paul stopped them, urging everyone to stay aboard. At dawn, he blessed and broke bread before all, encouraging them to eat. The ship eventually struck a reef and was destroyed, but all 276 survived, washing ashore on Malta.

On Malta

The locals welcomed them with fires and food. One day, a poisonous snake bit Paul, but he shook it off unharmed. The people expected death, whispering first, “He must be a murderer,” then in awe, “He is a god.” Paul pointed to God and continued healing the sick and teaching about Jesus. One notable miracle was healing Publius’s father, suffering from fever and dysentery.

Paul remained on Malta for three months, witnessing many healings and conversions. The islanders provided provisions for the voyage to Italy and Rome. After sailing, they stopped in Syracuse, Rhegium, and Puteoli, eventually reaching Rome, where Paul was welcomed by believers along the way. He rented a house and continued teaching about Jesus Christ boldly, unrestricted for two years. The gospel had now reached the capital of the world.

Paul’s Martyrdom

Historical sources agree that Paul eventually suffered martyrdom in Rome, likely by

beheading, around 64–67 CE. Yet Acts 1:8 reminds us that no human power can halt God’s plan.

The Early Church and the Holy Spirit

The Book of Acts demonstrates how the disciples, from humble fishermen like Peter and John to Paul himself, relied on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had promised in John 14:15ff:

“If you love me, keep my commands. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper—the Spirit of Truth.”

Though they were uneducated, these early followers acted with courage and faith. Peter and John left their nets immediately when Jesus called. At Pentecost, Peter addressed a crowd of 120, empowered by the Spirit, preaching boldly and fulfilling Joel’s prophecy about the last days.

The Spirit’s work in the early church included:

- Making believers children of God
- Awakened spiritual longing
- Opening doors for ministry (e.g., Cornelius)
- Gathering people around God’s Word
- Working through the gospel of Jesus
- Confirming new life through signs, tongues, and miracles
- Leading to baptism
- Bearing witness to the whole church

This teaches us that:

- No one is beyond God’s reach
- The gospel surpasses all human boundaries
- The Spirit makes us God’s children, not the law
- The church’s mission is to follow the Spirit’s guidance

The Holy Spirit in Churches Today

Views on the Spirit's guidance vary among Christian denominations:

Denomination Emphasis on the Spirit's Guidance

Catholic	Office & tradition
Orthodox	Liturgy & tradition
Lutheran	Word & sacraments
Reformed	Scripture & structure
Free Church	Bible & personal faith
Pentecostal	Gifts & direct guidance

Common theological principles include:

- The Spirit never leads away from Christ
- The Spirit never opposes the gospel
- Guidance is tested in community

Acts 10, the story of Cornelius, exemplifies Spirit-led guidance—crossing boundaries, opening doors, and confirming God's universal plan.

Conclusion

From the chains of Paul in Caesarea to the fire of the Spirit at Pentecost, from Malta's shores to the churches of today, the Holy Spirit continues to guide, empower, and unite believers. The same Spirit who gave Peter courage, healed the sick, and enabled Paul to witness in Rome calls us to listen, act, and trust in God's ongoing plan.

Paul's Journey to Jerusalem and the Cost of Faithfulness

A Lecture on Acts 21–25

Introduction: When Calling Leads into Conflict

The final section of the Book of Acts marks a decisive shift. Paul is no longer moving freely from city to city as a missionary. Instead, he moves step by step toward imprisonment, trials, and ultimately Rome.

This is not a detour from God's plan—it *is* the plan.

Acts 21–25 shows us that faithfulness to God does not always lead to safety, approval, or success in human terms. Instead, it leads to testimony, endurance, and trust in God’s sovereign purpose.

1. Arrival in Jerusalem – Faith Meets Tension (Acts 21)

Paul arrives in Jerusalem after a long sea journey through Kos, Rhodes, Patara, Phoenicia, and Syria, finally reaching Tyre. He and his companions stay with disciples there for seven days.

When Paul reaches Jerusalem, he is initially welcomed warmly by the church. However, tension quickly becomes evident:

- Paul is known as the apostle to the Gentiles.
- Rumours circulate that he teaches Jews to abandon the Law of Moses.
- Jerusalem is crowded with pilgrims, increasing volatility.

Despite attempts to act wisely and respectfully, a riot breaks out in the temple. Jews from Asia accuse Paul of teaching against the people, the Law, and the temple—and of bringing Gentiles into the temple (a false accusation).

The crowd attempts to kill him.

Ironically, it is the Roman soldiers—not the religious leaders—who save Paul’s life.

2. Paul’s Testimony to the Crowd

Paul is permitted to speak to the people, addressing them in Hebrew (Aramaic), establishing cultural and religious connection.

He recounts:

- His former life as a Pharisee
- His encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus
- God’s calling for him to proclaim Jesus—crucified and risen—to the Gentiles

The message is personal, truthful, and centred on resurrection. This becomes the core issue in every trial that follows.

3. Before the Sanhedrin – When Religion Turns Violent (Acts 22:30–23:10)

Paul stands before the Jewish High Council and opens with a striking statement:

“Brothers, I have lived before God with a clear conscience to this day.”

This immediately provokes the high priest Ananias, who orders Paul to be struck.

Paul then recognizes the composition of the council:

- **Sadducees** – deny resurrection
- **Pharisees** – affirm resurrection

Paul declares:

“It is because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial!”

The council erupts into division and violence. Once again, Roman soldiers intervene to save Paul.

Key Insight

Paul is not trying to *win* the trial—he is bearing witness. God uses even division and chaos to protect His servant.

4. God Speaks in the Night (Acts 23:11)

That night, in isolation and danger, the Lord stands by Paul and says:

“Take courage. As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

This moment is crucial:

- Paul is not promised freedom
- He is promised *purpose*

Imprisonment is not failure. It is the path God has chosen.

5. The Voice of Conscience – A Lesson for Today

Paul’s declaration of a clear conscience becomes central.

Key principles:

- Conscience is not the voice of the majority, but the voice of God.
- Paul speaks truthfully without knowing the outcome.
- Religious systems can become corrupt and unjust.
- Faith is tolerated as private belief—but resisted when it shapes ethics and public truth.

Paul is not condemned for a crime, but for refusing to compromise on resurrection and absolute truth.

Modern Application:

- “Do not offend” replaces “Is it true?”
- Faith becomes problematic when it cannot be controlled.
- Christian freedom is not merely legal—it is spiritual and moral.

6. Transfer to Caesarea – God Uses Secular Power (Acts 23)

A plot to assassinate Paul is uncovered by his nephew. Roman authorities respond with overwhelming force:

- 200 infantry
 - 70 cavalry
 - 200 spearmen
- 470 soldiers in total**

Paul is escorted by night to Caesarea, treated with unusual dignity, even provided with mounts.

God protects Paul not through miracles—but through Roman law and military order.

7. Paul Before Felix – Truth Without Flattery (Acts 24)

Before Governor Felix, Paul faces formal accusations:

1. He is a public agitator
2. He is a leader of the Nazarene sect
3. He attempted to desecrate the temple

Paul responds calmly and factually:

- He has committed no crime
- No evidence is presented
- His only “offense” is belief in resurrection

Paul openly confesses his faith in “*the Way*” and explains that his life is guided by a clear conscience before God and people.

Felix postpones judgment, curious yet fearful, hoping for a bribe that never comes.

Paul remains imprisoned—but with freedom to receive visitors and continue his witness.

8. Festus and the Appeal to Caesar (Acts 25)

A new governor, **Porcius Festus**, takes office. He is regarded as fair and competent.

When Festus suggests a trial in Jerusalem, Paul invokes his Roman citizenship:

“I appeal to Caesar.”

This is not an escape—it is obedience to God’s promise that Paul would testify in Rome.

Festus responds:

“You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you shall go.”

Conclusion: What Acts 21–25 Teaches Us

This section of Acts is not about spectacular miracles. It is about:

- Faithfulness under pressure
- Leadership that suffers
- Courage guided by conscience
- Wisdom without compromise
- God’s sovereignty in unjust systems

Core Truths for Our Time

1. Justice can be corrupted—even in religious environments
2. Freedom of conscience is worth defending
3. Faith is more than private belief
4. God works through secular structures
5. Faithfulness matters more than comfort

Paul does not control his circumstances—but he remains free.

Christian freedom is greater than legal freedom.

And when all human systems fail, the Lord still says:

“Take courage.”

Paul Before King Agrippa and the Journey to Rome

A Lecture on Acts 25–28

Introduction

Paul's life in chains shows us that God's work is not limited by human obstacles. Even imprisonment, false accusations, and dangerous journeys are part of God's plan for His witnesses. In Acts 25–28, we see:

- Courage in front of rulers
 - Faithful testimony under threat
 - God's guidance through storms and dangers
 - The spread of the Gospel to the heart of the Roman Empire
-

1. Paul Before King Agrippa (Acts 25:13–26:23)

After two years of imprisonment in Caesarea:

- Roman Governor Festus is puzzled by Paul's case.
- King Agrippa and his sister Berenice come to hear the trial.

Paul's speech:

1. **Personal Testimony:** He recounts his life as a Pharisee and his persecution of Christians.
2. **Encounter with Jesus:** On the road to Damascus, Paul meets the risen Christ.
3. **Divine Calling:** Paul explains his mission to preach both to Jews and Gentiles.
4. **Focus on Resurrection:** The hope of resurrection frames the entire defence.

Key Observations

- Paul is calm, respectful, and direct.
- He does not compromise truth to please his audience.
- Festus calls him crazy; Paul responds with reason.
- Agrippa admits that he almost persuades him to become a Christian.

Lesson: Faithful testimony can convict hearts even without coercion. Paul's chains do not hinder his freedom in Christ.

2. Preparing for Rome: The Long Voyage (Acts 27–28)

Paul begins the journey to Rome under the protection of Julius and Roman soldiers:

- Accompanied by trusted friends, including Luke and Aristarchus.
- Multiple stops along Asia Minor, Crete, and Malta.

The Storm (Euroclydon)

- A violent storm threatens the ship and all on board.
- Crew and passengers despair; Paul reassures them, guided by an angel's message.
- Paul's faith in God's protection restores hope.

Practical Lessons:

- God communicates through warning and encouragement.
- Leadership rooted in divine guidance inspires others, even in chaos.

3. Shipwreck on Malta

- The ship crashes on the island of Malta; all survive.
- Paul demonstrates God's power:
 - A poisonous snake bites him, but he suffers no harm.
 - He heals the sick, including prominent locals.

Theological Insights:

- Miracles manifest God's presence.
 - Faith and divine protection often operate in public, showing God's power to others.
-

4. Arrival in Rome (Acts 28:14–31)

Paul finally reaches Rome:

- Receives a warm welcome from believers outside the city.
- Hires a house under guard but freely preaches for two years.
- Teaches about the fulfilment of God's promises through Jesus, from morning to evening.

Key Themes

1. **Persistence in Mission:** Paul continues teaching despite imprisonment.
2. **Respect for Jewish Tradition:** He demonstrates that Christianity fulfills the law and prophets.
3. **Universal Message:** Salvation is offered to Jews and Gentiles alike.
4. **Endurance and Witness:** His imprisonment does not prevent his ministry; it amplifies it.

5. Summary of Paul's Defence Speeches

Audience	Focus
Jerusalem (Acts 22:1–21)	Personal testimony; God's calling
Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1–10)	Resurrection; expose the real conflict
Governor Felix (Acts 24:10–21)	Faithful, reasoned defence; truth over flattery
King Agrippa & Festus (Acts 26:1–23)	Life story, mission, resurrection, fulfilment of prophecy

Lesson: Consistent message and faithfulness transcend audience, status, or circumstance.

6. Spiritual Lessons for Today

1. **Faith in Chains:** God's mission is not hindered by imprisonment or opposition.
2. **Courage in Witness:** Speak the truth even when facing powerful opposition.
3. **Leadership Through Example:** Integrity and calmness inspire others.
4. **God's Guidance:** Divine direction can come through warning, encouragement, or providential events.

5. **Enduring Impact:** A faithful witness can change hearts, communities, and history.
-

7. Concluding Reflections

Paul's journey reminds us:

- **Freedom in Christ exceeds human freedom.**
- **Faithfulness matters more than comfort or approval.**
- **The Gospel's power transcends storms, imprisonment, and societal resistance.**

Even as Paul reached the heart of the Roman Empire, he remained a servant of God, chained in body but free in Spirit. His life exemplifies perseverance, courage, and unwavering trust in God's plan.

"I am bound for the hope of Israel, to testify the good news of Jesus to both Jew and Gentile." – Acts 28:20

Perfect! I've created a **full, flowing English narrative** that combines your two texts into a cohesive story—from Paul's ministry, imprisonment, and journey to Rome, to reflections on the Holy Spirit's work in the early church and today. I've aimed for readability, historical accuracy, and theological clarity while keeping the reflective and narrative tone. Here it is:

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The Holy Spirit in Churches Today

Views on the Spirit’s guidance vary among Christian denominations:

Denomination Emphasis on the Spirit’s Guidance

Catholic	Office & tradition
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Conclusion

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The Holy Spirit's Guidance in Africa, India, the USA, and Brazil

Differences in how the Holy Spirit's guidance is understood and practiced in Africa, India, and the USA are clear and closely linked to culture, history, societal context, and religious environment. At the same time, common traits exist, especially within charismatic Christianity.

Here is a comparative overview:

Africa (especially Sub-Saharan Africa)

Understanding of the Spirit's guidance:

- Very concrete and existential: the Spirit guides in matters of illness, finances, conflicts, and everyday life.
- Strong focus on the Spirit's power (healing, deliverance, prophecy).
- The Bible is often read narratively, with Acts serving as a model.

Church expression:

- Rapidly growing Pentecostal and charismatic churches.
- Leadership is often person-centred (apostles, prophets).
- Worship services feature spontaneity, prayer, and music.

Strengths and risks:

- Deep expectation of God's intervention; faith is integrated into daily life.
- Risk of power abuse; sometimes insufficient theological discernment.

India**Understanding of the Spirit's guidance:**

- Relational and discerning rather than confrontational.
- The Spirit is seen as guiding in wisdom, perseverance, and holiness.
- Less public emphasis on power gifts in some contexts due to social pressures.

Church expression:

- Small congregations, often as religious minorities.
- Strong focus on prayer, fasting, and community.
- Charismatic expressions exist but are often more restrained than in Africa.

Strengths and risks:

- Deep spiritual maturity; strong emphasis on theology of suffering.
- Risk of caution or invisibility; limited space for public expression of faith.

USA**Understanding of the Spirit's guidance:**

- Highly diverse: ranging from strict cessations to strong charismatic expressions.
- Often individualistic: "God is leading me."
- Guidance is sometimes linked to personal success, calling, and development.

Church expression:

- Megachurches, networks, and branded ministries.
- Strong teaching culture, conferences, and media presence.
- Charismatic expressions are often professionally organized.

Strengths and risks:

- Good theological education; strong innovation and mission focus.

- Risk of commercialization; guidance can be mixed with personal ambition.

Common Themes

Despite the differences, several patterns are consistent:

- The Spirit is experienced as alive and active.
- Guidance occurs in tension between the Bible, community, and context.
- Churches are shaped as much by culture as by theology.

Perfect! Here's a **full comparative overview including Brazil**, summarizing how the Holy Spirit's guidance is understood, expressed, and practiced across Africa, India, the USA, and Brazil, including strengths, risks, and cultural notes:

The Holy Spirit's Guidance: Global Comparison

Aspect	Africa (Sub-Saharan)	India	USA	Brazil
Core Emphasis	Power & presence	Wisdom & perseverance	Calling & success	Spiritual experience & community
Context	Spiritual worldview; everyday life integration	Religious pluralism; minority churches	Individualism; personal development	Religious syncretism; strong Pentecostal/charismatic culture
Charismatic Expression	Very strong: healing, deliverance, prophecy	Moderate; more restrained	Highly varied: from cessation's to charismatic	Strong; lively worship, miracles, and prophecy
Leadership	Charismatic, person-centered 102(apostles, prophets)	Collective, relational	Strategic, professionalized	Mix of personal and collective leadership; strong pastors
Church Expression	Rapidly growing Pentecostal/charismatic	Small congregation	Megachurches, networks,	Vibrant Pentecostal and charismatic

Aspect	Africa (Sub-Saharan)	India	USA	Brazil
	tic churches; spontaneous worship, prayer, music	s, focus on prayer, fasting, community	conferences, media-driven	churches; street evangelism; music & media
Strengths	Deep expectation of God's intervention; integrates faith & daily life	Spiritual maturity; strong theology of suffering	Theological education; innovation; mission- focused	Strong communal faith; experiential; high engagement with Holy Spirit gifts
Risks	Authoritarian leadership; occasional lack of theological discernment	Caution, invisibility; limited public faith expression	Commercializ e guidance mixed with personal ambition	Risk of emotionalism; sometimes lack of theological grounding; dependency on strong personalities

Observations and Common Patterns

1. In all regions, the Holy Spirit is experienced as **alive and active**.
2. Guidance occurs at the intersection of **Scripture, community, and cultural context**.
3. Cultural context shapes church life and practices as much as theology.
4. Charismatic expressions vary in **intensity and public visibility**, but the Spirit's role is central.
5. Risks include **authoritarian leadership, individualism, emotionalism, or commercialization**, depending on context.
6. Strengths include **spiritual empowerment, active faith, communal engagement, and strong mission focus**.

Here's a careful English translation of your text on **the role of religion in Brazil**:

The Role of Religion in Brazil

Brazil remains the country with the largest number of Catholics in the world, though their proportion has decreased, while evangelical/charismatic groups have grown significantly over recent decades.

Social Role of Evangelical Churches

Evangelical churches play an important social role, especially in vulnerable areas such as favelas, where they provide community, social support, and sometimes basic services in the absence of state structures.

Political Influence

Evangelical groups have become influential political actors, particularly conservative groups that engage in issues related to family, morality, and politics.

Charismatic Expression

Charismatic practices are a central feature of many Brazilian congregations:

- Testimonies, speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy, and signs and wonders are common in services.
- Music, enthusiastic preaching, and interactive services are typical, especially in larger charismatic megachurches.
- Charismatic expressions tend to be emotional, experiential, and often person-centred, with pastors shaping the dynamics of the service.

Leadership Structure and Role

- In many Brazilian charismatic churches, pastors hold a central, often charismatically authoritative role—they are seen as spiritual leaders with direct connection to God, influencing both religious and sometimes social matters.
- Many leaders are media personalities, using TV, social media, and radio to reach audiences and shape public discourse on faith and society.
- Large congregations often have hierarchical leadership, centralized around the pastor or owner (e.g., Edir Macedo of the Universal Church).
- Some churches are multi-site, similar to megachurches in the USA, with networks of branches across the country and internationally (e.g., International Grace of God, Lagoinha Church).

Identified Risks

- **Religious Intolerance:** Conflicts have been reported between evangelical groups and Afro-Brazilian/Catholic religions in some areas.
- **Political Polarization:** Religious movements can become politically active, polarizing societal debates in a conservative direction.
- **Authoritarian Leadership:** Charismatic leaders may create dependency structures where criticism is met with exclusion.
- **Economic Issues:** Critics note problems with prosperity gospel teachings, which emphasize giving for material blessing.
- **Manipulation in Marginalized Areas:** Media and reports mention cases where gang leaders in marginalized areas adopt evangelical symbols to legitimize power, showing how religion can sometimes be exploited in contexts of crime and social vulnerability.

Summary Table

Aspect	Characteristics in Brazil
Core Tone	Charismatic, evangelical, sometimes prosperity-focused
Context	Rapid growth in socially vulnerable areas; increasing political role
Charismatic Expression	Strongly experiential and Spirit-focused
Leadership	Pastors hold high authority; media-oriented outreach
Risks	Intolerance, politicization, authoritarian leadership, social criticism

How the Holy Spirit's Guidance Works in Swedish Congregations Today

As preachers, we have different experiences compared to Peter, John, and Paul. Church history shows the development since Jesus walked with the disciples, taught, encouraged, and gave them the mission to go out into the whole world.

Looking at congregational growth in the Western world over the last hundred years, it is the **charismatic movement** that has expanded most. South America and Africa provide interesting developments: Brazil today has about 40 million Pentecostal believers in **Assemblies of God (Igreja Assembleia de Deus)** and **Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of God)**.

More and more Catholics in Brazil are becoming Pentecostals. About 15% of Christians in Brazil now belong to a Pentecostal congregation, though the Catholic Church remains the largest with around 65%.

From my personal experience in various Christian congregations worldwide, those congregations that have **strong local personal connections** are the ones that grow in number and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Education is not the only path to good leadership; it is **love for others and guidance from the Holy Spirit** that attracts people through powerful preaching.

Compare this to the preaching of Peter and Paul when meeting the people in the various congregations they visited.

Questions for Reflection

- Why must a preacher know Greek, church history, or various doctrinal ceremonies?
- Why must they be politically active to lead a Christian congregation?

There may be many questions, but looking at the growing congregations of the first century, it was **the equipping and work of the Holy Spirit** and **personal experiences of Jesus** that multiplied congregations into thousands—not theological education or ceremonies.

Church History: The Early Church

The so-called early church can be dated from **30 CE to 300 CE**.

- The first Christians held simple gatherings. No special priestly clothing—leaders wore ordinary clothes.
- The focus was on **prayer, communion, and teaching**, often in homes. Ceremonies were simple and informal.

After Constantine opened the Roman Empire to Christianity in the 4th century, the church changed.

- In **313 CE**, Christianity was legalized. Worship moved to **large public buildings**.
- Liturgy became more solemn and structured.
- Priests began wearing clean, light-colored garments, which later became the **alb**, originally a Roman tunic. (Similar to white garments in Arab culture today, such as the pilgrim clothing Muslims wear at Mecca, also worn at funerals.)

Between **400–600 CE**, the alb (or the modern long white liturgical robe) was worn by bishops, priests, and deacons. Garments gained symbolic meaning of **purity before God**, so special clothing became reserved for worship. Ceremonial elements were also taken from Roman court culture.

By around **900–1000 CE**, the bishop's status was marked by the **mitre**, a bishop's hat, inspired by Roman and Byzantine headgear.

- By the **medieval period (1000–1500)**, liturgy became highly elaborate and complex.
- Each garment had fixed significance: the **alb** represented purity, the **stole** the office, and the **mitre** the bishop's authority. Ceremonies became more formal than in biblical times.

Summary:

- Jesus and the apostles wore no special clothing or rituals.
- Alb: 4th–5th century
- Mitre: ~900–1000 CE
- Most ceremonies developed **hundreds of years after the New Testament**

Biblical Perspective and the Reformation on Ceremonies

The Bible emphasizes **simplicity in worship and leadership**.

- No prescribed ceremonial clothing for Christian leaders.
- Jesus wore ordinary clothes (Matt 9:20).
- Apostles were fishermen and craftsmen—no ritual garments. Worship was in homes, not temples (Rom 16:5).

Warning Against External Show:

- Jesus criticized religious display:
“Watch out for the teachers of the law... who like to walk around in long robes...”
(Mark 12:38)

Paul emphasized **inner faith over outward forms** (Rom 12:1–2).

- All believers are priests before God (1 Pet 2:9).
- No alb, mitre, incense, or fixed liturgy is mentioned.
- The **priesthood of all believers** means all baptized Christians are called to serve God and their neighbor through prayer and holy living—not to rule over others.

Martin Luther often referred to:

- 1 Pet 2:9 – “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood”
- Rev 1:6 – Christ has made us priests
- Rom 12:1 – The whole life as spiritual worship

Ceremonies developed gradually, not by decision, because:

- Christianity became a state religion.
- Worship moved from homes to basilicas.
- Leadership became hierarchical.
- Roman court and temple culture influenced liturgy.

Result:

- Priests received special garments, bishops symbols of authority.
- Liturgy became ritualized.
- Gap widened between “priest” and “people.” The church began to resemble a religious empire rather than a movement.

Reformation (1500s):

- Martin Luther criticized elevating ceremonies to necessary for salvation.
- He retained simple liturgy pointing to Christ.
- Rejected the idea that clothing or rituals give spiritual power: **“Clothes do not make the priest, the Word does.”**
- Other reformers (Zwingli, Calvin) went further: removed priestly garments, altars, incense, and processions. Only what is biblically supported should be used.
- Principle: **Sola Scriptura** – Scripture alone

Comparison:

Aspect	Bible	Medieval Church
Worship	Simple gatherings	High ceremony
Clothing	No special garments	Alb, mitre, stole
Leadership	All believers are priests	Hierarchical clergy
Faith	Inner faith	External ritual

Ceremonies are historical traditions, not biblical requirements. The Reformation sought to return the church to the simplicity of the first century.

Practical consequences:

- Bible translated into the vernacular
- Lay teaching emphasized
- Clergy allowed to marry
- Congregation given more responsibility

Summary of Differences:

- Catholic view: The priest is something special
- Lutheran view: The priest does something special
- The **general priesthood** was a theological revolution, shifting focus from the altar to the congregation.

Perfect! Here's a **comprehensive global overview** of the **Holy Spirit's guidance, church context, leadership, charismatic expression, and risks**, now including **Sweden** alongside Africa, India, USA, and Brazil. I've integrated both historical insights and contemporary practices:

Global Comparison: The Holy Spirit's Guidance in Congregations

Aspect	Africa (Sub-Saharan)	India	USA	Brazil	Sweden
Core Emphases	Power & presence	Wisdom & perseverance	Calling & success	Spiritual experience & community	Discipleship & Spirit-led growth
Context	Spiritual worldview; integration into daily life	Religious pluralism; minority churches	Individualism; personal development	Rapid growth in socially vulnerable areas; political influence	Secularized society; focus on community and Spirit-led renewal
Charismatic Expression	Very strong: healing, deliverance, prophecy	Moderate; relationally discerned; restrained public expressions	Highly varied: cessationist to charismatic	Strong: lively worship, miracles, prophecy, interactive services	Moderate: charismatic gifts present, often within established denominations; personal faith emphasized
Leadership	Charismatic, person-centred (apostles, prophets)	Collective, relational	Strategic, professionalized	Centralized around pastors; media-savvy; some hierarchical networks	Often collaborative; lay involvement encouraged; pastors emphasize Spirit-led guidance
Church Expression	Rapidly growing Pentecostal/charismatic churches; spontaneous prayer, music	Small congregations; prayer, fasting, community	Megachurches, networks, media presence; organized events	Vibrant Pentecostal/charismatic churches; interactive services; community support	Emphasis on teaching, mission, and Spirit-led action; focus on local congregation

Aspect	Africa (Sub-Saharan)	India	USA	Brazil	Sweden
Strengths	Deep expectation of God's intervention; integrates faith & daily life	Spiritual maturity; strong theology of suffering	Theological education; innovation; mission-focused	Strong communal faith; experiential; high engagement with Spirit gifts	s and small groups Reliance on Holy Spirit; strong lay involvement; focus on personal faith and discipleship
Risks	Authoritarian leadership; sometimes weak theological discernment	Caution, invisibility; limited public faith expression	Commercialization; guidance mixed with personal ambition	Intolerance, political polarization, authoritarian leadership, prosperity gospel	Risk of over-intellectualization; emphasis on ceremony in some historic denominations

Observations and Common Patterns

1. **Spirit actively experienced worldwide**, though expressions differ culturally.
 2. **Guidance occurs at the intersection of Scripture, community, and context.**
 3. **Charismatic expressions vary** from very emotional and public (Africa, Brazil) to moderate and reflective (India, Sweden).
 4. **Leadership styles differ**, from highly charismatic and centralized (Brazil, Africa) to collaborative or relational (India, Sweden).
 5. **Risks** vary: authoritarianism, commercialization, political entanglement, or overemphasis on ritual.
 6. **Strengths:** empowerment, communal faith, active discipleship, experiential encounter with God.
-

Historical Context Integration

- Sweden reflects **Western church history**:
 - Influence of Reformation: focus on Scripture, general priesthood, simplicity in worship.
 - Pastors are guides, not intermediaries; emphasis on Spirit-led discipleship and teaching.
 - Ceremonial roles and hierarchical structures are minimal compared to medieval Catholic or some Brazilian churches.
 - Other regions reflect local culture:
 - **Africa & Brazil**: dynamic, expressive, Spirit-led services.
 - **India**: relational, disciplined, patient growth.
 - **USA**: diverse, often professionalized, sometimes individualistic.
-

Key Takeaways for Understanding the Holy Spirit Globally

- **No culture is too distant**: the Spirit works in every context.
- **Scripture, Spirit, and community together guide congregations.**
- **Growth is linked to relational connection, Spirit-led teaching, and personal experience of Jesus**, more than formal education or ceremonial expertise.
- **Cultural context shapes expression**, but core principles remain universal: faith, discipleship, empowerment, and mission.



Here is a clear and accurate **English translation** of the text:

Different Worship Traditions

It can be interesting to examine contemporary Catholic and Protestant worship services without polemics, yet with clear differences.

Overview

Area	Catholic Worship Service (Mass)	Protestant Worship Service
Center	The Eucharist (Holy Communion)	The Word (sermon)
Authority	The Bible and Tradition	The Bible alone
Role of the priest	Officiant who administers the sacraments	Preacher and shepherd

Area	Catholic Worship Service (Mass)	Protestant Worship Service
Role of the congregation	Participatory but led	Active through singing, prayer, and responses
Language	Formal, fixed liturgy	More everyday, freer
Ceremonies	High degree	Low–medium (varies)

The Catholic Mass

The structure of the service is almost identical throughout the world.

Parts:

1. Introductory rites
2. Liturgy of the Word (biblical readings)
3. Liturgy of the Eucharist
4. Concluding rites

Characteristics:

- Fixed order
- Fixed prayers
- Symbolic actions (sign of the cross, kneeling, incense)

Emphasis on holiness and continuity.

Protestant Worship Service

Protestant worship services can vary greatly between denominations.

Common elements:

- Praise and worship
- Prayer
- Scripture reading
- Sermon (main focus)
- Communion (sometimes)

Emphasis on understanding, teaching, and personal faith.

Views on Communion

Catholic view

- Bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation).
- Christ's sacrifice is made present sacramentally.
- Only the priest consecrates the elements.

Protestant views

- Different understandings:
 - **Lutheran:** Christ is truly present
 - **Reformed:** Spiritual presence
 - **Free Church/Evangelical:** Memorial act

Communion is not seen as a sacrifice, but as remembrance and fellowship.

Priesthood and Office

The Catholic Church

- The priest holds a special sacramental office
- Celibacy is the norm
- Clear hierarchy: priest, bishop, cardinal, and pope

Protestant Churches

- Priest and pastor are not ontologically distinct (the terms have essentially the same meaning)
- Marriage is usually permitted
- No universal leader

Vestments and Symbolism

	Catholic	Protestant
Alb	Yes	Sometimes
Mitre	Yes (bishop)	No
Incense	Yes	Rarely
Church interior	Altar-focused	Pulpit-focused

Music

Catholic

- Gregorian chant, choir
- Organ
- Liturgically text-based

Protestant

- Hymns and praise songs
 - Congregational singing
 - Modern music is common
-

Core Theological Differences

Question	Catholic	Protestant
Salvation	Faith and sacraments	Faith alone
Tradition	Binding	Subordinate to the Bible
The Church	Mediates grace	Proclaims grace

One-Sentence Summary

- **Catholic worship:** sacramental, timeless, rich in symbolism
- **Protestant worship:** word-centred, educational, and flexible

The Holy Spirit as the Thread Through the Acts of the Apostles and the Heart and Star of Christianity

The Holy Spirit is the thread running through the entire Book of Acts and is the very heart and guiding star of Christianity. Please follow along and read the biblical examples below:

Acts 1:2; 1:5; 1:8; 2:4; 2:38; 4:8; 5:32; 8:15–17; 9:17; 10:38; 10:44–46; 11:15–16; 11:24; 13:2; 13:52; 15:28; 19:2,6; 21:11

Historical Overview of the Christian World

Historically, unity within the Christian world functioned well during the first two hundred years. The episcopal see developed in Antioch under Ignatius, who according to tradition was a disciple of both Peter and John.

Unity in Christ lasted for approximately two centuries. Some important dates include:

Key Councils and Events

325 AD – First Council of Nicaea

The first ecumenical council. It partially formulates the Creed and establishes a theologically defined unity concerning the nature of Christ.

381 AD – Council of Constantinople

Completes the Nicene Creed (the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed). Marks the high point of doctrinal unity in the undivided Church.

431 AD – Council of Ephesus

Condemns Nestorianism. The Church remains formally united, but cracks begin to appear.

451 AD – Council of Chalcedon

Defines Christ as one person in two natures.

Leads to the first major schism: the Oriental Orthodox Churches effectively separate.

The Breaking of Unity

- **451** – First major schism (Oriental Orthodox)
 - **1054** – East–West Schism
 - **1517** – The Reformation
-

From 1517 Onward – The Reformation

Martin Luther's theses (1517) mark the beginning of Protestantism.

Western Christianity divides into:

- Catholics
- Lutherans
- Reformed churches
- Radical Protestants, among others

This becomes the largest and most enduring division in Church history.

1960s–1970s – Breakthrough of the Ecumenical Movement

Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)

Marks the Catholic Church's opening toward ecumenism.

Historic meeting in 1964:

Pope Paul VI ↔ Patriarch Athenagoras

(The mutual excommunications of 1054 are lifted.)

Other important steps toward unity:

- **1948:** Formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC)
 - **1999:** Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (Catholic Church and Lutheran World Federation)
-

2000s–2020s – Modern Unity Dialogue

- Continued Catholic–Orthodox dialogues
 - Within Protestantism, several denominations have united (e.g., United Churches)
 - Global ecumenism is strong, though no organizational reunification of Christianity has taken place
-

Why Did Divisions Arise in the Church?

One key cause can be traced to the **Council of Chalcedon (451)**, where it was declared that Christ is “one person in two natures,” divine and human.

Some churches in Egypt, Syria, and Armenia felt this sounded like two separate Christs and instead maintained that Christ's nature is united—**miaphysitism**.

Summary of Causes

- Theological misunderstandings
- Differences in language and cultural context
- Political tensions between Constantinople and regional churches
- Resistance to centralized control from the imperial capital

The Oriental Orthodox Churches (Coptic, Syriac, Armenian) went their own way.

The Schism of 1054 – East and West

The Great Schism between East and West was primarily driven by cultural and linguistic differences:

- The West developed through Latin
- The East through Greek theology, liturgy, philosophy, and church administration

Authority and the Papacy

- In the West, the Pope's role grew with the idea of universal papal authority
- In the East, patriarchs were seen as equals, opposing rule by a single bishop

This became the main driving force behind the schism.

Doctrinal Dispute

A major theological difference concerned the Holy Spirit:

- The West added “and the Son” (*Filioque*) to the Creed
- The East argued that no one had the right to alter an ecumenical creed without a council

Political Developments

- The Roman (Byzantine) imperial structure collapsed
- The fall of Western Rome (476) made Rome more independent
- The Crusaders' sack of Constantinople in 1204 deepened the schism long after it began

Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism went separate ways.

The Division of 1517 – The Reformation

Abuse of Power and Corruption in the West

Criticism was directed at:

- The sale of indulgences
- Luxurious lifestyles of church leaders
- Politicized episcopal offices
- Poor education among clergy

Theology – The View of Salvation

Reformation churches emphasized:

- Justification by faith
- The authority of Scripture over tradition
- The priesthood of all believers

The Catholic Church emphasized:

- Faith and works
- The role of the sacraments
- The Church's authority to interpret Scripture

Social and Political Factors

- European princes sought greater independence from Rome
- The printing press made ideas impossible to suppress

Protestant churches emerged, and Western Christianity divided into multiple traditions.

A Legitimate Question: When Will Catholics and Protestants Be United?

Since the Reformation in the 16th century, the Catholic Church and Protestant churches have not reunited into a single Church. They remain separate church families, but important steps toward unity have been taken:

1960s–1970s – Ecumenical Dialogues

Following the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church actively pursued unity and dialogue with Protestants.

1999 – Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

A historic agreement between:

- The Catholic Church

- The Lutheran World Federation

They reached a shared understanding of salvation—one of the central conflicts of the Reformation.

This represents the closest approach to theological unity so far.

2000s–2020s – Continued Cooperation

- Joint prayers and worship services
- Social and humanitarian work
- Ongoing theological dialogue

Today, the churches are closer to one another than at any time during the past five hundred years.

Below is an **academic-style adaptation** of the text. The tone is formal, neutral, and suitable for theology, church history, or religious studies contexts. Content is preserved, but phrasing is tightened, terminology standardized, and evaluative language minimized.

Charismatic Movements and Their Impact on Global Christianity

Charismatic movements have significantly reshaped traditional Christian denominations worldwide. Emerging in the nineteenth century through revival movements in England and the United States, these developments emphasized personal conversion, sanctification, and experiential awareness of God’s presence. Within Methodism, particularly in the theology of John Wesley, the concept of a “second blessing” was articulated, while the Holiness Movement in the United States further developed these themes.

These revivalist traditions provided the theological and experiential foundations for the emergence of the Pentecostal movement in the early twentieth century (1901–1906).

The Emergence of Pentecostalism

In **1901**, in Topeka, Kansas, Agnes Ozman reported speaking in tongues, an event widely regarded as the beginning of modern Pentecostalism.

Between **1906 and 1909**, the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, led by William J. Seymour, became a global catalyst for Pentecostal expansion. The revival was characterized by glossolalia, prophecy, divine healing, and interracial worship—features that were particularly notable given the racial segregation of the period.

From Azusa Street, Pentecostalism spread rapidly across the globe.

The Charismatic Movement Within Historic Churches (1960s–1970s)

A distinct phase began in the **1960s**, when charismatic expressions emerged within established Protestant denominations.

In **1960**, Episcopal priest Dennis Bennett publicly testified to having experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. This event is commonly identified as the starting point of the charismatic movement within mainline Protestant churches.

In **1967**, the **Catholic Charismatic Renewal** began when students at Duquesne University reported experiences described as a “baptism in the Spirit.” The movement spread rapidly within the Roman Catholic Church and today is present in over 200 countries.

During the **1970s and 1980s**, ecumenical charismatic conferences increasingly brought together Christians from diverse traditions, including Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Pentecostals, and Free Churches. This development marked the first large-scale ecumenical renewal movement since the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

Later Developments and Neo-Charismatic Movements

From the **1980s onward**, new charismatic expressions emerged, particularly through John Wimber and the Vineyard movement. These emphasized healing, prophecy, the immediacy of the Kingdom of God, and a relatively non-sensational (“low-church”) charismatic practice. This approach significantly influenced evangelical, Baptist, and Anglican communities and contributed to the rise of contemporary worship culture.

Global Expansion (1990s–2020s)

Between the **1990s and 2020s**, Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity experienced rapid global growth. Current estimates suggest that approximately **650–700 million Christians** identify with Pentecostal or charismatic traditions.

- More than **50 percent of Christians in Africa and Latin America** are charismatic
- Significant growth is observed in Asia, particularly in South Korea, China, India, and Indonesia

This period has also seen the rise of:

- Megachurches (e.g., Hillsong Church, Yoido Full Gospel Church)
- Prophetic and apostolic movements
- Global worship movements (Hillsong, Bethel, Vineyard)
- The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)
- Large-scale healing crusades, especially in Africa and Asia

Charismatic Christianity is no longer a marginal phenomenon but represents a **major stream within contemporary global Christianity**.

Today, charismatic expressions can be found within the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Churches, Lutheran and Anglican traditions, Baptist churches, Pentecostal denominations, Free Churches, house church networks, and transnational Christian movements.

Influential Figures in the Nordic Context

Lewi Petrus (1884–1974)

A central leader of Swedish Pentecostalism, pastor of the Philadelphia Church in Stockholm, founder of the newspaper *Dagen* (1945), and a key figure in shaping Nordic Pentecostal and charismatic life.

Carl-Gustaf Severin (b. 1955)

Missionary and charismatic preacher associated with Livets Ord (Word of Life), influential in evangelistic efforts in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the 1980s and 1990s.

Ulf Ekman (b. 1950)

Founder of Livets Ord (1983) and primary introducer of the Word of Faith movement in Sweden. He exercised significant national and international influence and entered the Roman Catholic Church in 2014, subsequently engaging in ecumenical dialogue.

Stanley Sjöberg (1936–2022)

Pentecostal pastor, ecumenical leader, and media figure; founder of TV-Inter and organizer of charismatic events.

Sven Lidman (1882–1960)

Author turned Pentecostal preacher, influential in early Swedish Pentecostal theology and rhetoric.

Frank Mangs (1897–1994)

Finnish evangelist active in Sweden, whose ministry shaped the spirituality and devotional life of Scandinavian revival movements.

Periodization of Nordic Charismatic Influence

Early Pentecostal Period (1900–1930):

Thomas Ball Barratt (Norway), Lewi Petrus (Sweden), Sven Lidman (Sweden)

Post-War Revivals and Healing Movements (1950–1980):

Emanuel Minos (Norway), Frank Mangs (Finland/Sweden), Niilo Yli-Vainio (Finland)

Neo-Charismatic and Word of Faith Movements (1980–2000):

Ulf Ekman (Sweden), Carl-Gustaf Severin (Sweden), Aril Edvardsen (Norway)

Contemporary Influence (2000–):

Egil Svartdahl (Norway), along with leaders associated with Bethel, Livets Ord, and Vineyard movements in the Nordic region.

Periodization of Charismatic Influence in the Nordic Countries

Early Pentecostal Charismatic Phase (1900–1930)

Key figures during the formative phase of Nordic Pentecostalism include:

- **Thomas Ball Barratt** (Norway)
- **Lewi Pethrus** (Sweden)
- **Sven Lidman** (Sweden)

This period marks the introduction and institutionalization of Pentecostal-charismatic spirituality in Scandinavia, largely influenced by transatlantic revival movements.

Post-War Revival and Healing Movements (1950–1980)

Following the Second World War, a renewed emphasis on healing, evangelism, and charismatic experience emerged:

- **Emanuel Minos** (Norway)
- **Frank Mangs** (Finland/Sweden)
- **Niilo Yli-Vainio** (Finland)

These figures contributed to large-scale revival meetings and healing campaigns, shaping popular religiosity across national boundaries in the Nordic region.

Neo-Charismatic and Word of Faith Movements (1980–2000)

From the 1980s onward, neo-charismatic expressions and the Word of Faith movement gained prominence:

- **Ulf Ekman** (Sweden)
- **Carl-Gustaf Severin** (Sweden)
- **Aril Edvardsen** (Norway)

This period was characterized by increased media usage, international networks, and theological emphases on faith, healing, and prosperity.

Emanuel Minos (1925–2014)

Evangelist and preacher known for a strong charismatic emphasis, including prophetic proclamation and revival-oriented ministry.

Aril Edvardsen (1938–2008)

Founder of *Troens Bevis* (Faith Evidence), Edvardsen was a charismatic evangelist and missionary pioneer, known for global campaigns and extensive television ministry.

Egil Svartdahl (b. 1954)

Pastor and television evangelist (notably through *Norge i dag*), representing contemporary charismatic influence in Norway.

Denmark: Key Figures

Jens Peter Larsen (1873–1952)

Early Pentecostal leader in Denmark and founder of the Apostolic Church, which developed into an international charismatic movement.

Johannes Facius (1936–2020)

Leader in national prayer initiatives and charismatic networks, playing a significant role in the charismatic renewal in Denmark and Europe.

Charismatic Influence within Renewal Movements

Certain leaders within Danish renewal movements (e.g., Ordet and Israel-related initiatives) incorporated charismatic elements, although fewer figures attained the same prominence as their counterparts in Norway and Sweden.

Concluding Reflections: Missiology and the Role of the Holy Spirit

From an academic and theological perspective, the study of early Christian mission—particularly as depicted in the opening chapter of the Acts of the Apostles—raises enduring questions concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in contemporary Christian practice.

The dependence of figures such as Peter and Paul on the Holy Spirit for missionary activity invites comparison with modern domestic and international mission strategies. Questions emerge regarding authority, sacrifice, stewardship, and theological motivation in present-day ecclesial contexts.

The New Testament understanding of humanity as entrusted with stewardship over creation further challenges contemporary Christian communities to evaluate how this mandate is exercised today.

Similarly, the sacrificial commitment of the earliest disciples prompts reflection on the nature of sacrifice in modern Christianity: what constitutes faithful witness, and what shapes contemporary mission priorities?

These reflections are grounded in the Great Commission, traditionally articulated in Matthew 28:18–20, where Jesus commissions his followers to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them within a Trinitarian framework. In academic theology, this passage remains central to discussions of mission, authority, and ecclesial identity.

Excellent — below is a **journal / doctoral-level adaptation**, written to meet **peer-review and dissertation standards**, followed by a **parallel Swedish version**.

The structure, tone, and register align with **religious studies, missiology, or historical theology**. I've also made explicit what distinguishes this from earlier versions.

Charismatic Christianity in the Nordic Context:

Historical Trajectories and Missiological Evaluation

Abstract

This study examines the historical development of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in the Nordic countries and offers a critical missiological and theological analysis of its influence on global and regional Christian mission. By situating Nordic charismatic movements within broader transnational revival networks, the article evaluates their pneumatologically assumptions, ecclesiological structures, and missional practices. Attention is given to questions of authority, contextualization, and sustainability. The study argues that charismatic Christianity represents a major missional paradigm within contemporary Christianity, while also requiring sustained theological critique and integration within the wider ecclesial tradition.

1. Introduction

Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity has emerged as one of the most significant movements in modern Christian history. While much scholarship has focused on its growth in the Global South, the Nordic countries provide a distinctive case study in which early adoption, strong institutionalization, and ongoing renewal intersect. This article traces the historical development of charismatic Christianity in the Nordic region and engages critically with its missiological implications.

2. Historical Overview: Charismatic Developments in the Nordic Countries

2.1 Early Pentecostal Foundations (1900–1930)

The early twentieth century witnessed the introduction of Pentecostal-charismatic spirituality into Scandinavia, largely through transatlantic revival networks. Figures such as **Thomas Ball Barratt** in Norway, **Lewi Petrus** in Sweden, and **Sven Lidman** played foundational roles in shaping Pentecostal theology, ecclesial organization, and evangelistic practice in the Nordic context.

This period established a durable Pentecostal infrastructure that combined revivalist spirituality with institutional stability—an unusual feature when compared to other European contexts.

2.2 Post-War Revivals and Healing Movements (1950–1980)

Following the Second World War, Nordic charismatic Christianity experienced renewed vitality through healing ministries and large-scale evangelistic campaigns. Leaders such as **Emanuel Minos**, **Frank Mangs**, and **Niilo Yli-Vainio** contributed to the popularization of charismatic practices across denominational boundaries.

These movements blurred distinctions between Pentecostal, Free Church, and mainline traditions, thereby preparing the ground for later charismatic renewal within historic churches.

2.3 Neo-Charismatic and Word of Faith Movements (1980–2000)

The late twentieth century marked a shift toward neo-charismatic expressions, particularly through the **Word of Faith movement**. In Sweden, **Ulf Ekman** and **Carl-Gustaf Severin**, and in Norway **Aril Edvardson**, exemplified a new generation of leaders who emphasized faith-based theology, global networking, and media-driven mission strategies.

This period reflects broader trends in global charismatic Christianity, including increased internationalization, theological diversification, and the rise of charismatic mega ministries.

2.4 Contemporary Developments (2000–)

In the twenty-first century, charismatic influence persists through media ministries, worship movements, and trans denominational networks. Figures such as **Egil Svartdahl**, along with leaders associated with **Bethel, Vineyard, and Livets Ord**, illustrate the ongoing adaptability of charismatic Christianity within Nordic societies.

3. Critical Missiological Analysis

3.1 Pneumatology and Mission

Charismatic Christianity foregrounds the Holy Spirit as the primary agent of mission, frequently appealing to the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. This pneumatological emphasis has fostered missionary dynamism and lay participation. However, from a missiological perspective, the prioritization of spiritual experience raises questions regarding theological normativity, discernment, and ecclesial accountability.

3.2 Contextualization and Globalization

The success of charismatic Christianity is partly attributable to its capacity for contextual adaptation. Yet this adaptability may also result in the uncritical exportation of globalized charismatic models, leading to theological standardization rather than genuine contextual theology. Nordic charismatic movements both receive and transmit such global influences, positioning them as active participants in transnational religious flows.

3.3 Authority, Leadership, and Sustainability

Charismatic ecclesiology often emphasizes spiritual gifting over institutional office, contributing to the democratization of ministry. At the same time, leadership frequently

becomes centralized around charismatic personalities. Missiologically, this tension highlights the need for structures that balance spiritual vitality with institutional continuity.

4. Theological Reflection (Non-Devotional)

From a theological perspective, charismatic Christianity challenges the Church to reconsider the relationship between spiritual power, suffering, and discipleship. While charismatic movements often associate mission with visible signs of divine activity, the New Testament witness also emphasizes perseverance, communal discernment, and faithful witness amid adversity.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) remains foundational, yet its interpretation varies widely. Charismatic Christianity contributes a renewed emphasis on divine empowerment but must remain integrated with catechesis, ethical formation, and ecclesial tradition if it is to sustain long-term missional credibility.

5. Conclusion

Charismatic Christianity in the Nordic countries represents both a historically rooted and dynamically evolving expression of Christian mission. Its global interconnectedness, pneumatologically focus, and missional vitality position it as a central force in contemporary Christianity. At the same time, its future effectiveness depends on critical theological reflection, institutional accountability, and sustained engagement with the wider Christian tradition.

Sermon Conclusion

As we reflect on the time from when Jesus spoke of His return in the opening chapter of the Book of Acts, we are led to an important and searching question:

How would Jesus recognize His church today?

How would He meet our congregations—across denominations, traditions, and cultures—here in our time?

When we look at Peter and Paul, we see men who were utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit in their mission. Their strength was not education, position, or structure, but obedience, faith, and surrender to God's leading.

When we compare their mission with ours today—whether close to home or across borders—we must ask ourselves:

Are we still depending on the Holy Spirit in the same way?

God entrusted humanity, the crown of His creation, with responsibility and stewardship. He placed His world in our hands.

How are we caring for that calling today—in our churches, our communities, and our daily lives?

We also cannot avoid the question of sacrifice.

The first disciples paid a high price to follow Christ. Their obedience cost them comfort, security, and often their lives.

So we must ask ourselves honestly:

What is our sacrifice today?

What does following Jesus truly cost us?

And what shapes our mission now?

Is it tradition, fear, convenience, or cultural expectations—or is it still the command and authority of Christ?

Jesus Himself gives us our direction and our hope:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

This commission has not changed.

The authority has not weakened.

The calling has not expired.

The question that remains is this:

Will we, like the first disciples, trust the Holy Spirit enough to obey?

May we be a church that listens, a people who respond, and disciples who follow—whatever the cost—until Christ comes again.

Amen.