

ACTS

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN



Acts 1—7 tells the story of the early church growing and prospering in Jerusalem until the stoning of the first martyr, Stephen, with the resulting persecution scattering Christians throughout Judea and Samaria. That attack worked to spread the Gospel further and set in motion the dramatic conversion of one of the Christians' greatest persecutors, Saul of Tarsus (Chap. 9). Saul (whose Roman name was Paul) helped a new church grow in Antioch of Syria, one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, and that church sent Paul and his companions on journeys across the eastern half of the empire to share the message that "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6, KJV).

Acts 13—20 tells how Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and the other missionaries endured persecution, but also established churches. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in His power, they took the message of Jesus to important crossroads towns such as Ephesus, Philippi, and Corinth. Even prison did not stop Paul; his voyage to Rome for a trial before the emperor became a golden opportunity to share the Good News in the world's largest city.

Left: This is the Gangites River, just outside the ruins of ancient Philippi. Here Paul and his companions found Lydia and other women praying and shared the Gospel with them (Acts 16:13-15).
Photo: © Dr. James C. Martin.

Far left: This artist's representation shows the Acropolis at Athens, famous for its Parthenon temple and statue of the goddess Athena, the patron goddess of the city. Paul came here to debate Christianity with the Greek philosophers in the city market (Acts 17:17) below the Acropolis and to speak to the Areopagus (vs. 22), which acted as a sort of town council in the areas of religion and morals. All major Greek cities had a central city marketplace where ideas were often debated, and many had their own acropolis hill topped with a cluster of temples dedicated to Greek and Roman gods. At the foot of the Acropolis is the Areopagus (Mars Hill). Photo: © akq-images

Insert: A present-day view of Mars Hill and Athens beyond, looking down from the top of the Acropolis. Photo: © Pictorial Library of Bible Lands.



Left: An ancient mosaic of a black fisherman found in Antioch of Syria. The Gospel crossed the social, economic, and ethnic barriers of the first century to appeal to all people, such as the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26-39) and all other Gentiles (13:46-48). Photo: © Pictorial Library of Bible Lands.

Top right: The inscription on this seat in the theater at ancient Miletus says it was reserved for Jews and "god-fearing" people. That description fit Cornelius (Acts 10:2) and many others who tried to serve God, some of whom converted to the Jewish faith (13:43). Paul stopped at the port of Miletus on his way to Jerusalem and addressed the elders of the church in Ephesus (20:17), some 30 miles away. The Miletus theater seated about 15,000 people, and ancient writings say there was a strong Jewish population in the city. Photo: © Pictorial Library of Bible Lands.

Right: This model of Herod's temple in Jerusalem shows the temple building itself and the court of the Gentiles surrounding it. The apostles gathered every day in the temple courts and also preached there (Acts 2:46; 5:42). Peter and John also healed a blind man at the temple's Beautiful Gate, possibly the gate (left center) that led into the inner courts of the temple itself. Photo: © Dr. James C. Martin. Reproduction of the City of Jerusalem at the time of the Second Temple—located on the grounds of the Holyland Hotel, Jerusalem.



A model of a Roman merchant ship. Paul and his companions would have booked passage on such ships, because there were no "passenger ships" in his time. Paul would simply have found room on ships going to wherever he was heading, as in his voyage from Troas to Neapolis (Acts 16:11).
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Map: Publisher-owned art by Paul Segsworth