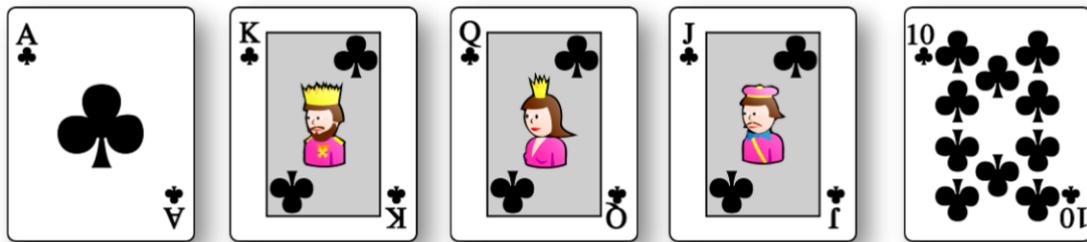


## Acts of the Apostles – The Growth of the Church

### *New Testament Survey – Lesson 15*

This week my travels took me to Las Vegas – TO SPEAK AT A CONFERENCE. I managed to get in and out the same day, and not only get through my speech and meetings, but also to get a marvelous illustration for today’s lesson!

As I went to the conference room where I was speaking, I walked through the casino area. I wondered how many of the hopefuls at the various tables were dreaming of that 1-in-649,739 hand, a royal straight flush. This is a five-card hand, with all the cards in the same suit, in order, ace – king – queen – jack – ten.



A royal straight flush in clubs

Look carefully at the picture above of the royal straight flush and ask yourself this question: Which of the cards, more so than any other, makes the hand? You might say, “The ace, of course. For you can’t have a royal straight flush without an ace.” But can’t that be said also of the king? You could never have a royal straight flush without a king. Or a queen either. Or a jack or a ten. In fact, each of the cards is integral to a royal straight flush, and if you remove any of the five and replace it with any other card in the deck, you cannot possibly have a royal straight flush.

This illustration helps me appreciate the story that begins to unfold in the book of Acts. The illustration works for me in two ways. First, just as each card is required to make the hand, so each of several factors was required to allow the church to establish and grow into the worldwide influence it became almost overnight, at least in the historical sense of “overnight.” Without the Roman peace, the Roman roads, the Jewish dispersion, the temple worship, the key people in the key places, the church would have never made it. This confluence of these important factors works as each of the cards in the flush. Without each one, the

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hand does not make. God's hand and timing were (and are) perfect. Yet these "cards" alone will not make the hand without divine intervention, which brings us to the second usage of this illustration.

A second way the illustration speaks to me about Acts is the consideration of the odds. This confluence of factors could be "coincidence," but the odds are so slim, they would make the 1-in-649,739 royal straight flush an hourly occurrence. Think about the church establishment as you might an investment. If you were an investor, would you invest in this idea:

There are a few rag tag, uneducated fishermen in a backwater of the Roman Empire who are by and large illiterate, who have no real following, who believe that one of their buddies who was killed came back from the dead. They claim they saw him over a few weeks before he shot up into the sky with a promise he would come back. This buddy, they say, was "God." Their plan was to take this global as a movement. There was no earthly benefit to the plan; they could only sell you on the idea that it might make your life on earth miserable. BUT they could assure folks who were willing to sign on, that there would be a great life after death.

This is a spur of the moment idea. It was launched seemingly on a whim. They have no business plan, nor do they have any authoritative backers. In fact, the authorities were seeking to destroy the ideas, just as they put to death the original fellow they deemed a rabble-rouser. These very enemies are the ones upon which the enterprise will rely for its growth. Their minds must be "changed." No groundwork was laid for the enterprise. They have no money, are relatively poor and living from hand to mouth. They have no way to sustain the enterprise, short of volunteers and donations.

There are no emails, no Facebook connections, no mass-mailings or printed books. There are no cell phones or landlines to enable ready communication. People are without all of the modern aids of communication. There is no hierarchy or structure in place to govern or guide the enterprise. There is no army, no police force, and no base of operations.

Over time, many have tried with better resources and training to start something profound and meaningful, often claiming to follow some charismatic leader (granted, the leader was generally alive and not simply a "reputation"). Those have each failed and faded into the anonymity of history.

Would *you* invest in the success of this effort? Would you stick all your money into it? Your odds of success are MUCH less than a royal straight flush. Yet in reality this movement conquered the world. Again, only by the hand of God!

## ACTS IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the three synoptic gospels, we read about Jesus using a parable of the sower to explain people's reception to the teaching about the kingdom of heaven. The teaching of the kingdom was likened to seed. For some, the seed (teaching) fell on the path and was eaten by birds, never even sprouting. For others, the seeds fell on rocky ground with enough dirt to sprout the seed, but not enough for the roots to grow. So the seed sprouted and quickly died. A third soil type was weedy, and seeds that fell there grew, but were choked out by the weeds. The final seeds fell on good soil and grew, produced grain, and multiplied many times over (See, Matt. 13:1-9; Mk. 4:1-9; Lk. 8:4-8). That parable speaks directly to the heart of people, but it also marvelously displays the truth of the kingdom on a larger scale.

The book of Acts unfolds astronomical church growth in a soil that, while statistically improbable, turned out to be the perfect environment for the church to grow as it did. We place Acts into a historical context by considering several of the "cards" that made the hand!

### *The Jewish Dispersion (The "Diaspora" )<sup>1</sup>*

As a nation, the Jews were repeatedly exiled from the physical boundaries of their homeland in the centuries before Christ. After the Babylonian captivity (586BC), many exiled Jews carefully maintained their faith and its practices, even though separated physically from Jerusalem and the temple. They still maintained important ties back to the homeland, returning to Jerusalem to celebrate various festivals and important religious events that required presence of the temple. This would continue until the Romans destroyed the temple in 70AD. The temple served as an umbilical cord that kept the Jewish faithful tied to the homeland for faith and practice. It was a regular draw that brought back the devoted from the far regions of the Roman Empire. This is why so many were present in Jerusalem on Pentecost when Peter unlocked the doors to the kingdom with his Pentecostal sermon. Acts tells us there were Jews who were,

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars use the word "diaspora" to refer to the voluntary dispersion of Jews, as opposed to "exile" or "captivity." While historically it might have its genesis in a captivity, once Jews were allowed to return to their land, but instead chose to remain where their lives had taken root, they became a part of the diaspora. The word "diaspora" comes from the Greek *diaspora* (διασπορά) and means simply "dispersion."

devout men from every nation under heaven... Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome ... Cretans and Arabians (Acts 2:5-11).

Look at these places on a map of the Mediterranean world:



These were the nations represented in Jerusalem that heard Peter's sermon. It is much of the known world. Of course, any of Luke's contemporaries who read his Acts would register these places in their minds. As we do so today, we can readily note a glaring area missing: Greece and Macedonia (north and east of Greece). It would have provoked in me a question of how God was going to reach the Greek world. This is a geographical set-up of the insistence of the Holy Spirit that Paul's mission efforts, planned for Asia and Bithynia, were instead pushed across the Bosphorus Straights and into Macedonia and Greece.

Among these nations there were Jews and "proselytes" (or converts to Judaism) who were all on a spiritual trek to Jerusalem. These were the seeds that heard the words of Peter's sermon, were convicted by the Spirit, placed their faith in Christ, and took the faith back home. Once home, they were not isolated in their faith, but had synagogues in which they were able to share and study more.

Undoubtedly some were not so readily convinced, but the seed was taking root and upon their returns to home, they were wrestling with what they heard and were weighing it against what they knew and the Scriptures they had to study. That

brings us to another card that was critical to the growth of the church: the Septuagint.

### *The Septuagint*

We have spoken before of the influence Greek culture had upon the Mediterranean world after the conquests of Alexander the Great. His city in Egypt, appropriately named Alexandria, became Egypt's capital. Successive rulers (the "Ptolemies") built great structures for learning there. They built a massive lighthouse, which was known as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, just offshore on the island of Pharos. The body of Alexander the Great was embalmed and placed in a glass sarcophagus for viewing in Alexandria. By the 200's BC, Alexandria was not only the largest city in the world, it also featured the world's largest library. Although scholars are uncertain of the size or content, a reasonable estimate of 400,000 volumes is frequently given.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that Alexandria also held a large Jewish population, a part of the diaspora.

It is not surprising that the Greek intelligentsia, including the ruling authorities, sought to have the Jewish Scriptures and other important writings translated into Greek. This was the birth of what scholars today call the Septuagint (abbreviated "LXX," the Roman numerals for "70"<sup>3</sup>). The first Jewish Scriptures translated were the Torah, the five books of Moses generally agreed to have been translated into Greek around 250BC.<sup>4</sup> The remaining Jewish Scriptures followed, and many other Jewish writings were included as well. By the time of Acts, these Greek translations were important in the Greek-speaking Jewish communities throughout the diaspora. Most Jews living outside the Semitic countries likely were more familiar with Greek than Hebrew.

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<sup>2</sup> Lewis, D. M., *et al.*, *The Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge 1994), 2d Ed., Vol. VI, at 416.

<sup>3</sup> The name "Septuagint" comes from the Latin title of the translation: *Versio Septuaginta Interpretum*, which means "version of the seventy interpreters." This also explains why the abbreviation for the Septuagint is the Roman numeral for 70. Somewhere around 200BC, a letter from "Aristeas to Philocrates" was written containing an account, generally accorded to be legend in many aspects, about the writing of the Septuagint. In the letter, it is explained that the Alexandrian librarian Demetrius of Phalerum persuaded Ptolemy II (309-246 BC) to enrich the library with a set of the Jewish Scriptures. The king sent ambassadors to the High Priest in Jerusalem asking for help. The High Priest sent 72 scholars (representing six from each tribe) to do the work. Supposedly (and this is generally deemed to be part of the legend as opposed to fact) the scholars finished their work in exactly 72 days. For more, see, Wasserstein, Abraham, and Wasserstein, David, *The Legend of the Septuagint, From Classical Antiquity to Today* (Cambridge 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Jobes, Karen, and Silva, Moises, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, (Baker 2000), at 29.

This Septuagint was the Scripture Paul generally quoted in his letters to the churches outside Judea. Luke also had great familiarity with the Septuagint as evidenced in his usage in Luke and Acts. Not only did Greek-speaking Jews know the Septuagint translation, but it was understandable by Greek-speaking Gentiles as well. The ramifications of the ready availability of the Septuagint are profound.

First, the obvious result is the ready availability of Scriptures that Paul, Barnabas, and others could use in their mission efforts. They were able to go into areas and use Scriptures that people had at their disposal. These were not “invented” by the church, but had been in place for over a century or two. They were already established before the birth of Christ. Consider the impact this would have on the story of Jesus’ birth. Luke informs us in his first volume (his gospel) that Jesus was born of a virgin. Many skeptics are quick to point out that when the New Testament speaks of Jesus born of a virgin as fulfilling Isaiah 7:14 (“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”), it uses the Greek word “*parthenos*” (παρθένος), which clearly means “virgin.” Yet the Hebrew of Isaiah, the critics add, speaks of an *almah* (עלמה), which means “maiden.” Now a “maiden” was typically a virgin, as a young unmarried woman; however, it is possible that the word might simply mean a young unmarried woman and leave no comment on the question of promiscuity. Yet Jews and others would have been readily able to determine what the understanding of the Old Testament passage was by people uninfluenced by the birth of Jesus or the Christian faith. Simply by looking at the Septuagint, they would see that their Jewish fathers understood “*almah*” in its normative sense of “virgin” because the Jewish scholars translated the word into Greek as *parthenos* (παρθένος), a “virgin.”

A more subtle way the Septuagint influenced the Scriptures and the spread of the church is seen in the writings of Luke, both his gospel and Acts. As Edward Fudge wrote me recently, if Paul was Luke’s spiritual mentor, then Isaiah would qualify as Luke’s Old Testament godfather. Luke was clearly wise to the Scriptures and deeply influenced by them such that even his writings reflect it in structure as well as quotations. Consider the following:

- Luke includes five extended quotations from the Septuagint of Isaiah, two in his gospel and three in Acts (Isa. 40:3-5/Lk. 3:4-6; Isa. 61:1-2/Lk. 4:18-19; Isa. 66:1-2/Acts 7:49-50; Isa. 53:7-8/Acts 8:32-33; and Isa. 6:9-10/Acts 28:26-27). These are more extended quotations from Isaiah than found in any other book of the Bible.

- Scholars have found over 100 verbal allusions to the Septuagint of Isaiah in the writings of Luke.<sup>5</sup>
- This leads some scholars to think that “Luke probably had access to Isaiah LXX (an abbreviation for the Septuagint) scrolls, if not his own copies.”<sup>6</sup>

Luke’s fondness for Isaiah might stem from his personal study, from his walk with Paul, who often referred to Isaiah<sup>7</sup>,

If we consider the structure of Acts, we see,

Luke outlines the ministry of Jesus and that of the disciples and in particular that of Paul by means of quotations from or allusions to Isaiah... In this way, Luke uses Isaianic ideas as a framework, illustrating at crucial points the ministries of his protagonists.”<sup>8</sup>

Luke’s fondness could also be explained by the fact that Luke was the only Gentile writer in our New Testament Scriptures, and as a Gentile, he must have been impressed that Isaiah, of all the Old Testament prophets, spoke the most of God’s salvation going forth among the Gentiles. It is in Isaiah 2 that we read of “the latter days” when “all the nations” will “flow” to Jerusalem (the “mountain of the house of the LORD”). There the “many peoples” will seek “his [God’s] ways...that we might walk in his path.”

There is still another way the Septuagint played a critical role in preparing the soil for the growth of the church. Think again of those Jews who heard the gospel message in Jerusalem and then returned to their homes. A significant part of the story in Acts was that the speech Peter delivered, which most likely was in Aramaic, a language closely related to Hebrew, was understood by the foreign Jews in their own tongues. For many of them, they certainly would have had a decent comprehension of Greek. That was the language of the international world.

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<sup>5</sup> This is found in Appendix IV of Nestle Aland’s 27<sup>th</sup> edition of the Greek New Testament; Aland, B. K., *et al.*, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Mallen, Peter, *The Reading and Transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts*, (T&T Clark 2008), at 3.

<sup>7</sup> Paul used the Septuagint of Isaiah regularly in his sermons (Isaiah 42:5 is quoted nearly verbatim by Paul in his Mars Hill sermon recorded in Acts 17:24-25; Paul also used Isaiah 42 and 49 in his sermon at Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13:15-47). In Acts 26, Paul explained to Agrippa Paul’s apostolic commission to the Gentiles by referencing Isaiah. See a good explanation of this in Fudge, Edward, “Paul’s Apostolic Self-Consciousness at Athens,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (1971), Vol. 14:3.

<sup>8</sup> Koet, B.J., *Five Studies on the Interpretation of Scripture in Luke-Acts*, (Peeters Publishers 1989), at 145.

That was the language of their Scriptures (the Septuagint). As the people returned to their homes, they had the Septuagint to search and study to determine whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah. There was a resource of God's revelation available in a tongue they could understand. This brings us to another card in the royal flush – the synagogue.

### *The Synagogue*

The dispersed Jews built local synagogues as places of community, teaching, and worship. I agree with the assessment of Louis Rabinowitz,

[The synagogue] has had a decisive influence not only on Judaism throughout the ages, but on organized religion as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

The synagogue as a community site of meeting and formal worship/teaching would become the basic form and idea followed by the Christian church as well as the Muslim mosque.

While its origins are not definitively known, the synagogue was clearly a creation of the diaspora. Jews sought to maintain meeting places that reinforced and nurtured their faith and community as they lived away from Jerusalem and the temple. By the first century, the synagogue is well established. We read of the synagogues in the New Testament, but we can just as readily read of them from the pens of non-Christian first-century Jewish writers like Philo of Alexandria (c.20BC-c.50AD) and Josephus (37-c.100 AD).<sup>10</sup>

These synagogues provided a place for Paul and other missionaries to go and find people who already believed in God's Scriptures. They were places of teaching and discussion that provided a rich and ready mission field for the word of God. Over and over in Acts we read that Paul went into the synagogues and taught of Jesus (Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14ff.; 14:1; 17:1, 10ff.; 18:4ff.; 18:19, 26; 19:8; 24:12).

These synagogues provided not only a place for the Jews to fellowship, worship, and study, but they also provided a forum for Gentiles who were interested in the Jewish conception of a single God rather than many. A number of Greeks had grown semi-attached to the worship found in the Jewish faith. The Greek mythologies we learn in our history classes were held true by a number of people; however, a growing number of Greek "thinkers" had decided that the gods taught through the myths and legends had to be that – myths and legends. As the Greeks

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<sup>9</sup> "Synagogue," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, (Keter Publishing House 1972), Vol. 15, at 579.

<sup>10</sup> Philo, *Legatione ad Gaium*, at 132f.; Josephus mentions a number of different synagogues throughout his writings.

grew in their learning and thinking, and as philosophy became the leading rudder of Greek society, many came to believe that there had to be a single guiding force behind the universe and world as we saw it. For many, this became an understanding of a singular power considered “god,” though not necessarily in a personal sense that we understand God.

With the Roman Empire, Greek philosophy and language were never fully displaced. Though perhaps an oversimplification, the Romans, by and large, were more focused on building an Empire that provided peace and stability by emphasizing government and regulation. The Greeks were the ones more bent on figuring out why things were the way they were. Greek philosophy probed the basics of mathematics and geometry, the stars in the sky, the science of medicine and physics as well as the more esoteric problems of human existence, the presence of evil, and the destiny of a human after death. A number of these Greeks took their belief in one “god” or the unity of all things and found the Jewish faith appealing. In the Jews, Greeks saw a people who from antiquity (and Greeks were fond of things old!) had worshipped only one God and held detestable the idea that there could be more.

In the first century, the Greeks who appreciated the Jewish faith, even though never formally converting, were called “God-fearers.” But, these God-fearers brought another aspect of soil that was ripe for the fullness of teaching on the one true God, his morality, his interactions with humanity, and his plans for the human soul. Greek philosophy would ultimately become a central breeding ground for the church. The issue of how to get the gospel to these Greeks was met by using one of the principal assets of the Roman Empire, the roads! This leads us to the next critical card making the circumstances precisely what were needed for the church to grow.

### *The Roman Empire*

One final element of the soil that we would be remiss for failure to mention is the Roman Empire itself. As mentioned earlier, the Romans were careful to meld together a coherent empire built upon regulations and consistency. Critical to maintaining the empire was the means to travel the empire easily. So Rome built roads, some of which are still with us today.<sup>11</sup> These roads and the travel ease of the Empire would allow the church to spread easily. History recognizes Caesar

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<sup>11</sup> The roads are with us in two forms. One can go find these roads amidst ruins in archaeological areas of the Roman Empire. A second way the roads are with us is in the form of current roads. There are numerous places in the Mediterranean world today where the roads are just modern pavements over the older roads that the Romans originally established!

Augustus (63BC-14AD) as the Emperor first initiating the purposeful building and maintenance of roads as an integral part of the Empire.<sup>12</sup> Along with the roads and trade routes were shipping lanes that moved people and ideas with consistency from port to port. For the first time in history, there was consistency in coinage, in trade, and in interaction between what had historically been distrusting people who would have little or no interaction. And into this ripe soil, the church as an idea and faith were easily transported around the civilized world.

The Roman structure included a core value in citizenship. Initially the class of “citizen” was enjoyed by the ruling few in Rome and select places. The core right of citizens was that of participating in Roman politics. As a result of a war against Rome in 91BC, Roman citizenship was extended to all free males living on the peninsula of Italy.

Over the next generation, the rights of citizenship were extended to certain favored people, who were well-off, entitling them to the right of participation not only in local politics, but also in other Roman rights as well.<sup>13</sup> This became important to the spread of the gospel because it was a right that by the time of Christ had spread outward to places like Tarsus, where the family of Saul enjoyed the privilege of Roman citizenship. Citizenship was given as a means of shoring up needed community support or as a reward for loyalty. This included a right to appeal a criminal finding in the court of Caesar in Rome. Paul availed himself of this right as a means of going to Rome both to encourage the church and also to preach and evangelize the unsaved (Acts 25:6-12).

Rome also had armies of great size stationed throughout the Empire. At a cost of one-half the state’s entire budget, these armies kept a peace (popularly called the *pax Romana*, or “peace of Rome”) ushered in by Augustus Caesar. That is not to say that there was no conflict, but that the civil wars and wars of expansion known in earlier centuries were replaced with a general stability that enabled freedom of travel and trade.

Augustus also established a “Praetorian Guard,” an elite group of personal bodyguards for the Emperor paid at three times the rate of normal soldiers.<sup>14</sup> These were important individuals, and it is no small thing that Paul, while imprisoned in Rome awaiting his appeal to Caesar, saw his testimony before the

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<sup>12</sup> Boatwright, Mary, *et al.*, *The Romans – From Village to Empire*, (Oxford 2004), at 343.

<sup>13</sup> Woolf, Greg, ed., *Cambridge Illustrated History of the Roman World*, (Cambridge University Press 2003), at 124ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, at 336.

Praetorian Guard as an amazing work of God. (Phil. 1:13 – called the “Imperial Guard” by the ESV).

A final important note on the timing of the church’s growth recorded in Acts and the Roman factor: Rome recognized the Jewish religion. Jews in Rome were credited with providing Julius Caesar with the necessary funds to rise to power. As a reward, Julius issued a decree that recognized the rights of the Jews to freely practice their religion.

All other measures notwithstanding, I allow these persons [the Jews] to gather and to organize their community following the customs of their fathers and according to their own laws.<sup>15</sup>

This would get reinforced by Caesar Augustus and Claudius Caesar. Claudius’ edict would be the last to recognize Jewish freedom in this way:

Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, pontifex maximus, holding the tribunician power, proclaims: . . .Therefore it is right that also the Jews, who are in all the world under us, shall maintain their ancestral customs without hindrance and to them I now also command to use this my kindness rather reasonably and not to despise the religious rites of the other nations, but to observe their own laws.<sup>16</sup>

Once the Jewish rebellion began in 66AD, the window of Roman approval of Jewish practice began to close. Yet by this time, the Book of Acts is complete, and the church had taken on a life of its own.

## CONCLUSION

Think about it: Paul was clear that at the right time in history, Christ came.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

This was a magnificent crescendo of history, all culminating at a precise moment in time. Christ was born into the world at the right moment, died at the right moment, ascended at the right moment, and sent the Spirit to launch the church at

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<sup>15</sup> Callewaert, Joseph, *The World of Saint Paul*, (Ignatius Press 2011), at 14.

<sup>16</sup> Edict of Claudius on Jewish Rights, 41AD.

the right moment. Twenty years later? Too late! Twenty years earlier? Too early! This is the precision of God that no one could ever have imagined.

As we continue to open the history Luke has given us in Acts, we will repeatedly see the perfection of God's timing in bringing about the life of the church when and how he did. All of the cards were exactly the ones needed to bring about the kingdom of God as it did.

My Vegas trip was more than I bargained for. I explained this to my friend Steve Taylor as I was preparing to write the introduction to this lesson. Steve appreciated the illustration, nodding and even noting it left him with a chill. He did recover quickly, however, and then asked me, "So how much did you win in Vegas?" Steve, I did not place any money on the tables to win or lose, but I picked up an illustration that helped me appreciate God and his work all the more! So hopefully we all won in Vegas as we appreciate the hand of God through this lesson.

### POINTS FOR HOME

1. *"Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven"* (Acts 2:5).

The price of living quarters in Jerusalem at an inn or hotel? *X* shekels. The cost of clothes for the Jewish festivals? *Y* shekels. The price for food and other sustenance while in Jerusalem? *Z* shekels. God's timing for his kingdom? Priceless. Not only priceless, but amazing. This was no afterthought. It was the careful culmination of the world's history into the backwater mountain town of Jerusalem where God was set to change the world and eternity. That is the same God at work today. Does it not make you wonder how you fit into his plans? Does it not make you want to say, "Here I am! Use me however you wish!"

2. *"...Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome ... Cretans and Arabians"* (Acts 2:5-11).

I love maps. I love this passage. I love to map this passage. It leaves a glaring hole on the map for Macedonia and Greece. In light of that, I am enthralled by the passage where Luke says that Paul's missionary team was standing with the hole (Macedonia and Greece) to the west, and Asia/Bythinia to the East. Paul was planning on going to the East, but the

Holy Spirit said, “No!” Paul was to go into the “hole” and take the gospel into Macedonia and Greece. From there we get the churches at Philippi, at Thessalonica, at Berea, at Corinth, and many places in between. This is our God, not only in geography, but in personal interest as well. God is a God who fills holes. He finds the places that need his hand and his work, he finds the places that need his gospel’s touch, and he brings it. I have holes he is filling, and I can readily testify to his faithfulness. As Paul would later write, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

3. “...*The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet*” (Acts 28:25).

I love Luke’s usage of Isaiah. I love the way he points out the Ethiopian eunuch reading the book. Isaiah 18 spoke of Ethiopians being called and used by God (called “Cush” by the ESV). Luke was not only an author of the Word; he was a student of the word! Luke impresses me, and I want to follow in his footsteps. I want to learn more and more each day about my Lord and the marvelous gift he has left us in his revealed word.