Last time we worked on reconstructing Saul. This session we turn to what we can know about this individual after his conversion; we'll work at reconstructing Paul, the missionary to gentiles. The name "Saul" is found only in the book of Acts, and only before he begins his missionary travels; from then on he is called only Paul.

The switch in name comes just after Saul and Barnabas have been sent out by the people of Antioch. Their trip begins from "Seleucia; and from there they sail to Cyprus." I.e. they hike to the coastal city of Seleucia and hop a boat for Cyprus where, according to v. 5, their first stop was Salamis. While Acts says they began their work in Salamis, v. 6 reports they then traversed the island until they came to Paphos, where they encountered a magician, also called a Jewish false-prophet. There, for the first time on this journey, Saul is given words, and Luke introduces them this way: "9Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10and said, "You son of the devil...." - From this point on, Luke consistently refers to him as Paul. The name "Saul" appears again only when Paul recalls words spoken to him at the time of his encounter with the risen Jesus.

Some have suggested that "Saul" is simply a name made up by Luke. But notice that Luke does not depict a scene in which Paul's name is formally changed, even in connection with his "conversion," which would have been a naturally dramatic place for such a name change, if the name "Saul" had been concocted only to demarcate Paul's early life from his later one. Instead, Luke simply informs us at this point that "Saul [was] also known as Paul."

It's not unreasonable to think that a family so devoted to their Jewish heritage that they were even able to trace their ancestry back to the tribe of Benjamin should have chosen for their son the name "Saul" - the name of the most renowned Benjaminite. Moreover, Roman names were composed of three parts, of which Saul might reasonably have been one, and "Paul" (or, in Latin, Paulus) would have been the formal sir-name, perhaps taken from the master who had bequeathed Paul's father or grandfather Roman citizenship. (It was customary for freed slaves to take the sir-name of their former master.)

In any case, what Luke has done is to use the name "Saul" throughout Paul's early period and then switch exclusively to "Paul" once he begins his work in the larger Roman Empire. But how did Paul reach this watershed in his life when he actively sought to extend to Gentiles what had been a form of Judaism? How did he, in effect, turn from Saul into Paul?

Acts 9, which we visited last time, recounts Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus, which Luke posits occurred on the road to Damascus, intent on persecuting followers of "the Way" there, although we've already noted the problems with that
scenario. Nevertheless, the tradition of Paul having a transformative encounter with the risen Jesus is confirmed by Paul's own words, which we'll look at shortly. In the flow of Acts' narrative, the significance of this encounter is that the leading opponent of the Gospel is suddenly turned from his course and becomes one of its leading exponents; he becomes, in fact, the one who extends the Gospel "to the ends of the earth," thus fulfilling Jesus' mandate in Acts 1.

The interaction between the blinded Saul and the risen Jesus highlights this transformation: "3Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

First, let's notice the phenomena of this Christophany (or "appearance of Christ") that provides the context for the conversation. Saul is stopped dead in his tracks by a heavenly flash of light that seems to affect only him. After the interchange between Saul and Jesus, Luke reports, "The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one." - They are portrayed as also unaffected by the light inasmuch as, says Luke, when Saul got up from the ground blind, his companions "led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus."

This Christophany is recounted two times in the course of Paul's preaching to the Gentiles, each time with minor variations. In chapter 22, speaking to the riotous crowd in the Temple, Paul recalls the bright light: "6While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me." - And he specifies what his companions experienced: "9Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me." - According to Paul here, his companions saw the light, although they apparently were not affected by it the way he was. More oddly, however, he asserts that, while they saw the light, they did not hear the voice, whereas the narrative of chapter 9 asserts that they did hear the voice.

The next time Paul recounts this incident is in chapter 26, when he appears before King Agrippa: "13When at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. 14When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me...." - Paul recalls that a voice spoke to him, but doesn't specifically deny that others heard it. More striking, however, is that Paul describes the bright light as surrounding all of them, causing all of them to fall to the ground, even though the other accounts say nothing of an effect on Saul's companions.

Obviously, Luke is not concerned about forging consistency in the story, but is freely combining the various phenomena in different contexts. We might well
compare the way he treats Mark's story of Jesus' baptism. Mark's narrative reads, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Now let's compare Luke's rendition of this scene: "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Luke diminishes the direct assertion that John baptized Jesus by simply making Jesus' baptism (along with everyone else's) the backdrop for the action. In fact, the Spirit does not descend as Jesus rises from the water, as in Mark, but while he is praying after baptism. Moreover, in contrast to Mark's report that the descent of the Spirit was something Jesus saw, Luke narrates it as something observable by anyone present, underscoring that by specifying that the dove descended in bodily form. This was no private vision, but a public event. Luke's flexible reshaping of Mark's narrative is similar to the freedom he shows in modifying elements of the story of Paul's conversion upon each new telling.

We should also note that this scene of a brilliant light confronting Saul on the road to Damascus is a motif found in Jewish literature prior to this. The most striking parallel is in 2 Maccabees 3, which tells of a man named Heliodorus, dispatched by a foreign king to plunder the Jerusalem temple. The fateful approach of Heliodorus is narrated as follows: "24When he arrived at the treasury with his bodyguard, then and there the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority caused so great a manifestation that all who had been so bold as to accompany him were astounded by the power of God, and became faint with terror. 25For there appeared to them a magnificently caparisoned horse, with a rider of frightening mien; it rushed furiously at Heliodorus and struck at him with its front hoofs. Its rider was seen to have armor and weapons of gold. 26Two young men also appeared to him, remarkably strong, gloriously beautiful and splendidly dressed, who stood on either side of him and flogged him continuously, inflicting many blows on him. 27When he suddenly fell to the ground and deep darkness came over him, his men took him up, put him on a stretcher, 28and carried him away-this man who had just entered the aforesaid treasury with a great retinue and all his bodyguard but was now unable to help himself."

This story concerns the defense of the temple through a divine specter that prevents Heliodorus from plundering it. To the extent that Acts 19 tells of a person stopped from damaging the people of the risen Lord, it is parallel to the story of Heliodorus. In fact, the issue of protection is the focus of the exchange between Jesus and Saul: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you,
"Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. "But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

According to these verses, the Christophany was not a matter of converting Saul, but of stopping his persecution of Jesus' followers. And this accords with the blindness that besets Saul, even as Heliodorus is disabled by the epiphany at the temple. The actual "conversion" of Saul comes only after Paul has entered the city, through the agency of a man named Ananias, who likewise receives words from the risen Christ: "The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."

The motif of an agent of conversion sent in response to a person's prayers is found in the Greco-Roman era Jewish story, Joseph and Aseneth, which answers the burning question, how did a good Jewish boy like Joseph wind up married to a pagan Egyptian like Aseneth? The answer comes in the form of a lengthy story in which Aseneth renounces her Egyptian religion and heritage, prays incessantly, and then is visited by a divine messenger who is said to be as bright as lightning and who births her through the process of conversion.

Similarly, Ananias is sent to restore Saul's sight and prepare him for a mission, about which Ananias is informed a few verses later: "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel."

Acts 9 does not narrate Ananias relaying these words to Saul, but Paul recounts Ananias' words later, in chapter 22: "Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.'"

Notice that Ananias speaks of what Paul has experienced as being allowed to "see God's Righteous One" and that, in connection with this, he will be "his witness to all the world," which again tags into a central theme of Acts: the disciples will be "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." And recall that later Luke has Paul describe missionaries as "witnesses," an descriptor Paul doesn't use in his letters.

And so the conversion of Paul, as portrayed in Acts, has features that are decidedly Lucan. The question is, to what degree does this picture - so common to many of us that we assume it as information about Paul - to what degree does it correspond to what Paul says of his encounter with the risen Jesus?

Unfortunately, Paul doesn't say much about this. His most detailed statement is in Gal 1.13-17: "You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was
violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. 14I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. 14But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased 16to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gen-tiles, I did not confer with any human being, 17nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus." - Dunn gives a good overview of what he has in mind by reference to his "former life in Judaism," so I won't spend time on it now.

Rather, the first thing to stipulate is that this narrative is not presented as primarily a recounting of his encounter with the risen Jesus. In Galatians 1 Paul is defending his claim to be an apostle and the validity of his message. As we'll see, other missionaries had apparently dissed Paul's Gospel as derivative of the Gospel preached by others, except that Paul has diluted it by telling Gentiles they don't have to submit to Jewish rites like circumcision.

The reason Paul speaks of events surrounding his conversion is to defend his legitimacy and that of the message he preaches. That's the reason he stresses that, after his conversion, he did not confer with any human being, including those who were already apostles. In fact, rather than going to Jerusalem, he headed off to Arabia. And upon his return, he didn't stop by Jerusalem, but went straight back to Damascus. His point is that his gospel is not derivative from Jerusalem, but was delivered specially to him. But how? That he discloses just prior to this, in vv. 11 & 12: "11For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; 12for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

If we consult others of Paul's letters, this would seem a somewhat disingenuous statement. E.g. in 1 Corinthians 15 he takes pains to say just the opposite: "1Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you - unless you have come to believe in vain. 3For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles."

The good news Paul preached and to which he wants his readers to adhere, is the same one he received: all he has done is pass it along to them. You kind of feel like shaking Paul and saying, "Gee, Paul, you can't have it both ways. Either get
your story straight or become a politician!" - How can Paul insist in Galatians that his gospel message derives solely from his encounter with the risen Jesus, and then reassure the Corinthians that his gospel is one-and-the-same with the gospel from the earliest days of the faith, because it is the gospel he himself received from others? The answer to that question has to do with the way Paul unpacks his claim in Galatians 1, taking up his autobiography about his life as a Jewish firebrand, persecuting the church.

By the way, the NRSV's "violently" is not the best translation of the Greek phrase *kath huperbolen*. In essence, the NRSV translators have been a little too beholden to the account in Acts, where Paul *does* persecute the church violently, even putting people to death. However, the Greek phrase does not mean "violently," *per se*, but "to an extraordinary degree." A translation something like, "I was vigorously persecuting the church" would be closer to the Greek.

In any case, Paul's report of his conversion runs parallel to Acts: he begins with referring to persecution of the church, setting in bold relief his transformation into an evangelist.

Then comes Paul's statement about his encounter with the risen Jesus, and as Roetzel tells you, his words resonate deeply with passages from two prophetic books: Isaiah 49.1 and Jeremiah 1.4-5. Of these two, the verses from Jeremiah offer the closest parallel to Paul's language; and yet both passages express the same idea of a messenger specially designated - even prior to birth - to bring the Lord's word to the nations.

The importance of uncovering this echo is that it reveals how Paul understood his confrontation with the risen Jesus. He didn't merely conclude that he should no longer persecute Christians, nor did he infer merely that he should join the ranks of his fellow Jews who had confessed faith in Jesus as Messiah. The more radical implication he extracted from this encounter was that he was commissioned to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles.

And in the undisputed Pauline epistles this is his resolve from the outset. In fact, in Galatians 2, Paul recalls an agreement reached even before he and Barnabas began their work: "when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised." - Paul understood there to be a division of labor from the start: his mission (and that of Barnabas) was to the Gentiles, while James, Cephas and John had a mission to the Jews.

In fact, in the lead-in to this, Paul speaks of having obtained the Jerusalem leaders' acknowledgement that he "had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised." - I.e. it's not just a matter of different missions, but also one gospel
apropos for Gentiles and one apropos for Jews. Taken together, these statements suggest that Paul conceived of his mission not in terms of a gospel that could be proclaimed indiscriminately to any crowd, Jewish or Gentile; no, he had been charged with a gospel tailored specifically to Gentiles; they were to be his audience. And it seems that this was what Paul had in mind when, in Galatians, he spoke of having received his gospel directly from heaven.

Thus, in the book of Romans, the latest of the undisputed Pauline epistles, Paul says that through Jesus Christ he received "grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name" - Paul's role as an "apostle" is highly important for him, as Roetzel notes. It is, then, significant that he defines his apostleship in terms of bringing about "the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles." Paul seems to have had a single-minded definition of his mission from early on as a mission to Gentiles.

This sheds great light on what Paul says he did immediately after his conversion: "I went away at once into Arabia." - If we take seriously Paul's conception that the entire reason for his encounter with the risen Jesus was "so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles," then it is easy enough to understand why he left Damascus and its Jewish community for the region of the Nabateans. He didn't head there because he considered it a good place to sort out all that had happened to him; that certainly doesn't explain why Aretas IV sought to capture Paul when he took control of Damascus. More likely, he headed to Arabia because it was a manifestly Gentile territory where he could carry out his commission. From the very start, Paul understood himself as under a mandate to evangelize Gentiles. And given that, we have to set aside as unlikely another element of Acts' portrayal of Paul's work.

Recall that the aim of Paul's mission, as summarized for Ananias, is this: "he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel." It's the last phrase, "and before the people of Israel," that raises problems, especially in the way Acts portrays Paul's mission as directed also to the people of Israel.

You'll recall, for example, that the first stop Barnabas and Paul made on their initial missionary journey was Cyprus, where they landed at Salamis, and "proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews." - Luke has them head first to the synagogues.

Upon leaving Salamis, reports Luke, they passed through to the other side of Cyprus, and "then Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia…. And they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia." Once in Pisidian Antioch (not to be confused with Syrian Antioch where their journey had originated), they adopted the same approach they did in Salamis: "On the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of
the law and the prophets, the officials of the synagogue sent them a message, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, give it." So Paul stood up and with a gesture began to speak.…"

At the conclusion of Paul's sermon, many in the synagogue urged him to return the next sabbath and speak again. However, when that sabbath arrived, not all welcomed him: "The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul. Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

What's striking here is that while Paul and Barnabas acknowledge a commission "to be a light for the Gentiles" - quoted from Isaiah 49, one of the passages that speaks of being chosen from the womb - this mission is presented only as "plan B."

In fact, Barnabas and Paul assert the necessity that the "the word of God should be spoken first to you (Jews)." - And only after the Jews have rejected it, do they turn to the Gentiles. This is quite different than Paul's sensibility in Galatians that his call was, from the first, to carry the gospel to the Gentiles, so that he speaks of his gospel being one for the uncircumcised, over against the gospel Peter preaches to the circumcised, such that the acknowledged pillars of the church agreed that Paul and Barnabas "should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised."

We might attempt to account for this difference by concluding that this incident in Pisidian Antioch is where all of this actually gelled. I.e. prior to this time, Paul had conceived of his mission to Jews first, and only secondarily to Gentiles. It was, then, this incident that caused Paul to articulate his mission in a new way: only to the Gentiles. After all, this incident would have taken place before Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem for the meeting at which the mission field was divvied up into Jewish and gentile sectors.

That would be a convincing explanation if it weren't for the fact that Luke does not show Paul changing his modus operandi after this. In fact, the next chapter opens with the report, "The same thing occurred in Iconium, where Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers." - Even though the verse reports that "both Jews and Greeks became believers," the method remains the same: Paul and Barnabas go first to the synagogue.

And Paul's tactic hasn't changed by the time he sets out on another missionary trip with his new associate, Silas. Particularly notable is their stop in Thessalonica: "After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to
Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, *as was his custom*, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you." Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women."

According to Acts 17, then, some of the Thessalonian Jews attending synagogue embraced Paul's message, as did "a great many of the devout Greeks" (i.e. gentiles who admired Judaism and attended synagogue, but had not yet taken the final step in converting to Judaism). What makes this portrayal problematic, however, is Paul's first letter to this congregation (indeed, the first letter of his we have), written from Corinth not long after he left Thessalonica, in which he recalls their reception of him and his message: "For the people of these regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming."

Most striking is the report that they "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God," for that would be a very peculiar description of a Jewish audience or even an audience of "devout Greeks." It befits, rather, Gentiles not attached to the synagogue. In accord with this is the complete absence in 1 Thessalonians of any quotations from the Hebrew Bible or even allusions to people or events mentioned in it. Nothing in 1 Thessalonians suggests the church there was composed of anyone who was not a gentile through and through.

We find this pattern of going first to a Jewish audience even in Paul's last stop in the book of Acts: "When we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him. Three days later he called together the local leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, he said to them...

At this point Paul offers an explanation of why he is in Rome: because Palestinian Jews opposed his message of hope for Israel. The Roman Jewish officials set a day when Paul can expound this message for them. Of that occasion Acts reports: "They came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah, 'Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.' For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their
eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn - and I would heal them.' Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen. - Here again, in spite of the fact that some Jews respond to Paul's message, Paul declares that the gospel has been sent to gentiles because the Jews refuse to listen. And yet the first contact Paul makes in Rome, as everywhere else, is with Jews. This is quite different than Paul's own claim that his allotted mission, as recognized even by the pillars in Jerusalem, is to gentiles, and his gospel is a gospel for gentiles rather than Jews.

So why does Acts portray Paul's missionary strategy this way? The answer to that is bound up in a concomitant feature of Paul's mission portrayed by Acts: namely, everywhere Paul goes he runs into opposition from Jews.

We've already noted that integral to Acts 9's story of Saul after his encounter with the risen Jesus is his sojourn in Damascus, which ends with him being pursued by "the Jews [who] plotted to kill him," so that his disciples had to let him down through a window in the wall, suspended in a basket. But we've noted that that story doesn't square with Paul's report that while he did escape Damascus in a basket let down through the wall, he did so not due to persecution from Jews, but because of the governor, the agent of King Aretas of Arabia.

Similarly, later in Acts 9 we read of Paul's sojourn in Jerusalem that ends in Paul again forced to flee for his life, this time because of the Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews) who sought to assassinate him. But as with the incident in Damascus, this one suffers from confirmation in Paul's letters, as well as from the improbability that Paul was this active in Jerusalem following Damascus, given his own reports of his brief and virtually unremarkable visit with Peter and James. These problems alone raise suspicions about the repeated reports in Acts that Paul was hounded from town to town by Jews.

Let's notice also a curious narrative in chapter 14 about Paul and Barnabas in Lystra, in Asia Minor, where they encounter a lame man: In Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet and had never walked, for he had been crippled from birth. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And the man sprang up and began to walk. When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes [the messenger of the gods], because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates; he and the crowds wanted to offer sacrifice. When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting, "Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like
you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them...¹⁸ Even with these words, they scarcely restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them."

As if this narrative isn't curious enough, the succeeding verses make it more so:

"¹⁹ But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium [the last two cities they had visited] and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. ²⁰ But when the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the city. The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe."

Paul explicitly mentions suffering at the hands of fellow-Jews, particularly in 2 Corinthians 11.24, where he reports, "Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one." So we cannot discount reports of physical attacks on Paul by fellow Jews. And notice what he reports next: "Three times I was beaten with rods. [A distinctly Roman punishment] Once I received a stoning." - And so neither can we discount a scene that has Paul being stoned.

However, notice that his recollection of being stoned - which may refer to this incident in Lystra - is separated from his recollection of Jewish whippings by the Roman punishment of being beaten with rods, leaving open whether his stoning was also at the hands of gentiles.

What's more, while Paul in his letters speaks of opponents to his gospel, most often it is Jewish Christians who oppose him rather than "Jews" in general. As we'll see, it was those who thought Paul's gospel violated the true gospel that took root in Jewish soil and among Jews, who gave Paul the greatest grief.

Moreover, notice that in Acts 14 only Paul is stoned, even though both Paul and Barnabas are active in the preceding activities in Lystra. It is at least curious that only Paul comes in for this treatment, instigated by Jews.

It is also curious that these Jews have made the trip from Antioch and Iconium to stir up trouble for Paul in Lystra. Given the absence of any mention of a synagogue in Lystra, it would appear that no Jews were being addressed in Lystra. While it was certainly feasible (if curious) for Jews to walk the 44 miles from Iconium to Lystra (about a three day journey), and even to undertake the 132 mile trip from Antioch to Lystra (nearly a two week walk), the question is, why would they have done so, since (apparently) no Jewish community was at stake?

Certainly no Jews from Lystra itself are reported to be either supportive of or resistant to Paul. In each of the earlier confrontations, it was the local synagogue that rose up against Paul due to the threat of his persuasive powers; here it is Jewish outsiders.

So there are, again, reasons for strong suspicion that Jewish opposition to Paul in this passage is a Lucan creation. But why would Luke do this, and why would he show Paul in repeated attempts to proclaim the Gospel first to Jews and then, only
upon their rejection of it, to Gentiles, when Paul seems so resolved to *Gentile* mission?

The answer to that question comes from again considering Acts as part of the two volume work written to Theophilus. The portrayal of Jewish rejection and the consequent turn to the Gentiles is also a distinctive feature of Luke's Gospel, compared to the others.

The theme of Jewish rejection is persistent throughout Luke, but it is especially accented by having the first scene of Jesus' work take place in his hometown synagogue of Nazareth. (Mark, on the other hand, has Jesus begin his work in Galilee, with his first village being Capernaum, while he has no scene in Nazareth, let alone a confrontation in its synagogue.)

Luke 4.16 reports, "When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 16 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him." - After Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 and identifies himself with the prophet who speaks there, he receives mixed reviews, leading to a conflict Luke describes this way: 23 "He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" 24 And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; 26 yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' 28 When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage."

What enrages Jesus' hearers is not his interpretation of their actions as a rejection, but his *explanation* of their rejection. When he cites the example of Elijah as a parallel, saying that while there were many widows in Israel, it was one in *Sidon* to whom Elijah was sent, he refers to a woman of a non-Jewish (i.e. Gentile) community. Similarly, the only leper cleansed in Elisha's time was a Syrian, i.e. a non-Israelite. Jesus interprets their rejection of him as compelling God to shift attention to the Gentiles - a theme not found in Mark.

Similarly, only in Luke do we find Jesus, as he approaches Jerusalem just days before his execution, lamenting it: 31 "As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, 32 saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 33 Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. 34 They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."

Here we find the theme of rejection explained as Jerusalem's failure to "recognize the time of her visitation from God." - As a consequence, Luke's Jesus (and only Luke's Jesus) says subsequently, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." - The failure of Jerusalem to respond to Jesus will lead to the Gentiles ruling over it.

That theme of Jews rejecting Jesus and finding themselves supplanted by Gentiles is carried on by Luke in his second volume. Their persecution of Paul parallels their persecution of Jesus, while Paul's resolve to turn to the gentiles parallels Jesus' charge that, as in the days of Elijah and Elisha, it is gentiles who will embrace him rather than his own people. Again, Luke's own agenda seems to override Paul's understanding of his mission.

And yet, this emphasis is quite in line with Luke's purpose, which is to address a prominent gentile, Theophilus, with assurance about the gospel he has received. The repeated emphasis that this is a gospel with its roots in the heritage and pedigree of Israel - even though an essential element of his reassurance of Theophilus - would be ineffective without his assurance that this message has been extended to gentiles like him. Luke's mechanism for explaining this is Jewish rejection of the gospel that opens the gospel to embrace by gentiles.

In sum, then, it seems that Saul, having been stopped dead in his tracks from persecuting Christians, became convinced that he, like Jeremiah, had been appointed to proclaim a message to the gentiles. Even though Acts emphasizes Paul's association with Jerusalem and shows him appealing first to Jewish communities, Paul's own words about himself (not to mention his words to the church in Thessalonica) indicate, on the contrary, that he saw his mission primarily in terms of the gentiles.

If Paul understood himself assigned a mission directed squarely at the gentiles, then how did he look on this mission and his role in it? What did it mean for him to be the apostle to the gentiles? That's the question we'll pursue next time.