

## What is the difference between...

- Destruction by explosion
- Destruction by erosion

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## Erosion:

Gradual destruction, bit by bit

- How does erosion happen in:
  - Geology
  - Physical things (cars)
  - Human bodies
  - Relationships
  - Hope
  - The church



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# Against the Flow

Acts 21:17-36

Chinese page 1805  
 Spanish page 1419  
 English-Green page 761  
 English-Brown\* page 1116  
 \* **larger print**



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## *The Book of Acts*

- What Jesus Christ continued to do and to teach through the Church by the work of the Holy Spirit
- The task of the church

*Acts 1:8*

– “But you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Chapters 1-7  
 Chapters 8-12  
 Chapters 13-28

**21**

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### *The Book of Acts*

- Paul anticipated trouble in Jerusalem
  - Paul said: “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that **in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.**” *Acts 20:22-23*
  - “Coming over to us, [Agabus the prophet] took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, “In this way the **Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.**””” *Acts 21:11*

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### *Acts 21:17-36*

**17-20a:** Jerusalem: greetings and report about Gentile ministry

20b-25: • Paul finally arrived in Jerusalem

26-29: • Joined by 7 representatives of Gentile churches

30-36: • As well as Luke (seemingly a Gentile also)

• Delivered a financial gift from the Gentile Christians to the Jewish Christians

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Paul said... “Pray that

- I may be kept safe from the **[Jewish]** unbelievers in Judea and
  - that the contribution **[from Gentile Christians]** I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord’s people **[Jewish Christians]** there,
- so that I may come to you with joy, by God’s will, and in your company be refreshed.”

*Romans 15:31-32*

7

***Acts 21:17-36***

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20b-25: • Paul finally arrived in Jerusalem

26-29: • Joined by 7 representatives of Gentile churches

30-36: • As well as Luke (seemingly a Gentile also)

• Delivered a financial gift from

the Gentile Christians to the Jewish Christians

• Paul was concerned about Jew/Gentile conflict

• Warmly welcomed by many Jewish Christians

• Who were enthusiastic  
for God’s work among Gentiles  
through Paul’s travels

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*Acts 21:17-36*

17-20a: Jerusalem: greetings and report about Gentile ministry

20b-25: Report about Jewish ministry. The conflict and plan

26-29: • God also worked among Jews

30-36: • They were zealous for Jewish culture: “the Law”

- Rumors of Paul telling Jews to stop being Jewish
  - Actually he taught freedom about Jewish culture
- Plan: public display of Paul supporting Jewish culture: a vow ceremony in the temple
  - Show that Paul was an “observant Jew”

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To the **Jews** I became like a **Jew**, to win the **Jews**. To those **under the law** I became like one **under the law** (though ***I myself am not under the law***), so as to win those **under the law**.

To those **not having the law** I became like one **not having the law** (though ***I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law***), so as to win those **not having the law**.

To the **weak** I became **weak**, to win the **weak**.

I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. *1 Corinthians 9:20-23*

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30-36: • They were zealous for Jewish culture: “the Law”

- Rumors of Paul telling Jews to stop being Jewish
  - Actually he taught freedom about Jewish culture
- Plan: public display of Paul supporting Jewish culture: a vow ceremony in the temple
  - Show that Paul was an “observant Jew”
  - In reality: he was “culturally flexible” *1 Corinthians 9:20-23*
- They were okay with Gentiles not following the law

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***Acts 21:17-36***

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**26-29: Paul followed the plan, and it failed!**

30-36: • Paul immediately followed their plan

- Had to be separated from his Gentile companions
- Jews from Asia (perhaps Ephesus) were there
  - Where the last big riot was (that was started by Gentiles)
- They stirred up the crowd with exaggerated claims and false claims
  - Bad assumptions yet had some basis in facts

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**30-36: Resulted in chaos. Saved by Roman arrest**

- Much like the events leading to Jesus' crucifixion
  - The beginning of Paul's extensive ministry in chains
- "Get rid of him!" = "Put him to death!"
- Increased the division between Jews and Gentiles
  - Threatened to split the church
  - Imagine the Jewish Christians
  - Imagine the Gentile Christians

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### *In contrast to God's Plan*

God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—  
**to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.**

*Ephesians 1:9-10*

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### **The Big Idea**

God's plan is to unite all things  
 in Christ  
 through the church  
 while sin and its effects  
 bring decay and division

**Major issue of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine:**

- **Conflict between Jew and Gentile**

**The Church experienced this same trouble**

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For Jesus Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to **create in himself one new humanity out of the two**, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. **For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.**

*Ephesians 2:14-18*

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### **The Big Idea**

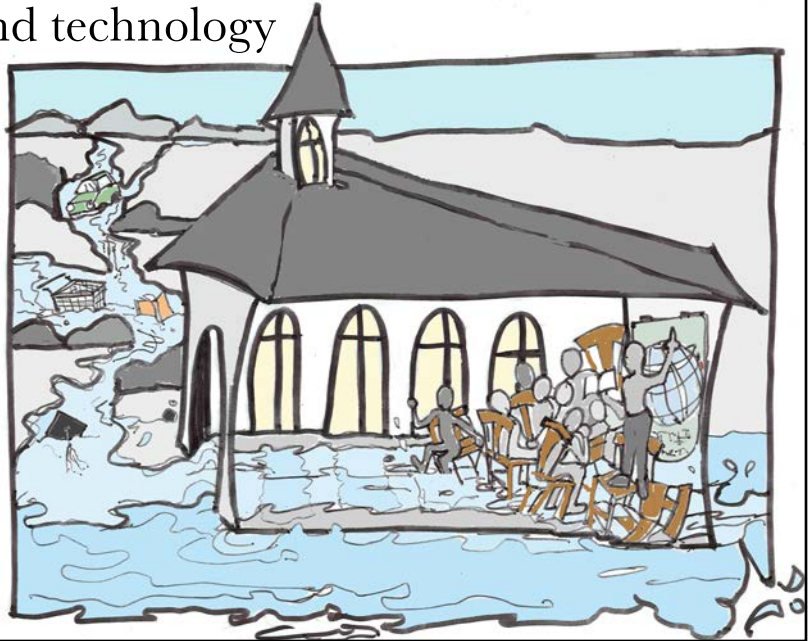
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**The "currents" in society will affect the church as well**

18

The “currents” in society will affect the church as well

- Hope in technique and technology
- Greed & selfish ambition
- Division based on race, ethnicity, social class, politics, and more
- ...



19

God grant that the people of good will will rise up with courage, take over the leadership, and **open channels of communication between races**, for I think that one of the tragedies of our whole struggle is that the South is still

**trying to live in monologue, rather than dialogue** and

I am convinced that men **hate** each other  
because they **fear** each other.

They **fear** each other

because that **don't know** each other

and they **don't know** each other

because they **don't communicate** with each other,

and they **don't communicate** with each other

because they are **separated** from each other.

*Address by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  
Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa, October 15, 1962*

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- Those who think alike gravitate together
  - Homogeneous unit principle
- They encounter alternative ideas only
  - “in the emasculated form of rumour that the outsiders say ‘thus and thus’”
  - Each groups hears not the best but the worst that the other can say

*C.S. Lewis, “God in the Dock”*

**emasculated = without its main strength or power**  
**‘thus and thus’ = statements made by the outsiders**

21

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God's plan is to unite all things  
in Christ  
through the church  
while sin and its effects  
bring decay and division

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### Application

- Know and pursue God's intention for the Church
  - God's purpose is "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" *Ephesians 1:9*
  - "Create one new humanity out of the two" *Ephesians 2:15*
  - A splintered church (both local and universal) is certainly not God's design
    - By race, ethnicity, tribe, politics, social class, secondary theological issues, age, ...

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### *Application*

- Know and pursue God's intention for the Church
- Come closer to people who are different from us
  - Separation > don't communicate > don't know > fear > hate
  - “The Word became flesh and **made his dwelling among us.**” *John 1:14*
  - When you and I choose a place to live, go to work, go to school, go to church, go to eat, go to play, go for fellowship, engage in ministry, ...
  - Go to listen and learn, and then to share
  - This must be an intentional work in our church

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### *Application*

- Know and pursue God's intention for the Church
- Come closer to people who are different from us
- Love
  - When we encounter people who are different from us...  
*1 Corinthians 13*
    - Be patient and kind
    - Don't be easily angered or keep a record of wrongs
    - Protect, trust, hope, and persevere
  - Work to build bridges of understanding and trust

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### *Application*

- Know and pursue God's intention for the Church
- Come closer to people who are different from us
- Love
- By the power and character of the Holy Spirit
  - “The **fruit** of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.”  
*Galatians 5:22-23*

**forbearance = patient, endurance**

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### *Application*

- Know and pursue God's intention for the Church
- Come closer to people who are different from us
- Love
- By the power and character of the Holy Spirit

28



### The Big Idea

God's plan is to unite all things  
**"For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."** **in Christ** through the church  
*2 Corinthians 4:5* while sin and its effects bring decay and division

**Where have we failed to do this?**

**Confess, apologize, and pursue change in Christ**

**What can you and I do, and continue to do, to join in the work of God in His Church and in His church?**

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After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God,  
 who sits on the throne,  
 and to the Lamb."

*Revelation 7:9-10*

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