

PAUL

THE APOSTLE

AN INTRODUCTION

MARGOT MORRELL

In every battle you will need faith
as your shield to stop the fiery
arrows aimed at you by Satan.

And you will need the helmet of
salvation and the sword of the
Spirit—which is the Word of God.

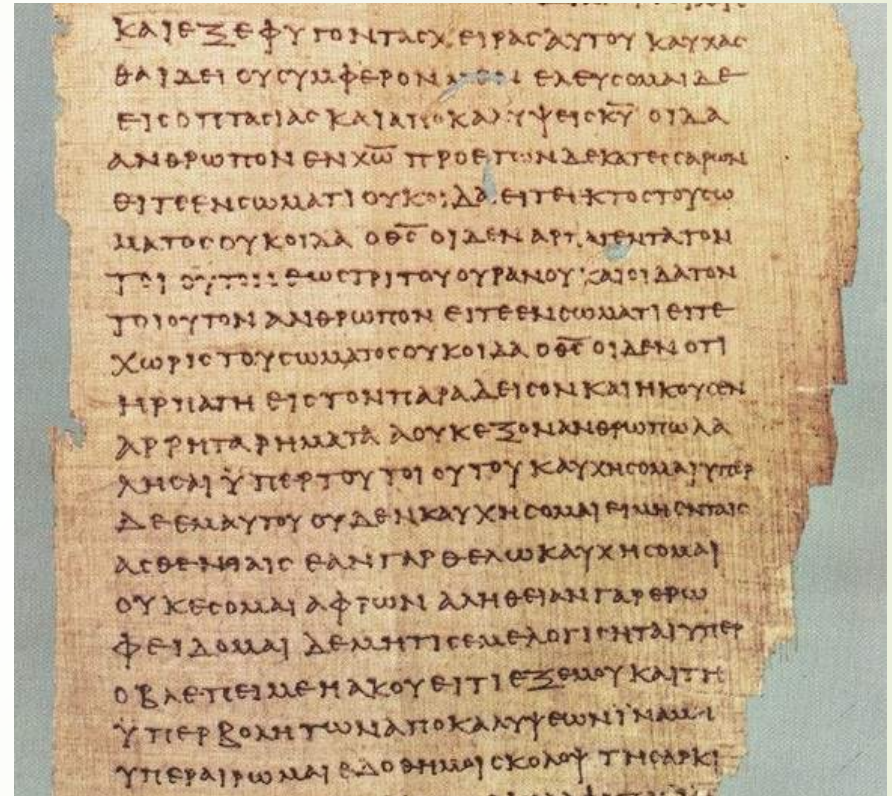
Letter to the Ephesians 6:16-17



In the thirty years after Christ's death, his most unlikely follower traveled thousands of miles over treacherous terrain to share the Lord's gospel - love God and love one another.

Throughout the vast Roman Empire, Paul the Apostle planted and nurtured communities of believers.

Like a loving parent, Paul wrote letters to his far-flung flocks. In those letters, Paul shared the teachings of the risen Savior he had met on the road to Damascus.



2 Cor. 11:33 – 12:9, remnant of the New Testament written in ancient Greek on papyri. ca. 4th c.



In Paul's first letter, the former persecutor of Christians wrote,

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Letter to Galatians 1:11-12

He added,

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Letter to Galatians. 5:22-23

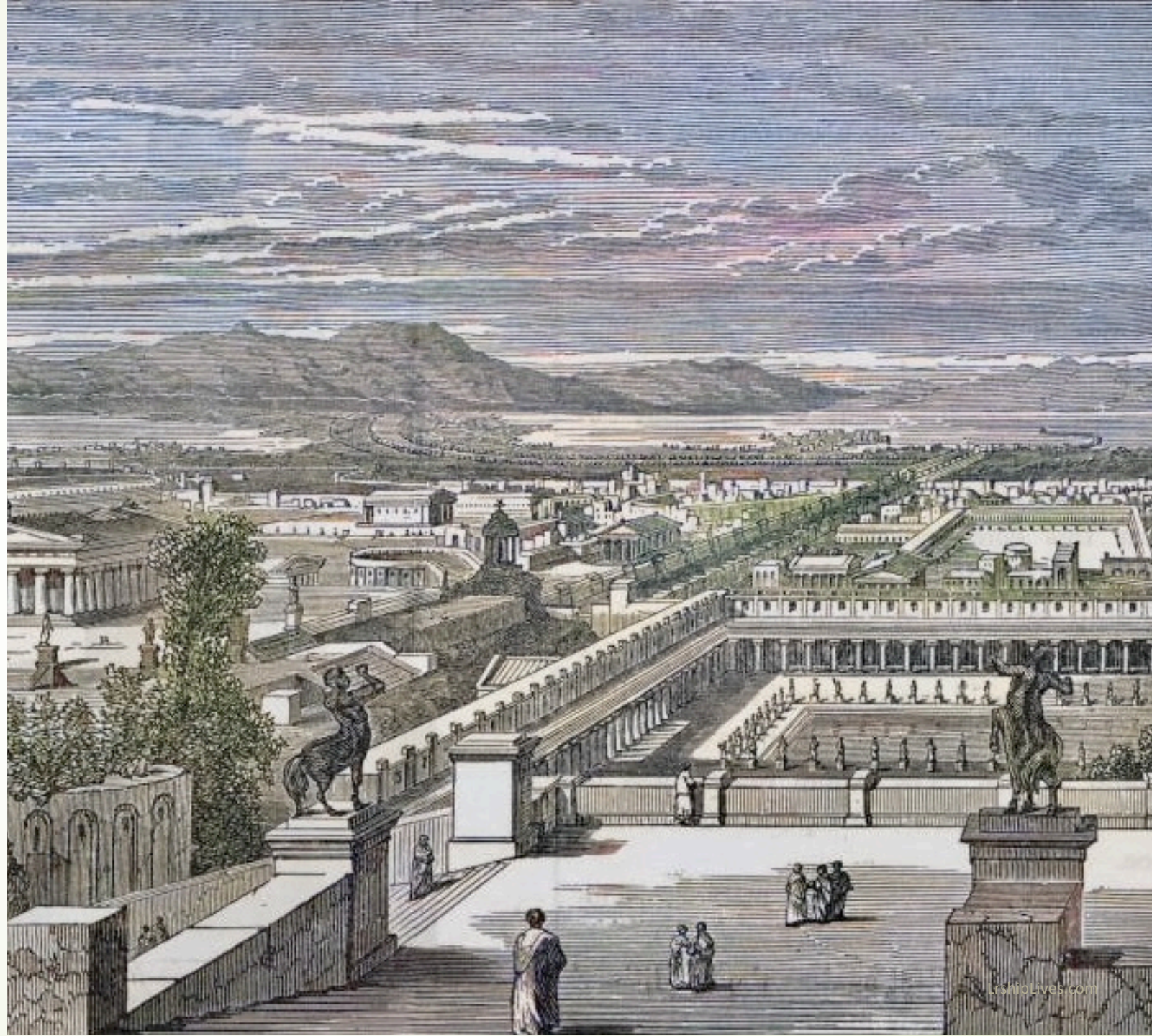
When Paul heard the church in Corinth was struggling, he wrote to his friends...

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails.

1st Letter to Corinthians 13:4-7

1st c. Corinth; 19th c. engraving



From prison, Paul wrote to comfort friends in Philippi who were worried about him,

Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Letter to Philippians. 4:4-7

Paul, the Apostle - Rembrandt, ca. 1633

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Paul's path wasn't easy.


More than once, fellow believers helped him escape from people who wanted to kill him...

When I was in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas kept guards at the city gates to catch me. I had to be lowered in a basket through a window in the city wall to escape from him.

2nd Letter to Corinthians 11:32-33



Damascus, Syria, 1906



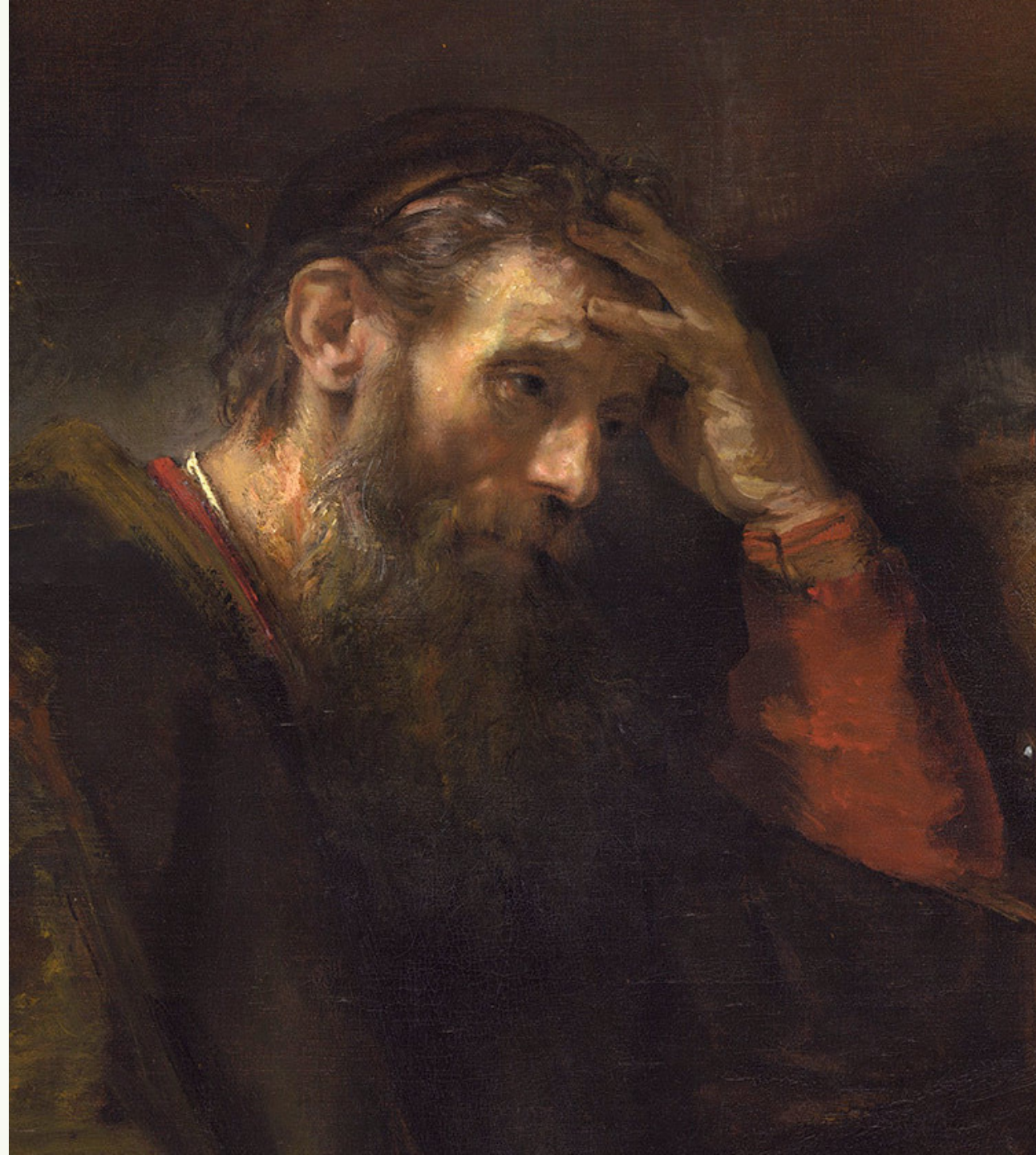
Traveling from Turkey to Greece, Paul paused to write again to the beleaguered believers in Corinth...

...I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea.

2nd Letter to Corinthians 11:23-25

St. Paul
Rembrandt, ca. 1657

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Why did Paul persevere?

He tells us about his conversion on the road to Damascus...

I was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether I was in my body or out of my body, I don't know—only God knows. Yes, only God knows whether I was in my body or outside my body. But I do know that I was caught up to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words, things no human is allowed to tell.


That experience is worth boasting about, but I'm not going to do it. I will boast only about my weaknesses.

2nd Letter to Corinthians 12:2-5

Conversion of Paul
Caravaggio, 1600, Yale

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Paul explains his perspective...

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

2nd Letter to Corinthians 4:8-9

Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2nd Letter to Corinthians 4:16-18



Who was this extraordinary man who wrote
civilization's most profound and stirring words?

In a letter from prison to friends in Philippi, Paul shared a bit about his background...

He was born “of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”

Letter to the Philippians 3:5-6

Saint Paul
Rembrandt, c. 1630

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Paul was born in Tarsus, near the southeast coast of Turkey in the region known as Cilicia.

Enterprising Cilicians had created one of the Roman Empire's most important ports on the Mediterranean Sea.

They cut a path, known as the Cilician Gates, through the Taurus mountains, forty miles north of their city, to connect Tarsus with ancient trade routes.

The principal goods of the region were timber and the unusually long and waterproof wool of Cilician goats – a commodity prized for making tents, cloaks and boots.



The industrious Cilicians dredged the local river to open their city to the Mediterranean Sea, sixteen miles downstream.





Bedouin tent, 1920

Paul came from a family of prosperous tentmakers.

Every Jewish child learned a trade. Tentmaking provided Paul with an income wherever he went. While his hands were busy, his mind was free to think and talk.

Exceptionally bright, when Paul was about 13, he was sent to Jerusalem to study with a renowned teacher, Gamaliel, who came from a celebrated family of scholars.

The Jewish version of his name was Saul. In Greek or Latin his name was Paul.



Tarsus, Turkey, 1906

By the time Paul set out on the road to Damascus, he was:

- On the fast-track to a spectacularly successful career as a Pharisee – a strict interpreter of Mosaic law.
- Familiar with a variety of cultures from growing up in the cosmopolitan cities of Tarsus and Jerusalem.
- Fluent in three languages – Greek, the language of Tarsus, Hebrew, Aramaic, a dialect of Hebrew spoken by Jesus and the apostles and spoke some Latin.
- Was an experienced traveler.
- Was unusually well-educated in the Hebrew Bible. In his letter to Romans, he cites 70 verses from 16 of the 38 books of the Old Testament.

Paul was a favorite subject of the 17th century Dutch painter, Rembrandt.

The Apostle is always painted with a sword – a shorthand way of telling an illiterate populace who the image represents.

The sword refers to Paul's words in Ephesians 6:17 – “the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.”

Paul, the Apostle
Rembrandt, ca. 1633

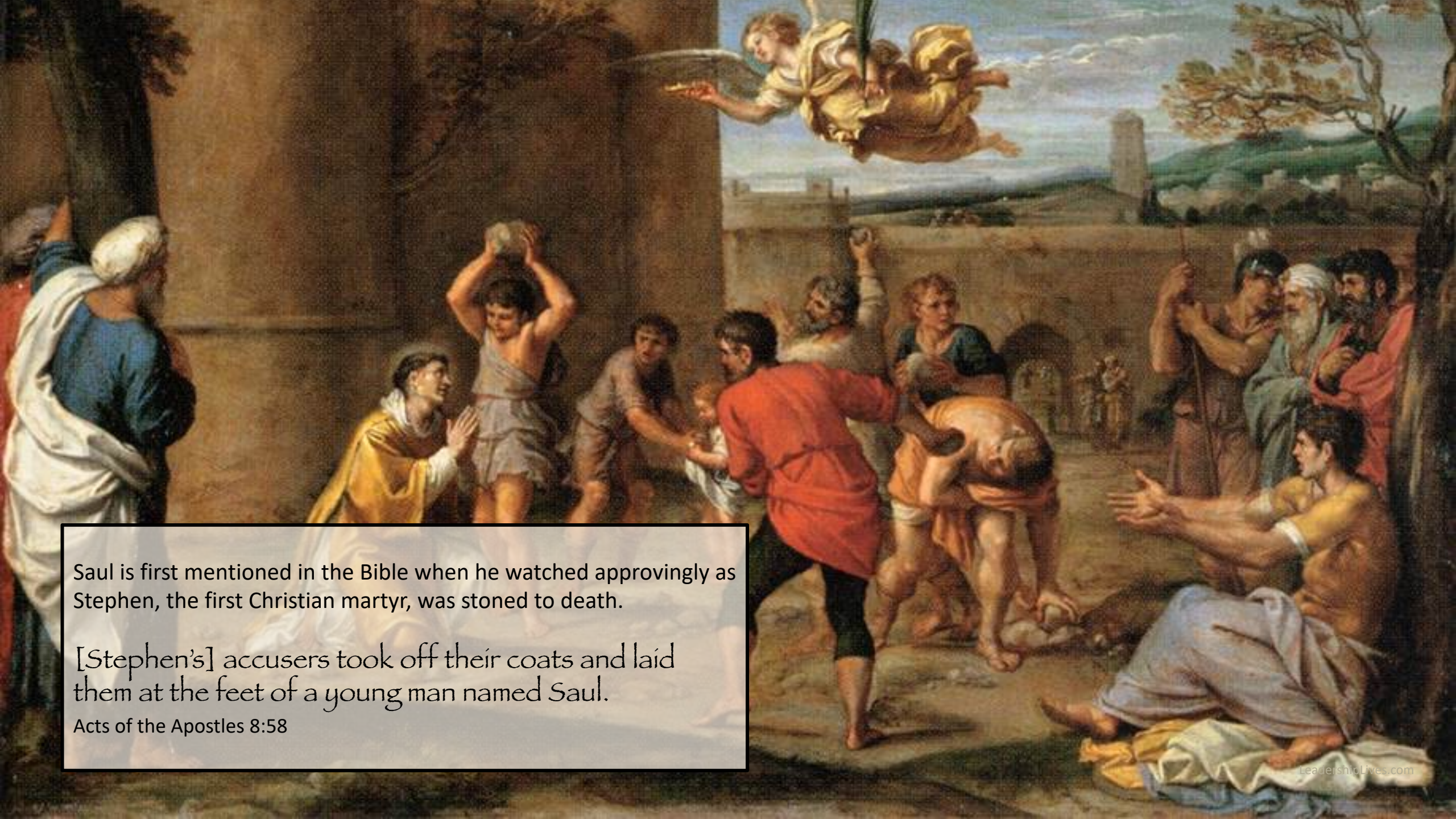
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Paul was born about 5 AD, to a Jewish family who had the coveted status of being Roman citizens. A Roman citizen could not be scourged or crucified and could appeal the ruling of a provincial law court to Rome.

During Paul's missionary journeys, he may have looked like this facial composite created by experts at the Landeskriminalamt of North Rhine-Westphalia using historical sources.



Saul is first mentioned in the Bible when he watched approvingly as Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned to death.

[Stephen's] accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

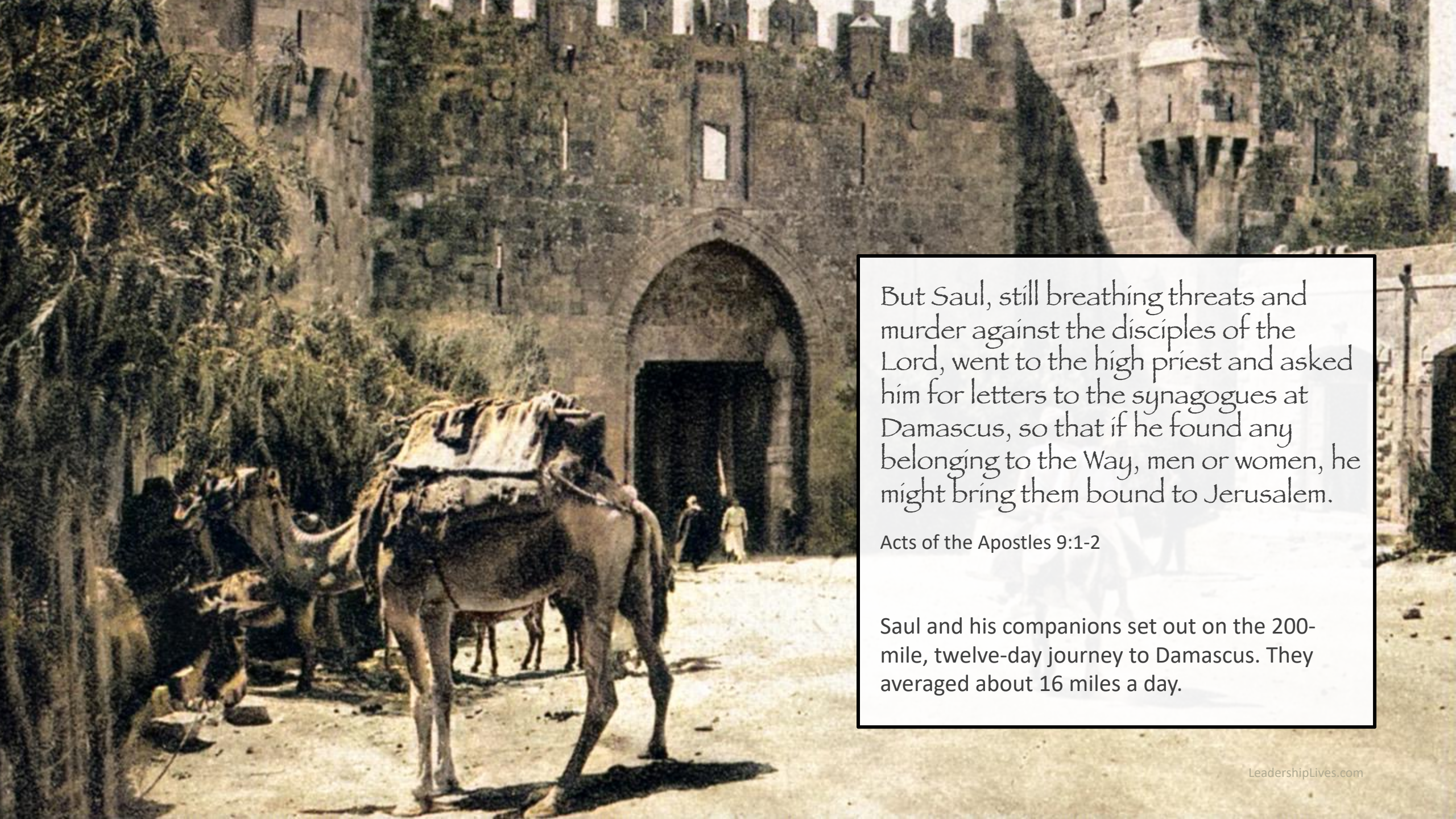
Acts of the Apostles 8:58



After Stephen's death, Saul rounded up and persecuted all the believers he could find in Jerusalem – men and women - and had them thrown in jail.

Reports of Saul's activities spread far and wide.

1st century Jerusalem
19th c. engraving



But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts of the Apostles 9:1-2

Saul and his companions set out on the 200-mile, twelve-day journey to Damascus. They averaged about 16 miles a day.

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him.

And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

And he said, "Who are you, Lord?"

And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Acts of the Apostles 9:3-6

The Conversion of St. Paul
Benvenuto Tisi, called il Garofalo, ca. 1525

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Damascus c. 1880

The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So, they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

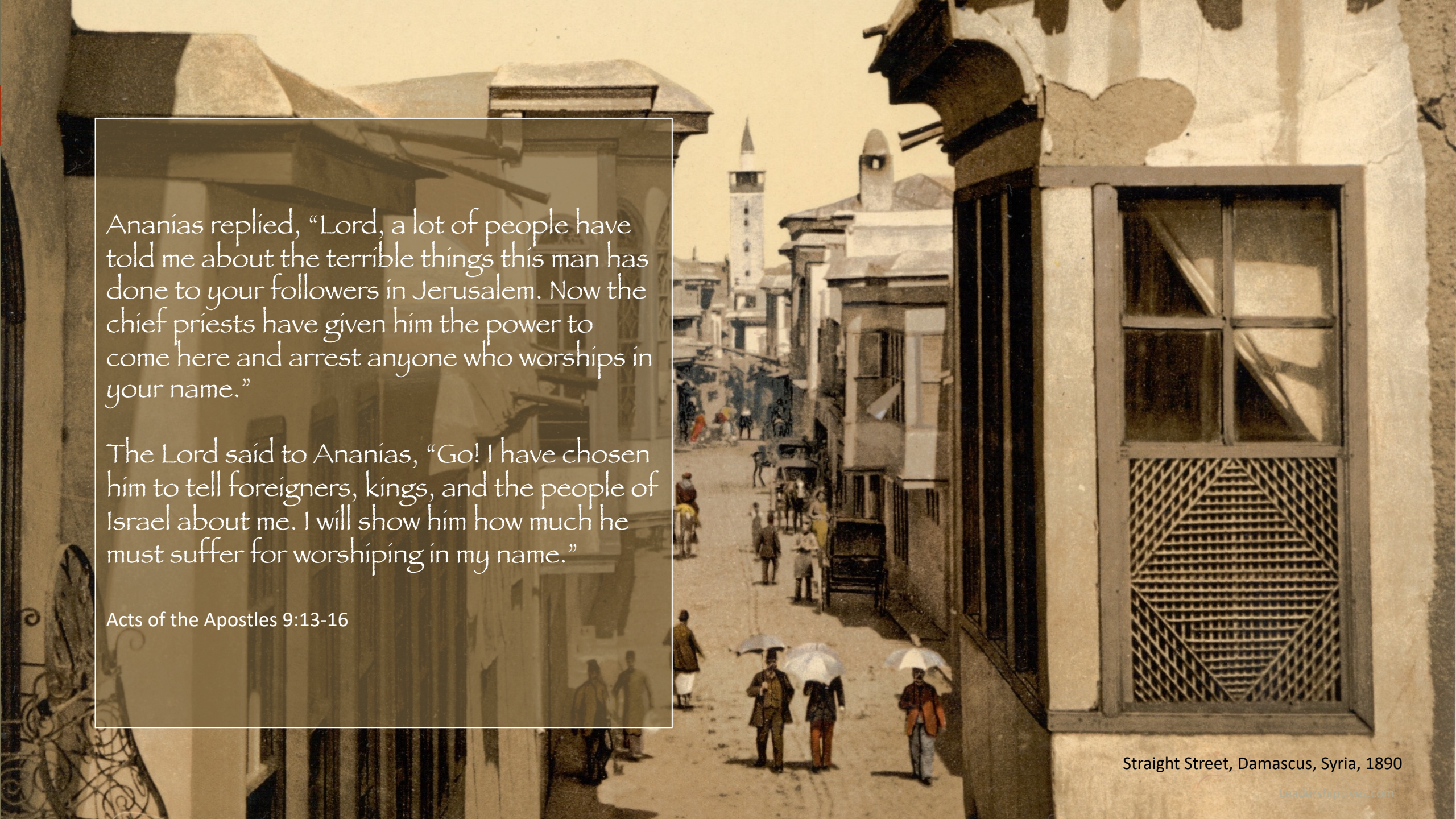


Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, 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."

Acts of the Apostles 9:10-12

Gate to Straight Street
Damascus, Syria



Ananias replied, “Lord, a lot of people have told me about the terrible things this man has done to your followers in Jerusalem. Now the chief priests have given him the power to come here and arrest anyone who worships in your name.”

The Lord said to Ananias, “Go! I have chosen him to tell foreigners, kings, and the people of Israel about me. I will show him how much he must suffer for worshiping in my name.”

Acts of the Apostles 9:13-16

Straight Street, Damascus, Syria, 1890



So, Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.

Acts of the Apostles 9:17-18

Ananias Restoring the Sight of St. Paul
Pietro da Cortona, c. 1631

Like John the Baptist and Jesus before him, Paul went to the desert to absorb the enormous change in his life.

Paul wrote In his letter to Galatians that Christ revealed to him how he, Jesus, is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Savior.



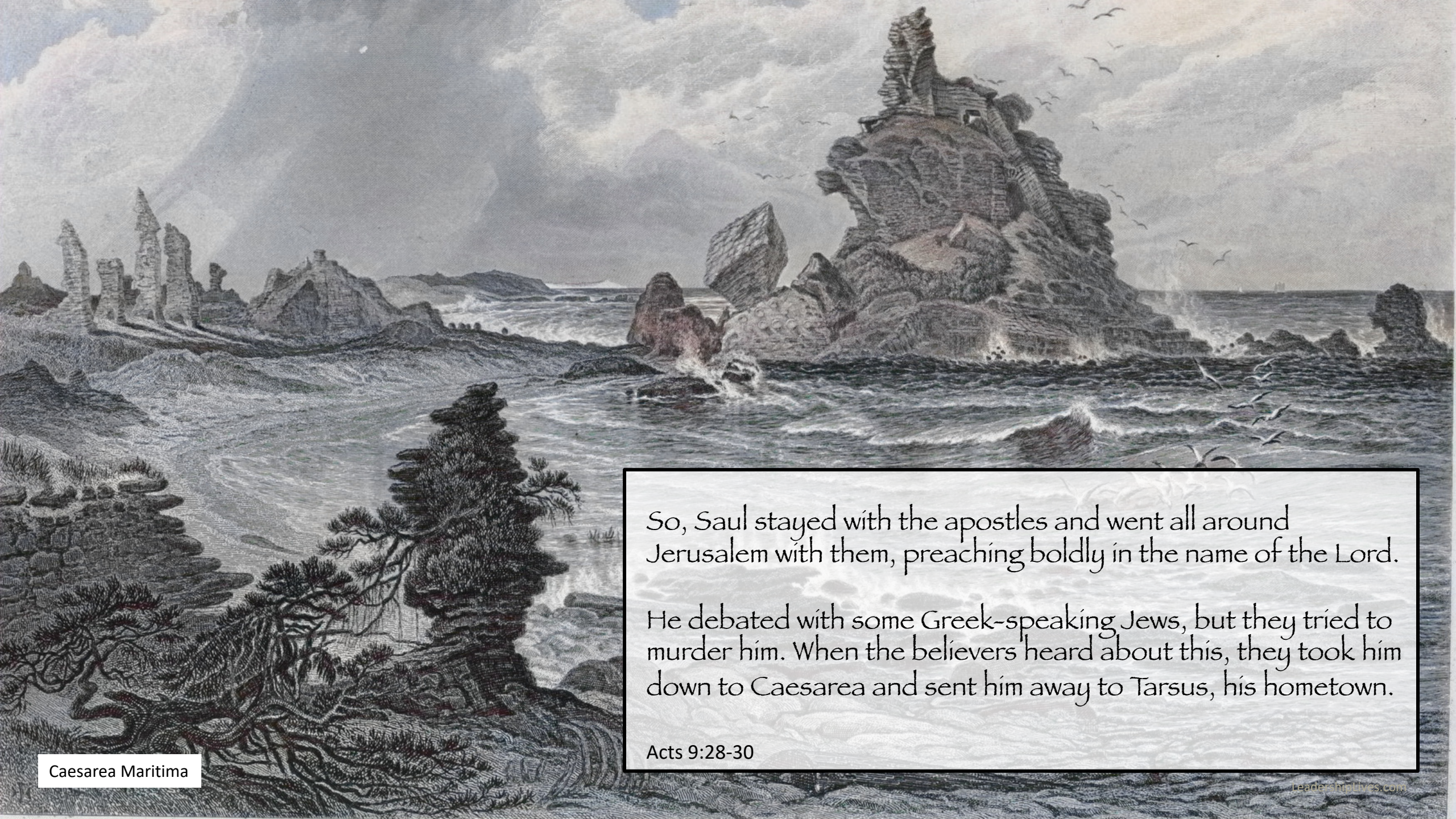
Three years after Saul set out for Damascus to persecute believers, he returned to Jerusalem a changed man.

Unaware of Paul's conversion, the apostles in Jerusalem were terrified of Saul.

Barnabas, a devout believer who had heard Saul preach the Gospel "boldly" in Damascus, offered to act as Paul's ambassador and introduced him to Peter.

Barnabas was the hinge that opened the door to Saul's new life.





So, Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him. When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.

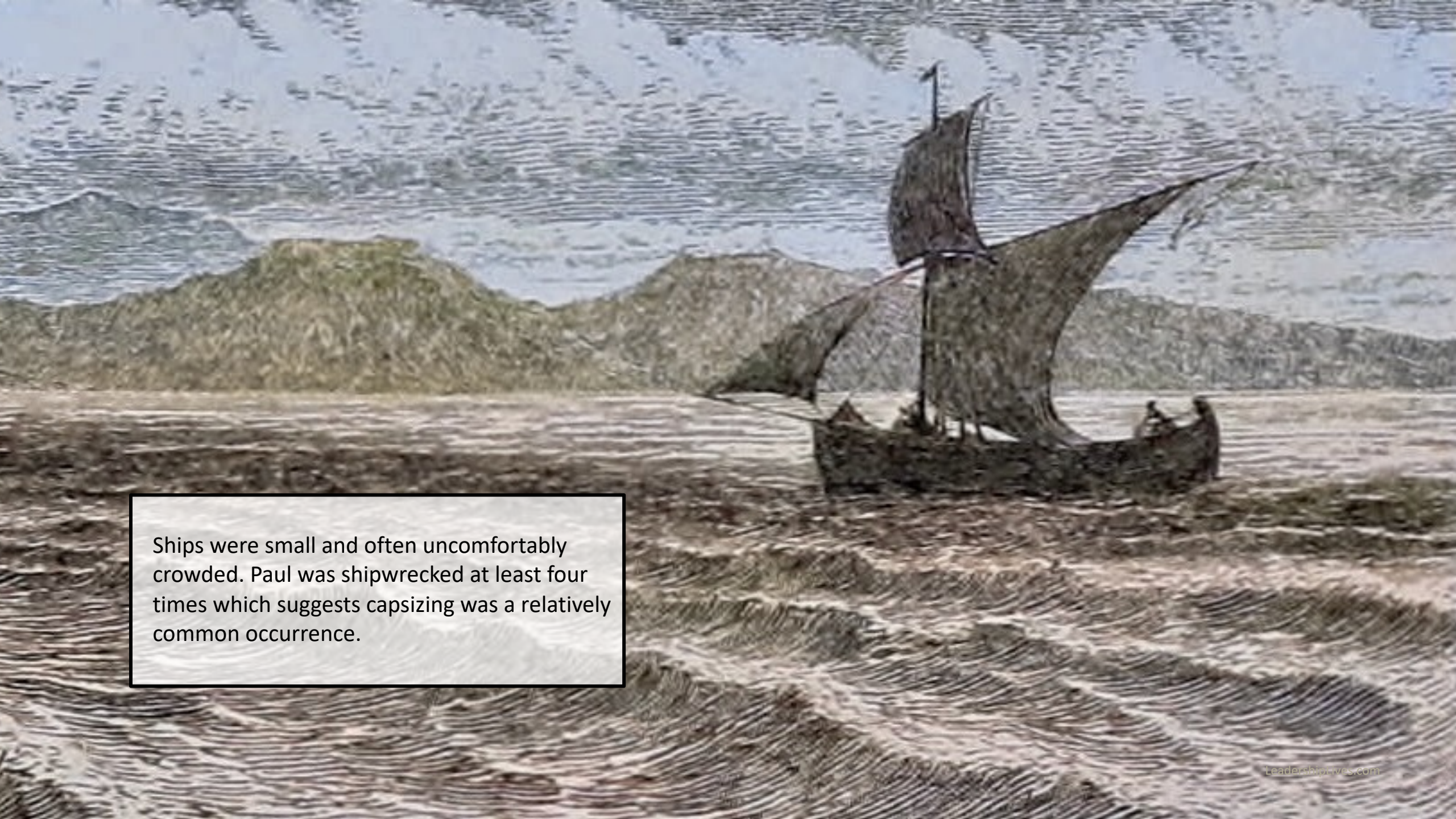
Acts 9:28-30



There were no set schedules, so travelers like Paul waited at ports for a ship that was going to their destination.

Thanks to Roman rule, the sea was relatively free of pirates but traveling by ship in the Mediterranean Sea was treacherous and open for travel only half the year.

Primitive navigation tools meant ships hugged the coastline whenever possible.



Ships were small and often uncomfortably crowded. Paul was shipwrecked at least four times which suggests capsizing was a relatively common occurrence.



Saul remained in Tarsus for nine years.



Then Barnabas arrived and invited Paul to work with him in Antioch.

End of the Introduction to Paul the Apostle