Notes on
Acts

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Introduction

TITLE

The title "Acts of the Apostles" is very ancient. The *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* to the Gospel of Luke (A.D. 150-180) contains the oldest reference to the book by this name. The title is a bit misleading, however, because the book contains only a *few* of the "acts" of *some* of the apostles, primarily Peter and Paul. The book is more a story of the extension of the church from Jerusalem to Rome than it is a complete history of the apostles' acts. Whereas Jesus is the chief character in the Gospels, the Holy Spirit working through the apostles is in Acts.

WRITER

Two lines of argument lead to the conclusion that Luke, the friend, fellow missionary, and physician of Paul wrote this book, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. First, there is the internal evidence, the passages written in the first person plural that can refer to Luke (16:10-40; 20:5—21:18; 27:1—28:16). Second, we have external evidence indicating that Luke wrote Acts. This evidence includes references by early church fathers,[1] comments in collections of New Testament books,[2] and editorial statements in early notes on certain New Testament books.[3] Luke's name does not appear in Acts, but it is a shortened Greek form of a Latin name—either Lucanus, Lucianus, Lucius, or Lucillus. Eusebius and Jerome wrote that Luke was a native of Syrian Antioch.[4] There is also some tradition that he was from Philippi.[5]

DATE AND PLACE OF COMPOSITION

The date of composition was probably in the early sixties, A.D. 60-62. In view of his emphases, Luke probably would have mentioned several important events had they occurred by the time he wrote. These include the Neronian persecution of Christians that began in A.D. 64, Paul's death in A.D. 68, and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

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[1]E.g., Irenaeus, c. 180 A.D.

[2]E.g., the *Muratorian Canon*, second century A.D. See *Documents of the Christian Church*, pp. 28-29, for an English translation of the text.

[3]E.g., the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* to the Gospel of Luke, second century A.D. See T. W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, p. 49, for an English translation.

[4]J. S. Howson, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 241.

[5]A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 2:x.

We do not know for sure where Luke was when he wrote Acts. Perhaps he composed it over a period of years, drawing on various sources, and then put it into its final form in Rome where Paul was in confinement for two years (28:30-31; A.D. 60-62).

> "Fortunately the intelligibility and value of the book are largely independent of a knowledge of the precise situation in which it was written. While the finer points of the interpretation of Acts can still cause intense discussion among scholars, the essential themes of the book are basically clear and simple."[6]

SCOPE

The events recorded in Acts cover a period of about 30 years: beginning with the Lord Jesus' ascension in A.D. 33, and extending to Paul's two-year Roman house arrest that ended about A.D. 62.[7] The Delphic Inscription and several references in Josephus, plus one in Suetonius, enable us to identify key dates in Acts.[8]

GENRE

Most scholars believe that Acts fits within the literary classification of ancient history. The Greek word *praxeis*, "acts," identifies a specific genre or subgenre in the ancient world: narratives of the heroic deeds of individuals or cities. However, it was not the name of a technical genre as such.[9] Acts bears all the marks of a book of ancient history. Luke was on a par with other writiers of ancient history in his day regarding his skill and methods.[10]

PURPOSE

There seems to have been a three-fold purpose for the writing of Acts. As with the other books of the Bible that record history in narrative form, certainly the Holy Spirit had a historical purpose.[11] He intended to provide an inspired record of selected events that show the spread of the gospel and the church. They branched out from Jerusalem, the center of Judaism where the church began, to Rome, the uttermost part of the Gentile earth in Luke's day.

> "Streeter suggested that an alternative title for the book of Acts might be 'The Road to Rome', for this is indeed the significance of Luke's work. Whatever minor motifs Luke had in mind, such as the establishment of Christianity in men's minds as a constructive and not destructive element in the social order, his main concern was to show that, in God's plan for the renewal of the life of mankind, Jerusalem, the heart of old Israel, was

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[6]I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 49.

[7]See Appendix 1 at the end of these notes for a table of Paul's activities.

[8]See Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, p. 30, for a chart of these.

[9]Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 285, 300-01.

[10]Ibid., pp. 316-21.

[11]William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. xvii.

> the goal of Stage I [i.e., the Book of Luke], while Rome, the centre of the world, was the goal of Stage II [i.e., the Book of Acts]."[12]

However, the fact that Luke included what he did, and omitted much other historical data, indicates a second, theological purpose. He showed how the plans and purposes of God were working out through history. In particular, he showed how Jesus Christ was faithfully and irresistibly building His church (Matt. 16:18).[13] This involved clarifying how God's dealings with humankind had taken a different course because of the Jews' rejection of their Messiah.[14]

> ". . . Luke in Acts is not merely concerned to draw a link between the time of Jesus and the time of the early church, as is commonly noticed, but also between the time of Israel and the time of Jesus and His church. Acts insists that the God who was at work in the history of his ancient people, Israel, bringing them salvation, is the same God who is at work in the church."[15]

Third, Luke evidently had an apologetic purpose in writing. He frequently pointed out the relationship of the church to the Roman state by referring to many Roman officials, not one of whom opposed Christianity because of its doctrines or practices. This would have made Acts a powerful defensive tool for the early Christians in their struggle to survive in a hostile pagan environment.

Longenecker identified Luke's purposes as kerygmatic, apologetic, conciliatory, and catachetical.[16]

> "We agree with a growing number of scholars who think that Luke wrote with a variety of specific purposes and that these purposes are part of a larger, general purpose—the edification of Christians."[17]

UNIQUE FEATURES

Acts is the only New Testament book that continues the history begun in the Gospels. Whereas Luke's Gospel focuses on the vertical universalization of the gospel (up and down the social scale), Acts focuses on its horizontal universalization (from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the world).

> ". . . the Acts is to be seen in close literary association with the Gospel [of Luke]. They form two parts of one work, conceived in its final form as a unity, whether or not the original composition of the Gospel took place independently of the plan to produce the two-part work. Although there

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[12]William Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 27.

[13]See Stephen J. Strauss, "The Purpose of Acts and the Mission of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:676 (October-December 2012):443-64.

[14]For a very good discussion of the major theological emphases in Acts, see Marshall, pp. 23-34.

[15]Brian S. Rosner, "Acts and Biblical History," in ibid., p. 82. Cf. George E. Ladd, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, pp. 1123-24.

[16]Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts," in *John-Acts*, vol. 9 of *The expositor's Bible Commentery*, pp. 216-21.

[17]Carson and Moo, p. 305.

> are other examples of literary compositions in two parts (Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, is one of the nearest parallels to Luke-Acts in time and cultural context), Luke's work appears to be unique among Christian writings and to have no close secular precedents in its combination of the stories of a religious leader and of his followers."[18]
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> "The book which we call the Acts of the Apostles may be said to complete the Pentateuch of New Testament history. Four of these books present the Person of our Lord; while the fifth gives the first page of the history of the Church . . ."[19]

Acts is also an indispensable historical record for understanding the Apostle Paul's epistles; without it we could not understand some of the things he wrote. It is the only Bible book that records the historical transition from Judaism to Christianity. It provides basic information about and insight into the early church. And it challenges every modern Christian.[20]

Richard Longenecker has shown that Luke's method of writing history was in line with current historiography of his day.[21] Ben Witherington observed that Luke-Acts is more typical of ancient Greek history writing than Roman (Latin).[22] Others have argued that it is more like the Hebrew Scriptures than anything else.

The Gospel of Luke is the longest book in the New Testament with 1,151 verses, Matthew is the second longest with 1,071 verses, and Acts is the third longest with 1,003 verses.

STRUCTURE

Longenecker identified five phenomena about the structure of Acts that the reader needs to recognize to appreciate what Luke sought to communicate.

> "1. It begins, like the [Third] Gospel, with an introductory section of distinctly Lukan cast dealing with the constitutive events of the Christian mission (1:1—2:41) before it sets forth the advances of the gospel 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (1:7).
> "2. This introductory section is followed by what appears to be a thematic statement (2:42-47). This material, while often viewed as a summary of what precedes, most probably serves as the thesis paragraph for what follows.
> "3. In his presentation of the advance of the Christian mission, Luke follows an essentially geographical outline that moves from Jerusalem (2:42—6:7), through Judea and Samaria (6:8—9:31), on into Palestine-Syria (9:32—12:24), then to the Gentiles in the

[18]I. Howard Marshall, "Acts and the 'Former Treatis,'" in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 1: The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, p. 182.
[19]G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.
[20]Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 349.
[21]Longenecker, pp. 212-14.
[22]Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p. 28.

eastern part of the Roman Empire (12:25—19:20), and finally culminates in Paul's defenses and the entrance of the gospel into Rome (19:21—28:31).

"4. In his presentation, Luke deliberately sets up a number of parallels between the ministry of Peter in the first half of Acts and that of Paul in the last half.[23]

"5. Luke includes six summary statements or 'progress reports' (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; and 28:31), each of which seems to conclude its own 'panel' of material.[24]

"Taking all these literary and structural features into account, we may conclude that Luke developed his material in Acts along the following lines:

"Introduction: The Constitutive Events of the Christian Mission (1:1—2:41)
Part I: The Christian Mission to the Jewish World (2:42—12:24)
Panel 1—The Earliest Days of the Church at Jerusalem (2:42—6:7)
Summary Statement: 'So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith' (6:7).
Panel 2—Critical Events in the Lives of Three Pivotal Figures (6:8—9:31)
Summary Statement: 'Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord' (9:31).
Panel 3—Advances of the Gospel in Palestine-Syria (9:32—12:24)
Summary Statement: 'But the word of God continued to increase and spread' (12:24).
Part II: The Christian Mission to the Gentile World (12:25—28:31)
Panel 4—The First Missionary Journey and the Jerusalem Council (12:25—16:5)
Summary Statement: 'So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers' (16:5).
Panel 5—Wide Outreach Through Two Missionary Journeys (16:6—19:20)
Summary Statement: 'In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power' (19:20).
Panel 6—To Jerusalem and Thence to Rome (19:21—28:31)

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[23]W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Acts of the Apostles: Outline Studies in Primitive Christianity*, pp. 25-26, offered some helpful comparisons between Peter's ministry and Paul's in Acts. For two lists of 16 parallels between Acts 1—12 and 13—28, see Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, pp. 23-24. This book contains many tables of interesting parallels within Acts, within Luke, and between Luke and Acts.

[24]Cf. *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. by James Hastings, s.v. "The Chronology of the New Testament," by C. H. Turner, 1:421. Turner's first panel included 1:1—2:41.

> *Summary Statement:* 'Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ' (28:31)."[25]

THEOLOGY

Darrell Bock has identified the key subjects in Acts as God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. More particularly, he noted the following theological emphases: the plan and work of the mighty God; mission, opposition, and the inclusion of the Gentiles; Jesus, the Lord of all for a gospel sent to all; the new community's emerging separate identity; the law; the triumph of the gospel; and eschatology.[26]

OUTLINE

I. The witness in Jerusalem 1:1—6:7
   A. The founding of the church 1:1—2:47
      1. The resumptive preface to the book 1:1-5
      2. The command to witness 1:6-8
      3. The ascension of Jesus 1:9-11
      4. Jesus' appointment of a twelfth apostle 1:12-26
      5. The birth of the church 2:1-41
      6. The early state of the church 2:42-47
   B. The expansion of the church in Jerusalem 3:1—6:7
      1. External opposition 3:1—4:31
      2. Internal compromise 4:32—5:11
      3. Intensified external opposition 5:12-42
      4. Internal conflict 6:1-7

II. The witness in Judea and Samaria 6:8—9:31
   A. The martyrdom of Stephen 6:8—8:1a
      1. Stephen's arrest 6:8—7:1
      2. Stephen's address 7:2-53
      3. Stephen's death 7:54—8:1a
   B. The ministry of Philip 8:1b-40
      1. The evangelization of Samaria 8:1b-25
      2. Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch 8:26-40
   C. The mission of Saul 9:1-31
      1. Saul's conversion and calling 9:1-19a
      2. Saul's initial conflicts 9:19b-30
      3. The church at peace 9:31

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[25]Longenecker, pp. 233-34. For further study of background issues such as the history, authorship, unity, text, composition, theology, church, and ministry of the Book of Acts, see the Introduction in Richard B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. xiii-cxv.

[26]Bock, pp. 32-42.

III. The witness to the uttermost part of the earth 9:32—28:31
  A. The extension of the church to Syrian Antioch 9:32—12:24
    1. Peter's ministry in Lydda and Joppa 9:32-43
    2. The conversion of Cornelius 10:1—11:18
    3. The initiatives of the Antioch church 11:19-30
    4. The persecution of the Jerusalem church 12:1-24
  B. The extension of the church to Cyprus and Asia Minor 12:25—16:5
    1. The divine appointment of Barnabas and Saul 12:25—13:3
    2. The mission to Cyprus 13:4-12
    3. The mission to Asia Minor 13:13—14:21a
    4. Paul and Barnabas' return to Antioch of Syria 14:21b-28
    5. The Jerusalem Council 15:1-35
    6. The strengthening of the Gentile churches 15:36—16:5
  C. The extension of the church to the Aegean shores 16:6—19:20
    1. The call to Macedonia 16:6-10
    2. The ministry in Macedonia 16:11—17:15
    3. The ministry in Achaia 17:16—18:17
    4. The beginning of ministry in Asia 18:18-22
    5. The results of ministry in Asia 18:23—19:20
  D. The extension of the church to Rome 19:21—28:31
    1. Ministry on the way to Jerusalem 19:21—21:16
    2. Ministry in Jerusalem 21:17—23:32
    3. Ministry in Caesarea 23:33—26:32
    4. Ministry on the way to Rome 27:1—28:15
    5. Ministry in Rome 28:16-31

MESSAGE

The message of Acts is that the church of Jesus Christ is God's instrument to glorify Himself in the present age. The subject of the Book of Acts, what is its primary focus of attention, is the church of Jesus Christ.

Acts contains three major revelations regarding the church.

The first of these concerns is the *origin* of the church. Jesus Christ created the church.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ prepared for the creation of the church. He instructed His disciples with *truth* they did not fully understand at the time, and He demonstrated for them *life* that they did not fully appreciate at the time (John 14:6). We have this record in the Gospels.

After His ascension, Christ poured out His Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This was the birthday of the church. The baptism of the Spirit did something God had never done before in history. It united believers with Christ in a new relationship: as fellow members of the spiritual body of Christ (John 14:17: "He abides *with* you and will be *in* you.").

Believers then shared the life of Christ in a way never before experienced. God united them with Him. The same Spirit of God that indwelt Him now indwells us. The unity of the church is not external: what we believe (creeds), how we organize ourselves (polity), or where and how we meet (culture). It is internal: through Him who indwells us. The basis of our unity in the church goes back to the origin of the church. It began when the Holy Spirit first baptized believers on the day of Pentecost (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9). The "church" is not just a new name for Israel.

The second major revelation of the church that we receive in Acts concerns the *nature* of the church. The church is one with Jesus Christ. That is its nature. It shares one life with its risen Lord.

In Luke's Gospel, Luke presented Jesus Christ as the Head of a new race. As Adam was the head of one race, Christ is the last Adam, the Head of a new race. As Adam was the first man, Christ is the second man, the Head of a new race. As the first-born from the dead, Christ is the Head of a new race.

In Acts, we see the new race springing from "The Firstborn from the Dead." We see the brotherhood of which Christ is the Elder Brother. We see the body growing of which Christ is the Head. The spiritual bonds that unite the members of Christ's race are stronger than the physical bonds that unite the members of Adam's race (cf. Matt. 12:47-50). The members of the new race are often feeble, faulty, and foolish, but they possess the life of Christ. Christ is manifesting His life through those who have become partakers of His life by Holy Spirit baptism. The nature of the church is that it is one organic whole (one body) empowered by the life of Christ. The Holy Spirit has joined us organically to Christ. Whenever Christians partake of the Lord's Supper, they should remember that just as the bread and wine (or juice) become part of the participant's physical body, so Christ has become part of us spiritually.

The third major revelation of the church that Acts gives us concerns the *function* of the church. The function of the church is to be the instrument of Jesus Christ, His hands and feet and mouth, to carry out His will in the world. What is the will of Christ? There are three things that Acts emphasizes.

The will of God is the imparting of *life* where there is death. Jesus Christ ministers divine life through His human instruments. We see Peter, Paul, and all God's other servants in Acts, doing the same kinds of things Jesus did when He walked this earth. They even did the same types of miracles. Christ, by His Spirit, was working through them (cf. 1:1-2). References to their being filled with the Spirit reflect Christ's control of these people as His instruments. He wants to impart life through us too, and He does so as we herald the gospel.

The will of God is also the manifesting of *light* where there is darkness. The light of the gospel shines through Spirit-filled believers, effectually bringing the lost into the light of God's presence. In Acts we see Christ, through the Holy Spirit, choosing the *persons* to whom the gospel would go. We see Him indicating the *places* where the gospel would reach. We see Him initiating the *procedures* by which the gospel would penetrate the darkness caused by Satan. This is what Christ wants to do today too. He wants to

manifest light through believers. Spiritual ignorance is taking over in the post-modern world. Our world needs to see light through Christians.

Third, the will of God is the producing of *love* where there is apathy, bitterness, and hatred. Christ's love reaches through believers, His instruments, by the Holy Spirit. It produces in the believer love for the Lord, love for Christian brothers and sisters, and love for the world. We see this illustrated in Acts. This is what Christ wants to do through Christians: produce love.

In summary, there are three great revelations of the church in Acts: As to its origin, Jesus Christ created it (Matt. 16:18). As to its nature, the church is one with Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). As to its function, the church is the instrument of Christ. Second Corinthians 6:1 says that we are "workers together" with God. It is a tremendous privilege to be Christ's members!

Acts also warns us of three major antagonists facing the church.

The first of these is *prejudice*. Prejudice means prejudging, judging on the basis of limited information. The outstanding example of this type of opposition in Acts is the unbelieving Jews. They refused to accept the witness of the Christians. They would not tolerate the evidence that the Christians presented. They became the major enemies of the church, as well as missing the blessings that could have been theirs if they had acknowledged their Messiah. The church faces the same opposition today (e.g., traditional concepts as opposed to Scriptural revelation). Many Christians are simply playing church. The commitment of many Christians to non-biblical traditions, as though they were biblical, is frightening.

The root cause of this problem is lack of confidence in the Holy Spirit. Prejudice says, "I do not trust what the Holy Spirit has said in Scripture." We must always interpret experience in the light of revelation, not the other way around. Many Christians feel safer with tradition. Many Christians simply want to be told what to believe and do. They do not want to think for themselves, or even read the Bible for themselves.

The second antagonist the church faces that Acts identifies is *personal agendas*. By this I mean the desire for something other than the will of God. There are several examples of this peril in Acts. Ananias and Sapphira wanted a *reputation* for spirituality, not just spirituality itself. Simon Magus wanted a supernatural gift for his own personal glory, not just for the glory of God. Our flesh also tempts us to serve ourselves while we serve God. This is compromising with the will of God.

The root cause of this problem seems to me to be lack of passive yielding to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not fill or control such Christians. They are double-minded. We need to yield total control to Him (cf. Rom. 6:12-13).

A third antagonist the church faces that we also see in Acts is *pride*. Two men provide perhaps the outstanding examples of this peril: Felix and Agrippa. Their desire for personal prestige determined their response to God's will. Many a person's career goals and ego needs have kept that one from salvation, or limited God's use of him or her as a Christian.

The cause of this problem is lack of active obedience to the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit through His Word says, "Do this," and we refuse, it is because we set our wills against His. That is pride. We need to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. In 10:14, Peter said, "By no means, Lord." What a contradiction!

These are three major perils to the church corporately, as well as to Christians individually. Luke warned us of them in Acts. They are major obstacles to Christ building His church in the world: prejudice, personal agendas, and pride.

Acts also presents three major lessons for the church that it should always keep in view.

First, the church's *passion* must be the glory of God. This was the driving motive in the lives of Peter, Paul, and the other faithful missionaries and witnesses that Luke recorded in this book. Their passion was not their own personal safety or their physical comfort, or the opportunity to relieve the sufferings of others, or the desire to create better living conditions in the world. They subordinated all these worthy ambitions to God's glory in their hearts. We too must commit ourselves to glorifying God above everything else, personally and corporately. The cry of the Protestant Reformers was, "*Sola gloria dei*; Only the glory of God." Jesus taught us to pray, "Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2).

Second, the church's *governing principle* must be loyalty to Christ. Again, the leaders of the early church modeled this for us. They put Christ's interests before their own, and they were single-minded in their living. This is the evidence of their being filled with the Spirit. Their primary commitment was to letting His life work in and through them, and to carrying out His work, not their own. How loyal are we to Christ individually and corporately? John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). We must be single-minded and radical in our commitment to please the Lord (cf. 2 Tim. 2:4).

Third, the church's *power* must be the Holy Spirit. The many references to prayer in Acts show us how conscious the early Christians were of their dependence on God's power. They did not go out in self-confidence, but in God-confidence. They called on Him to reveal Christ's life in and through them (4:24-30). They called on Him to direct Christ's works in and through them (12:12; 20:36). We must not only be obedient and yielded to the Holy Spirit but also dependent on Him, because He is our power individually and corporately (John 15:5).

Finally, three challenges grow out of the emphases of Acts.

First, what is your motivation as a Christian? Why do you do what you do? What motivated the Spirit-filled believers in Acts was the desire that God should get the glory above everything else. Who do you want to get the credit for what you do? Former President Ronald Reagan reportedly had a sign on his desk in the White House that said, "There is no limit to what you can accomplish, if you don't care who gets the credit."

Second, what is your method as a Christian? How do you do what you do? Our models in Acts cooperated with God so Christ could work through them by His Holy Spirit. This

involved having confidence in His revelation, yielding to His will, obeying His Word, and depending on His Holy Spirit.

Third, what is your emphasis as a Christian? What do you do? In Acts, the leaders of the church gave priority to what is most important to God, not to what was most important to themselves personally. Furthermore, they emphasized the essentials, not the incidentals. Let us not get so fascinated with the incidentals, such as how God manifested His power (healings, speaking in tongues, etc.), that we fail to give priority to the essentials. One essential is that He is powerful enough to do anything to accomplish His purposes. Many Christians are very reluctant to believe that God can do whatever needs to be done. Let us give ourselves to the task before us wholeheartedly and enthusiastically. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said: "All authority has been given unto Me in heaven and on earth." In Acts 1:8, He said, "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you." In Matthew 16:18, He said: "I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Acts is a fantastic book, because in it we see Him doing just that, and we find encouragement to participate in His great program of church building.[27]

[27]Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:75-91.

Exposition

I. THE WITNESS IN JERUSALEM 1:1—6:7

This first major section of Acts contains the record of the founding of the church on the day of Pentecost, and its expansion in the city of Jerusalem.

A. THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH 1:1—2:47

In his account of the founding of the Christian church, Luke gave background information that ties Jesus' giving of the Great Commission to the day of Pentecost. He showed how Jesus enabled His disciples to obey His command to evangelize the nations.

1. The resumptive preface to the book 1:1-5

Luke wrote these introductory statements to connect the Book of Acts with his Gospel.[28] In his former book, Luke had recorded what Jesus had begun to do and to teach during His earthly ministry. In this second book, he wrote what Jesus continued doing to build His church through Spirit-indwelt Christians (cf. John 14:12).

1:1 Luke referred to his Gospel as "the first account." The Greek word *proton* means "first," but it does not imply that Luke intended to write more than two books. This has been the unnecessary conclusion of some scholars.[29] It simply means that Luke was the first of these two books that he wrote.

"Theophilus" means lover of God. Some interpreters have suggested that Theophilus was not an actual person and that Luke was writing to all lovers of God whom he personified by using this name (cf. Luke 1:3). All things considered, it seems more likely that Theophilus was a real person. There is no reason he could not have been. Such is the implication of the address, and Theophilus was a fairly common Greek proper name. (Flavius Josephus similarly addressed his *Antiquities of the Jews* to a man named Epaphroditus.[30])

Luke wanted his readers to be careful to note that the remarkable supernatural events he was to unfold were ultimately the work of Jesus Christ. They were not just those of His enthusiastic followers.

> "The order of the words 'doing' and 'teaching' is noteworthy. Deeds first; then words. The same order is found in Luke 24:19 (contrast Acts 7:22). The 'doing' comes first, for Christianity is primarily life. The teaching follows afterwards, for 'the life is the *light* of men.'"[31]

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[28]See Longenecker, p. 252, for an explanation of the parallel structures of Luke 1—2 and Acts 1—2.
[29]E.g., E. M. Blaiklock, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 49.
[30]Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, preface, par. 2. Cf. idem, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, par. 76.
[31]Thomas, pp. 18-19. Cf. Ezra 7:10.

1:2 Jesus was "taken up" at His ascension (Luke 24:51). The orders that He had given His apostles were that they should remain temporarily in Jerusalem (1:4; Luke 24:49). Then they should go out into the whole world to herald the good news of salvation (1:8; Luke 24:47; Matt. 28:19-20).

Apostles are by definition "sent ones." However, this term here has specific reference to the few disciples Jesus gave this command to personally. Their calling was unique; these men laid the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). All Christians are "apostles," in the sense that Christ has sent all of us who are believers on this mission. Yet the 12 apostles (and Paul) were a unique group with special powers the Lord did not give to the rest.[32]

> "Each of these four factors—the witness mandate, the apostles, the Holy Spirit, the ascended Lord—is a major emphasis that runs throughout Acts; each receives special attention in chapters 1 and 2."[33]

1:3 The Greek word *tekmeriois*, translated "proofs," occurs only here in the New Testament. It refers to proof by incontrovertible evidence as contrasted with the proof claimed by a witness. Luke asserted that Jesus Christ's resurrection was beyond dispute.

> "The fact of the resurrection was to be the solid foundation of the apostles' faith and the chief ingredient of their early message."[34]

As 40 days of temptation in the wilderness preceded Jesus' earthly ministry (Luke 4:2), so He introduced His present ministry with a 40-day period of preparation. Jesus' baptism with the Spirit occurred before his 40-day test, whereas the reverse order of events appears here in Acts. God had instructed Moses for 40 days on Mt. Sinai in preparation for Israel's mission in the world. Now Jesus instructed the Apostles for 40 days in preparation for the church's mission in the world.

> "What Luke is describing is a new beginning, yet a beginning which recalls the beginning already made in the Gospel and with which the story of Acts is continuous. The forty days, therefore, is a vital vehicle for conveying Luke's theology of continuity . . ."[35]

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[32]See Robert D. Culver, "Apostles and the Apostolate in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:534 (April-June 1977):131-43.
[33]Longenecker, p. 253.
[34]Blaiklock, p 49.
[35]John F. Maile, "The Ascension in Luke-Acts," *Tyndale Bulletin* 37 (1986):54.

The term "kingdom" occurs only eight times in Acts, but 39 times in Luke, and 18 times in the New Testament epistles. The "kingdom of God," of which Jesus taught His disciples between His resurrection and ascension, probably refers to God's rule in its largest sense, including His rule over the church, and His messianic kingdom.[36]

Dispensationalists believe that Jesus Christ will rule on the earth as Messiah in the future. Progressive dispensationalists, along with covenant premillennialists, amillennialists, and postmillennialists, believe that the messianic kingdom began during Jesus' first advent ministry and that the church is the present form of the messianic kingdom on earth. Normative dispensationalists (i.e., those other than "progressives") believe that the Jews' rejection of Jesus resulted in a temporary withdrawal or postponement of the kingdom and that the church is a distinct entity, not another name for the messianic kingdom. They believe that the messianic kingdom is an earthly kingdom and that it will begin when Jesus Christ returns to reign personally on the earth. I believe there is better scriptural support for the normative view.[37]

Since I will be referring to these various groups of Bible interpreters throughout these notes, let me digress briefly and take a few paragraphs to define them. "Dispensationalists" believe that references to Israel in the New Testament always refer to ethnic Jews. This is how "Israel" is used in the Old Testament. "Non-dispensationalists" believe that some references to Israel in the New Testament refer to Christians who may be either Jewish or Gentile. They speak of the church as "the new Israel." They believe that the church has replaced Israel as the people of God, and that there is no special future for Israel as a people; God will fulfill His promises to Israel in the church—all Christians—in a spiritual rather than a literal way.

Among dispensationalists, there are those who believe that God will fulfill His promises concerning the reign of Christ as Messiah *after* Jesus returns to the earth at His Second Coming. These are "normative" or "traditional" dispensationalists. Sometimes this group is further divided into "classical" dispensationalists (who represent the earlier forms of dispensational teaching) and "revised" dispensationalists (who represent later refinements in dispensational teaching). In contrast to "normative" (traditional) dispensationalists, there are "progressive" dispensationalists. They believed that God has already begun to fulfill His promises concerning the reign of Christ as Messiah from heaven as the Head of the Church, and that He will fulfill the promises concerning Christ's earthly reign after He returns at His Second Coming. "Ultradispensationalists" believe that the church did not begin at Pentecost but later.

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[36]Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 424-25.

[37]See Appendix 2 "Views of the Kingdom," and Appendix 3 "The Kingdoms of God," at the end of these notes, for a diagram and a chart of these matters.

"Non-dispensationalists" are for the most part covenant theologians. These can be divided into "amillennialists" (who believe that the Messianic reign of Christ will not be on the earth but is Christ's present reign from heaven), "postmillennialists" (who believe that the present age will improve, this will culminate in Messianic kingdom conditions on earth, and then Christ will return to the earth), and "*historic* (covenant) premillennialists" (who believe that Christ will return to earth and then set up an earthly kingdom, but presently the church is the new Israel).

Sometimes the phrase "kingdom of God" refers to God's heavenly rule over humans throughout history. Both are biblical uses of the term "kingdom of God."[38] An earthly kingdom seems clearly in view in this passage, since the disciples had expected Jesus to inaugurate the messianic kingdom predicted in the Old Testament on earth then (v. 6). However, God postponed that kingdom because Israel rejected her King (v. 7).[39] Evidently, during those 40 days before His ascension, Jesus gave His disciples further instruction concerning the future and the postponed kingdom. There may be some significance in the fact that God renewed the broken Mosaic Covenant with Moses on Mt. Sinai in 40 days (Exod. 34:5-29).[40]

1:4 What Jesus told His disciples to wait for in Jerusalem was the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; cf. 1:5; John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). It must have been difficult for these disciples to wait for God to do what He had promised, as all Christians find it to be. Jesus viewed the Spirit as a significant gift of God's grace to His people (cf. Luke 11:13). He is not just a means to an end but a major part of the blessings of salvation.

> "No New Testament writer more clearly emphasises [*sic*] the Divine Personality and continuous power of the Spirit of God. Thus in the two-fold emphasis on the Exalted Lord and the Divine Spirit we have the most marked feature of the book, namely, the *predominance of the Divine element over the human* in Church life and work."[41]

1:5 "Baptized" (Gr. *ebaptisen*) means "dipped" or "immersed," and results in union with something (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-2). John the Baptist predicted that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; cf. John 7:39). Jesus now announced that this baptism would take place in just a

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[38]For a synopsis of the New Testament revelation concerning the kingdom of God, see Robert L. Saucy, "The Presence of the Kingdom and the Life of the Church," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:577 (January-March 1987):30-46.

[39]J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, pp. 214, 225-28. See also Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in the Gospels," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:600 (October-December 1993):458-78.

[40]J. Manek, "The New Exodus in the Books of Luke," *Novum Testamentum* 2 (1957):8-23.

[41]Thomas, p. 15.

few days (v. 5). It took place 10 days after His ascension (ch. 2). As the Holy Spirit had baptized Jesus and had thereby empowered Him for service, so His successors also needed such a power-producing baptism.

> "Luke's purpose in writing his history is not *primarily* apologetic. He writes in order to provide his readers with an orderly account of the rise and progress of Christianity.[42] But since this movement was 'everywhere spoken against' (Acts 28:22), it seemed desirable to refute some of the current objections to it. The first Christian historian found himself accordingly obliged to be the first Christian apologist. Of three main types of Christian apologetic in the second century Luke provided first-century prototypes: apologetic in relation to pagan religion (Christianity is true; paganism is false); apologetic in relation to Judaism (Christianity represents the fulfillment of true Judaism); apologetic in relation to the political authorities (Christianity is innocent of any offense against Roman law)."[43]

2. The command to witness 1:6-8

The key to the apostles' successful fulfillment of Jesus' commission was their baptism with, and consequent indwelling by, the Holy Spirit. *Without* this divine enablement, they would only have been able to follow Jesus' example, but *with* it, Jesus could literally continue to do His work and teach His words through them. Consequently their preparation for the baptism of the Spirit was very important. Luke recorded it to highlight its foundational significance.

Verses 6-8 announce the theme of Acts and set the stage for all that follows.

> "The concept of 'witness' is so prominent in Acts (the word in its various forms appears some thirty-nine times) that everything else in the book should probably be seen as subsumed under it—even the primitive kerygma [preaching] . . ."[44]

1:6 The Old Testament associated Spirit baptism with the beginning of the messianic (millennial) kingdom (Isa. 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Ezek. 39:28-29; Joel 2:28—3:1; Zech. 12:8-10). It was natural, therefore, that the disciples

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[42]See L. C. Alexander, "Luke's Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing," *Novum Testamentum*, 28 (1986):48-74.

[43]F. F. Bruce, "Paul's Apologetic and the Purpose of Acts," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 89:2 (Spring 1987):389-90. See also pp. 390-93; and David Peterson, "The Motif of Fulfilment and Purpose of Luke-Acts," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 1: The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, p. 104, who agreed that primarily Luke's purpose was edification and secondarily apologetic.

[44]Longenecker, p. 256.

would ask if that kingdom was about to begin, in view of Jesus' promise that the Spirit would baptize them in a few days. "This time" refers to "not many days from now" (v. 5). In the Septuagint, the term "restoration" (Gr. *apokatastaseos*) technically refers to God's political restoration of Israel (Ps. 16:5; Jer. 15:19; 16:15; 23:7; Ezek. 16:55; 17:23; Hos. 11:11).[45] The Gentiles had taken the Jews' kingdom from them, which occurred with Nebuchadnezzar's conquest in 586 B.C. Clearly the messianic kingdom is in view here.[46]

> "In the book of Acts, both Israel and the church exist simultaneously. The term *Israel* is used twenty times and *ekklesia* (church) nineteen times, yet the two groups are always kept distinct."[47]

Fruchtenbaum listed 73 occurrences of "Israel" in the New Testament.[48]

1:7 Jesus did not correct the disciples for believing that the messianic kingdom would come.[49] He only corrected their assumption that they could know when the kingdom would begin and that the kingdom would begin in a few days.

Amillennialists do not believe that God will restore an earthly kingdom to Israel *as Israel*, but that He will restore a spiritual kingdom to the church, which they believe has replaced physical Israel as "spiritual Israel" or "the new Israel." Premillennialists believe that since the promises about Messiah's earthly reign have not yet been fulfilled, and since every reference to Israel in the New Testament can refer to physical Israel, we should anticipate an earthly reign of Messiah on the earth following His Second Coming.

> "Jesus' answer to the question about restoring the reign to Israel denies that Jesus' followers can know the time and probably corrects their supposition that the restoration may come immediately, but it does not deny the legitimacy of their concern with the restoration of the national life of the Jewish people."[50]

> "This passage makes it clear that while the covenanted form of the theocracy has not been cancelled and has only been postponed, this present age is definitely *not* a

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[45]J. Carroll, *Response to the End of History*, p. 146, footnote 124.

[46]See Darrell L. Bock, "Evidence from Acts," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, pp. 187-88; and Ladd, p. 1125.

[47]Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 118.

[48]Ibid., pp. 118-20.

[49]See John A. McLean, "Did Jesus Correct the Disciples' View of the Kingdom?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:602 (April-June 1994):215-27.

[50]Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:15.

> development of the Davidic form of the kingdom. Rather, it is a period in which a new form of theocratic administration is inaugurated. In this way Jesus not only answered the disciples' question concerning the timing of the future Davidic kingdom, but He also made a clear distinction between it and the intervening present form of the theocratic administration."[51]

Jesus' disciples were not to know yet when the messianic kingdom would begin. God would reveal the "times" (Gr. *chronous*, length of time) and "epochs" (Gr. *kairous*, dates, or major features of the times) after Jesus' ascension, and He would make them known through His chosen prophets (cf. 1 Thess. 5:1; Rev. 6—19).

> "In Acts 3:20 [*sic* 19], the phrase chosen is *kairoi anapsuxeos* (seasons of refreshing). . . . In other words, the last days of fulfillment have two parts. There is the current period of refreshing, which is correlated to Jesus' reign in heaven and in which a person shares, if he or she repents. Then at the end of this period Jesus will come to bring the restoration of those things promised by the Old Testament."[52]

> "There is a close connection between the hope expressed in 1:6 and the conditional promise of Peter in 3:19-21, indicated not only by the unusual words 'restore' and 'restoration . . .' but also by the references to 'times . . .' and 'seasons . . .' in both contexts. The 'times of restoration of all that God spoke' through the prophets include the restoration of the reign to Israel through its messianic King."[53]

1:8 Rather than trying to figure out when the kingdom would come, the disciples were to give their attention to something different, namely, worldwide witness. Moreover, the disciples would receive divine enablement for their worldwide mission (cf. Luke 24:47-49). As God's Spirit had empowered both the Israelites—and Jesus—as they executed their purposes, so God's Spirit would empower the disciples as they executed their purpose. The power promised was not to enable the apostles to live godly lives, though the Holy Spirit does enable believers to do that.

> "What is promised to the apostles is the power to fulfil their mission, that is, to speak, to bear oral testimony, and to perform miracles and in general act with authority. This

[51]Pentecost, p. 269.
[52]Darrell L. Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, p. 57.
[53]Tannehill, 2:15-16.

> power is given through the Spirit, and conversely the Spirit in Acts may be defined as the divine agency that gives this power."[54]

"You shall be" translates a future indicative verb (as in "you shall receive"). Is the clause "You shall be" a prediction or a command? Grammatically it could be either. The apostles clearly felt compelled to preach (cf. 10:42). However, if it was a command, it could have been stated more forcefully. Therefore both verbs ("you shall be" and "you shall receive") are probably predictions, and statements of fact, rather than commands.

> "*They were now to be witnesses*, and their definite work was to bear testimony to their Master; they were not to be theologians, or philosophers, or leaders, but witnesses. Whatever else they might become, everything was to be subordinate to the idea of personal testimony. It was to call attention to what they knew of Him and to deliver His message to mankind. This special class of people, namely, disciples who are also witnesses, is therefore very prominent in this book. Page after page is occupied by their testimony, and the key to this feature is found in the words of Peter: 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard' (4:20)."[55]

This verse contains an inspired outline of the Book of Acts. Note that it refers to a person (Jesus Christ), a power (the Holy Spirit), and a program (ever expanding worldwide witness). Luke proceeded to record that the fulfillment of this prediction would continue until the gospel and the church had reached Rome. From the heart of the empire, God would pump the gospel out to every other remote part of the world. Starting from Jerusalem, the gospel message radiated farther and farther, as ripples do when a stone lands in a placid pool of water. Rome was over 1,400 miles from Jerusalem.

> "The Christian church, according to Acts, is a missionary church that responds obediently to Jesus' commission, acts on Jesus' behalf in the extension of his ministry, focuses its proclamation of the kingdom of God in its witness to Jesus, is guided and empowered by the self-same Spirit that directed and supported Jesus' ministry, and follows a program whose guidelines for outreach have been set by Jesus himself."[56]

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[54]C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 1:79.
[55]Thomas, p. 21.
[56]Longenecker, p. 256.

Jerusalem was the most wicked city on earth, in that it was *there* that Jesus Christ's enemies crucified Him. Nevertheless there, too, God manifested His grace first. The linking of "Judea and Samaria" preserves an ethnic distinction, while at the same time describing one geographic area. The phrase "to the remotest part of the earth" is literally "to the end of the earth." This phrase is rare in ancient Greek, but it occurs five times in the Septuagint (Isa. 8:9; 48:20; 49:6; 62:11; Pss. Sol. 1:4). Jesus was evidently alluding to Isaiah's predictions that God would extend salvation to all people, Gentiles as well as Jews.[57]

> "*Witnessing to the Jews* meant witnessing to those who held a true religion, but held it for the most part falsely and unreally [*sic*].
>
> "*Witnessing in Samaria* meant witnessing to those who had a mixed religion, partly true, and partly false, Jewish and Heathen.
>
> "*Witnessing to the uttermost part of the earth* meant witnessing to those who had no real and vital religion at all."[58]

GOSPEL OUTREACH IN ACTS				
Reference	**Center**	**Chief Person**	**Gospel to**	**Evangelism**
Acts 1—12	Jerusalem	Peter	Judea and Samaria	Primarily Jewish
Acts 13—28	Antioch	Paul	The uttermost part of the earth	Primarily Gentile

This pericope (vv. 6-8) is Luke's account of Jesus' farewell address to His successors (cf. Gen. 49; Num. 20:26; 27:16-19; Deut. 31:14-23; 34:9; 2 Kings 2; et al.). Luke used several typical features of a Jewish farewell scene in 1:1-14.[59]

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[57]Tannehill, 2:16. Cf. Thomas S. Moore, "'To the End of the Earth': The Geographical and Ethnic Univarsalism of Acts 1:8 in Light of Isaianic Influence on Luke," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:3 (September 1997):389-99.

[58]Thomas, p. 22. See also Steve Walton, "What Does 'Mission' in Acts Mean in Relation to the 'Powers That Be'?" *Journal of the Evangleical Theological Society* 55:3 (September 2012):537-56.

[59]See D. W. Palmer, "The Literary Background of Acts 1:1-14," *New Testament Studies* 33:3 (July 1987):430-31, for more information concerning the literary forms Luke used to introduce Acts—namely, prologue, appearance, farewell scene, and assumption. See William J. Larkin Jr., "The Recovery of Luke-Acts as 'Grand Narrative' for the Church's Evangelistic and Edification Tasks in a Postmodern Age," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:3 (September 2000):405-15, for suggestions for using Luke-Acts in a postmodern age.

3. The ascension of Jesus 1:9-11

1:9 Jesus Christ's ascension necessarily preceded the descent of the Holy Spirit to baptize and indwell believers, in God's plan (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:33-36). "While they were looking on" stresses the fact that the apostles really saw Jesus ascending, which they bore witness to later. This reference supports the credibility of their witness. In previous post-resurrection appearances Jesus had vanished from the disciples' sight instantly (Luke 24:31), but now He gradually departed from them. The cloud seems clearly to be a reference to the *shekinah*, a visible symbol of the glorious presence of God (cf. Exod. 40:34; Matt. 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7).[60] Thus what the disciples saw was the symbol of God's presence receiving and enveloping Jesus into heaven. This connoted God's approval of Jesus and Jesus' entrance into the glorious presence of God.[61]

> "It was necessary that as Jesus in a moment of time had arrived in the world in a moment of time He should leave it."[62]

1:10-11 "Intently" (Gr. *atenizein*) further stresses that these men really did see Jesus ascend (v. 2; Luke 24:51). Luke used this dramatic Greek word 12 times. It only appears two other times in the New Testament. "Into the sky" (lit. "into heaven," *eis ton ouranon*) occurs four times in these two verses. Luke emphasized that Jesus was now in heaven. From there He would continue His ministry on earth through His apostles and other witnesses. The two "men" were angelic messengers who looked like men (cf. Matt. 28:3; John 20:12; Luke 24:4). Some commentators have suggested that they may have been Enoch and Elijah, or Moses and Elijah, but this seems unlikely. Probably Luke would have named them if they had been such famous individuals. Besides, the similarity between Luke's description of these two angels and the ones that appeared at Jesus' tomb (Luke 24:1-7) suggests that they were simply angels.

The 11 disciples were literally "men of Galilee" (v. 11). Judas Iscariot was the only one of the Twelve who originated from Judea. This conclusion assumes the traditional interpretation that "Iscariot" translates the Hebrew *'ish qeriyot*, "a man of Kerioth," Kerioth being Kerioth-Hezron, which was 12 miles south of Hebron.[63] The "men" announced two things: the Jesus they had known had entered into His heavenly abode, and the Jesus they had known would return to the earth. Jesus ascended in a cloud personally, bodily, visibly, and gloriously, and He will return the same way (Dan.

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[60]See Richard D. Patterson, "The Imagery of Clouds in the Scriptures," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:657 (January-March 2008):18.

[61]See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 535-37, for a history of the church that Helena, the mother of emperor Constantine, built to commemorate the site.

[62]Barclay, p. 6.

[63]See *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Judas Iscariot," by R. P. Martin.

7:13; Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 24:50-51; Rev. 1:7).[64] He will also return to the same place, the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4). Jesus' own descriptions of His return to the earth appear in Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; and Luke 21:27. This was no repetition of the Transfiguration (Luke 9:27-36).

> "Throughout the period of the post-resurrection forty days, Jesus had frequently appeared to the disciples, and during the intervals he had disappeared. Each time, apparently, they had no reason to suppose that he would not reappear shortly, and until this time he had not disappointed them."[65]

What filled these disciples with great joy (Luke 24:52) was probably the hope that they would see Jesus again soon. Without this hope His departure would have made them very sad. The joyful prospect of the Lord's return should have the same effect on us.

John Maile summarized the significance of the ascension narratives in Luke-Acts as follows. First, he stated, "The ascension is the confirmation of the exaltation of Christ and his present Lordship." Second, it is "the explanation of the continuity between the ministry of Jews and that of the church." Third, it is "the culmination of the resurrection appearances." Fourth, it is "the prelude to the sending of the Spirit." Fifth, it is "the foundation of Christian mission." Sixth, it is "the pledge of the return of Christ."[66]

> "Rightly understood, the ascension narratives of Luke . . . provide a crucial key to the unlocking of Luke's theology and purpose."[67]

> "Luke's point is that the missionary activity of the early church rested not only on Jesus' mandate but also on his living presence in heaven and the sure promise of his return."[68]

> "In Luke's mind the Ascension of Christ has two aspects: in the Gospel it is the end of the story of Jesus, in Acts it is the beginning of the story of the Church, which will go on until Christ comes again. Thus for Luke, as Barrett says, 'the end of the story of Jesus is the Church, and the story of Jesus is the beginning of the Church'."[69]

4. Jesus' appointment of a twelfth apostle 1:12-26

Peter perceived the importance of asking God to identify Judas' successor in view of the ministry that Jesus had said the Twelve would have in the future. He led the disciples in obtaining the Lord Jesus' guidance in this important matter (cf. vv. 21, 24). From his

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[64]See John F. Walvoord, "The Ascension of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121:481 (January-March 1964):3-12.

[65]Homer A. Kent Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in the Book of Acts*, p. 23.

[66]Maile, pp. 55-59.

[67]Ibid., p. 59.

[68]Longenecker, p. 258.

[69]Neil, p. 26.

viewpoint, the Lord could have returned very soon to restore the kingdom to Israel (v. 6), so the Twelve had to be ready for their ministry of judging the twelve tribes of Israel when He did.

The disciples' spiritual preparation 1:12-14

1:12-13 The disciples returned to Jerusalem to await the coming of the Holy Spirit.

> "They are about to undergo a spiritual transformation; to pass, so to speak, from the chrysalis to the winged stage. They are on the eve of the great illumination promised by Jesus before His death. The Spirit of Truth is about to come and lead them into all Christian truth."[70]

The short trip from where Jesus ascended on Mt. Olivet to "the upper room" was only "a Sabbath day's journey away" (about 2,000 cubits, two-thirds of a mile, or one kilometer; cf. Exod. 16:29; Num. 35:5).[71] This "upper room" may not have been the same one in which the disciples had observed the first Lord's Supper with Jesus (Luke 22:12). Different Greek words describe the places. It may have been the place where He had appeared to them following His resurrection (Luke 24:32, 36; John 20:19, 26), but this too is unclear. The definite article "the" with "upper room" in the Greek text (*to hyperoon*), and the emphatic position of this phrase, may suggest that Luke meant to identify a *special upper room* that the reader would have known about from a previous reference to it. One writer suggested that this upper room, as well as the ones mentioned in 9:37, 39, and 20:8, may have been part of a synagogue.[72] The repetition of the apostles' names recalls Jesus' previous appointment of them as apostles (cf. Luke 6:13-16).[73] This list, however, omits Judas Iscariot and sets the stage for the selection of his replacement.

1:14 The apostles gave (devoted) "themselves to prayer" (Gr. *proseuche*) probably for the fulfillment of what Jesus had promised would take place shortly (cf. Dan. 9:2-3; Luke 11:13). "The" prayer (in Greek) suggests that they may have been praying at the Jewish designated times of prayer (cf. 2:42; 6:4). *Proseuche* sometimes has the wider meaning of worship, and it may mean that here. Luke stressed their unity ("all with one mind"), a mark of the early Christians that Luke noted frequently in Acts. The disciples were "one" in their purpose to carry out the will of their Lord. Divine promises should stimulate prayer, not lead to abandonment of it.

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[70]A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, p. 538.

[71]Mishnah *Sotah* 5:3.

[72]Rainer Riesner, "Synagogues in Jerusalem," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, p. 206.

[73]See Margaret H. Williams, "Palestinian Jewish Personal Names in Acts," in ibid., pp. 79-113.

> "In almost every chapter in Acts you find a reference to prayer, and the book makes it very clear that something happens when God's people pray."[74]

> ". . . when God is going to do some great thing He moves the hearts of people to pray; He stirs them up to pray in view of that which He is about to do so that they might be prepared for it. The disciples needed the self-examination that comes through prayer and supplication, that they might be ready for the tremendous event which was about to take place . . ."[75]

The women referred to were apparently the same ones who accompanied the disciples from Galilee to Jerusalem (Luke 8:1-3; cf. 23:49; 23:55—24:10). Luke's interest in women, which is so evident in his Gospel, continues in Acts.

> "Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there, but you will notice they were not praying to Mary, nor were they burning candles to her; they were not addressing themselves to her, nor asking her for any blessing; but Mary, the mother of Jesus, was kneeling with the eleven and the women, and all together they prayed to the Father."[76]

This is, by the way, the last reference to "Mary the mother of Jesus" in the Bible. Jesus' half-brothers (John 7:5; Mark 6:3), among those "devoting themselves to prayer," apparently had become believers following His death and resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7).

The choice of Matthias 1:15-26

1:15 In view of Peter's leadership gifts, so obvious in the Gospels, it is no surprise that he is the one who took the initiative on this occasion.

> "Undoubtedly, the key disciple in Luke's writings is Peter. He was the representative disciple, as well as the leading apostle.[77]

"Brethren" is literally "disciples" (Gr. *matheton*). The group of 120 that Peter addressed on this occasion (cf. vv. 13-14) was only a segment of the believers living in Jerusalem at this time (cf. 1 Cor. 15:6, which refers to

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[74]Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:405.

[75]Harry A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts*, pp. 28-29. For evidence of the cause and effect relationship of prayer and revival, see J. Edwin Orr, *The Fervent Prayer: The Worldwide Impact of the Great Awakening of 1858*, ch. 1: "The Sources of the Revival."

[76]Ironside, pp. 26-271.

[77]Darrell L. Bock, "A Theology of Luke-Acts," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 148.

more than 500 brethren). Nonetheless this was a tiny group from which the church grew. God can take a small number of people, multiply them, and eventually fill the earth with their witness.

1:16-17 Peter addressed the assembled disciples in a way that was evidently customary when speaking to Jews. Here "brethren" is literally "men, brothers" (*andres, adelphoi*). This same salutation occurs elsewhere in Acts always in formal addresses to Jews (cf. 2:29, 37; 7:2; 13:15, 26, 38; 15:7, 13; 22:1; 23:1, 6; 28:17).

Notice the high regard with which Peter viewed the Old Testament. He believed David's words came from the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16), and he viewed them as Scripture (holy writings). Peter interpreted David's words about false companions and wicked men who opposed God's servants as applying to Judas. What God had said through David about David's enemy was also true of Jesus' enemy, since Jesus was the LORD's Anointed whom David anticipated.

> "Since David himself was God's appointed king, many times Scripture treats him as typical of Christ, the unique Anointed One, and David's enemy becomes a type of Jesus' enemy."[78]

> "Of course the betrayal of the Messiah by one of his followers, leading to his death, required such an explanation, since this was no part of early Jewish messianic expectation."[79]

Peter said this Scripture "had" (Gr. *dei*, by divine necessity) to be fulfilled.

> "The understanding [of Peter] here is . . . (1) that God is doing something necessarily involved in his divine plan; (2) that the disciples' lack of comprehension of God's plan is profound, especially with respect to Judas who 'was one of our number and shared in this ministry' yet also 'served as guide for those who arrested Jesus'; and (3) that an explicit way of understanding what has been going on under divine direction is through a Christian understanding of two psalms that speak of false companions and wicked men generally, and which by means of the then widely common exegetical rule *qal wahomer* ('light to heavy,' or *a minore ad majorem*) can also be applied to the false disciple and wicked man par excellence, Judas Iscariot."[80]

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[78]Kent, p. 27.
[79]Witherington, p. 122.
[80]Longenecker, p. 263.

1:18-19 Luke inserted these verses, assuming his readers were unfamiliar with Judas' death and did not know Aramaic, the language spoken in Palestine in the first century. This helps us understand for whom he wrote this book. Judas purchased the "Field of Blood" indirectly by returning the money he received for betraying Jesus to the priests who used it to buy the field (Matt. 27:3-10). Perhaps the name "field of blood" was the nickname the residents of Jerusalem gave it since "blood money" had purchased it.

This account of Judas' death differs from Matthew's, who wrote that Judas hanged himself (Matt. 27:5). Undoubtedly both accounts were true. Perhaps Judas hanged himself and in the process also fell (lit. "flat on his face") and tore open his abdomen. Perhaps the rope or branch with which he hanged himself broke. Or perhaps when others cut his corpse down it fell and broke open, as Luke described. The traditional location of Hakeldama is southeast of Jerusalem, near where the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys meet. This description of Judas' death stressed the awfulness of that apostle's situation. It was Judas' defection, which led to his horrible death, and not just his death, that led to the need for a successor. Matthias succeeded Judas because Judas had been unfaithful, not just because he had died. Thus this text provides no support for the view that Christ intended one apostle to succeed another when the preceding one died. We have no record that when the apostle James died (12:1-2) anyone succeeded him.

1:20 Peter's quotations are from Psalms 69:25 and 109:8. Luke's quotations from the Old Testament are all from Greek translations of it.[81] Psalm 69 is an Old Testament passage in which Jesus Himself, as well as the early Christians, saw similarities to and foreviews of Jesus' experiences (cf. John 2:17; 15:25; Rom. 11:9-10; 15:3).[82] Jesus fulfilled the passage Peter cited, in the sense that His situation proved to be the same as David's, only on a more significant messianic scale. Peter did not appeal to Psalm 69:25 to justify replacing Judas with another apostle, however. He used the quotation from Psalm 109:8 to do that. It is another verse that Peter applied to Jesus' case, since it described something analogous to Jesus' experience. He used what David had written about someone who opposed the LORD's king—and was replaced—to support the idea that someone should replace Judas in his office as one of the Twelve.

1:21-22 Why did Peter believe it was "necessary" to choose someone to take Judas' place? Evidently he remembered Jesus' promise that the 12 disciples would sit on 12 thrones in the messianic kingdom, judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; cf. Rev. 21:14). To be as qualified for this ministry as the other 11 disciples, the twelfth had to have met the conditions Peter specified.

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[81]Witherington, pp. 123-24.

[82]See C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, pp. 61-108.

> "In 1:21 Peter speaks not of being with Jesus but of *going* with him on his journeys. . . . This emphasis on journeying with Jesus, particularly on his final journey to the cross, suggests that the apostolic witnesses are qualified not simply because they happened to be present when something happened and so could report it, like witnesses to an accident. Rather they have been taught and trained by Jesus for their work. They shared Jesus' life and work during his mission. In the process they were tested and discovered their own defects. That discovery may also be part of their preparation. The witness of the Galileans does not arise from casual observation. They speak out of a life and mission shared with Jesus, after being taught and tested. From this group the replacement for Judas is chosen."[83]

> "The expression 'went in and out among us' [NIV] is a Semitic idiom for familiar and unhindered association (cf. Deut 31:2; 2 Sam 3:25; Ps 121:8; Acts 9:28)."[84]

Having been a witness to Jesus Christ's resurrection was especially important. The apostles prepared themselves, so that if Jesus Christ had returned very soon and set up His kingdom on the earth—they would have been ready. Often, in biblical history, God replaced someone who proved unworthy with a more faithful steward (e.g., Zadok for Ahithophel, Shebna for Eliakim, Samuel for Samson, David for Saul, et al.).

These two verses provide the basis for distinguishing a technical use of "apostle" from the general meaning of the word. By definition, an "apostle" (from *apo stello*, "to send away") is anyone sent out as a messenger. Translators have frequently rendered this word "messenger" in the English Bible. Barnabas, Paul's fellow workers, James, and Epaphroditus—were *apostles* in this sense (Acts 14:4, 14; 2 Cor. 8:23; Gal. 1:19; Phil. 2:25). Every Christian should function as *an apostle*, since Christ has given us the Great Commission. Nevertheless, the Twelve were apostles in a special sense. They not only went out with a message, but they went out having been personally discipled by Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. They were the *official apostles*, the apostles who occupied the apostolic office (v. 20), which Jesus established when He first chose and sent out the Twelve (Luke 6:13). As we shall see, Paul was also an *official apostle*, even though he had not been personally discipled by Jesus as the Twelve had been.

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[83]Tannehill, 2:23.

[84]Longenecker, p. 265.

This address of Peter (vv. 16-21) is the first of some 23 or 24 speeches that Luke reported in Acts. About one third of the content of Acts is speeches.[85] This one is an example of deliberative rhetoric, in which the speaker seeks to persuade his hearers to follow a certain course of action in the near future.[86] How accurate did Luke attempt to be when he recorded the speeches in Acts?

> "To an extent, of course, all the speeches in Acts are necessarily paraphrastic, for certainly the original delivery contained more detail of argument and more illustrative material than Luke included—as poor Eutychus undoubtedly could testify (Acts 20:7-12)! Stenographic reports they are not, and probably few ever so considered them. They have been reworked, as is required in any précis, and reworked, moreover, in accord with the style of the narrative. But recognition of the kind of writing that produces speeches compatible with the narrative in which they are found should not be interpreted as inaccurate reporting or a lack of traditional source material. After all, a single author is responsible for the literary form of the whole."[87]

Josephus "recorded" many speeches in his histories, but he clearly put them in his own words. One example is Herod the Great's speech to the Jews encouraging them to defend themselves against the attacking Arabians. The same speech appears in both the *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews*, but the content is somewhat different.[88] Another is Herod Agrippa I's speech to the Jews discouraging them from getting into war with the Romans.[89]

1:23-26 Those present, probably the other apostles, nominated two apparently equally qualified men. "Joseph" is a Hebrew name, "Barsabbas" is Aramaic, meaning "Son of the Sabbath," and "Justus" is Roman. "Matthias" is Hebrew, and is a short form of "Mattithia." The apostles then prayed for the Lord to indicate which one He chose (cf. 6:6; 13:3; 14:23; 1 Sam. 22:10; 23:2, 4, 10-12). They acknowledged that only God knows people's hearts (1 Sam. 16:7), and He would not make the mistake that the Israelites did when they chose King Saul. They wanted God to identify the man after His own heart, as He had done with David. Next they cast

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[85]See Appendix 4, "Sermons and Speeches in Acts," at the end of these notes, for a chart of them. See Neil, pp. 38-45, for a helpful discussion of the speeches in Acts; and M. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns*.

[86]George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, p. 116.

[87]Longenecker, p. 230. See Witherington's excursus on the speeches in Acts, pp. 116-20.

[88]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 15:5:3; idem, *The Wars of the Jews*, 1:19:4.

[89]Ibid., 2:15:4. Note especially the footnote, which explains that ancient writers typically put speeches in their own words.

> "lots," probably by drawing one of two designated stones out of a container, or by throwing down specially marked objects (cf. Lev. 16:8; Josh. 14:2; 1 Sam. 14:41-42; Neh. 10:34; 11:1; Prov. 16:33). The ancient Greeks often used pebbles in voting, black for condemning and white for acquitting.[90] The Lord identified "Matthias" as His sovereign choice to fulfill the ministry (service) and apostleship (office) of Judas. Judas' "own place" was a place different from that of the Eleven, namely: perdition (hell). Matthias received no further mention in the New Testament. Legend has it that he died as a martyr in Ethiopia.[91]
>
> > ". . . it was not enough to possess the qualifications other apostles had. Judas's successor must also be appointed by the same Lord who appointed the Eleven."[92]
>
> This instance of casting lots to determine God's will is the last one the New Testament writers recorded. This was not a vote. "Casting lots" was necessary before the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but when He came, He provided the guidance, *inwardly*, that God had formerly provided *externally*. Christians do not need to cast lots to determine God's will, since *now* the indwelling Holy Spirit provides that guidance. He does so *objectively* through Scripture, and *subjectively* by impressing His will on yielded believers in response to prayer.

Was Peter correct in leading the believers to recognize a twelfth apostle, or did God intend Paul to be the replacement? Several commentators believed that Paul was God's intended replacement.[93] Paul was, of course, an apostle with authority equal to that of the Twelve. However, Paul had not been with Jesus during His earthly ministry. Luke, Paul's friend, spoke of the Twelve without equivocation as an official group (Acts 2:14; 6:2). Furthermore the distinctly Jewish nature of the future ministry of the Twelve (Matt. 19:28) supports Paul's exclusion from this group. His ministry was primarily to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9). Paul never claimed to be one of the Twelve, though he did contend that his official apostleship had come to him as a direct commission from the Lord. However, it came from the risen Lord, and he considered himself abnormally born as an apostle (1 Cor. 15:7-8). Finally, there is no hint in Scripture that the decision made on this occasion was a mistake.

> ". . . the pericope suggests that a Christian decision regarding vocation entails (1) evaluating personal qualifications, (2) earnest prayer, and (3) appointment by Christ himself—an appointment that may come in some culturally related fashion, but in a way clear to those who seek guidance."[94]

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[90]Robertson, 3:19, 446.

[91]Blaiklock, p. 53.

[92]Longenecker, p. 266.

[93]E.g., Blaiklock, p. 53; Morgan, *The Acts . . .*, p. 24; and J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 4:514.

[94]Longenecker, p. 266.

> "Matthew concludes with the Resurrection, Mark with the Ascension, Luke with the promise of the Holy Spirit, and John with the promise of the Second Coming. Acts 1 brings all four records together and mentions each of them. The four Gospels funnel into Acts, and Acts is the bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles."[95]

5. The birth of the church 2:1-41

The Holy Spirit's descent on the day of Pentecost inaugurated a new dispensation in God's administration of the human race.[96] Luke featured the record of the events of this day to explain the changes in God's dealings with humankind that followed in the early church and to the present day. This was the birthday of the church. Many non-dispensationalists, as well as most dispensationalists (except ultradispensationalists), view the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost as the beginning of the church.[97]

> "This event is a fulcrum account in Luke-Acts."[98]

> "The plot of a work can often be illuminated by considering the major conflict or conflicts within it. Although Jesus' witnesses face other conflicts, the central conflict of the plot, repeatedly emphasized and still present in the last major scene of Acts, is a conflict within Judaism provoked by Jewish Christian preachers (including Paul). Acts 2:1—8:3 traces the development of this conflict in Jerusalem."[99]

The descent of the Spirit 2:1-4

Luke had introduced the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry with His baptism with the Spirit (Luke 3:21-22). He now paralleled that with the beginning of Jesus' heavenly ministry with the Spirit baptism of His disciples (Acts 2:1-4). The same Spirit who indwelt and empowered Jesus during His earthly ministry would now indwell and empower His believing disciples. John the Baptist had predicted this Pentecost baptism with the Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16), as had Jesus (Acts 1:8). Jesus had already done the baptizing, and now the Spirit "came upon" the disciples.

2:1 The day of Pentecost was an annual spring feast at which the Jews presented the first-fruits of their wheat harvest to God (Exod. 34:22a). The Jews also called Pentecost the Feast of Harvest and the Feast of Weeks in earlier times. They celebrated it at the end of seven weeks (i.e., a week of

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[95]McGee, 4:515.

[96]For more information about the dispensations, see Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, or idem, *Dispensationalism*.

[97]E.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p. 49; Eduard Schweizer, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v., "*pneuma* . . .," 6:411; Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, p. 161; Neil, p. 71; Longenecker, p. 271; and Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 22). For a summary of the views of ultradispensationalists, see Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, ch. 10; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, ch. 11.

[98]Bock, *Acts*, p. 92.

[99]Tannehill, 2:34.

weeks) following the Feast of Passover. God received a new crop *of believers*, Christians, on this particular day of Pentecost. The Jews also celebrated Pentecost as the anniversary of the giving of the Mosaic Law (cf. Exod. 19:1). Paul regarded the Spirit's indwelling presence as God's replacement for the external guidance that the Mosaic Law had provided believers under that old covenant (Gal. 3:3, 23-29).

"Pentecost" is a Greek word, transliterated into English, that means "fiftieth." This feast fell on the fiftieth day after Passover. It was one of the feasts at which all the male Jews had to be present at the central sanctuary (Exod. 34:22-23). Jews who lived up to 20 miles from Jerusalem were expected to travel to Jerusalem to attend these feasts. Pentecost usually fell in late May or early June. Traveling conditions that time of year made it possible for Jews who lived farther away to visit Jerusalem, too. These factors account for the large number of Jews present in Jerusalem on this particular day.

> ". . . by paralleling Jesus' baptism with the experience of Jesus' early followers at Pentecost, Luke is showing that the mission of the Christian church, as was the ministry of Jesus, is dependent upon the coming of the Holy Spirit. And by his stress on Pentecost as the day when the miracle took place, he is also suggesting (1) that the Spirit's coming is in continuity with God's purposes in giving the law and yet (2) that the Spirit's coming signals the essential difference between the Jewish faith and commitment to Jesus, for whereas the former is Torah centered and Torah directed, the latter is Christ centered and Spirit directed—all of which sounds very much like Paul."[100]

The antecedent of "they" is apparently the believers Luke mentioned in 1:15. However, it could refer to the Twelve, since Luke later wrote that the multitude marveled that those who spoke in tongues were "Galileans" (v. 7). It is not possible to identify the place (lit. "the house," Gr. *ton oikon*) where they assembled with certainty. Perhaps it was the "upper room" already mentioned (1:13), or another house. Clearly the disciples were indoors (v. 2).

2:2 The sound like "a violent rushing wind" came from heaven, the place where Jesus had gone (1:10-11). This noise symbolized the coming of the Holy Spirit in power. The same Greek word (*pneuma*) means either "wind" or "spirit." Ezekiel and Jesus had previously used the wind as an illustration of God's Spirit (Ezek. 37:9-14; John 3:8).

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[100]Longenecker, p. 269.

> "Luke particularly stresses the importance of the Spirit in the life of the church [in Acts]."[101]

Jesus' earlier breathing on the disciples and giving them the Holy Spirit (John 20:22) may have been only a temporary empowerment with the Spirit along the lines of Old Testament empowerments. Others believe that Jesus was giving these disciples a symbolic and graphic reminder, an advance example as it were, of the Spirit who would come upon them later. It was a demonstration of what Jesus would do when He returned to the Father, and which He did do on Pentecost. He was not "imparting" the Spirit to them in any sense then. I prefer this second explanation.

> "A friend of my daughter lives in Kansas and went through the experience of a tornado. It did not destroy their home but came within two blocks of it. When she wrote about it to my daughter, she said, 'The first thing we noticed was a sound like a thousand freight trains coming into town.' Friend, that was a rushing, mighty wind, and that was the sound. It was that kind of sound that they heard on the Day of Pentecost."[102]

2:3 "Fire," as well as wind, symbolized the presence of God (cf. Gen. 15:17; Exod. 3:2-6; 13:21-22; 19:18; 24:17; 40:38; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). The believers received a visual as well as an audio indication that the promised Holy Spirit of God had come. Evidently, at first the apparent fire came in one piece, and then separated into individual flames, which always resemble tongues of fire. "Distributing themselves" translates *diamerizomenai*, a present and probably a middle participle, suggesting that the fire was seen dividing itself. Each one of these "flames" abode (settled) on a different believer present. God could hardly have depicted the distribution of His Spirit to every individual believer more clearly. The Spirit had in the past abode on the whole nation of Israel corporately, symbolized by the pillar of fire. Now He abode on each believer, as He had on Jesus. This fire was obviously not normal fire because it did not burn up what it touched (cf. Exod. 3:2-6).

Probably the Jews present connected the "tongues," by which the believers spoke miraculously, with the "tongues of fire." They probably attributed the miracle of speaking in tongues to the God whose presence they had identified with fire in their history and who was now obviously present among them.

Was this the fulfillment of John the Baptist's statement that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; cf. Joel 2:28-29; Mal. 3:2-5)? Some believe it was a complete fulfillment of those

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[101]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 32.

[102]McGee, 4:516.

prophecies and that we should expect no further subsequent fulfillment. This seems doubtful, since these prophecies occur in contexts involving the experiences of *all Israel*. Others believe that what happened on the day of Pentecost was an initial, partial, or similar fulfillment, and that complete fulfillment is still future. Some who hold this second view believe that the prophecy about the baptism with the Holy Spirit was fulfilled on Pentecost, but the prophecy about baptism with fire was not fulfilled and will be fulfilled in the Tribulation. Others who hold this second view believe that both baptisms occurred on Pentecost, and both will occur again in the future and will involve Israel. A third view is that what happened on Pentecost was not what the Old Testament predicted at all, since those predictions have Israel in view. I view what happened on Pentecost as a *foreview* of what will happen for Israel in the future. What we have in this verse is a gracious *baptizing*—that involved the Holy Spirit and the presence and power of God—symbolized by fire.[103]

2:4 "Spirit filling" and "Spirit baptism" are two distinct ministries of the Holy Spirit. Both occurred on this occasion, though Luke only mentioned filling specifically. We know that *Spirit baptism* also took place, because Jesus predicted it would take place "not many days from now" before His ascension (1:5). Moreover, Peter spoke of it as having taken place on Pentecost a short time later (11:15-16).[104]

Filling with the Spirit was a phenomenon believers experienced at various times in the Old Testament economy (Exod. 35:30-34; Num. 11:26-29; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10), as well as in the New. An individual Christian can now experience it many times. God can fill a person with His Spirit on numerous separate occasions (cf. Acts 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9, 52). Furthermore, God has commanded all believers to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Luke used "filling" to express the Holy Spirit's presence and enablement.[105] Filling by the Spirit results in the Spirit's control (influence) of the believer (Eph. 5:18). The Spirit controls a believer to the degree that He fills the believer and vice versa. Believers experience Spirit-control to the extent that they yield to His direction. On the day of Pentecost, the believers assembled were under the Spirit's control because they were in a proper personal relationship of submission to Him (cf. 1:14). In the Book of Acts, whenever Luke said the disciples were Spirit-filled, their filling always had some connection with their gospel proclamation or some specific service related to outreach (2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9).[106]

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[103]See also my comments on 2:16-21 below.

[104]See Fruchtenbaum, pp. 116-17.

[105]Bock, "A Theology . . .," pp. 98-99.

[106]Frederick R. Harm, "Structural Elements Related to the Gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts," *Concordia Journal* 14:1 (January 1988):30.

> ". . . Luke *always* connects the 'filling of the Holy Spirit' with the proclamation of the gospel in Acts (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9). Those who are 'full of the Holy Spirit' are *always* those who are faithfully fulfilling their anointed task as proclaimers (Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24; 13:52)."[107]
>
> "No great decision was ever taken, no important step was ever embarked upon, by the early Church without the guidance of the Spirit. The early Church was a Spirit-guided community.
>
> "In the first thirteen chapters of Acts there are more than forty references to the Holy Spirit. The early Church was a Spirit-filled Church and precisely therein lay its power."[108]

The Christian never repeats Spirit baptism (in contrast to filling), God never commanded Spirit baptism, and it does not occur in degrees. Spirit baptism normally takes place when a person becomes a Christian (Rom. 8:9). However, when it took place on the day of Pentecost, the people baptized were already believers. This was also true on three later occasions (8:17; 10:45; 19:6). (Chapter 19 does not clearly identify John's disciples as believers, but they may have been.) These were unusual situations, however, and not typical of Spirit baptism.[109] Spirit baptism always unites a believer to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The "body of Christ" is a figure that the New Testament writers used exclusively of the church, never of Israel or any other group of believers. Therefore this first occurrence of the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit marks the beginning of the church, the body of Christ (cf. Matt. 16:18).

Speaking with other tongues (unlearned languages) was the outward evidence that God had done something to these believers inwardly (i.e., controlled them and baptized them into the body). The same sign identified the same thing on the other initial instances of Spirit baptism (10:46; 19:6). In each case, it was primarily for the benefit of Jews present, who as a people sought a sign from God to mark His activity, that God gave this sign (Luke 11:16; John 4:48; 1 Cor. 1:22).[110]

One of the fundamental differences between charismatic and non-charismatic Christians is the issue of the purpose of the sign gifts (speaking in tongues, healings on demand, spectacular miracles, etc.).

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[107]Walt Russell, "The Anointing with the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts," *Trinity Journal* 7NS (Spring 1986):63.

[108]Barclay, pp. 12, 13.

[109]See my comments on these verses in these notes for further explanations.

[110]See William G. Bellshaw, "The Confusion of Tongues," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:478 (April-June 1963):145-53.

Charismatic theologians have urged that the purpose of all the gifts is primarily edification (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7).[111]

> They "always seem to be spoken of as a normal function of the Christian life . . . [in which the Spirit] makes them willing and able to undertake various works for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church."[112]

Many non-charismatics believe that the purpose of the sign gifts was not primarily edification but the authentication of new revelation.

> There is an ". . . inseparable connection of miracles with revelation, as its mark and credential; or, more narrowly, of the summing up of all revelation, finally, in Jesus Christ. Miracles do not appear on the page of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the Apostolic Church is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic Age in revelation; and when this revelation period closed, the period of miracle-working had passed by also, as a mere matter of course."[113]

> ". . . glossolalia [speaking in tongues] was a gift given by God, not primarily as a special language for worship; not primarily to facilitate the spread of the gospel; and certainly not as a sign that a believer has experienced a second 'baptism in the Holy Spirit.' It was given primarily for an evidential purpose to authenticate and substantiate some facet of God's truth. This purpose is always distorted by those who shift the emphasis from objective sign to subjective experience."[114]

Other non-charismatics believe that the specific purpose of the sign gifts was to identify Jesus Christ as God's Son and to authenticate the gospel message that the apostles preached.

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[111]E.g., Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, pp. 134-36.

[112]E. D. O'Connor, *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church*, pp. 280, 283. See also Ernest Swing Williams, a classic Pentecostal theologian, *Systematic Theology*, 3:50; Bernard Ramm, *Rapping about the Spirit*, p. 115; John Sherrill, *They Shall Speak with Other Tongues*, pp. 79-88; and *Catalog of Oral Roberts University* (1973), pp. 26-27.

[113]Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, pp. 25-26.

[114]Joel C. Gerlach, "Glossolalia," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 70:4 (October 1973):251. See also John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit at Work Today*, p. 41; and Culver, p. 138.

Most non-charismatics grant that the sign gifts were edifying in their *result*, but say their *purpose* was to authenticate new revelation to the Jews (Acts 2:22; Mark 16:20; Acts 7:36-39, 51; Heb. 2:2-4; 1 Cor. 14:20-22).[115] Jews were always present when tongues took place in Acts (chs. 2, 10, and 19). It is understandable why God-fearing Jews, whom the apostles asked to accept new truth in addition to their already authenticated Old Testament, would have required a sign. They would have wanted strong proof that God was now giving new revelation that seemed on the surface to contradict their Scriptures.

God had told the Jews, centuries earlier, that He would some day speak to them in a foreign language—because they refused to pay attention to Isaiah's words to them in their own language (Isa. 28:11; cf. 1 Cor 14:21). Jews who knew this prophecy and were listening to Peter should have recognized that what was happening was evidence that it was God who was speaking to them.

> "Barclay and others have puzzled over the necessity for using various dialects when it would have been more expedient to simply use either Greek or Aramaic—languages known to speaker and hearer alike.[116] However to suggest this is to miss the point of the record. The Spirit desired to arrest the attention of the crowd. What better means could He adopt than to have men who quite evidently did not speak the dialects in question suddenly be endowed with the ability to speak these languages and 'declare the wonders of God' before the astonished assembly? The effect would be a multiple one. Attention would be gained, the evidence of divine intervention would be perceived, the astonished crowd would be prepared to listen with interest to the sermon of Peter, and thus the Spirit's purpose in granting the gift would be realized."[117]
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> "As has been pointed out by various scholars, if simple ecstatic speech was in view here, Luke ought simply to have used the term *glossais* [tongues], not *eterais glossais* [other tongues]."[118]
>
> ". . . the startling effect of the phenomenon on those who in difficult circumstances desperately wished otherwise (as in Acts 4:13-16; 10:28-29; 11:1-3, 15-18; and 15:1-12)

[115]See S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Gift of Tongues and the Book of Acts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):309-11.
[116]Barclay, p. 16.
[117]Harm, p. 30.
[118]Witherington, p. 133.

> supports the purpose of authentication (and not edification) for the sign gifts."[119]

God gave the gift of tongues also to rouse the nation of Israel to repentance (1 Cor. 14:22-25).[120]

It is clear from the context of Acts 2:4 that this sign involved the ability to speak in another language that the speaker had not previously known (vv. 6, 8). However, the ability to speak in tongues does not in itself demonstrate the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Satan can give the supernatural ability to speak in other languages, as the blasphemous utterances of some tongues speakers have shown. Sometimes an interpreter was necessary (cf. 1 Cor. 14), but at other times, as at Pentecost, one was not.

INSTANCES OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES IN ACTS				
Reference	**Tongues-speakers**	**Audience**	**Relation to conversion**	**Purpose**
2:1-4	Jewish believers	Unsaved Jews and Christians	Sometime after conversion	To validate (for Jews) God's working as Joel prophesied
10:44-47	Gentile believers	Jewish believers who doubted God's plan	Immediately after conversion	To validate (for Jews) God's working among Gentiles as He had among Jews
19:1-7	Believers	Jews who needed confirmation of Paul's message	Immediately after conversion	To validate (for Jews) Paul's gospel message

Were the tongues here the same as in Corinth (1 Cor. 12; 14)? If so, was ecstatic speech present on both occasions, and or were foreign languages present on both occasions? Or were the tongues here foreign languages and the tongues in Corinth ecstatic speech?[121]

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[119]J. Lanier Burns, "A Reemphasis on the Purpose of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:527 (July-September 1975):245.

[120]Zane C. Hodges, "The Purpose of Tongues," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:479 (July-September 1963):226-33. Some good books that deal with speaking in tongues exegetically include Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*; Robert P. Lightner, *Speaking in Tongues and Divine Healing*; John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective*; and Joseph Dillow, *Speaking in Tongues: Seven Crucial Questions*.

[121]See Kent, pp. 30-32, for a clear presentation of these views.

> "It is well known that the terminology of Luke in Acts and of Paul in 1 Corinthians is the same. In spite of this some have contended for a difference between the gift as it occurred in Acts and as it occurred in Corinth. This is manifestly impossible from the standpoint of the terminology. This conclusion is strengthened when we remember that Luke and Paul were constant companions and would have, no doubt, used the same terminology in the same sense. . . . In other words, it is most likely that the early believers used a fixed terminology in describing this gift, a terminology understood by them all. If this be so, then the full description of the gift on Pentecost must be allowed to explain the more limited descriptions that occur elsewhere."[122]

Probably, then, the gift of tongues was a term that covered speaking in a language or languages that the speaker had never studied. This gift was very helpful as the believers began to carry out the Great Commission, especially in their evangelization of Jews. Acts documents and emphasizes the Lord's work in executing that mission.

Evidently most, if not all the believers present, spoke in tongues (vv. 3, 7-11). It has been suggested that the tongues speaking on the day of Pentecost was not a normal manifestation of the gift of tongues. It may have been a unique divine intervention (miracle) instead.[123]

If these early Christians spoke in tongues, should not modern Christians do so too? Speaking in tongues is never commanded in the New Testament. Its purpose was to authenticate new revelation to Jews. And it was not a practice that the apostles valued highly, even in the early church (cf. 1 Cor. 12—14). Therefore, I would say they should not.

God gave three signs of the Spirit's coming to the Jews who were celebrating the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem: wind, fire, and inspired speech. Each of these signified God's presence in Jewish history.

> "At least three distinct things were accomplished on the Day of Pentecost concerning the relationship of the Spirit with men:
>
> (1) The Spirit made His advent into the world here to abide throughout this dispensation. . . . [i.e., permanent indwelling]
>
> (2) Again, Pentecost marked the beginning of the formation of a new body, or organism which, in its relation to Christ, is called 'the church which is his body.' . . . [i.e., Spirit baptism]

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[122]Johnson, pp. 310-11. See also Rackham, p. 21. Longenecker, p. 271, pointed out the differences between tongues in Acts 2 and 1 Cor. 12 and 14.

[123]See my note on 19:6 for further comments on the cessation of the gift of tongues.

> (3) So, also, at Pentecost the lives that were prepared were filled with the Spirit, or the Spirit came upon them for power as promised." [i.e., Spirit filling][124]

The amazement of the onlookers 2:5-13

2:5-6 The Jews living in Jerusalem were probably people from the "Diaspora" ("dispersion," residing outside the land of Palestine) who had returned to settle down in the Jewish homeland. Luke's other uses of *katoikountes* ("living") are in Acts 1:20; 7:2, 4, 48; 9:22; 11:29; 13:27; 17:24, 26; and 22:12, and these suggest permanence compared with *epidemeo* ("sojourning") in verse 10.

> "It was . . . customary for many pious Jews who had spent their lives abroad to return to end their days as close to the Temple as possible."[125]

A list of nations from which they had come follows in verses 9 and 10. The sound that attracted attention may have been the wind (v. 2) or the sound of the tongues speakers (v. 4). The Greek word translated "noise" in verse 2 is *echos*, but the word rendered "sound" in verse 6 is *phones*. The context seems to favor the sound of the tongues speakers. Verse 2 says the noise filled the house where the disciples were, but there is no indication that it was heard outside the house. Also verse 6 connects the sound with the languages being spoken. The text does not clearly identify when what was happening in the upper room became public knowledge, or when the disciples moved out of the upper room to a larger venue. Evidently upon hearing the sound, these residents of Jerusalem assembled to investigate what was happening.

When they found the source of the sound, they were amazed to discover Galileans speaking in the native languages of the remote regions from which these Diaspora Jews had come. The Jews in Jerusalem who could not speak Aramaic would have known Greek, so there was no need for other languages. Yet what they heard were the languages that were common in the remote places in which they had lived. Perhaps the sound came from the upper room initially, and then when the disciples moved out into the streets, the people followed them into the temple area. Since about 3,000 people became Christians that day (v. 41), the multitude (v. 6) must have numbered many thousands. As many as 200,000 people could have assembled in the temple area.[126] This fact has led some interpreters to assume that that may have been where this multitude congregated.

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[124]L. S. Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, pp. 19-21.

[125]Neil, p. 73. Cf. Kent, p. 30, n. 9.

[126]J. P. Polhill, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 118, footnote 135; Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 83.

2:7-11 Most of the disciples were Galileans at this time, and all of the Twelve evidently were. They were identifiable by their rural appearance and their accent (cf. Matt. 26:73).

> "Galileans had difficulty pronouncing gutturals and had the habit of swallowing syllables when speaking; so they were looked down upon by the people of Jerusalem as being provincial (cf. Mark 14:70). Therefore, since the disciples who were speaking were Galileans, it bewildered those who heard because the disciples could not by themselves have learned so many different languages."[127]

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and Mesopotamians lived to the east and north of Palestine. Some of them were probably descendants of the Jews who did not return from the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Many texts do not include "Judea," but if authentic it probably refers to the Roman province of Judea that included Syria. Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia were all provinces in Asia Minor to the northwest. Egypt, Libya, and Cyrene lay to the south and west. Simon of Cyrene, in North Africa, had carried Jesus' cross (Luke 23:26). Rome, of course, lay farther northwest in Europe. Luke had a special interest in the gospel reaching Rome, so that may be the reason he singled it out for special mention here. It may be that some of these Roman expatriates returned to Rome and planted the church there. Ambrosiaster, a fourth-century Latin father, wrote that the Roman church was founded without any special miracles and without contact with any apostle.[128] Josephus wrote that visitors to Jerusalem for a great feast could swell the population to nearly 3,000,000.[129]

> "The Roman Empire had an estimated population of fifty to eighty million, with about seven million free Roman citizens (Schnabel 2004: 558-59). About two and a half million people inhabited Judea, and there were about five million Jews altogether in the empire, 10 percent of the whole population."[130]

A "proselyte" was a Gentile who had adopted Judaism, and had become a part of the nation of Israel by submitting to three rites. Acts and Matthew are the only New Testament books that mention proselytes. These rites were circumcision (if a male), self-baptism before witnesses, and ideally the offering of a sacrifice.[131] "Cretans" lived on the island of Crete, and

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[127]Longenecker, p. 272.
[128]Ibid., p. 273.
[129]Flavius Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 6:9:3.
[130]Bock, *Acts*, p. 43.
[131]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, p. 64.

"Arabs" refers to the Arabians who lived east of Palestine between the Red Sea and the Euphrates River. All of these ethnic groups heard "the mighty deeds of God" (i.e., the gospel) in their own languages. This was a reversal of what took place at Babel (Gen. 11), and illustrated the human unity that God's unhindered working produces.

> "Although every Jew could not be present for Peter's speech, the narrator does not hesitate to depict representatives of the Jews of every land as Peter's listeners. This feature shows a concern not just with Gentiles but with a gospel for all Jews, which can bring the restoration of Israel as a united people under its Messiah."[132]

> "The point [of Luke's list] is not to provide a tour of the known world but to mention nations that had known extensive Jewish populations, which of course would include Judea.[133] More to the point, Luke's arrangement involves first listing the major inhabited nations or regions, then those from the islands (Cretans), then finally those from desert regions (Arabs)."[134]

2:12-13 Unable or unwilling to accept the miraculous working of God in their midst, some observers charged that the believers were under the control ("full") of wine rather than the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 5:18; 1 Cor. 14:23). The Greek word for wine here (*gleukous*) means "sweet wine," which had a higher alcoholic content than regular wine.[135]

Peter's Pentecost sermon 2:14-41

> "The miraculous is not self-authenticating, nor does it inevitably and uniformly convince. There must also be the preparation of the heart and the proclamation of the message if miracles are to accomplish their full purpose. This was true even for the miracle of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost. . . . All this prepares the reader for Peter's sermon, which is the initial proclamation of the gospel message to a prepared people."[136]

Barclay pointed out four different kinds of preaching that the early Christians practiced.[137] I would add two more. The first is *kerugma,* which means proclamation of the clear facts of the Christian message. The second is *didache* or teaching. This was

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[132]Tannehill, 2:27.
[133]See D. J. Williams, *Acts*, pp. 28-29.
[134]Witherington, p. 136.
[135]Blaiklock, p. 58.
[136]Longenecker, p. 273.
[137]Barclay, pp. 16-17.

explanation and interpretation of the facts—the "So what is the point?" Third, there was *paraklesis*, exhortation to apply the message. Fourth, there was *homilia*, the treatment of a subject or area of life in view of the Christian message. Fifth, there was *prophesia*, the sharing of a word from God be it new revelation or old. Sixth, there was *apologia*, a defense of the Christian message in the face of hostile adversaries. Often the speaker combined two or more of these kinds of address into one message, as Peter did in the sermon that follows. Here we find defense (vv. 14-21), proclamation (vv. 22-36), and exhortation (vv. 37-41). This speech is an excellent example of forensic rhetoric, the rhetoric of defense and attack.[138]

Peter's defense 2:14-21

2:14-15 Peter, again representing the apostles (cf. 1:15), addressed the assembled crowd. He probably gave this speech in the temple's outer courtyard (the court of the Gentiles). He probably spoke in the vernacular—in Aramaic or possibly in Koine (common) Greek—rather than in tongues. Peter had previously denied that he knew Jesus, but now he was publicly representing Him. The apostle distinguished two types of Jews in his audience: native Jews living within the province of Judea, and all who were living in Jerusalem. The Diaspora contingent was probably the group most curious about the tongues phenomenon. Peter began by refuting the charge of drunkenness. It was too early in the day for that to be a reasonable explanation, since it was only 9:00 a.m. The Jews began each day at sundown. There were about 12 hours of darkness, and then there were 12 hours of daylight. So the third hour of the day would have been about 9:00 a.m.

> "Unfortunately, this argument [i.e., that it was too early in the day for these people to be drunk] was more telling in antiquity than today."[139]

> "Scrupulous Jews drank wine only with flesh, and, on the authority of Ex. xvi. 8, ate bread in the morning and flesh only in the evening. Hence wine could be drunk only in the evening. This is the point of Peter's remark."[140]

2:16-21 Was Peter claiming that the Spirit's outpouring on the day of Pentecost fulfilled Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32)? Conservative commentators express considerable difference of opinion on this point. This is an interpretive problem because not only Joel but other Old Testament prophets prophesied that God would give His Spirit to individual believers in the future (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Zech. 12:10). Moreover John the Baptist also predicted the pouring out of God's Spirit on believers (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33).

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[138]Witherington, p. 138.
[139]Longenecker, p. 275.
[140]Blaiklock, p. 58

Some commentators believe that Peter was claiming that *all* of what Joel prophesied happened that day.

> "The fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel which the people had just witnessed was a sign of the beginning of the Messianic age . . ."[141]

> "What was happening was to be seen as the fulfillment of a prophecy by *Joel*. . . . Peter regards Joel's prophecy as applying to the last days, and claims that his hearers are now living in the last days. God's final act of salvation has begun to take place."[142]

> "For Peter, this outpouring of the Spirit began the period known in Scripture as the 'last days' or the 'last hour' (1 John 2:18), and thus the whole Christian era is included in the expression."[143]

Other scholars believe that God fulfilled Joel's prophecy only *partially*. Some of these, for example, believed that He fulfilled verses 17-18 on the day of Pentecost, but He will yet fulfill verses 19-21 in the future.[144] I believe the following explanation falls into this category.

> "This clause does not mean, 'This is *like* that'; it means Pentecost fulfilled what Joel had described. However, the prophecies of Joel quoted in Acts 2:19-20 were not fulfilled. The implication is that the remainder would be fulfilled if Israel would repent."[145]

> "Certainly the outpouring of the Spirit on a hundred and twenty Jews could not in itself fulfill the prediction of such outpouring 'upon all flesh'; but it was the beginning of the fulfillment."[146]

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[141]F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 15.

[142]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 73. For refutation of the view that the fulfillment of Joel 2 in Acts 2 has removed any barriers to women clergy, see Bruce A. Baker, "The New Covenant and Egalitarianism," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 12:37 (December 2008):27-51.

[143]Kent, p. 32. See also Longenecker, pp. 275-76; John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p. 73; Barrett, 1:135-39; and Robertson, 3:26-28.

[144]Ironside, pp. 46-48; Zane C. Hodges, "A Dispensational Understanding of Acts 2," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 168-71. See also Homer Heater Jr., "Evidence from Joel and Amos," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, pp. 157-64; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Back Toward the Future: Hints for Interpreting Biblical Prophecy*, p. 43; and Daniel J. Treier, "The Fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32: A Multiple-Lens Approach," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:1 (March 1997):13-26.

[145]Toussaint, p. 358. Cf. Pentecost, p. 271.

[146]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 68. See also Bock, *Dispensationalism*, . . ., pp. 47-48; Ladd, pp. 1127-28; Kenneth L. Barker, "The Scope and Center of Old and New Testament Theology and Hope," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 325-27; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 74, 178-80; and D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, p. 61.

Still others believe Peter was *not* claiming the fulfillment of *any* of Joel's prophecy. They believe he was only *comparing* what had happened that day with what would happen in the future as Joel predicted.

> "Peter was not saying that the prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost or even that it was partially fulfilled; knowing from Joel what the Spirit could do, he was simply reminding the Jews that they should have recognized what they were then seeing as a work of the Spirit also. He continued to quote from Joel at length only in order to be able to include the salvation invitation recorded in verse 21."[147]

> "It seems quite obvious that Peter did not quote Joel's prophecy in the sense of its fulfillment in the events of Pentecost, but purely as a prophetic illustration of those events. As a matter of fact, to avoid confusion, Peter's quotation evidently *purposely* goes beyond any possible fulfillment at Pentecost by including events in the still future day of the Lord, preceding kingdom establishment (Acts 2:19-20). . . . In the reference there is not the slightest hint at a continual fulfillment during the church age or a coming fulfillment toward the end of the church age."[148]

> "Virtually nothing that happened in Acts 2 is predicted in Joel 2. What actually did happen in Acts two (the speaking in tongues) was not mentioned by Joel. What Joel did mention (dreams, visions, the sun darkened, the moon turned into blood) did not happen in Acts two. Joel was speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the whole of the nation of Israel in the last days, while Acts two speaks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Twelve Apostles or, at most, on the 120 in the Upper Room. This is a far cry from Joel's *all flesh*. However, there was one point of similarity, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, resulting in unusual manifestations. Acts two does not change or reinterpret Joel two, nor does it deny that Joel two will have a literal fulfillment when the Holy Spirit will be poured out on the whole nation of Israel. It is simply applying it to a New Testament event because of one point of similarity."[149]

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[147]Charles C. Ryrie, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 20-21. See also McGee, 4:519; and Warren W. Wiersbe, "Joel," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Prophets*, p. 333.

[148]Merrill F. Unger, "The Significance of Pentecost," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122:486 (April-June 1965):176-77. See also John Nelson Darby, *Meditations on the Acts of the Apostles*, 1:17; and idem, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 4:13. Underlining added for clarification.

[149]Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, pp. 844-45. See also Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition*, p. 53; Thomas D. Ice, "Dispensational Hermeneutics," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 41; Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, pp. 36-38; Merrill F. Unger, *Zechariah*, p. 215; and Wiersbe, 1:409. Underlining added for clarification.

> "Peter did not state that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The details of Joel 2:30-32 (cp. Acts 2:19-20) were not realized at that time. Peter quoted Joel's prediction as an illustration of what was taking place in his day, and as a guarantee that God would yet completely fulfill all that Joel had prophesied. The time of that fulfillment is stated here ('aferward,' cp. Hos. 3:5), i.e. in the latter days when Israel turns to the LORD."[150]

I prefer this third view. Some writers have pointed out that the phrase "this is what" (*touto estin to*) was a particular type of expression called a "pesher."

> "His [Peter's] use of the Joel passage is in line with what since the discovery of the DSS [Dead Sea Scrolls] we have learned to call a 'pesher' (from Heb. *peser*, 'interpretation'). It lays all emphasis on fulfillment without attempting to exegete the details of the biblical prophecy it 'interprets.'"[151]

Peter seems to have been claiming that what God had predicted through Joel for the end times was analogous to the events of Pentecost. The omission of "fulfilled" here may be deliberate to help his hearers avoid concluding that what was happening was the complete fulfillment of what Joel predicted. It was *similar* to what Joel predicted.

Peter made a significant change in Joel's prophecy as he quoted it from the Septuagint, and this change supports the view that he was not claiming complete fulfillment. First, he changed "after this" (Joel 2:28) to "in the last days" (Acts 2:17). In the context of Joel's prophecy, the time in view is the day of the Lord: the Tribulation (Joel 2:30-31) and the Millennium (Joel 2:28-29). Peter interpreted this time as *the last days*. Many modern interpreters believe that when Peter said "the last days," he meant the time in which he lived. However, he was not in the Tribulation or the Millennium. Thus he looked forward to the last days as being future. The "last days" is a phrase that some New Testament writers used to describe the age in which we live (2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:5, 20; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 John 2:18; Jude 18), but in view of what Joel wrote, that must not be its meaning here. In the Old Testament, "the last days" refers to the days *just before the age to come*, namely, just before the age of Messiah's earthly reign. That is what it means here.

There are some similarities between what Joel prophesied would come "after this" (Joel 2:28) and what happened on Pentecost. The similarities

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[150]*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 930. Underlining added for clarification.

[151]Longenecker, p. 275.

are why Peter quoted Joel. Yet the differences are what enable us to see that this prophecy was not completely fulfilled then. For example, God had not poured out His Spirit on "all mankind" (v. 17), as He will in the future. He had only poured out His Spirit on some believers in Jesus. Joel referred to deliverance in the Tribulation (Joel 2:32), but Peter applied this offer to those who needed salvation in his audience. Joel referred to Yahweh as the LORD, but Peter probably referred to Jesus as the Lord (cf. 1:24).

Many dispensationalists understand Peter as saying that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled initially or partially on Pentecost (view two above). Progressive dispensationalists believe that the eschatological kingdom age of which Joel spoke had begun. Therefore the kingdom had come in its first phase, which they view as the church. The New Covenant had begun, and the Holy Spirit's indwelling was a sign of that, but that does not mean the messianic reign had begun. The Old Covenant went into effect some 500 years before any king reigned over Israel, and the New Covenant went into effect at least 2,000 years before Messiah will reign over Israel and the world. Thus the beginning of these covenants did not signal the beginning of a king's reign. One progressive dispensationalist wrote, ". . . the new covenant is correlative to the kingdom of God . . ."[152] I disagree with this.

Not all normative dispensationalists agree on the partial fulfillment interpretation. By the term "normative dispensationalists," I mean *traditional dispensationalists*, not progressives, including classical and revised varieties.[153] Some of them, like Toussaint, see a partial fulfillment on Pentecost, while others, like Ryrie, see no fulfillment then.

How one views the church will affect how he or she understands this passage. If one views the church as the first stage of the messianic kingdom, as progressive dispensationalists do, then he or she may see this as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the outpouring of the Spirit in the eschatological age. If one views the church as distinct from the messianic (Davidic) kingdom, then one may or may not see this as a partial fulfillment. It seems more consistent to me not to see it as a partial fulfillment but as a similar outpouring, specifically the one Jesus predicted in the Upper Room (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Some normative dispensationalists who hold the no fulfillment position distinguish baptism *with* the Spirit, the future event, from baptism *by* the Spirit, the Pentecost event.[154] There does not seem to me to be adequate exegetical basis for this distinction.[155]

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[152]Saucy, *The Case . . .*, p. 134.

[153]See Craig A. Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 9-56, for these labels.

[154]E.g., Merrill F. Unger, *The Baptizing Work of the Holy Spirit*.

[155]See Saucy, *The Case . . .*, p. 181.

> "Realized eschatologists and amillennialists usually take Peter's inclusion of such physical imagery [i.e., "blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke," and "the sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood"] in a spiritual way, finding in what happened at Pentecost the spiritual fulfillment of Joel's prophecy—a fulfillment not necessarily tied to any natural phenomena. This, they suggest, offers an interpretative key to the understanding of similar portrayals of natural phenomena and apocalyptic imagery in the OT."[156]

By repeating, "And they will prophesy" (v. 18), which is not in Joel's text, Peter stressed prophecy as a most important similarity between what Joel predicted and what his hearers were witnessing. God was revealing something new through the apostles. Peter proceeded to explain what that was.

Another variation of interpretation concerning the Joel passage that some dispensationalists espouse is this. They believe that Peter thought Joel's prophecy could have been fulfilled quite soon if the Jewish leaders had repented and believed in Jesus.[157] This may be what Peter thought, but it is very difficult to be dogmatic about what might have been in Peter's mind when he did not explain it. Jesus had told the parable of the talents to correct those "who supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately" (Luke 19:11-27). He also predicted that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you [Jews], and given to a nation producing the fruit of it" (Matt. 21:43). Daniel predicted that seven years of terrible trouble were coming on the Jews (Dan. 9:24-27; cf. Matt. 24—25). So there had to be at least seven years of tribulation between Jesus' ascension and His return. If advocates of this view are correct, Peter either did not know this, or he forgot it, or he interpreted the Tribulation as a judgment that God would not send if Israel repented. Of course, Peter did not understand, or he forgot, what the Old Testament revealed about God's acceptance of Gentiles (cf. ch. 10). Peter may have thought that Jesus would return and set up the kingdom immediately if the Jewish leaders repented, but it is hard to prove conclusively that God was reoffering the kingdom to Israel at this time. There are no direct statements to that effect in the text. More comments about this re-offer of the kingdom view will follow later.

Peter's proclamation 2:22-36

In this part of his speech Peter cited three proofs that Jesus was the Messiah: His miracles (v. 22), His resurrection (vv. 23-32), and His ascension (vv. 33-35). Verse 36 is a summary conclusion.

2:22 Peter argued that God had attested to Jesus' Messiahship by performing miracles through Him. "Miracles" is the general word, which Peter defined further as "wonders" (miracles eliciting awe) and "signs" (miracles

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[156]Longenecker, p. 276.

[157]E.g., Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Joel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1421.

signifying something). Jesus' miracles attested the fact that God had empowered Him (cf. John 3:2), and they led many people who witnessed them to conclude that He was the Son of David (Matt. 12:23). Others, however, chose to believe that He received His power from Satan rather than God (Matt. 12:24).

2:23 Peter pointed out that Jesus' crucifixion had been no accident, but was part of God's eternal plan (cf. 3:18; 4:28; 13:29). Peter laid the guilt for Jesus' death at the Jews' feet (cf. v. 36; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52; 10:39; 13:28) and on the Gentile Romans (cf. 4:27; Luke 23:24-25). Note Peter's reference to both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man in this verse.

> "God had willed the death of Jesus (John 3:16) and the death of Judas (Acts 1:16), but that fact did not absolve Judas from his responsibility and guilt (Luke 22:22). He acted as a free moral agent."[158]

The ultimate cause of Jesus' death was God's plan and foreknowledge, but the secondary cause was the antagonism of godless Jewish and Roman men. Really the sins of every human being put Jesus on the cross.

2:24 God, a higher Judge, reversed the decision of Jesus' human judges by resurrecting Him. God released Jesus from the "pangs (finality) of death" (Gr. *odinas tou thanatou*), namely, its awful clutches (cf. 2 Sam. 22:6; Ps. 18:4-6; 116:3). A higher court in heaven overturned the decision of the lower courts on earth. It was impossible for Death to hold Jesus because He had committed no sins Himself. He had not personally earned the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23), but He voluntarily took upon Himself the sins of others.

2:25 Peter appealed to Psalm 16:8-11 to prove that David prophesied Messiah's resurrection in the Jewish Scriptures.[159] Psalm 16 is perhaps the clearest prediction of Messiah's resurrection in the Old Testament. As earlier (1:20), Peter saw that Messiah's (Jesus') experiences fulfilled David's words.

In this Psalm, David spoke of Christ as being at God's "right hand," a figure for close association and powerful assistance. Peter saw Jesus' presence in heaven at God's right hand as an extension of what David had written.

2:26 God's presence with David made him happy and hopeful. Likewise, the fact that Jesus was now at God's right hand, made Peter happy and hopeful.

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[158]Robertson, 3:29.

[159]See Gregory V. Trull, "Views on Peter's Use of Psalm 16:8 in Acts 2:25-32," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:642 (April-June 2004):194-214, for seven views; and idem, "Peter's Interpretation of Psalm 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25-32," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:644 (October-December 2004):432-48.

2:27 David said he would not go "to Hades" (the place of departed spirits, Old Testament Sheol), and his body would not "suffer (undergo) decay." This was a poetic way of expressing his belief that God would not allow him to experience ultimate humiliation. David referred to himself as God's devout one. Peter saw this fulfilled literally in Jesus' resurrection from the grave after only three days. Jesus was the supremely Devout One.

2:28 David ended this psalm by rejoicing that, in spite of his adversaries, God would spare *his life* and enable *him* to enjoy God's presence in the future. Peter interpreted these statements as referring to *Jesus* entering into new life following His resurrection, and into God's presence following His ascension.

> "Peter quotes from Psalm 16, not to teach that Christ is on the Davidic throne, but rather to show that David predicted the resurrection and enthronement of Christ after His death. The enthronement on David's throne is a yet-future event while the enthronement at His Father's right hand is an accomplished fact."[160]

2:29-31 Peter next argued that David's words just quoted could not refer literally to David, since David had indeed died and his body had undergone corruption. Ancient tradition places the location of King David's tomb south of the old city of David, near the Pool of Siloam. David's words were a prophecy that referred to Messiah as well as a description of his own experience. God's oath to place one of David's descendants on his throne as Israel's king is in Psalm 132:11 (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16).[161]

Peter did not say that Jesus now sits on David's throne (v. 30), which is what many progressive dispensationalists affirm.[162] He said that David prophesied that "God had sworn . . . to seat" a descendant of David on David's throne. Jesus now sits on a throne in heaven, but He has yet to sit on David's throne, which is a throne on earth. He will sit on David's throne when He returns to the earth to reign as Messiah.

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[160]Pentecost, pp. 273.

[161]See Robert F. O'Toole, "Acts 2:30 and the Davidic Covenant of Pentecost," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102:2 (1983):245-58.

[162]E.g., Bock, *Dispensationalism*, . . ., pp. 49-50; Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 175-87; and Saucy, *The Case* . . ., p. 59-80. For refutations of the progressive dispensationalist view, see John F. Walvoord, "Biblical Kingdoms Compared and Contrasted," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, especially pp. 89-90; David A. Dean, "A Study of the Enthronement of Christ in Acts 2 and 3" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992); McLean, pp. 223-24; Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 168-69; Hodges, "A Dispensational . . .," pp. 174-78; and Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 231-32. See Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, pp. 81-82; and John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pp. 224-26, for the normative dispensational interpretations of the Davidic Covenant passages.

2:32 Peter equated Jesus with the Christ (Messiah, v. 31). He also attributed Jesus' resurrection to "God" again (cf. v. 24). The resurrection of Jesus Christ was one of the apostles' strongest emphases (cf. 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33-34, 37; 17:31; 26:23). They proceeded to bear witness to what they had seen and heard as Christ had commanded and foretold (1:8).

2:33 Peter next explained that it was *Jesus*, now at God's right hand, who had "poured forth" the promised Holy Spirit from the Father (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27). The evidence of this was the tongues of fire and demonstration of tongues speaking that his audience saw and heard. "The right hand of God" figuratively represents supreme power and authority, and reference to it sets up the quotation of Psalm 110:1 in the next verse.

Peter mentioned all three members of the Trinity in this verse.

> "Throughout Acts, the presence of the Spirit is seen as the distinguishing mark of Christianity—it is what makes a person a Christian."[163]

2:34-35 Peter then added a second evidence that Jesus was the Christ. He had proved that David had prophesied Messiah's resurrection (v. 27). Now he said that David also prophesied Messiah's ascension (Ps. 110:1). This was a passage from the Old Testament that Jesus had earlier applied to Himself (Matt. 22:43-44; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-42). It may have been Jesus' use of this passage that enabled His disciples to grasp the significance of His resurrection. It may also have served as the key to their understanding of these prophecies of Messiah in the Old Testament.

David evidently meant that the LORD (Yahweh, God the Father) said the following to David's Lord (Adonai, Master, evidently a reference to Messiah or possibly Solomon). David may have composed this psalm on the occasion of Solomon's coronation as Israel's king. Clearly it is an enthronement psalm. Yahweh, the true King of Israel, extended the privilege of serving as His administrator to Messiah (or Solomon), His vice-regent. Yahweh included a promise that He would subdue His vice-regent's enemies. Peter took this passage as a prophecy about David's greatest son, Messiah. Yahweh said to David's Lord: "Messiah, sit beside Me and rule for Me, and I will subdue Your enemies." This is something God the Father said to God the Son. Peter understood David's reference to his Lord as extending to Messiah, David's ultimate descendant.

> "Peter's statement that Jesus is presently at 'the right hand of God,' in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1, has been a focal point of disagreement between dispensational and non-

[163]Witherington, p. 140.

dispensational interpreters. Traditional dispensationalists have understood this as teaching the present session of Christ in heaven before his return to fulfill the Davidic messianic kingdom promise of a literal reign on earth. They are careful to distinguish between the Davidic throne and the position that Christ presently occupies in heaven at the right hand of God (Ac 2:30).[164]

"Non-dispensationalists, by contrast, see Peter's statement as a clear indication that the New Testament has reinterpreted the Davidic messianic prophecies. The messianic throne has been transferred from Jerusalem to heaven, and Jesus 'has begun his messianic reign as the Davidic king.'"[165]

"This does not mean that Jesus is at the present time ruling from the throne of David, but that He is now at 'the right hand of the Father' until His enemies are vanquished (Acts 2:33-35)."[166]

". . . it is preferable to see David's earthly throne as different from the Lord's heavenly throne, because of the different contexts of Psalms 110 and 132. Psalm 110 refers to the Lord's throne (v. 1) and a Melchizedekian priesthood (v. 4) but Psalm 132 refers to David's throne (v. 11) and (Aaronic) priests (vv. 9, 16). . . .

"Because the Messiah is the anointed Descendant of David and the Davidic Heir, He presently possesses the right to reign though He has not yet assumed David's throne. This was also true of David, who assumed the throne over Israel years after he was anointed.

"Before Christ will be seated on David's throne (Ps. 110:2), He is seated at the right hand of God (v. 1). His present session is a position of honor and power, but the exercise of that power is restricted to what God has chosen to give the Son. God the Father reigns and has decreed that Christ dispense blessings from the Holy Spirit to believers in this present age. When Christ returns to earth to begin His messianic reign on David's throne, He will conquer His

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[164]E.g., McClain, p. 401.

[165]Saucy, *The Case . . .*, pp. 69-70. His quotation is from George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 336. Cf. Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, p. 136. Saucy's discussion of "the right hand of God," pp. 72-74, is helpful.

[166]Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):74.

> enemies (Ps. 110:2, 5-7). Until then, He is now seated at God's right hand (v. 1), exercising the decreed role of the Melchizedekian King-Priest (v. 4), the believer's great High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 4:14-15; 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21)."[167]
>
> "Christ's enthronement at the time of His ascension was not to David's throne, but rather was a restoration to the position at His Father's right hand (Heb. 1:3; Acts 7:56), which position He had given up at the time of the Incarnation (Phil. 2:6-8). It was for this restoration that Christ had prayed to His Father in John 17:5. Since Christ had never occupied David's throne before the Incarnation it would have been impossible to restore Him to what He had not occupied previously. He was petitioning the Father to restore Him to His place at the Father's right hand. Peter, in his message, establishes the fact of resurrection by testifying to the Ascension, for one who had not been resurrected could not ascend."[168]

Normative dispensationalists:	Christ's *messianic* reign will be on earth.
Progressive dispensationalists:	Christ's *messianic* reign is now from heaven and will be on earth.
Non-dispensational premillenarians:	Christ's *messianic* reign is now from heaven and will be on earth.
Non-millennarians:	Christ's *messianic* reign is now and will be from heaven.

2:36 Peter wanted every Israelite to consider the evidence he had just presented, because it proved "for certain" that Jesus of Nazareth (cf. v. 22) was God's sovereign ruler (Lord) and anointed Messiah (Christ). It is clear from the context that by "Lord," Peter was speaking of Jesus as the Father's co-regent. He referred to the same "Lord" he had mentioned in verse 21.

> "This title of 'Lord' was a more important title than Messiah, for it pictured Jesus' total authority and His ability and right to serve as an equal with God the Father."[169]

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[167]Elliott E. Johnson, "Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:596 (October-December 1992):434, 436.

[168]Pentecost, pp. 272. Cf. Hodges, "A Dispensational . . .," pp. 172-78.

[169]Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 104. See Witherington's excursus on Luke's Christology, pp. 147-53.

Normative dispensationalists (both classical and revised, to use Blaising's labels) hold that Peter only meant that Jesus of Nazareth was the Davidic Messiah. Progressive dispensationalists, along with covenant theologians (i.e., non-dispensationalists), believe that Peter meant that Jesus not only was the Davidic Messiah but that He was also reigning as the Davidic Messiah then. Thus, for them, the Davidic messianic kingdom had begun. Its present (already) phase is with Jesus on the Davidic throne ruling from heaven, and its future (not yet) phase will be when Jesus returns to earth to rule on earth.

Progressive dispensationalists (and covenant theologians) also believe that Jesus' reign as Messiah began during his earthly ministry.[170] They see the church as the present stage in the progressive unfolding of the messianic kingdom (hence the name "progressive dispensationalism").[171] Normative dispensationalists interpret the Davidic kingdom as entirely earthly, and say that Jesus has not yet begun His messianic reign. He now sits on the Father's throne in heaven, ruling sovereignly as God, not on David's throne fulfilling Old Testament prophecies concerning the Davidic king's future reign (cf. Rev. 3:21).

Peter again mentioned his hearers' responsibility for crucifying Jesus, in order to convict them of their sin and to make them feel guilty (cf. v. 23).[172]

> "Peter did not present the cross as the place where the Sinless Substitute died for the world, but where Israel killed her own Messiah!"[173]
>
> "Peter's preaching, then, in vv. 14ff. must be seen as essentially a message to the Jews of the world, not to the whole world."[174]
>
> "The beginning and ending of the main body of the speech emphasize the function of disclosure. Peter begins, 'Let this be known to you,' and concludes, 'Therefore, let the whole house of Israel know assuredly . . .,' forming an inclusion (2:14, 36). In the context this is a new disclosure, for it is the first public proclamation of Jesus' resurrection and its significance. Acts 2:22-36 is a compact, carefully constructed argument leading to the conclusion in v. 36:

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[170]Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 248.
[171]Ibid., p. 49.
[172]See Darrell L. Bock, "Jesus as Lord in Acts and in the Gospel Message," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:570 (April-June 1986):147-48.
[173]Wiersbe, 1:410.
[174]Witherington, pp. 140-41.

> 'God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.' Peter not only proclaims Jesus' authority but also reveals the intolerable situation of the audience, who share responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion. The Pentecost speech is part of a recognition scene, where, in the manner of tragedy, persons who have acted blindly against their own best interests suddenly recognize their error."[175]
>
> "The Pentecost speech is primarily the disclosure to its audience of God's surprising reversal of their intentions, for their rejection has ironically resulted in Jesus' exaltation as Messiah, Spirit-giver, and source of repentance and forgiveness."[176]

God bestowed His Spirit on the believers on Pentecost (and subsequently) for the same reason He poured out His Spirit on Jesus Christ when He began His earthly ministry. He did so to empower them to proclaim the gospel of God's grace (cf. 1:8). Luke recorded both outpourings (Luke 3:21-22; Acts 2:2-4; cf. Acts 4:27; 10:28). This fact is further evidence that Luke wanted his readers to view their own ministries as the extension of Jesus' ministry (1:1-2).

> "Luke's specific emphasis (and contribution) to NT pneumatology is that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church not just to incorporate each believer into the body of Christ or provide the greater new covenant intimacy with him, but also to consecrate the church to the task of worldwide prophetic ministry as defined in Luke 4:16-30."[177]

Peter mentioned that Jesus was now at "the right hand of God"—in "heaven"—four times in this part of his speech (vv. 25, 30, 33, 34). This had particular relevance for "all the house of Israel" (cf. vv. 14, 22, 29).

> "Apparently, therefore, the messiahship of Jesus was the distinctive feature of the church's witness within Jewish circles, signifying, as it does, his fulfillment of Israel's hopes and his culmination of God's redemptive purposes.
>
> "The title 'Lord' was also proclaimed christologically in Jewish circles, with evident intent to apply to Jesus all that was said of God in the OT . . . . But 'Lord' came to have particular relevance to the church's witness to Gentiles just as 'Messiah' was more relevant to the Jewish world. So in

[175]Tannehill, 2:35.
[176]Ibid., 2:37.
[177]Russell, p. 63.

> Acts Luke reports the proclamation of Jesus 'the Christ' before Jewish audiences both in Palestine and among the Diaspora, whereas Paul in his letters to Gentile churches generally uses Christ as a proper name and proclaims Christ Jesus 'the Lord.'"[178]

Peter's exhortation 2:37-41

2:37 The Holy Spirit used Peter's sermon to bring conviction, as Jesus had predicted (John 16:8-11). He convicted Peter's hearers of the truth of what he said and of their guilt in rejecting Jesus. Their question arose from this twofold response.

Notice the full meaning of their question. These were Jews who had been waiting expectantly for the Messiah to appear. Peter had just explained convincingly that He had come, but the Jewish nation had rejected God's anointed King. Jesus had gone back to heaven. What would happen to the nation over which He was to rule? What were the Jews to do? Their question did not just reflect their personal dilemma but the fate of their nation. What should they do in view of this terrible situation nationally as well as personally?

2:38 Peter told them what to do. They needed to "repent." Repentance involves a change of mind and heart first, and secondarily a change of conduct. The Greek word translated repentance (*metanoia*) literally means a change of outlook (from *meta* and *noeo* meaning to reconsider). The Jews had just recently regarded Jesus as less than Messiah, and had rejected Him. Now they needed to accept Him and embrace Him. John the Baptist and Jesus had previously called for repentance in their audiences (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; et al.), and the apostles continued this emphasis, as Luke reported in Acts (Acts 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 10:43; 11:18; 13:24; 17:30; 19:4; 20:21; 26:18, 20).

> "The context of repentance which brings eternal life, and that which Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, is a change of mind about Jesus Christ. Whereas the people who heard him on that day formerly thought of Him as mere man, they were asked to accept Him as Lord (Deity) and Christ (promised Messiah). To do this would bring salvation."[179]

When people speak of "repentance," they may mean one of two different things. We use this English word in the sense of a conduct change (turning away from sinful practices). We also use it in the sense of a conceptual change (turning away from false ideas previously held). These two

[178]Longenecker, p. 281.

[179]Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, p. 176.

meanings also appear in Scripture. This has led to some confusion concerning what a person must do to obtain salvation.

> "The Greek verb [*metanoeo*, translated "to repent"] means 'to change one's mind,' but in its Lucan usage it comes very close to the Hebrew verb for repent which literally means 'to turn or turn around' (*sub*). . . . A change of perspective, involving the total person's point of view, is called for by this term. In fact, John called for the Israelites to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance ([Luke] 3:8). This passage is significant for it separates repentance from what it produces, and also expresses a link between repentance and fruit. One leads to the other.
>
> "In summary, Luke saw repentance as a change of perspective that transforms a person's thinking and approach to life."[180]

If a person just thinks of repentance as turning from sinful practices (reforming oneself), repentance becomes a good work that a person does. This kind of repentance is not necessary for salvation for two reasons. First, this is not how the gospel preachers in the New Testament used the word, as one can see from the meaning of the Greek word *metanoia* (defined above). Second, other Scriptures make it clear that good works, including turning from sin, have no part in justification (e.g., Eph. 2:8-9). God does not save us because of what we do for Him but because of what He has done for us in Christ.[181]

Repentance by definition is not an act separate from trusting Christ. It is part of the process of believing.[182] A few scholars believe that repentance plays no part in salvation, but that repentance is a condition for harmonious fellowship with God.[183] This is a minority view, however.

When a person trusts Christ, he or she abandons his or her false notions about the Savior and embraces the truth. The truth is that Jesus Christ is God's provision for our eternal salvation. When we rest our confidence in Him and the sufficiency of His cross work for us, God gives us eternal life. This is not just giving mental assent to facts that are true. Saving faith does that, but also places confidence in Christ, rather than in self, for salvation.[184]

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[180]Bock, "A Theology . . .," pp. 129-30, 132.

[181]See Joseph C. Dillow's excellent discussion of the true and false definitions of repentance in *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 30-36. See also Kent, pp. 33-34.

[182]See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3:3:5 and 9.

[183]E.g., Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, pp. 145-6.

[184]See Thomas L. Constable, "The Gospel Message," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 207.

> ". . . it needs ever to be insisted on that the faith that justifies is not a mere intellectual process—not simply crediting certain historical facts or doctrinal statements; but it is a faith that springs from a divinely wrought conviction of sin which produces a repentance that is sincere and genuine."[185]

Peter called for individual repentance ("each of you," Gr. second person plural). The Jews thought corporately about their responsibilities as God's chosen people, but Peter confronted them with their individual responsibility to believe in Jesus.

The New Testament uses the word "baptism" in two ways: Spirit baptism and water baptism. This raises the question of which type Peter was calling for here. In verse 38, "baptism" probably refers to *water* baptism, as most commentators point out. A few of them believe that Peter was referring to *Spirit* baptism, in the sense of becoming identified with Christ.

> "The baptism of the Spirit which it was our Lord's prerogative to bestow was, strictly speaking, something that took place once for all on the day of Pentecost when He poured forth 'the promise of the Father' on His disciples and thus constituted them the new people of God; baptism in water continued to be the external sign by which individuals who believed the gospel message, repented of their sins, and acknowledged Jesus as Lord, were publicly incorporated into the Spirit-baptized fellowship of the new people of God."[186]

This verse is a major proof text for those who believe that water baptism is essential for salvation.[187] Many people refer to this viewpoint as sacramental theology as contrasted with evangelical theology. It encounters its greatest problem with passages that make the forgiveness of sin, and salvation in general, dependent on nothing but trust in Christ (e.g., Acts 16:31; 10:43; 13:38-39; 26:18; Luke 24:47; John 3:16, 36; Rom. 4:1-17; 11:6; Gal. 3:8-9; Eph. 2:8-9).[188] Peter later promised forgiveness of sins on the basis of faith alone (5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18). Over 100 verses that deal with how to become a Christian make faith in Christ the only condition.

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[185]Harry A. Ironside, *Except Ye Repent*, pp. 9-10.

[186]Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., pp. 76-77.

[187]See Aubrey M. Malphurs, "A Theological Critique of the Churches of Christ Doctrine of Soteriology" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981).

[188]See Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*; Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* and Robert N. Wilkin, "Repentence and Salvation," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 1:1 (Autumn 1988):11-20, and 2:1 (Spring 1989):13-26.

> ". . . Christian [water] baptism was an expression of faith and commitment to Jesus as Lord."[189]

What is the relationship of repentance, water baptism, forgiveness, and the gift of the Spirit that this verse brings together? At least three explanations are possible if we rule out the idea that water baptism results in the forgiveness of sins.[190]

1. One acceptable option is to take the Greek preposition translated "for" (*eis*) as "because of" or "on the basis of." This is not the usual meaning of the word. The usual meaning is "for" designating aim or purpose. However, it clearly means "because of" in some passages (e.g., Matt. 3:11; 12:41; Mark 1:4). This explanation links forgiveness with baptizing. We could paraphrase this view as follows. "Repent and you will receive the gift of the Spirit. Be baptized because your sins are forgiven."[191]

2. Other interpreters emphasize the correspondence between the number (singular and plural) of the verbs and pronouns in the two parts of the sentence. "Repent" is plural as is "your," and "be baptized" and "you" (in "each of you") are singular.

   Repent (second person plural)
   be baptized (third person singular)
   each (third person singular) of you
   for the forgiveness of your (second person plural) sins

   According to this view Peter was saying, "You [all] repent for [the purpose of] the forgiveness of your sins, and you [all] will receive the Spirit." Then he added parenthetically, "And each of you [singular] be baptized [as a testimony to your faith]." This explanation links forgiveness with repentance.[192] This seems to me to be the best explanation.

   > "Repentance demands the witness of baptism; forgiveness is followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit [i.e., Spirit baptism]."[193]

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[189]Marshall, *The Acts . . .*, p.81.

[190]Lanny T. Tanton, "The Gospel and Water Baptism: A Study of Acts 2:38," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 3:1 (Spring 1990):27-52, discussed six interpretations of this passage.

[191]Advocates of this view include Ryrie, *The Acts . . .*, p. 24; W. A. Criswell, *Acts*, p. 96; H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, pp. 103-4; Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 3:76-77; Robertson, 3:35-36; and Wiersbe, 1:410.

[192]See Toussaint, "Acts," p. 359; Ned B. Stonehouse, "The Gift of the Holy Spirit," *Westminster Theological Journal* 13 (1949-51):1-15; Frank Stagg, *The Book of Acts*, p. 63; Bob L. Ross, *Acts 2:38 and Baptismal Regeneration*, pp. 45-49; Malphurs, pp. 167-69; and Luther B. McIntyre Jr., "Baptism and Forgiveness in Acts 2:38," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:609 (January-March 1996):53-62.

[193]Blaiklock, p. 60.

3. A third, less popular, view is that God withheld Spirit baptism from Palestinian converts to Christianity when the church was in its infancy. He did so until they had entered into communion with God by obeying His command to undergo baptism in water (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Their Christian experience unfolded in this sequence of events: regeneration, water baptism, forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, Spirit baptism. These Palestinian converts were individuals who had exposure to but had rejected the ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus. One advocate of this view felt that it accounts best for the instances of Spirit baptism in Acts 2:38; 8:12-17; 19:1-7; and 22:16. He took these occurrences as non-normative Christian experience unique in the early years of Christianity. Acts 10:43-48 reflects normative Christian experience where regeneration, forgiveness, and Spirit baptism take place simultaneously with water baptism following. By the time Paul wrote Romans, this later sequence had become normative (Rom. 8:9; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).[194]

Baptism in water was common in both Judaism and early Christianity. The Jews baptized themselves for ceremonial cleansing. Gentile converts to Judaism commonly baptized themselves in water publicly as a testimony to their conversion. The apostles evidently took for granted that the person who trusted in Christ would then submit to baptism in water.

> ". . . the idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in [the] NT."[195]

> "Since baptism signifies association with the message, group, or person involved in authorizing it [cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-2], baptism in the name of Jesus Christ meant for these people a severing of their ties with Judaism and an association with the messages of Jesus and His people. Baptism was the line of demarcation. Even today for a Jew it is not his profession of Christianity nor his attendance at Christian services nor his acceptance of the New Testament, but his submission to water baptism that definitely and finally excludes him from the Jewish community and marks him off as a Christian."[196]

Was Peter violating the Lord Jesus' instructions when the apostle told his hearers to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ alone? Jesus had commanded His disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). I do not think so. When Jesus gave

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[194]Rackham, p. 30; and Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Seige*, pp. 101-4.
[195]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 77. See also Longenecker, p. 284.
[196]Ryrie, *The Acts* . . ., pp. 23-24. See also Longenecker, p. 286.

the Great Commission, He had in view the discipling of the nations: everyone. When evangelizing non-Christians, it was necessary to have them identify with the triune God of Christianity through water baptism. Peter's audience on the day of Pentecost, however, was Jewish. They needed to identify with the true God too, but identification with Jesus Christ is what Peter stressed, since baptism in the name of Jesus would have been a particular problem for Jews. It meant acknowledging Jesus as their God. Jews already accepted the fatherhood of God and the idea that God is a Spirit.

The "gift of the Holy Spirit" was baptism with the Spirit. The Spirit *is* the gift. Peter connected reception of the Spirit with repentance. The Holy Spirit immediately baptized those who repented (11:15). Their Spirit baptism was not a later "second blessing."

Notice that Peter said nothing in this verse about acknowledging Jesus as Lord, in the sense of surrendering completely to His Lordship to receive eternal life. Those who contend that submission to the Lordship of Christ is essential for salvation must admit that Peter did not make that a requirement here. This would have been the perfect opportunity for him to do so. Peter did not mention submission to the Lordship of Christ because he did not believe it was essential for salvation. Admittedly he referred to Jesus as Lord in verse 36, but as I have explained, the context there argues for "Lord" meaning God rather than master. Further discussion of the "Lordship Salvation" view will follow in these notes.

2:39 The "promise" is the gift of the Holy Spirit (1:5, 8; 2:33). Peter's reference to "your children" reflects the strong influence that Jewish fathers exercised in their homes. When a father became a Christian, his children would normally follow his lead and become Christians too. Those "far off" probably include the Diaspora Jews, future generations of Jews, and the Gentiles. Peter had already expressed his belief that Gentiles could be saved (v. 21; cf. Joel 2:32), a fact taught repeatedly in both the Old and the New Testament. Peter's later problem involving the salvation of Cornelius was not due to a conviction that Gentiles were unsaveable. It was a question of the manner by which they became Christians (i.e., not through Judaism, but directly without becoming Jews first). Note, too, Peter's firm belief in God's sovereignty (cf. v. 23). God takes the initiative in calling the elect to salvation, and then they repent (v. 38; cf. John 6:37; Rom. 8:28-30).

2:40 The Greek word translated "generation" (*genea*) sometimes has a wider scope than simply all the people living within the same generational period. It has a metaphorical meaning here as elsewhere (e.g., Matt. 17:17; Mark 9:19; 13:30; Luke 9:41; 16:8). It means "a race of men very like each other in endowments, pursuits, character; and especially in a bad

sense a perverse race."[197] Here the reference seems to be to unbelieving Jews of all time, but particularly those living during Peter's lifetime. "Generation" in this larger sense is virtually the same as "race."

Jesus had announced that the actual generation of Jews who had rejected Him would experience God's judgment on themselves and their nation (Matt. 21:41-44; 22:7; 23:34—24:2). In view of that prediction, it seems that Peter may have had that impending judgment in mind when he issued this call to his hearers. Jesus' promised judgment fell in A.D. 70 when Titus invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and scattered the Jews.

> "This exhortation shows that Peter viewed that generation under the physical, temporal judgment about which Christ had spoken so forcefully and clearly. What Jesus had warned them about earlier (Matt. 12:31-32) had come on them and was inescapable. . . .
>
> "While judgment on the nation was inescapable, individuals could be delivered from it. Peter's answer was, 'Be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven,' that is, they were no longer to participate in the repeated sin of the nation in rejecting Christ. The confession of their faith in Christ and of their identification with him by baptism would demonstrate their separation from the nation. They would be put out of the synagogue and lose all identity in the nation. Thus, by this separation they would individually not undergo the judgment on that generation since they ceased to be a part of it. Baptism did not save them. Only their faith in the One in whose name they were being baptized could do that. But baptism did terminate their identity with the nation so that they could escape its judgment."[198]

2:41 Peter had called on his audience to repent and to be baptized (v. 38). Luke recorded the response of the believers. This reference, too, is probably to water baptism.

More people may have become Christians on this one day than did so during the whole earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:12). Luke evidently meant that 3,000 were added to the 120 mentioned in 1:15, since he was describing the visible relationships of the believers.[199]

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[197]*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "*genea*," p. 112.
[198]J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Apostles' Use of Jesus' Predictions of Judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 139-40.
[199]Kent, p. 34, footnote 14.

> Some interpreters believe that this verse does not describe what took place immediately following the conclusion of Peter's sermon, however. Luke may have been summing up the results of Peter's preaching as a new point of departure in his narrative. He often used the Greek word translated "then" (*men*) in Acts to do this. Furthermore "day" (*hemera*) can refer to a longer time as well as to one 24-hour period. Here it could refer to the first period in the church's life.[200]

The period between the death of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was a transitional period. The tearing of the temple veil when Jesus died (Matt. 27:51) symbolized the termination of the old Mosaic order and the beginning of a new order. The new order began when Jesus Christ died. However, it took several decades for God's people to make the transition in their thinking and practice. The Book of Acts documents many of those transitions.

> "The transition was extensive. Ethnically, there was a transition from dealing primarily with Jews to dealing with both Jew and Gentile without distinction. There was also a transition in the people with whom God was dealing, from Israel to the church. Likewise, there was a transition in the principle on which God was dealing with men, from Law to grace. There was a transition from the offer to Israel of an earthly Davidic kingdom to the offer to all men of salvation based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There was a transition from the prospect of Messiah's coming to the historical fact that the promised One had come. There was a transition from the promise that the Spirit would be given to the historical fact that the Spirit had come.
>
> "Again, all these transitions were made positionally in the brief period of time from the death of Christ to the Day of Pentecost. Yet experientially these truths were understood and entered into only over a span of some four decades. The Book of Acts records the positional transition as well as the experiential transition in the development of the theocratic kingdom program."[201]
>
> ". . . the Book of the Acts is particularly valuable as giving to us the earliest models of several ordinances and institutions which have since become part of the life of the Christian Church. These first occasions should be studied as types and models of what all subsequent occasions should be.
>
> "The first descent of the Spirit (chap. 2); the first Christian preaching (chap. 2); the first Christian Church (chap. 2); the first opposition to Christianity (chap. 4); the first persecution (chap. 4); the first prayer meeting (chap. 4); the first sin in the Church (chap. 5); the first Church

[200]Rackham, pp. 31-32; Neil, p. 80.
[201]Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom* . . ., pp. 266-67.

> problem (chap. 6); the first martyr (chap. 7); the first Church extension (chap. 8); the first personal dealing (chap. 8); the first Gentile Church (chap. 11); the first Church Council (chap. 11).
>
> "The first missionary (chap. 13); the first missionary methods (chaps. 13, 14); the first Church contention (chap. 15); the first Church in Europe (chap. 16); the first address to Christian ministers (chap. 20)."[202]

This list could be developed even further.

> ". . . what Acts aims to do is to give us a series of typical exploits and adventures of the great heroic figures of the early Church."[203]

6. The early state of the church 2:42-47

Luke now moved from describing what took place on a particular day to a more general description of the life of the early Jerusalem church (cf. 4:32—5:11; 6:1-6). Interestingly he gave comparatively little attention to the internal life of the church in Acts. His selection of content shows that his purpose was to stress its outward expansion.

2:42 These new converts, along with the disciples, gave ("devoted," Gr. *proskartereo*, cf. 1:14) themselves to two activities primarily: the apostles' teaching and fellowship. The grammar of the Greek sentence sets these actions off as distinct from the following two activities that define fellowship. The apostles' teaching included the Jewish Scriptures as well as the teachings of Christ on earth and the revelations He gave to the apostles from heaven. This means the early Christians gave priority to the revealed Word of God.[204]

> "The steady persistence in the apostles' teaching means (a) that the Christians listened to the apostles whenever they taught and (b) that they assiduously practised what they heard."[205]

The "fellowship" (Gr. *te koinonia*) refers to sharing things with others. The presence of the article with fellowship indicates that this fellowship was distinctive. It was a fellowship within Judaism. Even though their fellowship included material goods, its primary reference must be to the ideas, attitudes, purposes, mission, and activities that the Christians shared.

Two distinctive activities marked the fellowship of the early church. The "breaking of bread" is a term that here probably included the Lord's Supper as well as eating a meal together (cf. v. 46; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16;

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[202]Thomas, pp. 86-87.

[203]Barclay, p. xiii.

[204]See Steven J. Lawson, "The Priority of Biblical Preaching: An Expository Study of Acts 2:42-47," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (April-June 2001):198-217.

[205]Barrett, 1:163.

11:23-25; Jude 12).[206] Elsewhere the phrase describes both an ordinary meal (Luke 24:30, 35; Acts 20:11; 27:35) and the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24). Probably these early Christians ate together and as part of the meal, or after it, used their common food, bread and wine, to commemorate Christ's death.[207]

In "the prayers," the believers must have praised and thanked God, as well as petitioning and interceding for His glory (cf. Matt. 6:9-13). The article with prayer probably implies formal times of prayer (cf. 1:14), though they undoubtedly prayed together at other times too.[208]

> "Just as Luke has set up in Luke-Acts the parallelism between the Spirit's work in relation to Jesus and the Spirit's work in the church, so he also sets up the parallelism between prayer in the life of Jesus and prayer in the life of the church."[209]

> "Prayer is an expression of dependence, and when the people of God really feel their need you will find them flocking together to pray. A neglected prayer meeting indicates very little recognition of one's true need."[210]

Their persistence in these activities demonstrated their felt need to learn, to encourage one another, to refocus on Christ's death, and to praise and petition God (1:1).

2:43 The feeling of "awe" that the obvious working of God in their midst inspired, continued among all the people in Jerusalem. The wonder-inspiring miracles that the apostles performed pointed to God's hand at work and kept this spirit alive. Not the least of these wonders must have been the remarkable unity and self-sacrifice of the believers. Compare 2:22, where Peter said Jesus had done "wonders and signs," with this verse, where Luke wrote that the apostles performed "wonders and signs." This shows again Jesus' continuing work through His servants following His ascension.[211]

2:44-45 These early believers had frequent contact with each other. Communal living was voluntary and temporary in the Jerusalem church (4:32, 34-35;

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[206]Kent, pp. 34-35; Blaiklock, p. 61.

[207]Neil, p. 81.

[208]See Daniel K. Falk, "Jewish Prayer Literature and the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 267-301.

[209]Longenecker, p. 290. Cf. 1:14, 24; 4:24-31; 6:4, 6; 9:40; 10:2, 4, 9, 31; 11:5; 12:5; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 22:17; 28:8.

[210]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, p. 77.

[211]For a good evaluation of the "signs and wonders movement," which teaches that believers today may perform the same kind of miraculous works Jesus and the apostles performed to authenticate the gospel message, see Ken L. Sarles, "An Appraisal of the Signs and Wonders Movement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:577 (January-March 1988):57-82; or idem, "All Power & Signs," *Kindred Spirit* 13:2 (Summer 1989):8-11.

5:4); it was not forced socialism or communism. No other New Testament church practiced communal living to the extent that the Jerusalem Christians did. The New Testament nowhere commands communal living, and Acts does not refer to it after chapter five.[212]

The believers' willingness to sell their property (real estate, cf. 5:37) and personal possessions to help others in need demonstrated true Christian love. One writer argued that Luke's portrait of the early church was true to reality and not an idealized picture.[213] Others have disputed this claim.[214] The believers were probably giving to non-believers as well as to their Christian brethren, but what Luke stressed was their sacrificial giving to one another. Besides Christian love, it may have been their hope that Jesus Christ would return very soon that motivated them to live as they did. Furthermore since Jesus had predicted judgment on Jerusalem, what was the use of keeping property?

2:46-47 This progress report summarizes the growth of the church thus far. It is one of seven in Acts, each of which concludes a major advance of the church in its worldwide mission (cf. 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31).[215]

The believers met with one another daily, enjoying the unity of the Spirit. They congregated in the temple area, probably for discussion and evangelization (cf. 3:11; 5:12). Probably these Jewish believers considered themselves the true remnant within Israel until they began to realize the distinctiveness of the church. They ate meals and observed the Lord's Supper together in homes.

> ". . . the apostolic practice of partaking the Lord's Supper every Lord's-day may have been in imitation of the priests eating the shewbread every Sabbath."[216]

In the ancient Near East, eating together reflected a common commitment to one another and deep fellowship. A meal shared together was both a symbol and a seal of friendship. In contemporary pagan religions, the meal formed the central rite of the religion, because it established communion between the worshippers and between the worshippers and their god. In

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[212]See Brian Capper, "The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 323-56; and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Cenacle—Topographical Setting for Acts 2:44-45," in ibid., pp. 303-22.

[213]Alan J. Thompson, "Unity in Acts: Idealization or Reality?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:3 (September 2008):523-42.

[214]E.g., S. S. Bartchy, "Community of Goods in Acts: Idealization or Social Reality?" in *The Future of Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, pp. 309-18).

[215]See Witherington's excursus on the summaries in Acts, pp. 157-59.

[216]Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 188. See Calvin, 4:17:44-46, who advocated frequent observance of the Lord's Supper.

Judaism, too, eating some of the offerings of worship symbolized these things, especially the peace offering.

Public church buildings were unknown until the third century. At the general time that chapter 2 records, there was no significant opposition to the Christian movement, though there was, of course, difference of opinion about Jesus. The believers enjoyed the blessing of their Jewish brethren. People trusted Christ daily, and the Lord added these to the church so that it grew steadily. Luke, in harmony with his purpose (1:1-2), stressed the Lord Jesus' work in causing the church to grow (v. 47; cf. Matt. 16:18).

> ". . . this is one of the few references in Acts to the Christians worshipping God in the sense of rendering thanks to him. The fewness of such phrases reminds us that according to the New Testament witness Christian gatherings were for instruction, fellowship, and prayer; in other words for the benefit of the people taking part; there is less mention of the worship of God, although of course this element was not absent."[217]

> "Christianity was no proletarian movement. It appealed to a broad spectrum of classes."[218]

B. The Expansion of the Church in Jerusalem 3:1—6:7

Luke recorded the events of this section to document the continued expansion of the church and to identify the means God used to produce growth. In chapters 3—5 the emphasis is on how the Christians' witness brought them into conflict with the Jewish leaders.

1. External opposition 3:1—4:31

Opposition to the Christians' message first came from external sources, particularly the leaders of Judaism.

The healing of a lame man 3:1-10

Luke had just referred to the apostles' teaching, to the awe that many of the Jews felt, to the apostles doing signs and wonders, and to the Christians meeting in the temple (2:43-44, 46). Now he narrated a specific incident that included these elements. The Gospel writers also chose a healing to illustrate the nature of Jesus' early ministry (Matt. 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16, 24; John 4:46-54). The healing of this man resulted in the

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[217]Marshall, *The Acts . . .*, pp. 85-86.

[218]David A. Fiensy, "The Composition of the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, p. 230.

leaders of the Jews changing their attitudes toward the disciples from favorable to antagonistic (4:1-4). The Christians were not able to continue to enjoy favor with all the people (2:47).

This is the first of 14 miracles in Acts (by Peter: 3:1-10; 5:1-11; 9:32-35, 36-42; by an angel: 5:17-26; 12:1-19, 20-23; and by Paul: 13:4-12; 14:8-11; 16:16-19, 20-42; 20:7-12; 28:3-6, 7-8). These include four healings (three paralytics and one involving fever), two raisings from the dead, four liberations (two from physical bondage and two involving exorcisms), three acts of judgment, and one preservation miracle. There are also 10 summary notices of miracles in Acts (2:43; 5:12, 15, 16; 6:8; 8:6-7, 13; 14:3; 19:11-12; 28:9).[219]

> "This event shows the community's compassion and how it meets needs beyond merely material concerns [cf. 14:8-11; Luke 5:17]."[220]

3:1-2 The "John" in view was undoubtedly the writer of the fourth Gospel, the brother of James. The temple was Herod's Temple, and the Jewish hour of prayer in view was 3:00 p.m., the other key prayer time for the Jews being 9:00 a.m. (cf. 2:15; 10:9, 30; Dan. 6:10; 9:21; Judith 9:1).[221] The early Jewish Christians continued to follow their former habits of worship in Jerusalem. The lame man had been in his condition for over 40 years (4:22). Furthermore he had to be carried by others. His was a "hopeless case."

The term "Beautiful Gate" is descriptive rather than specific. We do not know exactly which of the three main entrances into the temple from the east Luke referred to.[222] He could have meant the Shushan (or Golden) Gate that admitted people into the Court of the Gentiles from the outside world.[223] He could have meant the Corinthian (or Eastern) Gate that led from the Court of the Gentiles into the Women's Court.[224] Another possibility is that it was the Nicanor Gate that led from the Women's Court into the Court of Israel.[225] Josephus' descriptions of the temple do not solve the problem, since he described both of these latter gates as very impressive.[226] The last two of the above options appear more probable than the first.

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[219]Bock, *Acts*, p. 157.

[220]Ibid., p. 158.

[221]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 14:4:3.

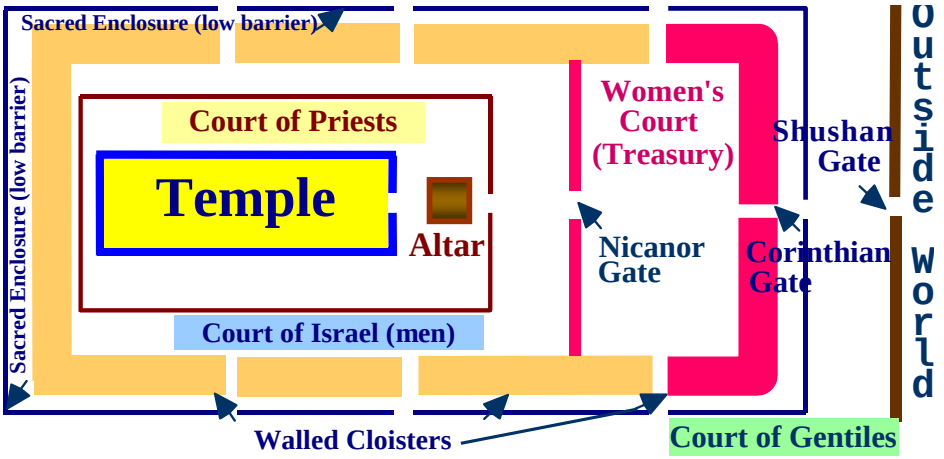
[222]See Barrett, pp. 179-80, for a brief discussion of the problem, or Martin Hengel, "The Geography of Palestine in Acts," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinain Setting*, pp. 37-41, for a long discussion of the alternatives.

[223]Jack Finegan, *The Archaelolgy of the New Testament*, pp. 129-30.

[224]Longenecker, p. 294; Kent, p. 37; Wiersbe, 1:412; Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1:245; idem, *The Temple*, p. 47; *The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1820.

[225]Witherington, p. 174. See *Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Temple," by W. T. Davies, 4:713-14.

[226]Josephus, *Antiquities* . . ., 15:11:5-7; idem, *The Wars* . . ., 5:5:3.



3:3-6

> "In the East it was the custom for beggars to sit begging at the entrance to a temple or a shrine. Such a place was, and still is, considered the best of all stances because, when people are on their way to worship God, they are disposed to be generous to their fellow men."[227]

Peter told the beggar to look at him and John because Peter needed his full attention. Peter then gave him a gift far better than the one he expected to receive. This is typical of how God deals with needy people. When we give people the gospel, we give them God's best gift.

> "In effect, Peter has given him a new life, which is precisely what the miracles represent, as Peter's subsequent speech will show."[228]

> ". . . the Church's opportunity is lame humanity, lame from its birth."[229]

The name of a person represented that person. When Peter healed this man in the name of Jesus, he was saying that it was Jesus who was ultimately responsible for the healing, not Peter. Peter healed him in the power of and with the authority of Jesus of Nazareth (cf. v. 16).

This was the first of three crippled people that Luke recorded the apostles healing in Acts (9:32-34; 14:8-10; cf. John 5; 9).

The gift of healing as it existed in the early church was quite different from the so-called gift of healing some claim to possess today. Examples of people using this gift in the New Testament seem to indicate that the

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[227]Barclay, p. 28.
[228]Bock, *Acts*, p. 161.
[229]Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 82.

person with this gift could heal anyone, subject to God's will (cf. Matt. 10:1, 8; Acts 28:8-9; et al.). The sick person's belief in Jesus Christ and in God's ability to heal him or her also seems to be a factor (v. 16; cf. Mark 6:5-6). There is a similar account of Paul healing a lame man in Lystra, in 14:8-10, where Luke said the man's faith was crucial. Jesus Christ gave this gift to the early church to convince people that He is God, and that the gospel the Christians preached had divine authority. He gave it for the benefit of Jewish observers primarily (1 Cor. 1:22).

> "The New Testament gift of healing is a specific gift to an individual enabling him to heal. It is not to be confused with the healing performed by God in answer to prayer.
>
> "There is little correspondence between modern-day charismatic 'healings' and the healings recorded in the New Testament. The differences are so vast that many of today's healers are careful to point out that they do not have the gift of healing, but are merely those to whom God often responds with healing."[230]

Of course, many other modern healers do claim that their healings are the same as what the New Testament records.

3:7-8 Peter evidently did not touch the lame man to heal him ("seized him by the right hand"), as much as to help him to his feet. God healed this man completely and instantaneously. The healed beggar began to test the capability of his strengthened limbs immediately. He evidently followed Peter and John into whatever part of the temple they were entering ("entered the temple with them"), "walking and leaping" and "praising God."

3:9-10 Almost everyone in Jerusalem would have known this beggar, since he had sat for so long at an entrance to the temple. Jesus may have passed this man many times as He walked in and out of the temple. There would have been no doubt about the genuineness of his healing. Peter performed this sign (a miracle with significance), just like Jesus had healed lame people before His crucifixion. By doing it in Jesus' name, it would have been evident to all present that the power of Jesus was now at work through His apostles. Isaiah had predicted that in Israel's future "the lame will leap like a deer" (Isa. 35:6). The healing of this lame man, as well as the healing of other lame people in the Gospels and Acts, indicated to the Jews present that the Messiah had come. Peter claimed that Jesus was *that* Messiah!

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[230]Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:580 (October-December 1988):376, 378.

> ". . . the similarity between Jesus' healing of the paralytic and Peter's healing of the lame man lies less in the healing itself than in the function of these scenes in the larger narrative. In both cases the healing becomes the occasion for a fundamental claim about Jesus' saving power, emphasizing its importance and general scope ('on earth,' Luke 5:24; 'under heaven,' Acts 4:12). In both cases the healing leads to proclamation of a saving power that goes beyond physical healing. In both cases the claim is made in the face of new opposition and is directly related to the mission announced in the Scripture quotation in the inaugural speech."[231]

This incident and the other miracles recorded in Acts have led readers of this book to wonder if God is still working miracles today. He is. God can and does perform miracles whenever and wherever He chooses. Regeneration is one of God's greatest miracles. Perhaps a better question would be, does God still give the gift of working miracles to believers today as He gave this ability to Peter, Paul, and other first-century apostles? Significantly, each of the three periods in biblical history, when God manifested this gift dramatically to selected servants, was a time when God was giving new revelation through prophets. These three periods are the times of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and the apostles. However, God has performed miracles throughout history. Each period of miraculous activity was brief, spanning no more than two generations of people. When the miraculous gift was present not even those who had it healed everyone who could have benefited from it (e.g., Mark 6:5-6; Phil. 2:27; 2 Tim. 4:20; et al.).

Peter's address in Solomon's colonnade 3:11-26

As is often true in Acts, an event led to an explanation (cf. ch. 2).

> "It seems strange, at first glance, that in his narrative Luke would place two such similar sermons of Peter so close together. But his putting the Pentecost sermon in the introductory section of Acts was evidently meant to be a kind of paradigm of early apostolic preaching—a paradigm Luke seems to have polished for greater literary effectiveness. As for the Colonnade sermon, Luke seems to have included it as an example of how the early congregation in Jerusalem proclaimed the message of Jesus to the people of Israel as a whole."[232]

> "In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter had to refute the accusation that the believers were drunk. In this sermon, he had to refute the notion that he and John had healed the man by their own power [cf. 14:8-18]."[233]

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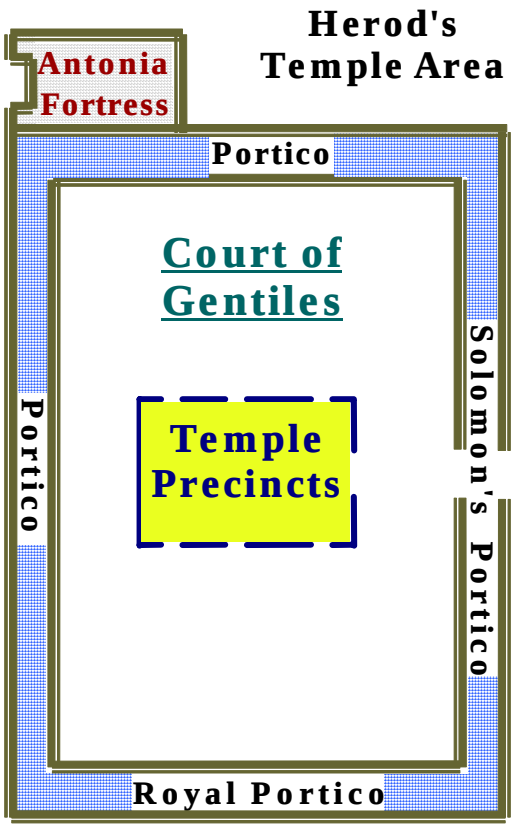
[231]Tannehill, 2:51-52.
[232]Longenecker, p. 296.
[233]Wiersbe, 1:412.

The setting of the sermon 3:11



Peter and John, with the healed lame man clinging to them, moved into the "portico" of the temple, and a large crowed, amazed by the healing, followed them (cf. 21:30). A covered porch supported by a series of columns surrounded the outer temple courtyard, the Court of the Gentiles. The eastern portion of this porch bore the name Solomon's portico "because it was built on a remnant of the foundations of the ancient temple."[234] Peter addressed the curious throng from this convenient shaded area, where Jesus had formerly taught (John 10:23).

Peter's proclamation 3:12-16

"In his former address Peter had testified to the power and presence of the Spirit of God at work in a new way in the lives of men through Jesus. Now he proclaims the power and authority of the name of Jesus by which his disciples are enabled to continue his ministry on earth. In both speeches there is a call for repentance for the crime of crucifying the Messiah, but here Peter stresses the role of Jesus as the Suffering Servant of God and as the new Moses who must be obeyed."[235]

3:12-15 Luke recorded seven of Peter's addresses in Acts (1:16-22; 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12: 10:34-43; 11:4-17; 15:7-11).[236] It is noteworthy that in these sermons, Peter did not discuss abstract doctrines or reason about profound theological problems. He presented the person and work of Christ in simple terms.

Peter spoke to his audience as a fellow Jew. First, he denied that it was the power or good character of himself, or John, that was responsible for the healing. Rather it was the God of the patriarchs, the God of their fathers, who was responsible. He had performed this miracle through the apostles to glorify His Servant Jesus (cf. 2:22). It was God's Servant, Jesus, whom Peter's hearers had disowned and put to death—preferring a murderer, Barabbas, to Him.

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[234]Robertson, 3:42.

[235]Neil, p. 84.

[236]For the rhetorical forms of the speeches in Acts, see Witherington's commentary.

Peter called Jesus the Servant (Gr. *paida*) of the Lord, the subject of messianic prophecy (Isa. 42:1; 49:6-7; 52:13; 53:11; cf. Mark 10:45); the Holy One, a title of Messiah (Ps. 16:10; Isa. 31:1; cf. Mark 1:24; 1 John 2:20); the Righteous One (Isa. 53:11; Zech. 9:9; cf. 1 John 2:1); and the Prince (Author) of Life (Ps. 16; cf. John 1:1-18; Col. 1:14-20; Heb. 1:2-3; 2:10; 12:2).

Peter charged these Jews with four things: First, handing Jesus over to be killed. He then pointed out three inconsistencies in the Jews' treatment of Jesus and contrasted their treatment of Him with God's. They had condemned Him when Pilate was about to release Him (v. 13). They rejected the Holy and Righteous One out of preference for a murderer, Barabbas (v. 14; Luke 23:18-19). Furthermore they executed the Author of Life whom God raised from the dead, of which the apostles were witnesses (v. 15). "Prince" or (better here) "Author of Life" presents Jesus as the resurrected Messiah who gives life that overcomes death.[237]

3:16 The proclamation portion of Peter's sermon expounds "the name of Jesus" (cf. v. 6). The "name" of Jesus summarizes everything about Him here as elsewhere in Scripture. Peter attributed the beggar's healing to the power of Jesus and to the man's trust in what he knew about Jesus. Jesus had given him faith. If the beggar had had no confidence in the deity and divine power of Jesus, he would not have responded to Peter's invitation to walk (v. 6). His response demonstrated his faith. Undoubtedly this man had previously seen and heard Jesus when He was in the temple. Jesus, now unseen but present in Peter, had given him "perfect health."

> "The Christian knows that so long as he thinks of what *I* can do and what *I* can be, there can be nothing but failure and frustration and fear; but when he thinks of 'not I, but Christ in me' there can be nothing but peace and power."[238]

Peter's exhortation 3:17-26

3:17-18 If Peter's charges against his hearers were harsh (vv. 13-15), his concession that they "acted out of (in) ignorance" was tender. He meant that they did not realize the great mistake they had made. Peter undoubtedly hoped that his gentle approach would win a reversal of his hearers' attitude.

> "Israel's situation was something like that of the 'manslayer' who killed his neighbor without prior malicious intent, and fled to the nearest city of refuge (Num. 35:9-34)."[239]

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[237]Neil, p. 85.
[238]Barclay, p. 31.
[239]Wiersbe, 1:413.

Jesus did not demonstrate His deity as convincingly as He might have during His earthly ministry. Consequently the reaction of unbelief, that many rulers as well as common Israelites demonstrated, was partially due to their ignorance. They were also ignorant of the fact that Jesus fulfilled many messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. Peter hastened to point out that Jesus' sufferings harmonized with those predicted of the Messiah by Israel's prophets. It was the prophets' revelations about the death of Messiah that the Jews in Peter's day, including Jesus' own disciples, had difficulty understanding.

> "Doubtless many in Peter's Jewish audience would have been agreeable to much of the preceding statement. They would not have been averse to accepting the idea of a genuine miracle, nor were they unfamiliar with Jesus' reputation as a miracle worker. The problem they faced was identifying Jesus as their conquering Messiah in the light of the crucifixion."[240]

3:19-21 If Jesus was the Messiah, where was the messianic kingdom? Peter proceeded to explain from Scripture that the Jews needed to accept their Messiah before the messianic kingdom would begin. He again called on his hearers to repent, in view of what he had pointed out (cf. 2:38). He also invited them to "return" to a proper relationship to God, which was possible only by accepting Jesus. The result would be forgiveness of their sins. Note that there is no reference to baptism as being essential to either repentance or forgiveness in this verse (cf. 2:38).

What is repentance, and what place does it have in salvation? The Greek noun translated "repentance" (*metanoia*) literally means "after mind," as in afterthought, or change of mind. Concerning salvation, it means to think differently about sin, oneself, and the Savior than one used to think. Peter's hearers had thought Jesus was not the Messiah. Now they needed to change their minds and believe He is the Messiah.

> "True repentance is admitting that what God says is true, and because it is true, to change our mind about our sins and about the Saviour."[241]

The Greek verb *metanoeo*, translated "repent," does not mean to be sorry for sin or to turn from sin. These are the *results* or fruits of repentance.

> "The conclusive evidence that repentance does not mean to be sorry for sin or to turn from sin is this: in the Old Testament, *God* repents. In the King James Version, the

[240]Kent, p. 41. Cf. Blaiklock, p. 63.
[241]Wiersbe, 1:413.

> word *repent* occurs forty-six times in the Old Testament. Thirty-seven of these times, God is the one repenting (or not repenting). If repentance meant sorrow for *sin*, God would be a sinner."[242]

People can repent concerning many things, not just sin, as the Scriptures use this term. They can change their minds about God (Acts 20:21), Christ (Acts 2:37-38), and works (Heb. 6:1; Rev. 9:20; 16:11), as well as sin (Acts 8:22; Rev. 9:21). This shows that in biblical usage, repentance means essentially *a change of mind*.

Repentance and faith are not two steps in salvation, but one step looked at from two perspectives. Appeals to repent do not contradict the numerous promises that faith is all that is necessary for salvation (e.g., John 1:12; 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 20:30-31; Rom. 4; et al.). The faith that saves includes repentance (a change of mind). One changes from unbelief to belief (Acts 11:17-18). Sometimes the New Testament writers used the two terms, "repent and believe," together (e.g., Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21; Heb. 6:1). Sometimes they used repentance alone as the sole requirement for salvation (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20; 2 Pet. 3:9). Nonetheless whether one term or both occur, they are as inseparable as the two sides of a coin.

> ". . . true repentance never exists except in conjunction with faith, while, on the other hand, wherever there is true faith, there is also real repentance."[243]

> "Biblical repentance may be described thus: the sinner has been trusting in himself for salvation, his back turned upon Christ, who is despised and rejected. Repent! About face! The sinner now despises and rejects himself, and places all confidence and trust in Christ. Sorrow for sin comes later, as the Christian grows in appreciation of the holiness of God, and the sinfulness of sin."[244]

> "We believe that the new birth of the believer comes only through faith in Christ and that repentance is a vital part of believing, and is in no way, in itself, a separate and independent condition of salvation; nor are any other acts, such as confession, baptism, prayer, or faithful service, to be added to believing as a condition of salvation."[245]

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[242]G. Michael Cocoris, *Evangelism: A Biblical Approach*, pp. 68-69. See especially his chapter "What is Repentance?"

[243]Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 487. See also L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:373.

[244]Donald G. Barnhouse, *God's River*, p. 202. See also Robert N. Wilkin, "Repentance and Salvation: A Key Gospel Issue," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 3:6 (June-July 1988):3.

[245]*Doctrinal Statement of Dallas Theological Seminary*, Article VII: "Salvation Only Through Christ."

> "Therefore, in a word, I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God that had been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam's transgression."[246]

The phrase "times of refreshing" (v. 19) seems to refer to the blessings connected with the day of the Lord, particularly the Millennium, in view of how Peter described them in verses 20-21.[247] They connect with the second coming of Messiah, the "period" of restoration of all things. They are the subjects of Old Testament prophecy. Zechariah predicted that the Jews would one day accept Messiah whom they had formerly rejected (Zech. 12:10-14; cf. Deut. 30:1-3; Jer. 15:19; 16:15; 24:6; 50:19; Ezek. 16:55; Hos. 11:11; Rom. 11:25-27). Peter urged them to do that now.

Some dispensational expositors believe that if the Jews had repented as a nation, in response to Peter's exhortation, Christ might have returned and set up His kingdom.

There seems to be nothing in scriptural prophecy that would have made this impossible. Peter, therefore, may have been calling for both individual repentance and national repentance. The result of the former was individual forgiveness and spiritual salvation. The result of the latter would have been national forgiveness and physical deliverance from Rome, and the inauguration of the messianic (millennial) kingdom.

> "Was Peter saying here that if Israel repented, God's kingdom would have come to earth? This must be answered in the affirmative for several reasons: (1) The word restore (3:21) is related to the word 'restore' in 1:6. In 3:21 it is in its noun form (*apokatastaseos*), and in 1:6 it is a verb (*apokathistaneis*). Both occurrences anticipate the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (cf. Matt. 17:11; Mark 9:12). (2) The concept of restoration parallels regeneration when it is used of the kingdom (cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:20-22). (3) The purpose clauses are different in Acts 3:19 and 20. In verse 19 a so that translates *pros to* (some mss. have *eis to*) with the infinitive [in the NIV]. This points to a near purpose. The two occurrences of that in verses 19b and 20 are translations of a different construction (*hopos* with subjunctive verbs), and refer to more remote purposes. Thus repentance would result in forgiveness of sins, the near purpose (v. 19a). Then if Israel

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[246]Calvin, 3:3:9. For an analysis of the view of H. A. Ironside concerning repentance, see Bob Wilkin, "Did H. A. Ironside Teach Committment Salvation?" *Grace Evangelical Society News* 4:6 (June 1989):1, 3. Ironside did not teach that repentance is a separate step in salvation.

[247]See Bock, "Evidence from . . .," p. 189.

as a whole would repent, a second more remote goal, the coming of the kingdom (times of refreshing at the second coming of Christ) would be fulfilled. (4) The sending of the Christ, that is, Messiah (v. 20) meant the coming of the kingdom. (5) The Old Testament 'foretold these days' (v. 24; cf. v. 21). The Old Testament prophets did not predict the church; to them it was a mystery (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:1-6). But the prophets often spoke of the messianic golden age, that is, the Millennium.

"This offer of salvation and of the Millennium pointed both to God's graciousness and to Israel's unbelief. On the one hand God was giving the Jews an opportunity to repent after the sign of Christ's resurrection. They had refused the 'pre-Cross' Jesus; now they were being offered a post-Resurrection Messiah. On the other hand Peter's words underscore Israel's rejection. They had been given the sign of Jonah but still they refused to believe (cf. Luke 16:31). In a real sense this message confirmed Israel's unbelief.

"Some Bible scholars oppose the view that the kingdom was offered by Peter. They do so on the basis of several objections: (1) Since God knew Israel would reject the offer, it was not a legitimate offer. But it was as genuine as the presentation of the gospel to any nonelect person. (2) This puts kingdom truth in the Church Age. However, church truth is found before the church began at Pentecost (cf. Matt. 16:18; 18:17; John 10:16; 14:20). (3) This view leads to ultradispensationalism. But this is not a necessary consequence if this offer is seen as *a transition within the Church Age*. Acts must be seen as a hinge book, a transition work bridging the work of Christ on earth with His work through the church on earth.

"In conclusion, Acts 3:17-21 shows that Israel's repentance was to have had two purposes: (1) for *individual* Israelites there was forgiveness of sins, and (2) for *Israel as a nation* her Messiah would return to reign."[248]

"Just as in the period of the Gospels the Kingdom had been offered to the nation of Israel, even so during the history of Acts the Kingdom was again offered to Israel. In both periods the offer was authenticated by the same 'signs and

[248]Toussaint, "Acts," pp. 361-62. Bold type omitted. See also idem, "The Contingency . . .," pp. 228-30; and idem and Jay A. Quine, "No, Not Yet: The Contingency of God's Promised Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:654 (April-June 2007):141-45.

> wonders' which, according to the prophets, belonged properly to such an offer. And its establishment, in both periods, was conditioned upon repentance and acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah on the part of the nation. Furthermore, in both periods there was Jewish opposition which moved to a crisis of rejection."[249]

Other dispensational interpreters believe that this was not a reoffer of the kingdom to Israel.

> "Here Peter was *not* reoffering the kingdom to the nation, nor was he telling them that if the nation repented the kingdom would be instituted at that time. Rather he was telling the nation—the same nation that had committed the sin for which there is no forgiveness [cf. Matt. 12:22-37]—what they must do as a nation in order to enter into the benefits of the kingdom that had been covenanted and promised to them. In a word, they must 'repent.' . . .
>
> "The time 'for God to restore everything,' to which Peter refers in Acts 3:21, is the same restoration referred to in 1:6. Therefore, this statement does not constitute a reoffer of the kingdom, since the necessary prerequisites are not at hand. Jesus Christ is not personally present and offering Himself to the nation. Only He could make a genuine offer of the kingdom. . . .
>
> ". . . Peter was not offering the kingdom to Israel, nor was he stating that the kingdom had already been instituted; instead he was stating the conditions by which the nation will eventually enter into their covenanted blessings."[250]

Some individual Jews did repent, but the nation as a whole did not in response to Peter's exhortation (4:1-4).[251]

> "Luke's manner of representing the nationalistic hopes of the Jewish people implies that he himself believed that there would be a future, national restoration. If Luke really believed that there would not be a restoration, he has certainly gone out of his way to give the contrary impression."[252]

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[249]McClain, p. 429.

[250]Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom* . . ., pp. 275, 276. See also McLean, p. 225.

[251]See *The New Scofield* . . ., p. 1166.

[252]Larry R. Helyer, "Luke and the Restoration of Israel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:3 (September 1993):329. See also J. Randall Price, "Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 137.

> "In his first sermon S. Peter had explained the Lord's absence by the necessity for the outpouring of the Spirit: now he answers the difficulty about the Messianic kingdom by unfolding its true nature."[253]

3:22-23 Peter proceeded to quote from the first writing prophet to confirm what he had just stated. Moses had predicted that God would provide prophets, similar to himself, through whom He would make His will known to His people (Deut. 18:15-19; cf. Lev. 23:29). As time passed, the Jews saw that this prophecy referred to one Prophet in particular who would appear and who would be like Moses in other respects as well.[254] He would deliver and judge His people. Thus believers in Peter's day regarded this passage as messianic prophecy (cf. John 1:21b, 25; 7:40). Peter, by quoting this prophecy, affirmed that Jesus was the Messiah, then urged his readers to accept Him or face destruction (v. 23). Destruction followed in A.D. 70. Belief in Moses should have led to belief in Jesus, and belief in Jesus would have made Peter's hearers obedient to Moses.

> "The particular interest of this sermon lies in the way in which it gives further teaching about the person of Jesus, describing him as God's servant, the Holy and Righteous One, the Author of life and the prophet like Moses. This indicates that a considerable amount of thinking about Jesus, based on study of the Old Testament, was taking place [in Jerusalem following Jesus' death and resurrection]."[255]

3:24 "Samuel" announced that David would replace Saul (1 Sam. 13:14; 15:28; 28:17; cf. 1 Sam. 16:13), but we have no record that he ever gave an explicitly messianic prophecy. Peter seems to have meant that in announcing David's reign, Samuel was also anticipating Messiah's reign. The other prophets whom Peter apparently had in mind were all those who spoke of David's continuing dynastic rule. Peter's statement in this verse, by the way, shows that Joshua did not fulfill Moses' prophecy about the coming prophet.

3:25-26 Peter's hearers were "the sons of the prophets" in that they were the descendants of those people, not prophets themselves. They were "sons . . . of the covenant" God made with Abraham because they were Abraham's physical descendants. They were part of Abraham's physical seed through whom God purposed to bring blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4). Their acceptance of God's Messiah was

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[253]Rackham, p. 49.
[254]Darrell L. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology*, pp. 191-94.
[255]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 89.

> essential to their fulfilling all of God's purposes through them and in them. God desired to bless all people, but He purposed to bless humanity by first blessing the Jews. It was to bless the Jews *first*, and after that all humanity, that God had called Jesus forth as a Prophet. "For you first" (v. 26, Gr. *hymin proton*) reflects the emphatic position of this phrase in the Greek text, which stresses the primacy of Jewish blessing.
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> It seems that in view of the context, the phrase "raised up" (v. 26) refers to God raising up Jesus as a prophet like Moses (v. 22). He probably did not mean that God raised Him up from the grave by resurrection, though obviously God did that too.
>
> The gospel went to the Jews before it went to the Gentiles (cf. Matt. 10:5-6; Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16) because the establishment of Christ's earthly kingdom depends on Israel's acceptance of her Messiah (Matt. 23:39; Rom. 11:26). Before Christ can reign on the earth, Israel must repent (Zech. 12:10-14).
>
> > ". . . as the original offer of the Kingdom by the King was made to Israel *first* during the 'days of his flesh,' so now again, having been raised from the dead, He is offered 'first' to the chosen nation for the purpose of turning them away from their iniquities (Acts 3:25-26)."[256]

> "This speech is one of the most christologically rich addresses in Acts, as Jesus is the servant, the Holy and Righteous One, the Author of life, the prophet like Moses, the Christ, and the seed of Abraham."[257]

Should modern Christians evangelize Jews before they evangelize Gentiles? We are not commanded to do so. The Great Commission passages make no Jew-Gentile distinction regarding who should get the gospel first. Evangelizing Jews first was the practice of the early church, but we are not commanded to do so. How can we tell whether we should practice a New Testament practice? We should ask ourselves: "Is it commanded, and is the practice trans-cultural (not limited to one particular situation)?"

By the way, there are several meanings of the word "Jew," and it is helpful to distinguish them. Biological or *ethnic Jews* are the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Some were "saved" in Old Testament times, but some were not. Today, most ethnic Jews are unbelievers in Jesus: non-Christians. *Religious Jews* are people who have practiced the religion of Israel in one of its various forms throughout history. Some Gentiles became adherents to Judaism as a faith (cf. Ruth). Some of these were "saved," and others were not. Today, a person may follow the religion of Judaism without being an ethnic Jew, and Christian ethnic Jews do not normally adhere to Judaiam. They adhere to Christianity. *"Saved" Jews* are ethnic Jews who believe in God like Abraham did, trust

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[256]McClain, p. 405.
[257]Bock, *Acts*, p. 165.

in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. Today, many "saved" Jews refer to themselves as Messianic or completed Jews.

In Old Testament times, “Jew” was a term that non-Jews used to describe the Israelites. It comes from the name “Judah.” The Israelites typically referred to themselves as Israelites.

When we read about the Israelites in the New Testament, we have to decide who is in view. Dispensationalists believe that “Israel” always refers to ethnic Jews in the New Testament, either "saved" or "unsaved," as is true in the Old Testament. Sometimes "saved" Jews are in view (e.g., Gal. 6:16), but they are "saved" ethnic Jews. Non-dispensationalists believe that in the New Testament, "Israel" sometimes refers to the new people of God: Christians, including both ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles.

The arrest of Peter and John 4:1-4

In chapters 4—7 there is a series of similar confrontations, with each one building up to the crisis of Stephen's death and the persecution that followed. The first four verses of chapter 4 conclude the incident recorded in chapter 3 ("As they were speaking," v. 1), and they introduce what follows in 4:5-31.

4:1 Evidently John spoke to the people as did Peter ("they"). Three separate though related (5:17) individuals and groups objected to Peter and John addressing the people as they did. Jesus had also encountered opposition from leaders who questioned His authority when He taught in the temple (Mark 11:27-28; Luke 20:1-2). The captain (Gr. *strategos*) of the temple guard was the commanding officer of the temple police force. The Talmud referred to this officer as the Sagan. This individual was second in command under the high priest.[258] He apparently feared that this already excited throng of hearers might get out of control. The Sadducees were Levitical priests who claimed to represent ancient orthodoxy. They opposed any developments in biblical law, and they denied the doctrine of bodily resurrection (23:8)—and therefore disagreed with Peter's teaching on that subject (cf. John 12:10). They believed that the messianic age had begun with the Maccabean heroes (168-134 B.C.) and continued under the Sadducees' supervision, so they rejected Peter's identification of Jesus as the Messiah.[259]

> "For them the Messiah was an ideal, not a person, and the Messianic Age was a process, not a cataclysmic or even datable event. Furthermore, as political rulers and dominant landlords, to whom a grateful nation had turned over all political and economic powers during the time of the Maccabean supremacy, for entirely practical reasons they

[258]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 20:6:1; 20:9:3; idem, *The Wars . . .*, 2:17:1; 6:5:3).

[259]See Steve Mason, "Chief Priests, Sadducees, Pharisees and Sanhedrin in Acts," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 147-56.

> stressed cooperation with Rome and maintenance of the status quo. Most of the priests were of Sadducean persuasion; the temple police force was composed entirely of Levites; the captain of the temple guard was always a high-caste Sadducee, and so were each of the high priests."[260]

4:2 Two things disturbed these leaders. First, the apostles were teaching the people. This was the Sadducees' function, since they were the recognized leaders of the Jews. Second, the apostles were teaching that Jesus had risen from the dead and that there was a resurrection from the dead.

> ". . . a woman called and asked me to serve on a committee that was trying to clean up downtown Los Angeles. I agreed it needed cleaning up, but I told her that I could not serve on the committee. She was amazed. 'Aren't you a minister?' she asked. 'Aren't you interested in cleaning up Los Angeles?' I answered, 'I will not serve on your committee because I don't think you are going about it in the right way.' Then I told her what the late Dr. Bob Shuler had told me years ago. He said, 'We are called to fish in the fish pond, not to clean up the fish pond.' This old world is a place to fish. Jesus said He would make us fishers of men, and the world is the place to fish. We are not called upon to clean up the fish pond. We need to catch the fish and get the fish cleaned up.
>
> "I have found that the biggest enemies of the preaching of the gospel are not the liquor folk. The gangsters have never bothered me. Do you know where I had my trouble as a preacher? It was with the so-called religious leaders, the liberals, those who claimed to be born again. They actually became enemies of the preaching of the gospel. It was amazing to me to find out how many of them wanted to destroy my radio ministry."[261]

Having worked with Dr. McGee in his church, I know that he sought to help people physically as well as spiritually. His point here was that spiritual help is more important than physical help.

4:3 It was too late in the day to begin a hearing to examine Peter and John formally, though this had not stopped the Sanhedrin from abusing Jesus (cf. Luke 22:63-66). Therefore the temple officials arrested the two and put them in jail, probably the Antonia Fortress. Thus the Sadducees became the first opponents of Christianity (cf. 2:47).

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[260]Longenecker, p. 301.
[261]McGee, 4:526.

> "Some of the most glorious traditions in Jewish history were connected with this castle, for there had been the ancient 'armoury of David,' the palace of Hezekiah and of Nehemiah, and the fortress of the Maccabees."[262]

4:4 *Belief* was the key factor in many more becoming Christians (cf. 3:19), not believing plus being baptized (2:38). Note that Luke simply wrote that they "believed" the message they had heard. The total number of male converts in Jerusalem now reached 5,000 (cf. 1:15; 2:41) because of Peter's message. The Greek word *andron* specifies males rather than people. Normally most of the people in the temple courtyard who would have witnessed these events would have been males. Estimates of Jerusalem's total population at the time range from 25,000 to 250,000, though the lower figure seems more probable.[263] One writer argued for 60,000 or more inhabitants.[264] Another believed 100,000 to 120,000 people inhabited the city in the forties.[265] Obviously there is a wide range of speculation.

Peter's explanation before the Sanhedrin 4:5-12

4:5 The "Council" (v. 15) before which soldiers brought Peter and John the next day was the Sanhedrin, which was the senate and supreme court of Israel. It consisted of the high priest, who served as its presiding officer, and 70 other men. Its aristocratic members, the majority, were Sadducees, and its lay leaders were Pharisees. Most of the experts in the Jewish law were Pharisees who were also nationalistic, but the Sadducees supported Rome. The Sadducees were more conservative, though rationalistic theologically, and the Pharisees were more liberal since they accepted oral traditions as authoritative in addition to the Old Testament.

The Sanhedrin normally held its meetings, including the one described in this chapter, in a hall adjoining the southwest part of the temple courtyard, the Chamber of Hewn Stone.[266] "Rulers" were priests who represented the 24 priestly courses (cf. 23:5; Matt. 16:21), "elders" were tribal and influential family heads of the people, and "scribes" were teachers of the law. Individuals from these three groups made up this body (cf. Luke 9:22). The rulers and elders were mainly Sadducees, while most of the scribes were Pharisees.

> "The Sanhedrin was acting within its jurisdiction when it convened to examine Peter and John. The Mosaic Law

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[262]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 32.

[263]Marshall, *The Acts . . .*, pp. 98-99.

[264]Fiensy, p. 214.

[265]Wolfgang Reinhardt, "The Population Size of Jerusalem and the Numerical Growth of the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, p. 263.

[266]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 5:4:2.

> specified that whenever someone performed a miracle and used it as the basis for teaching, he was to be examined, and if the teaching were used to lead men away from the God of their fathers, the nation was responsible to stone him (Deut. 13:1-5). On the other hand, if his message was doctrinally sound, the miracle-worker was to be accepted as coming with a message from God."[267]

This is the first of four times some of Jesus' followers stood before the Sanhedrin according to Acts. The others were Peter and the apostles (5:27), Stephen (6:12), and Paul (22:30).

4:6 "Annas," whom Luke called the high priest here (v. 6), was technically not the high priest at this time. He had served as high priest from A.D. 6 to 15, but from A.D. 18 on, his son-in-law Caiaphas had been the high priest. However, Annas continued to exert great influence (cf. Luke 3:2; John 18:13-24). He was so powerful that Luke could refer to him as "the high priest," even though he was only the power behind the office (cf. Luke 3:2; John 18:13; Acts 7:1). During this time, former high priests seem to have kept their titles and membership in the Sanhedrin.[268] At this time in Israel's history, the Roman governor of Palestine appointed the high priest. "John" may refer to Jonathan, a son of Annas who succeeded Caiaphas as high priest in A.D. 36. Luke did not mention "Alexander" elsewhere, and he is presently unknown.

THE HIGH PRIESTS OF ISRAEL (ca. A.D. 6-66)
ANNAS (ca. A.D. 6-15): the co-high priest with Caiaphas during Jesus' trial (Luke 3:2; John 18:13, 24), and the high priest who, with Caiaphas, tried Peter and John (Acts 4:6)
Eleazar (ca. A.D. 16-17): the son of Annas
CAIAPHAS (ca. A.D. 18-36): the son-in-law of Annas, the high priest during Jesus' earthly ministry (Luke 3:2; Matt. 26:3, 57; John 11:49-50), and the high priest who with Annas tried Peter and John (Acts 4:6)
Jonathan (ca. A.D. 36-37): the son of Annas, and possibly the "John" of Acts 4:6
Theophilus (ca. A.D. 37-41): the son of Annas
Matthias (ca. A.D. 42): the son of Annas
ANANIAS (ca. A.D. 47-59): tried Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea (Acts 23:1-10; 24:1-23)
Annas (ca. A.D. 61): the son of Annas
Matthias (ca. A.D. 65-66): the son of Theophilus, grandson of Annas

[267]Kent, pp. 45-46.
[268]Jeremias, p. 157.

4:7 The healed lame man was also present (v. 14), though we do not know if he had been imprisoned with Peter and John, or was simply brought in for the hearing. The Sanhedrin wanted to know by what authority—or in whose "name" (under whose jurisdiction)—Peter and John (plural "you") had behaved as they had.

4:8 Jesus had promised that when the disciples stood before hostile adversaries, God would give them the words to speak (Luke 21:12-15). This special filling appears to be in view in this verse. Again, filling reflects control by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit filled (controlled) Peter as he served as a witness in obedience to Jesus (1:8). The aorist passive participle *plestheis* ("filled") indicates an act performed on Peter rather than a continuing state. Peter addressed all the Sanhedrin members as "rulers and elders" of the Jews.

4:9-10 Peter referred to the "trial" as a preliminary hearing (Gr. *anakrinomai*), which it was. Jewish law required that people had to be informed of the consequences of their crime before being punished for it.[269] Peter's answer was straightforward and plain: "the power (name) of Jesus Christ" had benefited a sick man by healing him. This was good news not only for the Sanhedrin but for all the people of Israel. Peter used a Greek word that means saved (*sothenai*), which some English translators have rendered "made well." His use of this word anticipates the use of the same word in verse 12, where it has a broader meaning. Peter's intent was obviously to prick the consciences of these men, too (cf. 2:23, 36; 3:13-15). He laid the guilt for Jesus' death at their feet, and gave witness that God had raised Him from the dead. The Sanhedrin did not now or at any later time attempt to deny the fact that Jesus had arisen.

4:11 Peter showed that this teaching did not lead the people away from God, but rather fulfilled something that God had predicted. In quoting Psalm 118:22, Peter applied to Jesus Christ what David had said about the nation of Israel (cf. Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17). Israel's leaders had "rejected" Jesus as an unacceptable Messiah ("stone which was rejected"), but He would prove to be the most important part of what God was building.

Some scholars believe Peter meant that Jesus was the cornerstone ("chief corner stone"), the foundation of what God was building (cf. Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:7). Others believe he meant the "capstone," the final piece of what God was building (cf. Dan. 2:34-35).[270] If the former interpretation is correct, Peter was probably anticipating the church as a new creation of God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-8). In the latter view, he was viewing the Messiah as

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[269]Joachim Jeremias, "Untersuchungen zum Quellenproblem der Apostelgeschichte," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschrift* 36 (1937):208-13.

[270]E.g., Longenecker, pp. 304-5.

the long-expected completion of the house of David. Since Peter was addressing Israel's rulers, I think he probably meant that Jesus was the capstone, their Messiah. These rulers, the builders of Israel, had rejected their Messiah.

4:12 The verses immediately following Psalm 118:22 in the Book of Psalms refer to Messiah's national deliverance of Israel. It seems that Peter was referring to both national deliverance and personal salvation in this address, as he had in the previous one. The former application would have been especially appropriate in view of his audience here. The messianic age to which the Jews looked forward could only come if Israel's leaders repented and accepted Jesus as their Messiah.

Peter boldly declared that "salvation" comes through "no one else" but Jesus ("no other name"), not the Maccabean heroes or the Sadducees or anyone else. Zechariah (Luke 1:69), Simeon (Luke 2:30), and John the Baptist (Luke 3:6) had previously connected God's salvation with Jesus. Peter stressed that Jesus was a man: He lived "under heaven" and "among men." Jesus, the Messiah, the Nazarene (v. 10), is God's only authorized savior. Apart from Him there is no salvation for anyone (cf. John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

> "Peter (and/or Luke) is no advocate of modern notions of religious pluralism."[271]

". . . when we read the speech of Peter, we must remember to whom it was spoken, and when we do remember that it becomes one of the world's great demonstrations of courage. It was spoken to an audience of the wealthiest, the most intellectual and the most powerful in the land, and yet Peter, the Galilaean fisherman, stands before them rather as their judge than as their victim. But further, this was the very court which had condemned Jesus to death. Peter knew it, and he knew that at this moment he was taking his life in his hands."[272]

The Sanhedrin's response 4:13-22

4:13-14 The Sanhedrin observed in Peter and John what they had seen in Jesus, namely, courage to speak boldly and authoritatively without formal training (cf. Matt. 7:28-29; Mark 1:22; Luke 20:19-26; John 7:15). They may also have remembered seeing them "with Jesus" (John 18:15-16), but that does not seem to be Luke's main point here.

> "They spoke of the men as having been with Jesus, in a past tense. What was the truth? Christ was in the men, and speaking through the men; and the similarity which they

[271]Witherington, p. 194.
[272]Barclay, p. 36.

> detected was not that lingering from contact with a lost teacher, but that created by the presence of the living Christ."[273]

These powerful educated rulers looked on the former fishermen with contempt. What a change had taken place in the apostles in the short time since Peter had denied that he knew Jesus (Luke 22:56-60)! The rulers also observed facility in handling the Scriptures that was extraordinary in men who had not attended the priests' schools. This examining board could not dispute the apostles' claim that Jesus' power had healed the former beggar. The obvious change in the man made that impossible. They had no other answer, and "had nothing to say." Unwilling to accept the obvious, the Sanhedrin could offer no other explanation.

Several details in the stories of the apostles' arrests recall Jesus' teaching concerning the persecution that the disciples would experience (cf. Luke 12:12 and Acts 4:8; Luke 21:12 and Acts 4:3 and 5:18; Luke 21:13 and Acts 4:8-12 and 5:29-32; Luke 21:15 and Acts 4:13).

4:15-17 Evidently someone in the Sanhedrin, or someone else present in the room who was then or later became a Christian, reported the information in these verses to Luke. Perhaps Gamaliel told Paul, and Paul told Luke. Perhaps Nicodemus or some other believing member of the Sanhedrin was the source of this information. The most the Sanhedrin felt it could do was to "warn" and try to intimidate the apostles. The Sanhedrin members acknowledged that a miracle had taken place.

It seems clear that the Jewish leaders could not disprove the miracle. They were completely silent about the apostles' claims that Jesus was alive. After all, the simplest way to discredit the apostles would have been to produce Jesus' body or in some other way prove to the people that Jesus had not risen.

4:18-20 The Sanhedrin ordered ("commanded") the apostles "not to speak or teach at all" as Jesus' spokesmen. This order provided a legal basis for further action should that be necessary (cf. 5:28). Peter and John saw the command of the Sanhedrin as contradicting the command that Christ had given them (1:8; Matt. 28:19-20). They could not obey both, so they had to obey ("give heed to") God (cf. Jer. 20:9). This is the only basis for civil disobedience that Scripture permits. In all other matters we must obey those in authority over us (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).[274] Speaking what one has seen and heard (v. 20) is the essence of witnessing (1:8).

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[273]Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 96.

[274]See Charles C. Ryrie, "The Christian and Civil Disobedience," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:506 (April-June 1970):153-62. This article was reprinted with minor changes in idem, *You Mean the Bible Teaches That* . . ., pp. 11-22.

Contempt and threats have silenced many witnesses, but these tactics did not stop the Spirit-filled apostles.[275]

In many parts of the world these days, Christians wonder if they should break the law in order to evangelize. The principle that the apostles followed, and that we should follow is: breaking the law is only legitimate when it requires (not just permits) us to disobey the Lord.

4:21-22 Even in the face of open defiance, the Sanhedrin could do no more than threaten the apostles again. Peter and John had done nothing wrong. Furthermore they had become popular heroes by this healing. By punishing *them*, the rulers would have antagonized the people.

> "Yet a legal precedent had been set that would enable the council to take, if necessary, more drastic action in the future."[276]

The church's reaction 4:23-31

4:23-28 After hearing the apostles' report, the Christians sought the Lord (Gr. *Despota*, sovereign ruler) in prayer.

> "Three movements may be discerned in this prayer of the early church: (1) God is sovereign (v. 24). (2) God's plan includes believers' facing opposition against the Messiah (vv. 25-28). (3) Because of these things they petitioned God to grant them boldness to preach (vv. 29-30)."[277]

The believers contrasted God's position with that of His servants: David (v. 25), Jesus (vv. 27, 30), and themselves (v. 29). The word translated "servant" (*pais*), used of David and Jesus, contrasts appropriately with the word rendered "bond-servants" (*doulos*), used of the disciples.

The opening reference to God's creative power in the disciples' prayer (v. 24) has many parallels in other Old Testament prayers (e.g., Exod. 20:11; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 146:6; Isa. 42:5; cf. Acts 14:15; 17:24). This was a common and appropriate way to approach God in prayer, especially when a request for the exercise of that power followed, as it did here (cf. 2 Kings 19:15-19; Isa. 37:15-20).

Note the testimony to the divine inspiration of Psalm 2 contained in verse 25. God is the author of Scripture who has worked through human instruments to announce and record His revelations (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21).

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[275]See Barrett, p. 238.
[276]Longenecker, p. 307.
[277]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 364.

The believers saw a parallel to Jesus' crucifixion in the psalmist's prophecy that Messiah would experience opposition from Gentiles and leaders. This prophecy will find its fullest fulfillment in events still future from our time in history. God anointed Jesus at His baptism (cf. 10:38). David's references to "Gentiles," "the peoples," "kings," and "rulers" (vv. 25-26) applied to: the Roman Gentiles, the Israelites, Herod, and Pontius Pilate (v. 27). However, the believers again saw God's sovereign hand (the ultimate effective cause) behind human actions (the secondary instrumental cause, v. 28; cf. 2:23a; 3:18).

> "They see in this beginning of persecution the continued fulfilment [*sic*] of Scripture which had been evident in the Passion of Jesus."[278]

4:29-30 The disciples called on God to "take note of" the "threats" of the Sanhedrin. They may have done so, more to stress their need for more of His grace, than to call down His wrath on those rulers. The will of God was clear. The disciples were to witness for Christ (1:8; Matt. 28:19-20). Consequently they only needed enablement to carry out their task. They did not assume that God would automatically give them the courage to witness boldly, as He had done in the past. They voiced a fresh appeal for this grace, since additional opposition and temptations lay ahead of them (cf. Mark 9:29). They also acknowledged that God, not they, was doing a spiritual work. In these respects their prayer is a helpful model for us.

> "Prayer is not an escape from responsibility; it is our *response* to God's *ability*. True prayer energizes us for service and battle."[279]

> "It might have been thought that when Peter and John returned with their story a deep depression would have fallen on the Church, as they looked ahead to the troubles which were now bound to descend upon them. The one thing that never even struck them was to obey the Sanhedrin's command to speak no more. Into their minds at that moment there came certain great convictions and into their lives there came a tide of strength."[280]

It is noteworthy that these Christians did not pray for judgment on their persecutors, nor freedom from persecution, but for strength and enablement in their persecution (cf. Isa. 37:16-20). They rightly saw that their number one priority was preaching Jesus to a needy world.[281]

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[278]Neil, p. 91.
[279]Wiersbe, 1:416.
[280]Barclay, p. 39.
[281]Bock, *Acts*, p. 202.

4:31 It is not clear whether we should understand the shaking of the place where the disciples had assembled literally or metaphorically (cf. Exod. 19:18; 1 Kings 19:11-12; Isa. 6:4; Acts 16:26). In either case, those assembled received assurance from this phenomenon that God was among them and would grant their petition.

> "This was one of the signs which indicated a theophany in the Old Testament (Ex. 19:18; Isa. 6:4), and it would have been regarded as indicating a divine response to prayer."[282]

The same control by the Spirit, that had characterized Peter (v. 8) and the disciples earlier (2:4), now also marked these Christians. They now spoke boldly (Gr. *parresias*, with confidence, forthrightly; cf. v. 13, 29) as witnesses, as Peter had done. Note that tongues speaking did not occur here. This was not another baptism with the Spirit but simply a fresh filling.

> "In Luke 22:39-46, just before Jesus' arrest and just after Peter's assertion of readiness to suffer, Jesus urged the disciples to pray in order that they might not enter into temptation. Instead, the disciples fell asleep and were unprepared for the following crisis. In Acts 4:23-31 Jesus' followers are again confronted with the dangerous opposition of the Sanhedrin. Now they pray as they had previously been told to do. As a result they receive power from God to continue the mission despite the opposition. We have already noted that Peter's boldness before the Sanhedrin in Acts contrasts with his denial of Jesus in Luke. The church in Acts, finding power for witness in prayer, also contrasts with the disciples who slept instead of praying in Luke. These contrasts contribute to the narrator's picture of a dramatic transformation in Jesus' followers."[283]

2. Internal compromise 4:32—5:11

As was true of Israel when she entered Canaan under Joshua's leadership, failure followed initial success in the early church. The source of that failure lay within the company of believers, not their enemies.

> "The greater length of the story of Ananias and Sapphira should not lead to the conclusion that it is the important incident, the preceding section being merely an introduction to give it a setting; on the contrary, it is more likely that 4:32-35 describes the pattern of life, and is then followed by two illustrations, positive and negative, of what happened in practice."[284]

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[282]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 107.
[283]Tannehill, 2:71-72.
[284]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 108.

The unity of the church 4:32-35

This brief pericope illustrates what Luke wrote earlier, in 2:44-46, about the early Christians sharing and selling their possessions, as well as giving verbal witness. Luke recorded this description to emphasize the purity and unity in the church that resulted from the Spirit's filling (v. 31).

4:32 The unity of the believers extended beyond spiritual matters to physical, material matters (cf. Matt. 22:37-39). They owned personal possessions, but they did not consider them private possessions. Rather, they viewed their belongings as "common (Gr. *koina*, cf. *koinonia*, "fellowship") property." Customarily they shared what they had with one another (cf. 2:44, 46; Deut. 15:4). Their unity manifested itself in a sense of responsibility for one another. Love, not law, compelled them to share (cf. 1 John 3:17-18).

> "Their generosity sprang not from coercive legislation (as modern Socialists and Marxists demand) but from a true union of hearts made possible by regeneration."[285]

The economic situation in Jerusalem was deteriorating at this time due to famine and political unrest.[286] Employment opportunities were declining, and unsaved Jews were beginning to put economic and social pressure on the Christians.

4:33 The "great power" in the witness of the believers was their love for one another (cf. John 13:35), not just their rhetorical (homiletical) and miraculous power. Notice the central place "the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" occupied in their witness. His resurrection fulfilled prophecy and identified Jesus as the Messiah (cf. 2:29-32). The "abundant grace" that rested upon these Christians was the divine enablement that God granted them to speak and to live as they did. This grace was on the young church as it had been on the young Jesus (cf. Luke 2:40).

4:34-35 The voluntary sharing described in verse 32 seems to have been customary, but the occasional selling mentioned here was evidently exceptional (cf. 2:45). The imperfect tense verbs here imply "from time to time" (NIV). The apostles were in charge of distributing help to those in need (cf. 6:1-4). The Christians were witnessing with their *works* (vv. 32, 34-35) as well as with their *words* (v. 33).

Sincerity or insincerity could motivate these magnanimous deeds. An example of each type of motivation follows.

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[285]Kent, p. 50. Cf. Witherington, p. 206.

[286]Jeremias, *Jerusalem in . . .*, pp. 121-22.

The generosity of Barnabas 4:36-37

Luke now gave a specific instance of what he had just described in verses 34 and 35. This reference to "Barnabas" is significant because it introduces him to the reader. Barnabas becomes an important character in Acts later, mainly as a missionary (apostle) and preacher.[287] Furthermore Barnabas provides a vivid contrast to Ananias in chapter 5.

4:36 His given Jewish name was "Joseph," but people called him by his Jewish nickname (cognomen), Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement" (Gr. *huios parakleseos*). The Jews often called a person "son of ___" to denote his or her characteristics (e.g., "son of Beliel"). They probably did so because Barnabas was a constant positive influence on those around him, as further references to him in Acts will demonstrate (cf. 9:27; 11:22-30; 13:1—14:28; 15:2-4, 12, 22, 36-41; 1 Cor. 9:6).[288] Luke probably mentioned that he was "a Levite" just to identify him more specifically, not to throw a cloud of suspicion over him. The Mosaic Law forbade Levites from owning property in the Promised Land (Num. 18:24).

> ". . . the rule was no longer rigidly adhered to, and would not have applied to those living overseas."[289]

Levites had connections to the temple, but not everyone with temple connections opposed the apostles (cf. 4:1). Barnabas had lived on the island of Cyprus at some time, though he had relatives in Jerusalem, namely: John Mark, Mark's mother, and perhaps others (cf. 12:12; Col. 4:10).

4:37 Barnabas evidently "sold" some of his "land"—where it was we do not know—to provide cash for the needs of the church members. He humbly presented the proceeds of the sale to the apostles for their distribution.

> "Barnabas is a first example in Acts of the tendency to introduce an important new character first as a minor character, one who appears and quickly disappears. Philip (6:5) and Saul (7:58; 8:1, 3) are similarly introduced before they assume important roles in the narrative. This procedure ties the narrative together, and in each case the introductory scene contributes something significant to the portrait of the person."[290]

The hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira 5:1-11

We might conclude from what precedes that the church was a sinless community at this time. Unfortunately this was not the case. There were sinning saints in it. This episode

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[287]See S. Jonathan Murphy, "The Role of Barnabas in the Book of Acts," *Biblitheca Sacra* 167:667 (July-September 2010):319-41.

[288]See Michael Pocock, "The Role of Encouragement in Leadership," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 301-7.

[289]Neil, p. 94. Cf. Jer. 1:1; 32:6-15.

[290]Tannehill, 2:78.

reveals that God was working dramatically in the church's early days in judgment as well as in blessing. Luke did not idealize his portrait of the early church but painted an accurate picture, "warts and all."

> "The passage shows that God knows the hearts of believers. Peter is not the major figure in the text: God is. Luke is teaching about respect for God through one's action."[291]

The death of Ananias 5:1-6

5:1-2 "But" introduces another sacrificial act that looked just as generous as Barnabas' (4:37). However, in this case, the motive was quite different. Ananias' Jewish name, "Hananiah," means "Yahweh is gracious," and Sapphira's Aramaic name, "Sappira," means "beautiful." Their names proved as ironic as their behavior was hypocritical.

The Greek word *nosphizo*, ("kept back") also appears at the beginning of the record of Achan's sin in the Septuagint (Josh. 7:1, translated "took"). Ananias presented their gift to the apostles exactly as Barnabas had done (4:37).

5:3-4 Rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to fill him (cf. 2:4; 4:8, 31), Ananias had allowed Satan to control his heart. Ananias' sin was lying. He sought to deceive the Christians by trying to gain a reputation for greater generosity than he deserved. By deceiving the church, Ananias was also trying to deceive the Holy Spirit who indwelt the church. In attempting to deceive the Holy Spirit, he was trying to deceive God. Note the important identification of the Holy Spirit as "God" in these verses. His sin was misrepresenting his gift by claiming that it was the total payment that he had received when it was really only "a portion" of it. Since believers were free to keep their money, the Jerusalem church did not practice socialism or communism. Ananias' sin was *hypocrisy*, a particular form of lying.

> "I am a preacher of the Word—a glorious privilege—and if I have prayed once I have prayed a thousand times and said, 'Don't let me be able to preach unless in the power of the Holy Ghost.' I would rather be struck dumb than pretend it is in the power of the Spirit if it isn't; and yet it is so easy to pretend. It is so easy to come before men and take the place of an ambassador for God, and still want people to praise the preacher instead of giving the message only for the Lord Jesus."[292]

Achan, as well as Ananias and Sapphira, fell because of the love of material possessions (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10; 2 Tim. 4:10).

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[291]Bock, *Acts*, p. 219.

[292]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, p. 129.

> "Like Judas, Ananias was covetous; and just as greed of gain lay at the bottom of most of the sins and failures in the Acts—the sin of Simon Magus, the opposition of Elymas, of the Philippian 'masters' and the Ephesian silversmiths, the shortcomings of the Ephesian converts and the injustice of Felix—so Ananias *kept back part of the price*."[293]

Lying to the Holy Spirit is a sin that Christians commit frequently today. When Christians act hypocritically by pretending a devotion that is not theirs, or a surrender of life they have not really made, they lie to the Holy Spirit. If God acted today as He did in the early Jerusalem church, undertakers would have much more work than they do.

5:5 Peter identified Ananias' sin, but God judged it (cf. Matt. 16:19). Luke did not record exactly how Ananias died, even though he himself was a physician. His interest was solely in pointing out that he died *immediately* because of his sin. The Greek word *ekpsycho* ("breathed his last") occurs in the New Testament here and only where God strikes someone in judgment (v. 10; 12:23; cf. Judg. 4:21, LXX, where Sisera was the victim). Ananias' sin resulted in premature physical death.[294] It was a sin unto death (cf. 1 John 5:16; 1 Cor. 11:30).

We should not interpret the fact that God rarely deals with sinners this way as evidence that He cannot or should not. He does not do so out of mercy. He dealt with Ananias and Sapphira, Achan, Nadab and Abihu, and others—severely—when He began to deal with various groups of believers. He did so for those who would follow in the train of those judged, in order to illustrate how important it is for God's people to be holy (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6). Furthermore God always deals more severely with those who have greater privilege and responsibility (cf. Luke 12:48; 1 Pet. 4:17).

5:6 Immediate burial was common in Palestine at this time, as the burial of Jesus illustrates. Evidently some of the younger and stronger believers disposed of Ananias' corpse by preparing it for burial.[295] Many people were buried in caves or holes in the ground that had been previously prepared for this purpose, as we see in the burials of Lazarus and Jesus.

> "Burial in such a climate necessarily followed quickly after death, and such legal formalities as medical certification were not required."[296]

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[293]Rackham, p. 65.

[294]See Stanley D. Toussaint, "Suffering in Acts and the Pauline Epistles," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*, pp. 188-89.

[295]Barrett, p. 269.

[296]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on . . .*, p. 114.

> ". . . when a man had been struck down by the hand of Heaven (as Joshua specifically says was the case with Achan: Josh. 7.25) his corpse must surely be consigned rapidly and silently to the grave. No one should mourn him. The suicide, the rebel against society, the excommunicate, the apostate, and the criminal condemned to death by the Jewish court would be buried . . . in haste and without ceremonial, and no one might (or need) observe the usual lengthy and troublesome rituals of mourning for him."[297]

The death of Sapphira 5:7-11

5:7 The answers to questions such as whether someone tried to find Sapphira to tell her of Ananias' death lay outside Luke's purpose in writing. He stressed that she was as guilty as her husband, and therefore experienced the same fate.

5:8 Peter graciously gave Sapphira an opportunity to tell the truth, but she did not. He did not warn her ahead of time by mentioning her husband's death because he wanted her to speak honestly. She added a spoken lie to her hypocrisy.

5:9-10 Peter's "why" question to her means virtually the same thing as his "why" question to Ananias (v. 3). "Putting God to the test" means seeing how far one can go in disobeying God—in this case lying to Him—before He will judge (cf. Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:7). This is very risky business.

Some readers of Acts have criticized Peter for dealing with Sapphira and Ananias so harshly. Nevertheless the text clearly indicates that in these matters Peter was under the Holy Spirit's control (4:31), even as Ananias and Sapphira were under Satan's control (v. 3). Peter had been God's agent of blessing in providing healing to people (3:6), but he was also God's instrument to bring judgment on others, as Jesus Christ had done.

> "Peter was severe, and the fate of the two delinquents shocking, but the strictures of Christ on hypocrisy must be borne in mind (Mt. xxiii). . . . The old 'leaven of the Pharisees' was at work, and for the first time in the community of the saints two persons set out deliberately to deceive their leaders and their friends, to build a reputation for sanctity and sacrifice to which they had no right, and to menace, in so doing, all love, all trust, all sincerity. And not only was the sin against human brotherhood, but against the Spirit of God, so recently and powerfully manifest in the Church."[298]

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[297]J. D. M. Derrett, "Ananias, Sapphira, and the Right of Property," in *Studies in the New Testament Volume One*, pp. 198.
[298]Blaiklock, p. 69.

5:11 Luke reemphasized the sobering effect these events produced in all who heard about them (v. 5; cf. 2:43). People probably said, "There but for the grace of God go I!"

Here is the first of 23 uses of the word "church" in Acts. The Western (Beza) text used it in 2:47, but it is probably incorrect there. The Greek word, *ekklesia*, means "called out assembly." This was a common word that writers often used to describe assemblies of people that congregated for political and various other types of meetings. The word "church," like the word "baptism," can refer to more than one thing. Sometimes it refers to the body of Christ as it has existed throughout history, the *universal* church. Sometimes it refers to Christians living in various places during one particular period of time (e.g., the *early* church). Sometimes it refers to a group of Christians who live in one area at a particular time, a *local* church. Here it seems to refer to the local church in Jerusalem.

> "When Luke speaks of 'the church' with no qualification, geographical or otherwise, it is to the church of Jerusalem that he refers."[299]

The writers of Scripture always referred to the church, the body of Christ, as an entity distinct from the nation of Israel. *Every reference to Israel in the New Testament refers to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.* This is true in the Old Testament also.[300]

Ananias and Sapphira presented an *appearance* of commitment to God that was not true of them. They were insincere, appearing to be one way but really not being that way. Had Ananias and Sapphira never professed to be as committed as they claimed when they brought their gift, God probably would not have judged them as He did. They lacked personal integrity.

> "So familiar are we with 'spots and wrinkles' in the church that we can with difficulty realize the significance of this, the first sin in and against the community. It corresponds to the entrance of the serpent into Eden with the fall of Eve in the OT: and the first fall from the ideal must have staggered the apostles and the multitude. . . . The sin really was not the particular deceit, but the state of heart [cf. v. 3]—hypocrisy and unreality."[301]

Some interpreters have wondered if Ananias and Sapphira were genuine believers. Luke certainly implied they were; they were as much a part of the church as Barnabas was. Are

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[299]F. F. Bruce, "The Church of Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67:2 (Spring 1985):641.

[300]See Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 132-55; and C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, pp. 5-12.

[301]Rackham, p. 64.

true Christians capable of deliberate deceit? Certainly they are. One writer gave four reasons to conclude that they were real Christians.[302]

> "It is plain that the New Testament not only teaches the existence of the carnal Christian [1 Cor. 3:1-3; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18] but of true Christians who persisted in their carnality up to the point of physical death.[303]

3. Intensified external opposition 5:12-42

God's power, manifest through the apostles in blessing (3:1-26) as well as in judgment (5:1-11), made an increasingly powerful impact on the residents of Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders increased their opposition to the apostles, just as they had increased their opposition to Jesus. Luke preserved the record of the developing attitudes that resulted. The Sadducees became more jealous and antagonistic, the Pharisees chose to react with moderation, and the Christians gained greater joy and confidence.

The expanding influence of the apostles 5:12-16

This pericope is another of Luke's summaries of conditions in the church that introduces what follows (cf. 2:42-47; 4:32-35). It also explains why the Sadducees became so jealous that they arrested, not only Peter and John, but other apostles as well. The apostles were gaining great influence, not only in Jerusalem, but also in the outlying areas. The healing of one lame man had triggered initial opposition (3:1-10), but now many people were being healed.

5:12 The lame beggar was not the only person who benefited from the apostles' ministry of performing miracles. Many other needy people did as well. These miracles signified who Jesus really was ("signs"), and they filled the people with awe ("wonders"). The believers continued to meet in Solomon's portico (cf. 3:11).

5:13 The "rest" (Gr. *hoi loipoi*) were probably the unbelieving Jews.[304] Other possibilities are that they were the apostles, other Christians, or other Jerusalemites. They steered clear of the Christians because of the Jewish leaders' opposition (4:18) and the apostles' power (vv. 1-10). The "people" (Gr. *ho laos*), the responsive Jews, honored the believers ("held them in high esteem").

5:14 Luke stopped giving numbers for the size of the church (cf. 1:15; 2:41; 4:4) and just said that God was adding "multitudes" of both "men and women" to the church constantly.

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[302]Kent, pp. 53-54.
[303]Dillow, *The Reign* . . ., p. 64. Cf. 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; 11:30; Heb. 10:29; and 1 John 5:16-17.
[304]See Kent, pp. 55-56.

5:15 Peter's powerful influence reminds us of Jesus' influence during the early days of His Galilean ministry when all Capernaum gathered at His door (Mark 1:32-34). Elsewhere Luke described the power of God's presence overshadowing someone (cf. Luke 1:35; 9:34). The text does not say that Peter's "shadow" *healed* people. It says that people wanted to get close to Peter because he was so powerful.[305]

> "In the ancient world many people believed that a person's *shadow* could possess magical healing powrs. The people referred to in this verse were not necessarily Christians, but those who believed that Peter, as an advocate of a new religion, had magical powers. The people imposed their superstitions upon this new faith."[306]

Even today, some people superstitiously believe that a person's shadow carries his power. Some parents have pulled their children away from the shadow of a wicked person and thrust them into the shadow of an honored individual. The action of these first-century Near Easterners shows their respect for Peter, who had the power to heal. These signs and wonders authenticated the apostles as Jesus' and God's representatives (cf. 19:11-12; Matt. 10:8).

> "I have often told how my oldest son at one time had an eclipse of faith until one day several of us were invited to spend an afternoon with William Jennings Bryan in his Florida home, and I was asked to bring my son. During that visit, for two or three hours we discussed the Word of God and exchanged thoughts on precious portions of Scripture. The young man sat apart and said very little, but as we left that place he turned to me and exclaimed, 'Father, I have been a fool! I thought I couldn't believe the Bible, but if a man like that with his education and intelligence can believe, I am making a fool of myself to pretend I cannot accept it.' So much for the shadow ministry of William Jennings Bryan."[307]

5:16 News of the apostles' powers was spreading beyond Jerusalem. People from outlying areas were "bringing" their "sick" friends to them, just as people had brought sick friends to Jesus from miles around (cf. Luke 5:15). Luke probably meant that "all" whom the apostles intended to heal experienced restoration, not that they healed every single individual who was sick (cf. Matt. 8:16). Even Jesus' healings were limited in their scope (cf. Luke 5:17).[308] This verse is one of the texts that advocates of the

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[305]See Barrett, pp. 276-77.

[306]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1824.

[307]Ironside, *Lectures on* . . ., p. 136.

[308]See Deere, pp. 58-64.

> "prosperity gospel" appeal to as proof that it is never God's will for anyone to be sick. Other texts they use include Exodus 15:26; 23:25; Psalm 103:3; Proverbs 4:20-22; Isaiah 33:24; Jeremiah 30:17; Matthew 4:23; 10:1; Mark 16:16-18; Luke 6:17-19; and Acts 10:38.[309]

This section is very similar to 4:32-35, though this summary shows the church gaining many more adherents and much greater influence than the former one documented.

The apostles' appearance before the Sanhedrin 5:17-33

The popularity and effectiveness of the apostles riled the Sadducees just as Jesus' popularity and effectiveness had earlier.

> "One of the central motifs of Acts is the rejection of the Gospel by the Jewish nation. This section [vv. 17-42] traces a further step in rejection and persecution by the Jewish officials."[310]

5:17-18 The high priest "rose up" (Gr. *anastas*, cf. v. 34), taking official action as leader of the Sanhedrin. As mentioned above, the high priest and most of the Sanhedrin members were "Sadducees" (4:1). The Holy Spirit filled the believers, Satan had filled Ananias and Sapphira, and now "jealousy" filled the Sanhedrin members, particularly the Sadducees. They had the apostles arrested and confined "in a common (public) jail" (Gr. *teresis demosia*).

> "The Sadducees are often seen as more hostile to the new movement than the Pharisees in Acts, whereas in Luke's Gospel the Pharisees are major opponents of Jesus. This fits the shift of attention to Jerusalem from the setting of Jesus's ministry outside the city. The Sadducees have more to lose, since they control the council and have worked out a compromise with the Romans to share power."[311]

> "Sadduceeism is rampant, so is Pharisaism; they are represented to-day by rationalism and ritualism. These are the opponents of living, vital Christianity to-day, just as they were in Jerusalem."[312]

> "It is amazing how much envy can be hidden under the disguise of 'defending the faith.'"[313]

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[309]For a critique of this movement, see Ken L. Sarles, "A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):329-52.
[310]Ladd, "The Acts . . .," p. 1133.
[311]Bock, *Acts*, pp. 237-38.
[312]Morgan, *The Acts . . .*, p. 129.
[313]Wiersbe, 1:424.

Peter and John have been the apostles in view to this point, but now we read that "Peter and the apostles (plural) . . . stood . . . before the (Council) Sanhedrin" (vv. 27, 29). It is probable, therefore, that more apostles than just Peter and John are in view in this whole incident beginning with verse 17.

5:19 "Angel" (Gr. *angelos*) means messenger. Wherever this word occurs, the context usually determines whether the messenger is a human being or a spirit being. Luke did not identify which kind of messenger God used here. His point was that "the Lord" secured the apostles' release. The messenger's message had a very authoritative ring, so probably he was a spirit being (cf. 12:6-10; 16:26-27). This is one of three "jail door miracles" that Luke recorded in Acts (cf. Peter in 12:6-11; and Paul and Silas in 16:26-27).

5:20 The angel instructed the apostles to "go" (Gr. *poreuesthe*) and "stand" their ground (*stathentes*). They were to resist the opposition of the Sanhedrin. They were to continue addressing "the people," the Jews, with the full message that they had been heralding. They were not to back down or trim their words. The "whole message of this life" is a synonym for the *message of salvation* (cf. 4:12; 13:26).[314] The Greek words *zoe* ("life") and *soteria* ("salvation") both translate the same Hebrew word, *hayyah*.

5:21 The apostles obeyed their instructor and began teaching in the temple again early the next morning. At this same time, the full Sanhedrin assembled to try the apostles, whom they assumed were still in jail.

5:22-23 Luke's account of the temple police's bewilderment is really quite amusing. This whole scene calls to mind scenes from old Keystone Cops movies. The people readily accepted the miracles that the apostles were performing, but their leaders seem to have been completely surprised by this miracle.

5:24 The major concern of the leaders ("captain of the temple" and "chief priests") was the potential public reaction when what had happened became known. They appear again to have been more concerned about their own reputation and security than about the facts of the case.

> "If they had only known how this grain of mustard seed would grow into the greatest tree on earth and how dwarfed the tree of Judaism would be beside it!"[315]

5:25 Eventually word reached the Sanhedrin that the prisoners were "teaching" the people "in the temple." Probably they expected to discover that the apostles had fled the city.

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[314]Longenecker, p. 319.

[315]Robertson, 3:64-65.

5:26 The apostles were so popular with the people that the captain and his temple police had to be very careful not to create the impression that they were going to harm the apostles. The apostles had become local heroes, as Jesus recently had been in the eyes of many. Earlier when Israel's leaders had wanted to arrest Jesus, they were careful about how they did so, because they feared the reaction of the people (Luke 20:19; 22:2).

5:27-28 Perhaps the apostles accompanied "the captain" and his "officers" submissively ("without violence") because they remembered Jesus' example of nonviolence and nonretaliation when He was arrested (Luke 22:52-53). Furthermore the guards' power over them was inferior to their own. They may have offered no resistance, as well, because their appearance before the Sanhedrin would give them another opportunity to witness for Christ.

The high priest introduced his comments with a reference to the authority of Israel's leaders. Pilate had similarly threatened Jesus with his authority (cf. John 19:10-11). The high priest showed his dislike for Jesus by not referring to the Lord by name, referring instead to "this name." Official Jewish opposition to Jesus was firm. He believed the authority of the Sanhedrin was greater than the authority of Jesus (cf. Matt. 28:18). The leaders earlier had instructed Peter and John not to teach (3:18, 21), but Peter had said they would continue to do so because of Jesus' authority (3:19-20). Moreover Peter had charged Israel's leaders with Jesus' death (4:10-11). These rulers had rationalized away their guilt for Jesus' death, probably blaming it on Jesus Himself and the Romans (cf. 3:15). The Jewish leaders felt the disciples were unfairly heaping guilt on them for having shed Jesus' blood. However, only a few weeks earlier they had said to Pilate, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 27:25; cf. Matt. 23:35).

5:29 This verse clarifies that the authorities had arrested other apostles besides Peter and John. Peter, as spokesman for the apostles, did not attempt to defend their civil disobedience, but simply repeated their responsibility to "obey God rather than men," specifically the Sanhedrin (4:19; cf. Luke 12:4-5). This is Peter's fourth speech that Luke reported.

5:30 Peter also reaffirmed that "the God of their (our) fathers" had "raised up Jesus" from the dead, and that the Sanhedrin was responsible for His crucifixion, an extremely brutal and shameful death. "Hanging Him on a cross" is a euphemism for crucifying Him (cf. Deut. 21:22-23; 1 Pet. 2:24).

5:31 Peter further claimed that "God" had "exalted" Jesus to the place of supreme authority, namely, at "His right hand." The Sanhedrin had asked Jesus if He was the Christ, and Jesus had replied that they would see Him seated at God's right hand (cf. Luke 22:67-71). Jesus was Israel's national

"Prince" (leader, Messiah) and the Jews' individual and collective "Savior" (deliverer). Jesus had the authority to "grant repentance" (a change of mind) about Himself to the nation, and consequently "forgiveness of sins." Jesus' authority to forgive sins had been something Israel's leaders had resisted from the beginning of the Lord's ministry (Luke 5:20-24).

5:32 The apostles thought of themselves, not just as heralds, but as *eyewitnesses* ("witnesses") of that to which they now testified. The witness of "the Holy Spirit," to which Peter referred, was evidently the *evidence* that Jesus was the Christ—which the Spirit provided through fulfilled messianic prophecy. The apostles saw themselves as the human mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus had promised to send to bear witness concerning Himself (John 15:26-27). They announced the fulfillment of what the Holy Spirit had predicted in the Old Testament, namely, that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Furthermore God had now given the Holy Spirit to those who obeyed God by believing in Jesus (John 6:29). The Holy Spirit was also the greatest gift God had given people who lived under the Old Covenant (cf. Luke 11:13). These leaders needed to "obey" God by believing in Jesus, and then they too would receive this wonderful gift.

The early gospel preachers never presented belief in Jesus Christ as a "take it or leave it" option in Acts. God has *commanded* everyone to believe in His Son (e.g., 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). Failure to do so constitutes disobedience and results in judgment. The Holy Spirit now baptizes and indwells every person who obeys God by believing in His Son (John 3:36; 6:29; Rom. 8:9). This must be the obedience Peter had in mind.

5:33 Peter's firm but gracious words so infuriated the Sadducees that they were now about to order the death of the apostles—regardless of public reaction!

> "While the Sanhedrin did not have authority under Roman jurisdiction to inflict capital punishment, undoubtedly they would have found some pretext for handing these men over to the Romans for such action—as they did with Jesus himself—had it not been for the intervention of the Pharisees, as represented particularly by Gamaliel."[316]

Gamaliel's wise counsel 5:34-40

Gamaliel's advocacy of moderation is the main point and reason for Luke's record of the apostles' second appearance before the Sanhedrin. Whereas the Sadducees "rose up" against the apostles (v. 17), Gamaliel "rose up" against the Sadducees (v. 34). He proved

[316]Longenecker, p. 321.

to be God's instrument for preserving the apostles, and perhaps all the early Christians in Jerusalem, at this time. This is the first speech by a non-Christian that Luke recorded in Acts, which shows its importance.

5:34 As mentioned previously, the Pharisees were the minority party in the Sanhedrin, though there were more than 6,000 of them in Israel at this time.[317] They were, notwithstanding, far more influential with the masses than the Sadducees were. The Pharisees looked for a personal Messiah. They believed in the resurrection of the dead and the existence and activity of angels and demons. They tried to live a simple life, in contrast to the Sadducees' luxurious living.[318] The name "Pharisee" evidently comes from the Aramaic verb *peras*, meaning "to separate." They considered themselves to be separated to holiness and dedicated entirely to God. Most of the scribes, the Bible expositors of that day, were Pharisees. Consequently the Sadducees listened to the Pharisees and especially to Gamaliel.

> "In short, theologically the Christian Jews had a lot more in common with the Pharisees than they did with the Sadducees."[319]

Gamaliel was the leader of the more liberal school of Hillel, one of the two most influential parties within Pharisaism. He had been a protégé of Hillel, who may have been Gamaliel's grandfather.[320] Saul of Tarsus was one of his own promising young disciples (22:3). People called him Rabban Gamaliel. Rabban (lit. "our teacher") was a title of higher honor than rabbi (lit. "my teacher"). Gamaliel was the most "respected" Pharisee of his day ("respected by all the people"). The Mishnah, a collection of commentaries on the oral laws of Israel published toward the end of the second century A.D., contains the following statement about him.

> "Since Rabban Gamaliel the elder died there has been no more reverence for the law; and purity and abstinence died out at the same time."[321]

Gamaliel was able to direct the Sanhedrin as he did through his personal influence, not because he had any superior official authority within that body.

5:35-36 After the apostles had left the meeting room, Gamaliel addressed his colleagues with the traditional designation "Men of Israel" (cf. 2:22). He warned his brethren to do nothing rash. He pointed to two similar

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[317]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 17:2:4.
[318]Ibid., 13:5:9; 18:1:2-3; idem, *The Wars . . .*, 2:8:14.
[319]Witherington, p. 234.
[320]Neil, p. 98; Kent, p. 58; Witherington, p. 233.
[321]Mishnah *Sotah* 9:15. Cf. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on . . .*, p. 124.

movements that had failed when their leaders had died. Historians do not know anything about this "Theudas," though he may have come to prominence shortly after Herod the Great's death (ca. A.D. 4).[322] Josephus referred to a revolt led by a (different?) Theudas, but this occurred more than a decade after Gamaliel's speech.[323]

5:37 "Judas of Galilee" led a revolt against Rome in A.D. 6.[324] The "census" in view was probably the one that Quirinius, legate of Syria, took in A.D. 6 when Archelaus was deposed and Judea became part of the Roman province of Syria.[325] Judas founded the Zealot movement in Israel that sought to throw off Roman rule violently.

> "Judas was a fanatic who took up the position that God was the King of Israel; to Him alone tribute was due; and that all other taxation was impious and to pay it was a blasphemy."[326]

His influence was considerable, though it declined after his death. Gamaliel seems to have been playing down the influence of Judas a little more than it deserved.

5:38-39 Gamaliel's point was that if God was not behind the apostles, their efforts would prove futile in time. Obviously Gamaliel believed this was the case, or else he would likely have become a Christian. He offered the theoretical option that if the apostles were "of God," the Sanhedrin would find itself in the terrible position of "fighting against God." Obviously Gamaliel believed in the sovereignty of God. He advised his brethren to wait and see. He did not believe that the apostles presented as serious a threat to the leaders of Judaism as the Sadducees believed they did. Saul of Tarsus, on the other hand, took a different view of how the Jews should respond to the growing threat of Christianity. He executed many Christians, but that was after the number and influence of the Christians had increased dramatically (cf. chs. 6—7).

> "The point made . . . by Gamaliel . . . has already been made by the narrator through the rescue from prison and the ensuing scene of discovery. Here we have an instance of reinforcement through reiteration. A message is first suggested by an event and then clearly stated in the interpretive commentary of a story character."[327]

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[322]See Longenecker, p. 228, or any of the conservative commentaries for discussion of the problem of this Theudas' identification.

[323]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 20:5:1.

[324]Ibid., 2:8:1; 18:1:1, 6; *The Wars . . .*, 2:4:1; 2:8:1.

[325]Neil, p. 100.

[326]Barclay, pp. 48-49.

[327]Tannehill, 2:66.

Gamaliel's counsel helps us understand how objective unbelieving Jews were viewing the apostles' claims at this time. There had been others besides the apostles who had insisted that their leaders were great men. Yet their claims had eventually proved false. Many of the Jews, whom Gamaliel represented, likewise viewed the apostles' preaching as well-meaning but mistaken. Jesus to them was no more special than Theudas, or Judas of Galilee, had been. Other than their ideas about Jesus being the Messiah, the apostles held views that did not challenge fundamental Pharisaic theology. However the disciples, like Jesus, rejected the authority of oral tradition over Scripture.

5:40 Gamaliel convinced his fellow Sanhedrin members. They decided to settle for flogging the apostles, probably with 39 lashes (Deut. 25:3; Acts 22:19; 2 Cor. 11:24). The Mishnah contains a description of how the Jews normally did this.[328] This flogging (whipping) was for disobeying the Sanhedrin's former order to stop preaching (4:18). This is the first recorded instance, by Luke in Acts, of Christians receiving a physical beating for witnessing. The rulers also threatened the apostles again and then released them (cf. 4:21). The official ban against preaching in Jesus' name remained in force.

The response of the apostles 5:41-42

5:41 Rather than emerging from their beating repentant or discouraged, the apostles "went home (on their way) rejoicing." They did not enjoy the lashes, but they considered it an honor to "suffer" dishonor for the sake of Jesus' name (cf. 3:6; 16:25). Jesus had predicted that people would hate and persecute His disciples, and had instructed them to rejoice in these responses (Matt. 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23). Peter later wrote that Christians should count it a privilege to suffer for Christ's sake (1 Pet. 4:13; cf. 2:18-21; 3:8-17; Phil. 1:29). As the Master had suffered abuse from His enemies so, too, His servants were suffering abuse for their witness.

5:42 This treatment did not deter the apostles at all. Instead they continued explaining (Gr. *didasko*) and evangelizing (*euaggelizomai*) daily, publicly "in the temple" and privately "from house to house" (cf. 2:46), declaring that Jesus was the Messiah (cf. 28:31).

> "It [v. 42] is a statement that has nuances of defiance, confidence, and victory; and in many ways it gathers together all Luke has set forth from 2:42 on."[329]

4. Internal conflict 6:1-7

The scene shifts back to life within the church (cf. 4:32—5:11). Luke wrote this pericope to explain some administrative changes that the growth of the church made necessary. He

[328]Mishnah *Makkoth* 3:10-15a.

[329]Longenecker, p. 325.

also wanted to introduce the Hellenistic Jews, who took the lead in evangelizing the Gentiles. Their activity began shortly after the event he recorded here.

In this chapter we see two of Satan's favorite methods of assailing the church that he has employed throughout history: internal dissension (vv. 1-7) and external persecution (vv. 8-15).

6:1 The number of the disciples of Jesus continued to grow. This is the first mention of the word "disciple" in Acts, where it occurs 28 times. In addition, the word appears about 238 times in the Gospels, but nowhere else in the New Testament. This is probably because when Jesus was present, or had just departed to heaven, the New Testament writers referred to His followers in relationship to Him. Afterward they identified them in relation to one another and society.[330]

Two types of Jews made up the Jerusalem church. Some were native "Hebrews," who had lived primarily in Palestine, spoke Aramaic predominantly but also Greek, and used the Hebrew Scriptures. The others were "Hellenists," who originally lived outside Palestine (Jews of the Diaspora), but were now living in Palestine. Many of these Jews returned to Palestine to end their days in their ancestral homeland. They spoke Greek primarily, as well as the language of the area where they had lived, and they used the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul classed himself among the Hebrews (2 Cor. 11:22; cf. Phil. 3:5), even though he grew up outside Palestine.

> "It is enough to say, generally, that in the Aramaean ["Hebrew"] theology, Oriental elements prevailed rather than Greek, and that the subject of Babylonian influences has more connection with the life of St. Peter than that of St. Paul."[331]

The basic distinction between the Hebrews and Hellenists appears to have been linguistic.[332] Those who could speak a Semitic language were Hebrews, and those who could not were Hellenists.[333] Philo of Alexandria was the great intellectual representative of the Hellenists. Within Judaism, frequent tensions arose between these two groups, and this cultural problem carried over into the church. The Hebrews observed the Mosaic Law much more strictly than their Hellenistic brethren. Conversely the Hellenists typically regarded the Hebrews as quite narrow-minded and self-centered.

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[330]Blaiklock, p. 74.

[331]Howson, p. 30.

[332]Witherington, pp. 240-43.

[333]C. F. D. Moule, "Once More, Who Were the Hellenists?" *Expository Times* 70 (October 1958-September 1959):100.

The Hebrews and the Hellenists had their own separate synagogues in Jerusalem.[334] But when they became Christians, they came together in one fellowship. As the church grew, some of the Christians believed that the church leaders were discriminating against the Hellenists unfairly (cf. Eph. 4:31; Heb. 12:15). The conflict ("complaint") arose over the distribution of food to church "widows" (cf. 2:44-45; 4:32—5:11). Care of widows and the needy was a priority in Judaism (Exod. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; et al.). The Jews provided for their own widows weekly—in their own synagogues—along with the poor.[335]

> "It is not here said that the murmuring arose among the widows, but because of them. Women and money occasion the first serious disturbance in the church life."[336]

6:2-4 The 12 apostles wisely delegated responsibility for this ministry to other qualified men in the congregation, so that it would not distract them from their primary duties. This is the only reference to "the Twelve" in Acts (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5), though Luke referred to the Eleven earlier (2:14). "Serving tables" probably involved the organization and administration of ministry to the widows, rather than simply serving as waiters or dispensers (cf. Matt. 21:12; Luke 19:23).[337]

The leaders of the church asked the congregation to nominate ("select") "seven" qualified "men" whom the apostles would officially appoint. Many churches today take this approach in selecting secondary church leaders, basing their practice on this model. For example, the congregation nominates deacons, and the elders appoint some or all of them. This approach was common in Judaism. It was not a new method of leadership selection that the apostles devised, though it was new for the church.

> "Selecting *seven men* may go back to the tradition in Jewish communities where seven respected men managed the public business in an official council."[338]

These men needed to have "good reputation(s)," to be under the Spirit's control ("full of the Spirit"), and to be wise ("full of wisdom"; v. 3). Note that these are character traits, not special talents or abilities (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). The Twelve then would be free to concentrate on their

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[334]*Jewish Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Alexandrians in Jerusalem," by Emil Schürer. See also Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Chris*t, ch. xvi: Synagogues: Their Origin, Structure, and Outward Arrangements."

[335]B. W. Winter, "Providentia for the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3-16," *Tyndale Bulletin* 39 (1988):89. See also Barclay, p. 50; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Christ*, 2:437, n. 49; and Jeremias, *Jerusalem in* . . ., pp. 126-34.

[336]Robertson, 3:72-73.

[337]Longenecker, p. 331.

[338]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 367.

primary responsibilities: "prayer" and "the ministry of" God's "Word" (v. 4).

> "It is not necessarily suggested that *serving tables* is on a lower level than prayer and teaching; the point is rather that the task to which the Twelve had been specifically called was one of witness and evangelism."[339]

As elsewhere in Scripture, *prayer* is the primary way God has ordained whereby His people secure His working in human affairs.

> "Prayer is the most powerful and effective means of service in the Kingdom of God . . . It is the most dynamic work which God has entrusted to His saints, but it is also the most neglected ministry open to the believer.
>
> "The Bible clearly reveals that believing prayer is essential for the advancement of the cause of Christ. It is the essential element for Christian victory . . .
>
> "We may marvel at the spiritual power and glorious victories of the early apostolic church, but we often forget that its constant prayer life was the secret of its strength . . .
>
> "If the church today would regain the spiritual power of the early church it must recover the truth and practice of prayer as a vital working force."[340]

6:5 All seven men whom the congregation chose had Greek names. Luke gave the impression, by using only Greek names, that these seven were from the Hellenistic group in the church, though many Palestinian Jews at that time had Greek names. Thus Hellenists appear to have been given responsibility for settling a Hellenist complaint—a wise approach.

> "One commentator has called it the first example of affirmative action—'Those with political power generally repressed complaining minorities; here the apostles hand the whole system over to the offended minority.'"[341]

"Stephen" and "Philip" appear later in Acts, in important roles as apologist and evangelist, respectively. Luke did not mention "Prochorus," "Nicanor," "Timon," or "Parmenas" after this point. "Nicolas" was a Gentile who had first become a Jew by the "proselyte" process, and then

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[339]Marshall, *The Acts . . .*, p. 126.

[340]D. Edmond Hiebert, *Working With God: Scriptural Studies in Intercession*, pp. 19-20.

[341]Witherington, p. 248. His quotation is from Craig Keener, *Bible Background Commentary*, p. 338.

became a Christian. He came "from Antioch" of Syria, which Luke may have mentioned because of Antioch's later prominence as a center of Christianity. Traditionally Antioch was Luke's hometown. Tradition also links this Nicolas with the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6, 15), but this connection is questionable since there is no solid evidence to support it. Many Jews lived in Syria because of its proximity to Judea, and most of these lived in the city of Antioch.[342]

6:6 *Laying hands* on someone symbolized the bestowal of a blessing (Gen. 48:13; et al.). It also represented identification with the person (Lev. 1:4; 3:2; et al.), commissioning as a kind of successor (Num. 27:23), and granting authority (8:17-19; 9:17; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; Heb. 6:2). Here, commissioning for a task is in view (cf. 13:1-3), rather than formal ordination, which came later in church history.[343] Prayer accompanied this ceremony on this occasion, as was customary.

Many Bible students regard these seven men as the first deacons of the church. However, the text never uses the term "deacon" to describe them (cf. 21:8). The Greek word *diakonos* (deacon) does not occur in Acts at all, though related forms of the word do, even in this pericope. *Diakonia* ("serving" or "distribution" and "ministry") appears in verses 1 and 4, and *diakonein* ("serve" or "wait on") occurs in verse 2. I think it is more likely that these seven men represent a stage in the development of what later became the office of deacon. They probably served as a model for this office. Office typically follows function. The historical origin of deacons lies in Jewish social life. The historical origin of the elder office, incidentally, lies in Jewish civil and religious life, most recently in synagogue organization. As the Jerusalem church grew and as its needs and activities proliferated, it adopted some of the organizational features of Jewish culture that these Jewish believers knew well.[344]

> "The early church had problems but, according to Acts, it also had leaders who moved swiftly to ward off corruption and find solutions to internal conflicts, supported by people who listened to each other with open minds and responded with good will."[345]

6:7 This verse is another one of Luke's summary progress reports that ends each major section of Acts (cf. 2:47; 9:31; 12:24; 16:6; 19:20; 28:31). It also corresponds to other summary paragraphs within this section of the book (cf. 4:32-35; 5:12-16). Luke linked the spread of God's Word with

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[342]Irena Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, p. 128.

[343]Witherington, p. 251.

[344]See Phillip W. Sell, "The Seven in Acts 6 as a Ministry Team," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:665 (January-March 2010):58-67.

[345]Tannehill, 2:81.

church growth. This cause-and-effect relationship has continued throughout history. The advances of the gospel and the responses of the people were his primary concern in 3:1—6:7. "Many" of the numerous "priests" in Jerusalem were also becoming Christians. One writer estimated that about 2,000 priests lived in Jerusalem at this time.[346] The gospel did not win over only the "laity" in Israel.

> "The ordinary priests were socially and in other ways far removed from the wealthy chief-priestly families from which the main opposition to the gospel came. Many of the ordinary priests were no doubt men holy and humble of heart, like Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, men who would be readily convinced of the truth of the gospel."[347]

This pericope helps us see several very important things about the priorities of the early church. First, the church showed concern for both spiritual and physical needs. Its leaders gave priority to spiritual needs (prayer and the ministry of the Word), but they also gave attention to correcting injustice and helping the poor. This reflects the Christians' commitment to loving God wholeheartedly and loving their neighbors as themselves, God's great ethical demands. Second, the early church was willing to adapt its organizational structure and administrative procedures: to minister effectively and to meet needs. It did not view its original structure and practices as binding, but adapted traditional structures and methods to facilitate the proclamation of the gospel and the welfare of the church. In contrast, many churches today try to duplicate the form and functions of the early church because they feel bound to follow these. Third, the early church did not practice some things that the modern church does. Rather than blaming one another for the problem that arose, the disciples corrected the injustice and continued to give prayer and the ministry of the Word priority. Rather than paternalistically feeling that they had to maintain control over every aspect of church life, the apostles delegated authority to a group within the church (that had the greatest vested interest) and let them solve the distribution problem.[348]

Verse 7 concludes Luke's record of the witness in Jerusalem. From that city the gospel spread out into the rest of Judea, and it is that expansion that Luke emphasized in the chapters that follow next.

II. THE WITNESS IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA 6:8—9:31

In this next major section of Acts, Luke narrated three significant events in the life and ministry of the early church. These events were the martyrdom of Stephen, the ministry of Philip, and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Luke's presentation of these events was primarily biographical. In fact, he began his account of each event with the name of its

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[346]Fiensy, p. 228.

[347]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., pp. 131-32. Cf. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in* . . ., pp. 198-213.

[348]Longenecker, pp. 331-32.

major character (6:8; 8:5; 9:1). The time when these events took place was probably shortly after those reported in the preceding chapters of the book.

A. The martyrdom of Stephen 6:8—8:1a

Luke presented the events surrounding Stephen's martyrdom in Jerusalem next. He did so to explain the means God used to scatter the Christians and the gospel from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. This record also throws more light on the spiritual strength and vitality of the church at this time. Stephen's experiences as recorded here resemble those of our Lord, as Peter's did in the earlier chapters. Witherington listed 10 parallels between the passions of Jesus and Stephen.[349]

1. Stephen's arrest 6:8—7:1

6:8 Stephen was "full of grace" (cf. cf. 4:33; Luke 4:22) "and power" (cf. 2:22; 4:33), as well as the Holy Spirit (vv. 3, 5), wisdom (v. 3), and faith (v. 5). His ability to perform miracles seems unrelated to his having been appointed as one of the Seven (v. 5; cf. 21:8). Jesus and the Twelve were not the only ones who had the ability to perform miracles (cf. 2:22, 43; 5:12).

6:9-10 Many different synagogues existed in Jerusalem at this time (cf. 24:12). The Talmud said there were 390 of them before the Romans destroyed the city.[350] Other rabbinic sources set the number at 460 and 480, but these may be exaggerations.[351] Like local churches today, they tended to attract people with similar backgrounds and preferences. Many families, that had experienced liberation from some kind of slavery or servitude, evidently populated the "Synagogue of the Freedmen." Some scholars believe that as many as five synagogues are in view in this reference, but the best interpretation seems to be that there was just one.[352]

> "The *Freedmen* were Roman prisoners (or the descendants of such prisoners) who had later been granted their freedom. We know that a considerable number of Jews were taken prisoner by the Roman general Pompey and later released in Rome, and it is possible that these are meant here."[353]

These people had their roots in North Africa (Cyrene and Alexandria) and Asia Minor (Cilicia and Asia). Thus these were Hellenistic Jews, the group from which Stephen himself probably came. Since Saul of Tarsus

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[349]Witherington, p. 253.
[350]See Fiensy, p. 234.
[351]See Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:119.
[352]See Riesner, pp. 204-6.
[353]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 129. See also Barrett, pp. 323-24.

was from Cilicia, perhaps he attended this synagogue, though he was not a freed man. He had been born free. The leading men in this congregation took issue with Stephen, whom they had heard defend the gospel. Perhaps he, too, attended this synagogue. However, they were unable to defeat him in debate. Stephen seems to have been an unusually gifted defender of the faith, though he was not one of the Twelve. He was a forerunner of later apologists. God guided wise Stephen by His Spirit as he spoke (cf. Luke 21:15).

This is the first occurrence in Acts of someone presenting the gospel in a Jewish synagogue. Until now we have read that the disciples taught and preached in the *temple* and from *house to house* (5:42). We now learn that they were also announcing the good news in their Jewish religious meetings. Paul normally preached first *in the synagogue* in the towns he evangelized on his missionary journeys.

> "While not minimizing the importance of the apostles to the whole church, we may say that in some way Stephen, Philip, and perhaps others of the appointed seven may well have been to the Hellenistic believers what the apostles were to the native-born Christians."[354]

6:11 Failing to prove Stephen wrong by intellectual argumentation, his adversaries falsely accused him of defying Moses and God (cf. Matt. 26:61, 65). At this time in history, the Jews defined blasphemy as any defiant sin.[355]

6:12 Stephen's accusers "stirred up" the Jewish "people," the Jewish "elders" (family and tribal leaders), and the "scribes" (Pharisees) against Stephen. Soldiers then arrested him and "brought him before the Sanhedrin (Council)," as they had done to Jesus, Peter, John, and the other apostles (4:15; 5:27; cf. 22:30). Until now we have read in Acts that Jewish persecution focused on the apostles, but now we read that other Christians began to experience this persecution.

6:13-14 The false testimony against Stephen was that he was saying things about the temple ("this holy place") and the Mosaic "Law" that the Jews regarded as untrue and unpatriotic (cf. Matt. 26:59-61). Stephen appeared to be challenging the authority of the Pharisees, the Mosaic Law, and a major teaching of the Sadducees, namely, the importance of the temple. He was evidently saying the same things Jesus had said (cf. Matt. 5:21-48; 12:6; 24:1-2; Mark 14:58; John 2:19-21).

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[354]Longenecker, p. 335.

[355]Gustaf H. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, p. 314.

> "Like the similar charge against Jesus (Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58; cf. John 2:19-22), its falseness lay not so much in its wholesale fabrication but in its subtile and deadly misrepresentation of what was intended. Undoubtedly Stephen spoke regarding a recasting of Jewish life in terms of the supremacy of Jesus the Messiah. Undoubtedly he expressed in his manner and message something of the subsidiary significance of the Jerusalem temple and the Mosaic law, as did Jesus before him (e.g., Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6; 7:14-15; 10:5-9). But that is not the same as advocating the destruction of the temple or the changing of the law—though on these matters we must allow Stephen to speak for himself in Acts 7."[356]

> "For Luke, the Temple stands as a time-honored, traditional place for teaching and prayer in Israel, which serves God's purpose but is not indispensable; the attitude with which worshippers use the temple makes all the difference."[357]

6:15 Luke may have intended to stress Stephen's being full of the Holy Spirit, that resulted in his confidence, composure, and courage, by drawing attention to "his face." Moses' face similarly *shone* when he descended from Mt. Sinai after seeing God (cf. 7:55-56; Exod. 34:29, 35). Perhaps Stephen's hearers recalled Moses' shining face. If so, they should have concluded that Stephen was not *against* Moses, but was *like* Moses. Stephen proceeded to function as "an angel" (a messenger from God), as well as looking like one, by bringing new revelation to his hearers, as Moses had. The Old Covenant had come through angelic mediation at Mt. Sinai (Deut 33:2 LXX; cf. Heb. 2:2). Now revelation about the New Covenant was coming through one who acted and even looked "like . . . an angel." As on the day of Pentecost, God was giving both audio and visual evidence that what the speaker was saying came from Him.

7:1 The "high priest" probably refers to Caiaphas, the official high priest then, but possibly Luke meant Annas (cf. 4:6).[358] Jesus had stood before both of these men, separately, to face similar charges (John 18:13-14, 24; Matt. 26:57). This was the third time that Christian leaders had defended their preaching before the Sanhedrin that Luke recorded in Acts (cf. 4:15; 5:27).

2. Stephen's address 7:2-53

As a Hellenistic Jew, Stephen possessed a clearer vision of the universal implications of the gospel than did most of the Hebraic Jews. It was this breadth of vision that drew

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[356]Longenecker, p. 336.

[357]Francis D. Weinert, "Luke, Stephen, and the Temple in Luke-Acts," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 17:3 (July 1987):88.

[358]See my comments on 5:6.

attack from the more temple-bound Jews in Jerusalem and led to his arrest. His address was not a personal defense designed to secure his acquittal by the Sanhedrin. It was instead an apologetic for the new way of worship that Jesus taught, and which His followers embraced.

> "On the surface it appears to be a rather tedious recital of Jewish history [cf. 13:16-33] which has little relevance to the charges on which Stephen has been brought to trial; on closer study, however, it reveals itself as a subtile and skilful proclamation of the Gospel which, in its criticism of Jewish institutions, marks the beginning of the break between Judaism and Christianity, and points forward to the more trenchant exposition of the difference between the old faith and the new as expressed by Paul and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews."[359]

Luke evidently recorded this speech, the longest one in Acts, to explain and defend this new way of worship quite fully. He showed that the disciples of Jesus were carrying on God's plan, whereas the unbelieving Jews had committed themselves to beliefs and behavior that God had left behind and disapproved. The story of his speech opens with a reference to "the God of glory" (v. 2), and it closes with mention of "the glory of God" (v. 55).

The form of Stephen's defense was common in his culture, but it is uncommon in western culture. He reviewed the history of Israel and highlighted elements of that history that supported his contentions. He built it mainly around outstanding personalities: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and, to a lesser degree, David and Solomon. The first section (vv. 2-16) deals with Israel's patriarchal period and refutes the charge of blaspheming God (6:11). The second major section (vv. 17-43) deals with Moses and the Law, and responds to the charge of blaspheming Moses (6:11) and speaking against the Law (6:13). The third section (vv. 44-50) deals with the temple, and responds to the charge of speaking against the temple (6:13), and Stephen's alledgedly saying that Jesus would destroy the temple and alter Jewish customs (6:14). Stephen then climaxed his address with an indictment of his hardhearted hearers (vv. 51-53).[360] Longenecker believed Stephen's main subjects were the land (vv. 2-36), the Law (vv. 37-43), and the temple (vv. 44-50), plus a concluding indictment (vv. 51-53).[361]

> "Stephen . . . was endeavoring to show how the Christian message was fully consistent with and the culmination of OT revelation."[362]

Stephen's purpose was also to show that Jesus experienced the same things Abraham, Joseph, and Moses had experienced as God's anointed servants. As the Sanhedrin recognized *them* as men whom God had anointed for the blessing of Israel and the world,

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[359]Neil, pp. 107-8.

[360]See Brian Peterson, "Stephen's Speech as a Modified Prophetic *Rib* Formula," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57:2 (June 2014):351-69.

[361]Longenecker, pp. 337-48. For a rhetorical analysis of Stephen's forensic oratory, see Witherington, p. 260-66.

[362]Kent, p. 66.

so should they recognize *Jesus*. The people to whom these three patriarchs went as God's representatives *all* initially rejected them—but later accepted them—which is also Jesus' history.

Stephen quoted from the Septuagint (Greek) Old Testament. This was the translation most commonly used by Hellenistic Jews such as himself. His selective history of Israel stressed the points that he wanted to make.

> "In this discourse three ideas run like cords through its fabric:
>
> "1. There is progress and change in God's program. . . .
>
> 2. The blessings of God are not limited to the land of Israel and the temple area. . . .
>
> "3. Israel in its past always evidenced a pattern of opposition to God's plans and His men."[363]

Stephen's view of God 7:2-16

The false witnesses had accused Stephen of blaspheming God (6:11). He proceeded to show the Sanhedrin that his view of God was absolutely orthodox. However in relating Israel's history during the patriarchal period, he mentioned things about God and the patriarchs that his hearers needed to reconsider.

The Abrahamic Covenant 7:2-8

Stephen began his defense by going back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, and to the Abrahamic Covenant, God's foundational promises to the Jews.

7:2-3 Stephen called for the Sanhedrin's attention, addressing his hearers respectfully as "brethren and fathers" (cf. 22:1). These men were his brethren, in that they were fellow Jews, and fathers, in that they were older leaders of the nation.

He took the title "God of glory" from Psalm 29:2, where it occurs in a context of God revealing His glory by speaking powerfully and majestically. God had revealed His glory by speaking this way to their "father (ancestor) Abraham" when he was in Mesopotamia (cf. Gen. 15:7; Neh. 9:7). Genesis 12:1-3 records God's instruction for Abraham to leave his homeland to go to a foreign country that God would show him. Stephen was quoting from the Septuagint translation of Genesis 12:1.[364] According to Rackham, this is one of 15 historical problems in Stephen's

[363]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 369. Italics omitted.
[364]Barrett, p. 342.

speech, but these problems include additions to previous revelation as well as apparent contradictions.[365]

At least three solutions are possible. First, Stephen may have been referring to a Jewish tradition that God first called Abraham in Ur. Second, he may have been telescoping Abraham's moves, from Ur and then from Haran, and viewing them as one event. Third, he may have viewed Genesis 15:7 as implying Abraham's initial call to leave Ur.[366]

God directed Abraham to a promised land. The Promised Land had become a Holy Land to the Jews, and in Stephen's day the Jews venerated it too greatly. We see this in the fact that they looked down on Hellenistic Jews, such as Stephen, who had not lived there all their lives. What was a good gift from God, the land, had become a source of inordinate pride that made the Jews conclude that orthodoxy was bound up with *being in the land*.

7:4 Obeying God's call, Abraham "left" Mesopotamia, specifically Ur "of the Chaldeans" (cf. Gen. 15:7; Josh. 24:3; Neh. 9:7), and "settled" temporarily "in Haran," near the top of the Fertile Crescent. After Abraham's father Terah died, God directed Abraham south into Canaan, the land the Jews occupied in Stephen's day (Gen. 12:5).

> "A comparison of the data in Genesis (11:26, 32; 12:4) seems to indicate that Terah lived another 60 years after Abraham left [Haran]. . . . The best solution seems to be that Abraham was not the oldest son of Terah, but was named first because he was the most prominent (11:26)."[367]

> "It is more likely that Stephen is using an old and alternate Jewish tradition here that has left its trace in the LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch, although the possibility also exists that Gen. 11:26 should be read differently, so that the MT and the LXX are closer than it might appear."[368]

The father of Judaism was willing to depart from where he was, in order to follow God into unknown territory, on the word of God alone. The Jews in Stephen's day were not willing to depart from where they were *in their thinking*, even though God's word was leading them to do so, as Stephen would point out. Stephen wanted them to follow Abraham's good example of faith and courage.

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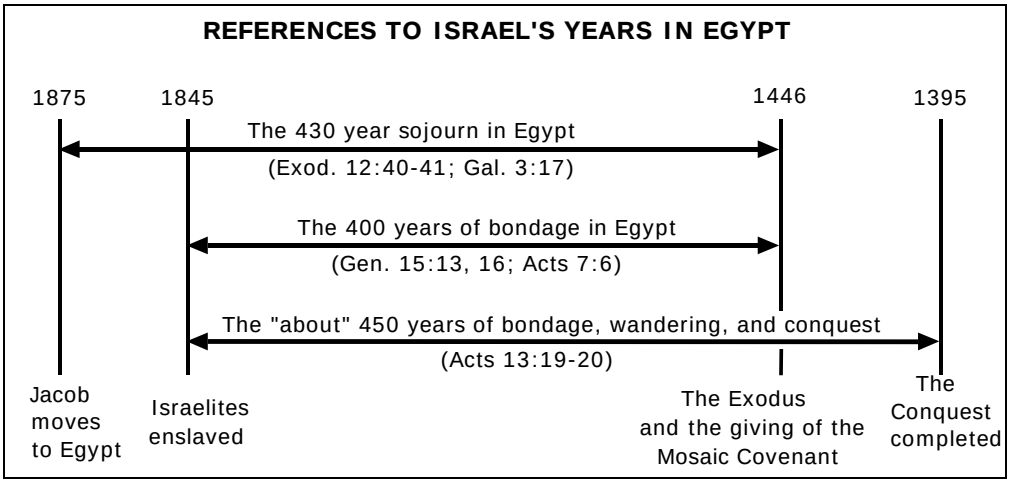
[365]Rackham, pp. 99-102. See Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 378-82, for suggested solutions to problems in verses 4, 14, 16, and 43.
[366]See Bock, *Acts*, pp. 282-83.
[367]Kent, p. 68.
[368]Bock, *Acts*, p. 284.

7:5 Stephen also contrasted Abraham's lack of, or "no inheritance" in the land with God's promise to give the land to Abraham's descendants as an inheritance (Gen. 12:7; cf. Heb. 11:8). God promised this when the patriarch had no children. Thus the emphasis is on God's promise of future possession of the land through descendants to come. Of course, Abraham did possess the cave of Machpelah in Canaan (Gen. 23:3-20), but perhaps Stephen meant that God gave no continuing or full possession to Abraham.

The Jews of Stephen's day needed to realize that God had not exhausted (finished or used up) His promises to Abraham in giving them what they presently had and valued so highly. There was greater inheritance to come, but it would come to future generations of their descendants, not to them. Specifically it would come to those who continued to follow Abraham's good example of faith by believing in Jesus. God sought to teach these Jews that there were spiritual descendants of Abraham who were not his physical descendants (Gal. 3:6-9, 29).

7:6 God also told Abraham that his offspring would be slaves and suffer mistreatment outside their land "for 400 years" (Gen. 15:13), namely, from the year their enslavement began, evidently 1845 B.C., to the Exodus, 1446 B.C. Some interpreters take the 400 years as a round number.[369]



The Israelites were currently under Roman oppression, but were again about to lose their freedom and experience antagonism, outside the land, for many years. Jesus had predicted this (Matt. 23:1—25:46).

[369]See also Harold W. Hoehner, "The Duration of the Egyptian Bondage," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:504 (October-December 1969):306-16.

7:7 God promised to punish ("judge") the nations that oppressed Israel (Gen. 12:3), and to bring her back into the land ("this place") eventually (Gen. 15:13). God had told Moses that He would bring the Israelites out of Egypt, and that they would worship Him at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 3:12). Stephen's point was that God had promised to punish those who oppressed His people. The Jews had been oppressing the Christians by prohibiting their preaching and even flogging them (4:18; 5:40). Gamaliel had warned that if the Christians were correct, the Jewish leaders would be fighting against God by opposing them (5:39). God's promise to judge His people's oppressors went back into the Abrahamic Covenant, which the Jews treasured and Stephen reminded them of here.

7:8 Stephen probably referred to God giving Abraham "the covenant of circumcision" (Gen. 17), because this was the *sign* that God would deliver on what He had promised. It was the seal of the Abrahamic Covenant. God's promise was firm. Moreover, God supernaturally enabled Abraham to father "Isaac," whom Abraham obediently "circumcised," and later Isaac begot "Jacob," who fathered "the 12 patriarchs." Thus this chapter in Israel's history ends with emphasis on God's faithfulness to His promises to Abraham. The Sanhedrin needed to reevaluate these promises in the light of how God was working in their day.

Stephen affirmed belief that the God of glory had given the Abrahamic Covenant, which contained promises of land (vv. 2-4), seed (v. 5), and blessing (vv. 6-7). He had sealed this covenant with a sign, namely, circumcision (v. 8). Circumcision was one of the Jewish customs that would pass away in view of the new revelation that had come through Jesus Christ (cf. 6:14).

Throughout his speech, Stephen made many statements that had revolutionary implications for traditional Jewish thinking of his day. He did not expound these implications, but they are clear in view of what the disciples of Jesus were preaching. As such his speech is a masterpiece of understatement, or rather non-statement. That the Sanhedrin saw these implications and rejected them, becomes clear at the end of the speech, when they reacted as negatively as possible.

God's faithfulness to His people 7:9-16

Stephen next proceeded to show what God had done with Joseph and his family. He apparently selected this segment of the patriarchal narrative primarily for two reasons. First, it shows how God miraculously preserved His people in faithfulness to His promises. Second, it shows the remarkable similarity between the career of Joseph, a "savior" God raised up, and that of Jesus. Jesus repeated many of Joseph's experiences, thus illustrating God's choice of Him. Also, the Israelites in the present were similar to Joseph's brothers in the past. Stephen's emphasis continued to be on God's faithfulness to His promises, despite the fact that Joseph's brothers were wicked and the chosen family was outside of the Promised Land. Stephen mentioned Jesus explicitly only once in his

entire speech, in his very last sentence (v. 52). Nevertheless he referred to Him indirectly many times, by drawing parallels between the experiences of Joseph and Moses and those of Jesus.

7:9-10 The "patriarchs," Joseph's brothers, "became jealous of" him (Gen. 37:11), and "sold him" as a slave "into Egypt" (Gen. 37:28). One of Jesus' 12 disciples was responsible for selling Him, even as one of Joseph's 11 brothers had been responsible for selling him. Nevertheless, "God was with Joseph" (Gen. 39:2, 21) "and rescued him" from prison, gave him "favor and wisdom before (in front of) Pharaoh (lit. 'Great House')," and "made him ruler (governor) over Egypt" (Gen. 41:41) and his father's family. God was with Joseph, even though his brothers rejected him, because he was one of God's chosen people and because he followed God faithfully. This is what the Christians were claiming to be and do.

> "The treatment of Joseph by his Hebrew brothers should have been a pointed reminder of the way Jesus had been dealt with by the Jewish nation."[370]

Like Joseph, Jesus' brethren rejected and literally sold Him for the price of a slave. Nevertheless God was with Joseph and Jesus (v. 9). God exalted Joseph under Pharaoh, and placed him in authority over his domain. God had done the same with Jesus.

7:11-12 The Jews' forefathers suffered from "a famine" in the Promised Land, and were sent to Egypt for "food" (Gen. 41:54-55; 42:2, 5). When hard times came upon God's people, He sustained them and brought them into blessing and under the rule of Joseph. So will it be in the future with Jesus. The Jews would first suffer hardship (in the destruction of Jerusalem and in the Tribulation), and then God will bring them into blessing under Jesus' rule (in the Millennium).

7:13-14 On their "second" visit, Joseph revealed himself "to his brothers," who could not believe he was their ruler, and he revealed his family's identity "to Pharaoh" (Gen. 45:1-4). In the future, similarly, Israel will finally recognize Jesus as her Messiah (Zech. 12:10-14). Joseph then "invited Jacob" and "all his family (relatives)," who numbered "75," to move to Egypt (Gen. 45:9-10). I take it that this was the number of people invited to Egypt. Some interpreters believe 75 people entered Egypt.

> "Stephen apparently cited the LXX figure which really was not an error, but computed the total differently by including five people which the Masoretic text did not."[371]

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[370]Kent, pp. 67-68.
[371]Ibid., p. 69.

> "One of the most widely accepted solutions is to recognize that the Hebrew text includes Jacob, Joseph, and Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (a total of 70), but that the Septuagint omits Jacob and Joseph but includes Joseph's seven grandchildren (mentioned in 1 Chron. 7:14-15, 20-25). This is supported by the Hebrew in Genesis 46:8-26 which enumerates 66 names, omitting Jacob, Joseph, and Joseph's two sons."[372]

7:15 The number of people who made the trip and entered Egypt was probably 70 (Gen. 46:26-27; Exod. 1:5; Deut. 10:22). "Jacob . . . died," safe and blessed under Joseph's rule. Likewise will Israel end its days under Jesus' rule in the Millennium. Jacob died in "Egypt," as did his sons and their immediate descendants. Thus verses 11-15 record both a threat to the chosen people and God's preservation of them, a second testimony to God's faithfulness in this pericope (cf. vv. 9-10).

7:16 From Egypt the chosen people eventually returned to the Promised Land. God had been with them away from the land, and He now returned them to the land. Believers in Jesus will end up in the final resting place of Jesus: heaven.

"Shechem" was of special interest to Stephen. The Israelites buried Joseph's bones there after their initial conquest of the land (Josh. 24:32). Stephen's allusion to this event was his way of concluding this period of Israel's history. Moses wrote that *Jacob*, not Abraham, "had purchased" the "tomb" from "Hamor in Shechem" (Gen. 33:19; cf. 23:16; 50:13). This is probably a case of attributing to an ancestor what one of his descendants did (cf. Heb. 7:9-10). In the ancient Near Eastern view of things, people regarded an ancestor as in one sense participating in the actions of his descendants (Gen. 9:25; 25:23; cf. Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:11-13). Abraham had purchased Joseph's burial site in the sense that his grandson Jacob eventually purchased it (cf. Heb. 7:9-10). Stephen probably intended that his reference to Abraham, rather than to Jacob, would remind his hearers of God's faithfulness in fulfilling the promises God gave to Abraham. He did this in one sense when Israel possessed Canaan under Joshua's leadership. Israel will experience the ultimate fulfillment of God's land promises to Abraham when she enters rest under Jesus' messianic rule in the Millennium.

Two other explanations of this apparent error are these. Stephen telescoped two events into one: Abraham's purchase from Ephron in Hebron (Gen. 23:1-20), and Jacob's purchase from Hamor in Shechem.[373] Second, Abraham really did purchase the plot in Shechem, though Moses

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[372]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 370. See also J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 226-67.
[373]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 149, n. 39.

did not record that (cf. Gen. 12:6-7), and Jacob repurchased it later because the Canaanites had retaken it.[374]

In Stephen's day, Shechem was in Samaritan territory. Stephen reminded the Sanhedrin that their ancestral deliverer Joseph was buried in the land that orthodox Jews despised and avoided. This was yet another instance of helping them understand that they should not think the only place God worked was in the Promised Land. Stephen had previously referred to Mesopotamia as the place where God had revealed Himself to Abraham (v. 2).

Stephen's view of Moses and the Law 7:17-43

Stephen continued his review of Israel's history by proceeding into the period of the Exodus. He sought to refute the charge that he was blaspheming against Moses (6:11) and was speaking against the Mosaic Law (6:13).

The career of Moses 7:17-36

Stephen's understanding of Moses was as orthodox as his view of God, but his presentation of Moses' career made comparison with Jesus' career unmistakable. As in the previous pericope, there is a double emphasis in this one, first, on God's faithfulness to His promises in the Abrahamic Covenant and, second, on Moses as a precursor of Jesus.

> "More specifically than in the life of Joseph, Stephen sees in the story of Moses a type of the new and greater Moses—Christ himself."[375]

7:17-18 Stephen had gotten ahead of himself briefly in verse 16. Now he returned to his history of Israel just before the Exodus. "The promise" God had made to Abraham was that He would judge his descendants' enslaving nation and free the Israelites (Gen. 15:14). This was a particular way that He would fulfill the earlier promises to give Israel the land, to multiply the Israelites, and to curse those nations that cursed Israel (Gen. 12:1-3, 7). The Israelites "increased" in Egypt until another Pharaoh ("king") arose who disregarded ("did not know") Joseph (Exod. 1:7-8).

Similarly, Christ had come in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4). Before Moses appeared on the scene, Israel increased in numbers and fell under the control of an enemy that was hostile to her. Likewise, before Jesus appeared, Israel had increased numerically and had fallen under Roman domination.

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[374]J. Rawson Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 164-65. See also Wiersbe, 1:431.
[375]Neil, p. 110.

7:19 This Pharaoh "took advantage" of the Israelites, and "mistreated" them by decreeing the death of "their infants" (Exod. 1:10, 16, 22). Like Pharaoh, Herod the Great had tried to destroy all the Jewish babies at the time of Jesus' birth.

7:20-22 "Moses," the great deliverer of his people, was "born," preserved, protected ("nurtured" by "Pharaoh's daughter" no less), and "educated" in Egypt.

> ". . . the pillar of the Law was reared in a foreign land and in a Gentile court."[376]

Moses became a powerful man "in word" (his writings?) "and deed." All this took place outside the Promised Land, which further depreciated the importance of that land in Stephen's account.

Like Moses, Jesus was lovely in God's sight when He was born, because God chose Him, and Mary nurtured Him at home, temporarily, before He came under the control of the Romans (cf. Matt. 1:18-21). Moses had great knowledge, as did Jesus; both became powerful men in words and deeds (v. 22).

> ". . . after forty years of learning in Egypt, God put him [Moses] out into the desert. There God gave him his B. D. degree, his Backside of the Desert degree, and prepared him to become the deliverer."[377]

7:23-29 Moses' presumptive attempt to deliver his people resulted in his having to flee Egypt to "Midian," where he "became an alien" (cf. v. 6). These verses relate another story of an anointed leader of God's people who, like Joseph, was rejected by those people. Yet God did not abandon Moses or His people. God blessed Moses in a foreign land, Midian, by giving him "two sons."

Although Moses offered himself as the deliverer of his brethren, they did not understand him. The same thing happened to Jesus. Moses' Jewish brethren, who did not recognize that God had appointed him as their ruler and judge, rejected him even though Moses sought to help them. Likewise Jesus' Jewish brethren rejected Him. Moses' brethren feared that he might use his power to destroy them rather than help them. Similarly the Jewish leaders feared that Jesus, with His supernatural abilities, might bring them harm rather than deliverance and blessing (cf. John 11:47-48). Moses' rejection led him to leave his brethren and to live in a distant land where he fathered "sons" (v. 29). Jesus, too, had left His people (the Israelites),

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[376]Ibid., p. 111.
[377]McGee, 4:539.

and had gone to live in a distant land (heaven) where He was producing descendants (i.e., Christians).

7:30-34 It was in Midian, "after 40 years," that God appeared to Moses in the "burning bush." The "angel" that appeared to Moses was the Angel of the Lord, very possibly the preincarnate Christ (vv. 31-33; cf. Exod. 3:2, 6; 4:2; John 12:41; 1 Cor. 10:1-4; Heb. 11:26). God commanded Moses to return "to Egypt" as His instrument of deliverance for the Israelites. Again, God revealed Himself and His Law *outside* the Holy Land.

Moses received a commission from God, in Midian, to return to his brethren in order to lead them out of their oppressed condition. Jesus, upon God's order, will return to the earth to deliver Israel from her oppressed condition during the Tribulation, when He returns at His Second Coming.

7:35-36 The very man ("This man Moses") whom the Israelite leaders had rejected as their "ruler and judge" (v. 27) "God sent" back to fulfill that role "with" His "help" (cf. 3:13-15). Moses proceeded to perform "wonders and signs in . . . Egypt," at the "Red Sea," and "in the wilderness."

The third reference to 40 years (cf. vv. 23, 30, 36) divides Moses' career into three distinct parts. These stages were: (1) preparation ending with rejection by his brethren, (2) preparation ending with his return to Egypt, and (3) ruling and judging Israel. The parallels with the career of Jesus become increasingly obvious as Stephen's speech unfolds.

> "Jesus too had been brought out of Egypt by Joseph and Mary, had passed through the waters of Jordan at his baptism (the Red Sea), and had been tempted in the wilderness for forty days."[378]

As Moses became Israel's ruler and judge with angelic assistance, so will Jesus. As Moses had done miracles, so had Jesus. The ultimate Prophet, whom Moses had predicted would follow him, was Jesus (cf. 3:22).

> "Stephen naturally lingers over Moses, 'in whom they trusted' (Jn. v. 45-47), showing that the lawgiver, rejected by his people (35), foreshadowed the experience of Christ (Jn. i. 11)."[379]

The teaching of Moses 7:37-43

Stephen continued dealing with the Mosaic period of Israel's history, but he focused next, more particularly, on Moses' teaching: the Mosaic Law. This is what the Jews of his day professed to venerate and follow exactly, but Stephen showed that they really had rejected what Moses taught.

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[378]Neil, p. 111.

[379]Blaiklock, p. 76.

7:37-38 Stephen stressed the fact that "this" Moses was the man who had given the prophecy about the coming Prophet (Deut. 18:15), and had received other divine oracles for the Israelites. "This" (Gr. *houtos estin*) with the articular adjectival participle in verses 37 and 38 is an intensified form of the demonstrative pronouns translated "this" in verses 35 (*touton*) and 36 (*houtos*). Stephen clearly respected Moses, but he noted that Moses himself had predicted that a Prophet like himself would appear (cf. Acts 3:22). Therefore the Jews should not have concluded that the Mosaic Law was the end of God's revelation to them. The fact that Stephen spoke of the Mosaic Law as "living oracles" suggests that he viewed it more in its revelatory than in its regulatory aspect.[380]

> ". . . preaching Christ was not disloyalty to an ancient tradition, but its fulfilment. This was powerful argument, and a continuation of Peter's theme (iii. 22, 23). (This truth was to be more fully developed for similar minds in the Epistle to the Hebrews; see iii. 1-6, ix. 18-20, xii. 24).)"[381]

Jesus had spent a time of temptation "in the wilderness" (40 days), and had heard God "speaking" audibly from heaven at His baptism. He, too, had rubbed shoulders with Israel's leaders, and had received revelations from God for His people.

7:39 The Israelites in the wilderness refused to listen ("were unwilling to be obedient") to Moses, and "repudiated" his leadership of them (Num. 14:3-4; Exod. 32:1, 23). By insisting on the finality of the Mosaic Law so strongly, as they did, Stephen's hearers were in danger of repudiating what Moses had prophesied about the coming Prophet.

The Israelites refused to follow Moses, wanting instead to return to their former place of slavery. So had Israel refused to follow Jesus, but "turned back" instead to her former condition of bondage under the Law (cf. Gal. 5:1).

7:40-43 The Israelites turned from Moses to idolatry (the golden calf "idol"), and in this rebellion their high priest, Aaron, helped them. Consequently God gave them over to what they wanted (cf. Rom. 1:24). He also purposed to send them into captivity as punishment (Amos 5:25-27).

By implication, turning from the revelation that Jesus had given amounted to idolatry. Stephen implied that by rejecting Moses' coming Prophet—Jesus—his hearers could expect a similar fate, despite the sacrifices they brought to God.

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[380]See Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 61.

[381]Blaiklock, p. 76.

> "Stephen's quotation of Amos 5:27, 'I will carry you away beyond Babylon,' differs from the OT. Both the Hebrew text and the LXX say 'Damascus.' The prophet Amos was foretelling the exile of the northern kingdom under the Assyrians which would take them beyond Damascus. More than a century later, the southern kingdom was captured because of her similar disobedience to God and was deported to Babylon. Stephen has merely substituted this phrase in order to use this Scripture to cover the judgment of God on the entire nation."[382]

Israel had turned from Jesus to idolatry, and her high priest had helped her do so. One of Stephen's concerns in this speech, therefore, was false worship. The Israelites had previously rejoiced in their idolatry, in the wilderness, and once again more recently, since Jesus was out of the way. God had turned from them because of their apostasy in the past, and He was doing the same in the present. They did not genuinely offer their sacrifices to God, and He did not accept them, since they had rejected His anointed Ruler and Judge. The Israelites were heading for another wilderness experience. They adopted a house of worship, and an object of worship, that were not God's choice—but their own creations. God would remove them far from their land in punishment (i.e., in A.D. 70).

Stephen had answered his accusers' charge that he had spoken against Moses (6:11, 13) by showing that he believed what Moses had predicted about the coming Prophet. It was really his hearers, like Jesus' hearers earlier, who rejected Moses—since they refused to allow the possibility of prophetic revelation that superseded the Mosaic Law.

> "Joseph's brethren, rejecting the beloved of their father, Moses' people, turning with scorn and cursing on the one who only sought to give them freedom—these were prototypes which the audience would not fail to refer to themselves."[383]

Stephen's view of the temple 7:44-50

Stephen effectively refuted the general charges that he had blasphemed God and Moses (6:11; cf vv. 2-16) and had spoken against the Law (6:13; cf. vv. 17-43). He next addressed the charge that he spoke against the temple (6:13). The charges that he had said Jesus would destroy the temple and alter Jewish customs (6:14) were really specific accusations growing out of Stephen's view of the temple.

The Jewish leaders of Stephen's day attached inordinate importance to the temple, as they did to the Mosaic Law and the Promised Land. They had distorted God's view of the temple, as they had distorted His meaning in the Law. Instruction concerning both the

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[382]Kent, pp. 70-71.

[383]Blaiklock, p. 76.

Law, which specified Israel's walk before people, and "the tabernacle," which specified her worship of God, came to Moses when he was not in the Promised Land, but at Mt. Sinai.

7:44 Stephen pointed out that it was the "tabernacle of testimony" in the wilderness that God had ordered built, not the temple. God even gave Moses blueprints ("the pattern") to follow in constructing it, because its design had instructive value. The tabernacle of testimony was important, primarily because it contained God's revealed will, and it was the place that God's presence dwelt in a localized sense. The "testimony" was the tablets of the Mosaic Law that stayed in the ark of the covenant.

7:45 The tabernacle was so important that the Israelites "brought it in" to the Promised Land when they conquered Palestine under Joshua's leadership. The Greek form of "Joshua" is "Jesus." God drove out the Canaanites in faithfulness to His promise to give the land to His people. The tabernacle continued to be God's ordained center of worship throughout David's reign.

7:46 God blessed David's reign, and it was the tabernacle—not the temple—that existed then. The initiative to build the temple ("a dwelling place for the God of Jacob") was David's, not God's. It had been David's desire to build God a more glorious place in which to dwell. However, God did not "jump" at this suggestion because He did not need another place in which to dwell.

> "The temple, Stephen implies, was a royal whim, tolerated of God."[384]

7:47 God did not even permit David to build the temple. He was not that eager to have a temple. However, He allowed "Solomon," a king who did not find as much favor in God's sight as David did, to build it.

7:48-50 Stephen hastened to clarify that the "Most High" God, for whom a suitable house was certainly a reasonable desire, does not restrict Himself to a habitation constructed by human "hands." Solomon himself had acknowledged this when he dedicated the temple (cf. 1 Kings 8:27; Isa. 66:1-2).

> "Judaism never taught that God actually lived in the temple or was confined to its environs but spoke of his 'Name' and presence as being there. In practice, however, this concept was often denied. This would especially appear so to Stephen, when further divine activity was refused out-of-hand by the people in their preference for God's past

[384]Ibid., p. 77.

> revelation and redemption as symbolized in the existence of the temple."[385]

Stephen quoted Isaiah 66:1-2 for support. He referred to Isaiah as "the prophet." As a prophet, Isaiah was worthy of as much respect as Moses. Significantly, the last part of Isaiah 66:2 says that God esteems those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at His Word. Stephen left this timely and powerful challenge unstated for his hearers.

> "It would seem that these verses form the real thrust of Stephen's speech. In quoting with approval Isaiah's words, Stephen would appear to imply that, as Christ is the new Moses, he is also the new Temple. In him and through him alone can men approach God."[386]

Stephen reminded the Sanhedrin that the temple, which they venerated excessively, was not the primary venue of God's person and work. He was arguing that Jesus was God's designated replacement for the temple, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews also taught (Heb. 8:1-2; 9:11-28).

There have been three major interpretations of Stephen's view of the temple: (1) God would replace it; (2) God had rejected it; and (3) God is above it. All three views are implications of Stephen's words.[387]

> "Throughout his speech he has, of course, been undermining the superstition which exalted a place of worship. The first great revelations of God had, in fact, taken place in foreign lands, Ur, Sinai, Midian, long before the temple existed (2-4, 29-34, 44-50)."[388]

Stephen's accusation 7:51-53

Stephen concluded his defense by indicting (formally accusing, charging) his accusers. They had brought charges against him, but now he brought more serious charges against them.

In his first speech to the Sanhedrin, Peter had been quite brief and forthright (4:8-12). He had presented "Jesus" as the only name by which people must be saved (4:12). In his second speech to that body, Peter had again spoken briefly but more directly (5:29-32). He had charged the Sanhedrin with crucifying the Prince and Savior whom God had provided for His people (5:30-31). In this third speech before the Sanhedrin, Stephen spoke extensively, giving even more condemning evidence. The Sanhedrin was guilty of

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[385]Longenecker, p. 346.
[386]Neil, p. 114. Cf. John 2:19, 21; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 9:1-10; 1 Pet. 2:5.
[387]See Dennis D. Sylva, "The Meaning and Function of Acts 7:46-50," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106:2 (1987):261-75.
[388]Blaiklock, p. 77.

unresponsiveness to God's Word, and of betraying and murdering the Righteous One (v. 52).

7:51 By rejecting Jesus, the Sanhedrin was doing just what their forefathers had done in rejecting God's other anointed servants, such as Joseph and Moses. They were "stiff-necked," a figure of speech for being self-willed. Moses used this expression to describe the Israelites when they rebelled against God and worshipped the golden calf (cf. Exod. 33:5; Deut. 9:13). While Stephen's hearers had undergone physical circumcision, and were proud of it, they were "uncircumcised" in their affections and responsiveness to God's Word. They were resisting the Holy Spirit, rather than allowing Him to control (fill) them. They were similar to the apostates in Israel's past (cf. Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16), whom the former prophets had rebuked (cf. Jer. 4:4; 9:26). By resisting Stephen, who was full of the Holy Spirit (6:3, 5), they were resisting the Holy Spirit.

7:52 The Sanhedrin members were behaving just as their forefathers had. Note that Stephen had previously associated himself with "our fathers" (vv. 2, 11-12, 15, 19, 39, 44-45), but now he disassociated himself from the Sanhedrin by referring to "your fathers." "Our fathers" were the trusting and obeying patriarchs, but "your fathers" were the unresponsive apostates. The Jews' ill treatment of their prophets was well known and self-admitted (cf. 2 Chron. 36:15-16; Neh. 9:26; Jer. 2:30). They had consistently resisted God's messengers sent to them, even killing the heralds ("those who had previously announced the coming") of God's "Righteous One" (cf. 3:14; 1 Kings 19:10, 14; Neh. 9:26; Jer. 26:20-24; Luke 6:23; 11:49; 13:34; 1 Thess. 2:15; Heb. 11:36-38). Stephen said the Sanhedrin members were responsible for the betrayal and murder of that same One, Jesus.

7:53 Their guilt was all the greater because they had received God's "law," which "angels" had delivered (Deut. 33:2 LXX; cf. Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2), but they had disobeyed it. They were the real blasphemers (defiant sinners). Stephen, *as an angel* (cf. 6:15), had brought them new insight, but they were about to reject it too.

The primary theme of Stephen's speech is that Israel's leaders had failed to recognize that God had told His people ahead of time that they could expect a change. They had falsely concluded that the present state of Judaism was the final stage in God's plan of revelation and redemption. We, too, can become so preoccupied with the past and the present that we forget what God has revealed about the future. We need to keep looking ahead.

> "He [Stephen] saw that the men who played a really great part in the history of Israel were the men who heard God's command, 'Get thee out,' and who were not afraid to obey it [cf. vv. 3, 15, 29, 36, 45]. The great men were the men who were prepared to make the adventure of faith.

> With that adventurous spirit Stephen implicitly contrasted the spirit of the Jews of his own day, whose one desire was to keep things as they were and who regarded Jesus and His followers as dangerous innovators."[389]

A second, related theme, is that Israel's leaders had departed from God's priorities to give prominence to secondary issues for their own glory (the Holy Land, Moses, the temple). We also can think too highly of our own country, our leaders, and our place of worship.

Another related theme, the theme of Israel's rejection of the Lord's anointed servants, also runs through Stephen's speech. Jesus was another of God's anointed servants. The Jews had dealt with Him as they had dealt with the other anointed servants whom God had sent them. They could expect to experience the consequences of their rejection as their forefathers had. We need to observe the pattern of *humiliation followed by glorification*, that has marked the careers of God's servants in the past, and to anticipate that pattern in our own careers.

> ". . . it [Stephen's defense] is not designed to secure Stephen's acquittal of the charges brought against him, but to proclaim the essence of the new faith. It has been well said that, although the name of Christ is never mentioned, Stephen is all the while 'preaching Jesus'. He is demonstrating that everything in Israel's past history and experience pointed forward to God's culminating act in his plan for the redemption of the world in sending the Christ. The witness of Abraham, Joseph, Moses and David in one way or another underlined the transitory nature of existing Jewish institutions and the hollowness of Jewish claims to have the monopoly of the way to salvation. The presence of God could not be restricted to one Holy Land or confined in one holy Temple, nor could his Law be atrophied in the ceremonialism of the Sadducees or the legalism of the Pharisees."[390]

Stephen's speech demonstrated remarkable insight, but this was more than mere human genius because the Holy Spirit was controlling (filling) him (6:5, 10). While it is easy to overstate Stephen's importance, he seems to have understood the changes that would take place because of the Jews' rejection of Jesus. He did so earlier, and more clearly, than some of the other leaders of the Jerusalem church, such as Peter (cf. ch. 10). He appears to have been an enlightened thinker, whom God enabled to see the church's future in relationship to Israel, as few did this early in the church's history. Many Jewish Christians—who still observed the Jewish hour of prayer, feasts, and temple ritual—probably did not appreciate this relationship. Stephen was in a real sense the forerunner of Paul, who became the champion of God's plan to separate Christianity from Judaism.[391]

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[389]Barclay, p. 53.

[390]Neil, p. 116.

[391]See Howson, pp. 59-60, for comparisons of the form and content of their defenses.

> "So he [Stephen] perceived, and evidently was the first to perceive clearly, the incidental and temporary character of the Mosaic Law with the temple and all its worship. This was the first germ of doctrine which S. Paul was afterward to carry out to its full logical and far-reaching consequences, viz. the perfect equality of Jew and Gentile in the church of God . . .
>
> "S. Stephen then is the connecting link between S. Peter and S. Paul—a link indispensable to the chain. Stephen, and not Gamaliel, was the real master of S. Paul. . . . For 'the work' of Stephen lasts on till chapter xii (see xi 19), and then it is taken up by his greater pupil and successor—Paul."[392]

There have been scholars who believed that Stephen probably did not understand the issues behind the cause for which he died.[393] However, a careful study of his speech reveals that he did.

3. Stephen's death 7:54—8:1a

Stephen's speech caused a revolution in the Jews' attitude toward the disciples of Jesus, and his martyrdom began the first persecution of the Christians.

Luke recorded the Sanhedrin's response to Stephen's message in order to document Jesus' continued rejection by Israel's leaders. He did so to explain why the gospel spread as it did, and why the Jews responded to it as they did, following this event.

7:54 "Cut to the quick" is a figure of speech that describes being painfully wounded. Stephen's charge of always resisting God's Spirit convicted and offended the members of the Sanhedrin. They retaliated fiercely. "Gnashing (grinding) their teeth" pictures brutal antagonism.

> "The possibilities are that what took place was a spontaneous act of mob violence or that Stephen was legally executed by the Sanhedrin, either because there was some kind of special permission from the Romans or because there was no Roman governor at the time and advantage was taken of the interregnum. The first of these possibilities is the more likely."[394]

7:55 Fully controlled by ("Being full of") the "Holy Spirit" (cf. 6:3, 5, 8, 15), Stephen received a vision of "Jesus standing at the right hand of God" in all His "glory." This vision of God's throne room in heaven is similar to visions that Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and John saw.

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[392]Rackham, p. 87-88.
[393]E.g., Adolph Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 1:50.
[394]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 148.

The unusual fact that Stephen saw Him standing rather than seated, as the biblical writers elsewhere describe Him (e.g., Ps. 110:1), may imply several things. It may imply His activity as Prophet and Mediator, standing between God and man, and as a Witness, since He was witnessing through His witnesses on earth.

> "Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing His servant before God. The proper posture for a witness is the standing posture. Stephen, condemned by an earthly court, appeals for vindication to a heavenly court, and his vindicator in that supreme court is Jesus, who stands at God's right hand as Stephen's advocate, his 'paraclete.' When we are faced with words so wealthy in association as these words of Stephen, it is unwise to suppose that any single interpretation exhausts their significance. All the meaning that had attached to Ps. 110:1 and Dan. 7:13f. is present here, including especially the meaning that springs from their combination on the lips of Jesus when He appeared before the Sanhedrin; but the replacement of 'sitting' by 'standing' probably makes its own contribution to the total meaning of the words in this context—a contribution distinctively appropriate to Stephen's present role as martyr-witness."[395]

"Standing" may also imply Jesus' welcome of Stephen into His presence as the first Christian martyr.

> "Here Jesus, functioning as Judge, welcomed Stephen into heaven, showing that despite earthly rejection, Stephen was honored in heaven."[396]

Psalm 110:1 describes Messiah as at God's right hand, where Stephen saw Jesus. Jesus' position in relation to God suggests His acceptance by Him, His authority under God, and His access to God.

7:56 Stephen announced his vision and described Jesus as the "Son of Man" (cf. Rev. 1:13; 14:14). This was a title of the Messiah used by Daniel that implied the universal aspect of His rule (Dan. 7:13-14). Only Jesus used this title of Himself in the Gospels. He had used it of Himself when He stood before the Sanhedrin not many weeks earlier (Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). Stephen was virtually saying that his vision confirmed Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man. Access to God is through Jesus Christ, not through temple ritual, as the Jews taught (1 Tim. 2:5).

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[395]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on . . .*, pp. 168-69. Cf. Witherington, p. 275.

[396]Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 111. Cf. idem, *Acts*, p. 312.

7:57-58 Stephen's declaration amounted to blasphemy to the Sanhedrin. They knew that when he said "Son of Man" he meant "Jesus." Furthermore, the Jews believed that *no one* had the authority to be "at God's right hand" in heaven.[397] The Sanhedrin members therefore cried out in agony of soul, covered their ears so they would hear no more, and seized Stephen to prevent him from saying more or escaping. "Stoning" was the penalty for blasphemy in Israel (Lev. 24:16; Deut. 17:7), and the Sanhedrin members went right to it.

There are two traditions concerning the place of Stephen's execution: The older one is a site north of the present Damascus Gate, and a more recent one is east of the present St. Stephen's Gate.[398] The exact location is impossible to nail down.

In the three trials before the Sanhedrin that Luke recorded thus far, the first ended with a warning (4:17, 21), the second with flogging (5:40), and the third with stoning (7:58-60). The Sanhedrin now abandoned Gamaliel's former moderating advice (5:35-39). It did not have the authority to execute someone without Roman sanction, and Jewish law forbade executing a person on the same day as his trial.[399] However, since witnesses were present to cast the first stones, as the Mosaic Law prescribed, Stephen's death seems not to have been simply the result of mob violence, but official action. Probably it was mob violence precipitated and controlled by the Sanhedrin along the lines of Jesus' execution (cf. Matt. 26:67-68). One of the officially approved methods of punishment, when a person supposedly violated a positive precept of the Mosaic Law or the traditions of the elders, was the "rebel's beating." Such offenders could be punished on the spot, without a trial.[400]

> "The message of Stephen, it seems, served as a kind of catalyst to unite Sadducees, Pharisees, and the common people against the early Christians."[401]

"Saul" of Tarsus was there, and cooperated with the authorities by holding their cloaks, while they carried out their wicked business (cf. 8:1; 22:20). He was then a "young man" (Gr. *neanias*, cf. 20:9; 23:17-18, 22), but we do not know his exact age. Since he died about A.D. 68, and since Stephen probably died about A.D. 34, perhaps Saul was in his early or mid-thirties. Jesus and Saul appear to have been roughly contemporaries. This verse does not imply that Saul was a member of the Sanhedrin.[402]

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[397]Ibid.

[398]Howson, p. 61.

[399]Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4:1.

[400]Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 66-67.

[401]Longenecker, p. 351.

[402]See Simon Légasse, "Paul's Pre-Christian Career according to Acts," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 365-90.

7:59-60 Stephen "called upon" the Lord (Gr. *epikaloumenon*), as Peter had exhorted his hearers to do, for deliverance (2:21): "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Stephen died as Jesus did, with prayers for his executioners ("Lord, do not hold this sin against them!") being his last words (cf. Luke 23:34, 46; cf. 2 Chron. 24:22; Luke 6:27-28). However, Stephen prayed to Jesus, whereas Jesus prayed to His Father. Luke probably wanted his readers to connect the two executions, but they were not exactly the same. Some commentators have argued that Luke presented Stephen's execution as a reenactment of Jesus' execution.[403]

> "Between Stephen and Jesus there was communion of nature, there was communion of testimony, there was communion of suffering, and finally there was communion of triumph."[404]

Stephen's body, not his soul, fell asleep to await resurrection (cf. 13:36; John 11:11; 1 Thess. 4:13, 15; et al.).

> "For Stephen the whole dreadful turmoil finished in a strange peace. He fell asleep. To Stephen there came the peace which comes to the man who has done the right thing even if the right thing kills him."[405]

> "As Paul is to become Luke's hero, in that he more than any other single man was instrumental in spreading the Gospel throughout the Gentile world, so Stephen here receives honourable recognition as the man who first saw the wider implications of the Church's faith and laid the foundations on which the mission to the Gentiles was built."[406]

8:1a Saul's active approval of Stephen's execution reveals his commitment to the extermination of Jesus' disciples, which he proceeded to implement zealously. This verse introduces Saul and provides a transition to what follows later concerning Saul's conversion and subsequent ministry.

B. THE MINISTRY OF PHILIP 8:1B-40

Luke next featured other important events in the expansion of the church and the ministry of another important witness. "Philip" took the gospel into Samaria, and then indirectly to Ethiopia, one of the more remote parts of the earth (cf. 1:8). The account of Philip's ministry in this chapter has several connections with chapters 6 and 7. Philip, like Stephen, was a member of the Seven (6:5). The persecution begun in chapters 6 and

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[403]E.g., Charles H. Talbert, *Luke and the Gnostics*, p. 76.
[404]Morgan, *The Acts . . .*, p. 142.
[405]Barclay, p. 62.
[406]Neil, p. 105.

7 continues in chapter 8, where it became a "great persecution," and the church continued to feel Saul's antagonism.

1. The evangelization of Samaria 8:1b-25

The first part of Philip's important witness took place in Samaria. Luke recorded the cause of Philip's ministry there (vv. 1b-3), its nature (vv. 4-8), and its effects (vv. 9-24).

The dispersion of the witnesses 8:1b-3

This short section sets the stage for Philip's ministry by giving us its cause.

8:1b Stephen's execution ignited the first popular ("great") "persecution" of Christian Jews.[407] Luke showed that the early Jerusalem Christians first received a warning (4:21), then flogging (5:40), then martyrdom (7:58-60), then widespread persecution. Since Stephen was a Hellenistic Jew, the Hellenistic Jewish Christians were probably the main targets of this antagonism. The unbelieving Jews living in Jerusalem turned against the believing Jews. This hostility resulted in many of the believers leaving Jerusalem for more secure places of residence. They took the gospel seed with them, and planted churches in all Judea (cf. 1 Thess. 2:14) as well as in Samaria. The Greek word *diesparesen*, translated "scattered" here and in v. 4, comes from the verb *speiro*, used to refer to sowing seed (cf. Matt. 6:26; 13:3-4, 18; 25:24, 26; Luke 8:5; 12:24; et al.). The word "diaspora" derives from it. This persecution was hard on the Christians, but it was good for the church since it resulted in widening evangelization. The apostles probably stayed in Jerusalem because they believed their presence there was essential regardless of the danger. Moreover, the persecution seems to have been against Hellenistic Jews particularly, and the Twelve were Hebraic Jews.

8:2 The "devout men" who buried Stephen were probably God-fearing Jews like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who buried Jesus (Luke 23:50-53). There were undoubtedly many Jews in Jerusalem who were still sympathetic with the Christians (cf. 6:7). Some of them evidently gave Stephen a burial suitable to his importance. The Mishnah considered open lamentation for someone who had suffered death by stoning as inappropriate.[408] Luke's notation that people "made loud lamentation" for Stephen may, therefore, be evidence that there were many Jews who regarded Stephen's stoning as extremely unfortunate.

8:3 The Greek word translated "ravaging" (*lumainomai*) occurs only here in the New Testament. The Septuagint translators used it in Psalm 80:13 to describe wild boars destroying a vineyard. In English we use "ravaging" as

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[407]See Ernst Bammel, "Jewish Activity against Christians in Palestine according to Acts," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 357-64.
[408]Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 6:6.

a synonym for raping. This is how Saul began behaving. The verb is evidently an inceptive imperfect, indicating the beginning of the action. Saul was a leader of the persecution in Jerusalem (9:1-2, 29; 22:4-5; 26:11). Evidently Stephen's execution fueled Saul's hatred for the Christians, and resulted in his increasing antagonism toward them. He not only went from house to house, arresting Christians (cf. 2:46; 5:42) and putting them "in prison," but also carried his purges into the synagogues (cf. 6:9), and tried to force believers to blaspheme there (22:19; 26:11).

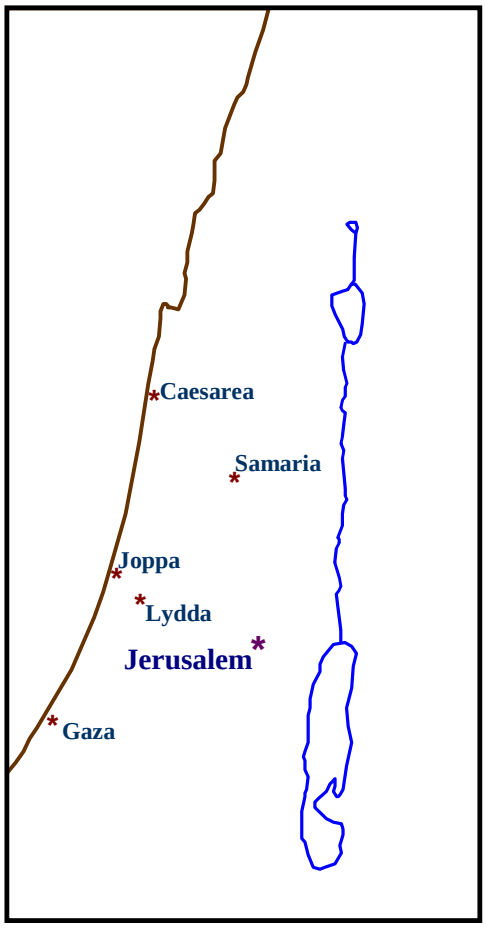
Philip's evangelization of Samaria 8:4-8

8:4 Whereas persecution resulted in the death of some believers, it also dispersed the disciples over a wider area. Luke described what they did, as scattered believers, as "preaching the word" (Gr. *euaggelizomenoi ton logon*, lit. "proclaiming good news the word"). The gospel message is in view. Sometimes, what *appears* to be very bad, turns out to be very good (Matt. 16:18).

". . . persecution faced faithfully can have positive results for the church (see also Acts 11:19-30 for more results from this dispersion)."[409]

". . . the thrust of the church into its mission after the persecution of the Christian community in Jerusalem is parallel with Luke's portrayal in his Gospel of the spread of Jesus' fame after the devil's assault in the wilderness."[410]

"As the mission begins to move beyond Jerusalem and Judea, it is useful to distinguish two roles within it: the role of the *initiator* and the role of the *verifier*. The apostles shift at this point from the former to the latter role. That is, their function is reduced to recognizing and



[409]Bock, *Acts*, p. 317.
[410]Longenecker, p. 355.

> confirming the work of the evangelists who bring the gospel to new areas and groups, or to working as evangelists in areas already opened for mission (cf. 8:25; 9:32-42)."[411]

8:5 This "Philip" was apparently a Hellenistic Jew like Stephen. He was Philip the evangelist, who was one of the Seven (cf. 6:5), not the Philip who was one of the Twelve. He traveled north from Jerusalem to Samaria, and followed Jesus' example of taking the gospel to the Samaritans (cf. John 4). The other Jews did not like the people who lived in this area and had no dealings with them (John 4:9). They regarded them as racial and religious half-breeds. They did so because their ancestors were the Jews who had intermarried with the Gentiles, whom the Assyrians had sent to live there following Assyria's conquest of Israel in 722 B.C. Furthermore, the Samaritans had opposed the rebuilding of the temple in Ezra's day, and had erected their own temple on Mt. Gerizim, in competition with the temple on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. In view of Stephen's depreciation of the Jerusalem temple (7:44-50), it is not incredible to read that Philip took the gospel to Samaritans. The Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch as authoritative, and looked for a personal Messiah who would be like Moses.

We do not know exactly where Philip went, because Luke did not identify the place specifically.[412] It was "down" from Jerusalem topographically, not geographically. Some ancient versions of Acts refer to "*a* city of Samaria," whereas others have "*the* city of Samaria." Probably "the city" is correct, even though some scholars believe the region of Samaria is in view.[413] The capital town stood a few miles west and a little north of Old Testament Shechem, and very near New Testament Sychar (cf. John 4:5). The Old Testament city of Samaria—"Sebaste" was the Greek name of Caesar Augustus that Herod the Great gave the city[414]—had been the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. Philip's willingness to preach "the Christ" (cf. v. 12) to the Samaritans demonstrates an openness that had not characterized Jesus' disciples formerly (cf. John 4:9). Sometimes God moves us out of our comfort zone because He has a job for us to do elsewhere. A whole new people-group came to faith in Christ.

8:6-8 Philip also could perform miracles like Jesus and the apostles. He cast out demons and healed "paralyzed" and "lame" people. These "signs" attracted the attention of multitudes ("crowds") of Samaritans, and supported Philip's claim that God was with him. Perhaps the fact that the Jerusalem Jews had rejected Philip made him appealing to the Samaritans, since they

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[411]Tannehill, 2:102.

[412]See Hengel, pp. 70-76, for a full discussion of this enigmatic reference.

[413]E.g., Witherington, p. 282; Bock, *Acts*, pp. 324-35, 337.

[414]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 15:8:5; Howson, p. 22.

too had experienced rejection by those Jews. Again, deliverance brought rejoicing (cf. 2:46-47).

> "It is not too difficult to imagine what would have happened had the apostles at Jerusalem first been the missioners [*sic*] to Samaria. Probably they would have been rebuffed, just as they were rebuffed earlier in their travels with Jesus when the Samaritans associated them with the city of Jerusalem (cf. Luke 9:51-56). But God in his providence used as their evangelist the Hellenist Philip, who shared their fate (though for different reasons) of being rejected at Jerusalem; and the Samaritans received him and accepted his message."[415]

Simon the Sorcerer's conversion 8:9-13

8:9-11 Another person who was doing miracles in Samaria, but by satanic power, was "Simon," whom people have sometimes called "Simon Magus." "Magus" is the transliteration of the Greek word *magos* meaning "magician" or "sorcerer." The magic that he did was not sleight of hand deception, but *sorcery*: the ability to control people and or nature by demonic power. This ability had made Simon very popular, and he had encouraged people to think that he was a "great power" whom God had sent ("the Great Power of God").[416]

> "As the counterfeit of the true, these false prophets were among the most dangerous enemies of Christianity; and the distinction between the true and the false, between religion and spiritualism, had to be sharply drawn once for all."[417]

8:12 Simon promoted himself, but Philip preached "Christ."

> "I believe that Simon is the first religious racketeer in the church—but, unfortunately, not the last."[418]

Luke described Philip's message as "the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (cf. 1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Those who trust in Christ become partakers in His spiritual rule over them now, and eventually will enter into His future earthly millennial rule. Both aspects of the "kingdom" are probably in view here (cf. 1:3). The phrase "name of Jesus Christ" points to the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed Messiah (cf. 1 John 5:1). Note that water baptism

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[415]Longenecker, p. 359.
[416]See ibid., p. 358, forthe teaching of the early church fathers concerning Simon.
[417]Rackham, p. 113.
[418]McGee, 4:543

followed conversion almost immediately (cf. 2:38). Both "men and women" believed, and "were being baptized." This was clearly *water* baptism, since they did not experience Spirit baptism until later (v. 17).

8:13 Even "Simon himself" believed. I see no reason to conclude that Simon's faith was spurious, though many students of this passage have concluded that he was an unbeliever.[419] The text says that "Simon himself believed," just like the others Luke mentioned (v. 12), and there is no reason to doubt the reality of *their* faith. Having practiced Satan's magic, Simon could hardly believe the difference between Philip's God-given miracles and his own magic.

Compromise in the Samaritan church 8:14-24

8:14-17 The 12 apostles were, of course, the divinely appointed leaders of the Christians (ch. 1). It was natural and proper, therefore, that they should send representative apostles to investigate the Samaritans' response to the gospel.[420] This was especially important in view of the hostility that existed between the Hebrews and the Samaritans. The way the Jews and the Samaritans felt about one another was similar to how most Israelis and Palestinians feel about one another today. It was important that both the Samaritan Christians and the Jewish Christians believed that God had united them in Christ. When "Peter and John . . . came down," they observed that these Samaritans had, like themselves, also accepted Jesus as the Messiah. They asked God in prayer to send His "Holy Spirit" to baptize them, as He had baptized the Jews who believed in Jesus (cf. Luke 11:13).

> "Being baptized 'into' [Gr. *eis*, cf. 19:5] . . . the name denotes incorporation into the Lord and his community, declaring one's allegiance and implying the Lord's ownership . . ."[421]

> "This was a period of transition from the OT dispensation to the NT era, and these believers at Samaria were in a position similar to the believers at Jerusalem prior to Pentecost."[422]

However, this baptism of the Spirit occurred somewhat differently than it had in Jerusalem (ch. 2; cf. 8:38; 10:44). There it happened spontaneously, but here it came in answer to the apostles' prayer and with the laying on of

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[419]E.g., Calvin, 3:2:10; McGee, 4:544, 545; Toussaint, "Acts," p. 373; Wiersbe, 1:435-36; and Witherington, pp. 288-89.

[420]See *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1873, for a map of Peter's missionary journeys.

[421]Bock, *Acts*, p. 331.

[422]Kent, p. 79.

their hands. There the sound of a mighty wind, visible flames of fire, and speaking in tongues had accompanied it. Here there is no mention that these phenomena were present. Perhaps tongues were not spoken here, if they were not, because the Jews and the Samaritans spoke the same language. In both places, Jerusalem and Samaria, the Spirit's reception for permanent indwelling through Spirit baptism is in view, and the Holy Spirit baptized people who were already believers in Jesus Christ.

> "But what if the Spirit had come upon them [the Samaritans] at their baptism when administrated by Philip? Undoubtedly what feelings there were against Philip and the Hellenists would have carried over to them, and they would have been doubly under suspicion. But God in his providence withheld the gift of the Holy Spirit till Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritans—Peter and John, two leading apostles who were highly thought of in the mother church at Jerusalem and who would have been accepted at that time as brothers in Christ by the new converts in Samaria."[423]

Does what happened in Jerusalem and Samaria set a precedent for a "second blessing" experience (i.e., the baptism of the Spirit as a separate work of God subsequent to regeneration)? Paul described normative Spirit baptism in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Romans 8:9. The person who has not experienced Spirit baptism is not a Christian (Rom. 8:9). Therefore the instances of Spirit baptism in Acts, when it followed salvation later, must have been exceptional occasions. This unusual separation of salvation and Spirit baptism is understandable. People needed to perceive Spirit baptism as such at the beginning of the church's history. God baptized believers with the Spirit—in this way—to validate Jesus' promise that He would send the Spirit to indwell believers permanently, something not occurring previously (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).[424]

In chapter 2, God identified Spirit baptism—which normally takes place without the believer being aware that it is happening—with wind, fire, and speaking in tongues. These things served as signs to the Jews present of God's working. Here in chapter 8, signs apparently did not announce the baptism of the Spirit, but accompanied Philip's preaching. What would have convinced the Samaritans that the baptism of the Spirit was taking place? And what would have convinced the Jews in Jerusalem that it had taken place in Samaria? The Spirit's baptizing work taking place in response to "the laying on of the apostles' hands" (v. 18) would have done so (cf. 9:17; 19:6). This is, of course, exactly what happened.

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[423]Longenecker, p. 359.

[424]See Harm, pp. 30-33.

> "Peter used the keys committed to him (Matt. 16:18, 19) to open the door officially to the Samaritans, just as he did to 3,000 Jews at Pentecost, and would again a little later to the gentiles at the house of Cornelius (chap. 10). It would be a great mistake, however, to treat this incident at Samaria as normative for all subsequent believers. A look at the Spirit's coming upon Saul (9:17) and Cornelius (10:44) will reveal considerable differences, so that the Samaritan experience was not the regular pattern in the Book of Acts."[425]

8:18-19 Clearly, some external sign accompanied the coming of the Spirit to baptize, because the people present perceived it as happening ("when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed"). Simon desired to buy the ability to produce Spirit baptism and its accompanying sign from Peter and John (cf. 19:19). This practice, the attempt to buy spiritual powers and offices, has become identified with Simon's name (i.e., "simony"). Simon may have thought that paying for this power was legitimate, since others had probably paid him for the secrets of his magic.[426] Simon failed to appreciate the uniqueness and holiness of Spirit baptism. He appears to have wanted to produce this in anyone, not just believers. Possibly Simon's error was an innocent mistake, due to theological ignorance. It was clear to Simon that the laying on of hands communicated Spirit baptism (v. 19).

8:20-23 Peter's stern response, however, revealed the seriousness of Simon's error. J. B. Phillips paraphrased Peter's opening words, "To hell with you and your money!"[427] Literally Peter said, "Your silver be with you into perdition." By his request, Simon had revealed that he hoped he could buy God's gifts, namely: the Holy Spirit and the ability (or "authority") to impart the Holy Spirit to others. Peter corrected him harshly. God's gifts are gifts; people cannot purchase them, because God gives them *freely* and *sovereignly*. Simon had much to learn about the grace of God. Peter told him God would not grant the ability ("authority") he sought ("you have no part or portion"), because his "heart" was "not right with (before) God." Simon wanted to be able to bring glory to himself rather than to God. Barclay referred to James Denney, the Scottish preacher, as having said that we cannot at one and the same time show that we are clever and that Christ is wonderful.[428] Proper motives are essential as we seek to serve Jesus Christ. Simon's flesh, rather than the Holy Spirit, still controlled him. Bitterness, bondage, and iniquity still characterized him (v. 23). Perhaps Peter received insight *as a prophet* into Simon's motivation (cf. 5:3).[429]

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[425]Kent, pp. 79-80.

[426]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1833.

[427]*The New Testament in Modern English*.

[428]Barclay, p. 68.

[429]Witherington, p. 287.

"Peter describes Simon's offer as poison and a chain."[430]

Simon was to the Samaritan church what Ananias and Sapphira were to the Jerusalem church: an early instance of self-seeking (cf. 5:1-11). Peter may have wondered if God would judge Simon as He had Ananias and Sapphira, and if Simon was about to fall dead at his feet.

8:24 Peter's rebuke terrified Simon. A man with the tremendous spiritual power Peter had demonstrated, which Simon himself had witnessed, was no one to antagonize. Probably Simon's request for prayer that God would be merciful to him was sincere.

Many interpreters believe that Simon was not a genuine believer, but he may have been. True Christians can do, and have done, everything that Simon said and did. His background, fresh out of demonism, makes his conduct easier to understand. I see him as another Ananias, except that Ananias knew exactly what he was doing, whereas Simon's error seems to have involved ignorance to some extent. Probably that is why he did not suffer the same fate as Ananias. Both men became examples to the Christians, in their respective geographical and ethnic areas, of how important it is to behave under the control of the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 5:15-21).

Evangelism elsewhere in Samaria 8:25

The subjects of this verse are evidently Peter and John. The fact that, while the apostles were returning to Jerusalem they preached the gospel in other Samaritan towns, shows that they now fully accepted the Samaritans as fellow believers. Furthermore they welcomed them into the church. Quite a change had taken place in John's heart, in particular, and in Peter's, since the time these disciples had first visited Samaria with Jesus. John had wanted to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village (cf. Luke 9:52-54).

This mission into Samaria constituted a further gospel advance to the Gentiles. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as half Jew and half Gentile. In view of Peter's later reluctance to go to the Gentiles (ch. 10), this incident was clearly part of God's plan to broaden his vision. It prepared him to accept Gentiles into the church on an equal basis with Jews.

2. Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch 8:26-40

Luke recorded this incident to show the method and direction of the church's expansion to God-fearing Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism at this time. The Ethiopian eunuch had visited Jerusalem to worship, was studying the Old Testament, and was open to instruction by a Jew. Therefore he was much more sympathetic to the Christians' gospel than the average Gentile. This man appears to have been the first full-fledged

[430]Robertson, 3:108.

Gentile that Luke recorded being evangelized in Acts, though he could have been a "diaspora Jew."

> "The admirably-told story of the Ethiopian is probably in Philip's own words, passed on to the author when he and Paul were entertained in the evangelist's house at Caesarea, twenty years later (xxi. 8). As a piece of narrative it ranks with the stories of the Lord's own personal work (e.g. John iii and iv)."[431]

8:26 God's messenger (an angel? cf. 5:19) directed Philip to "go south" to a road that ran "from Jerusalem to Gaza." Philip did not return to Jerusalem with Peter and John. Whenever Luke introduced "an angel of the Lord" (Gr. *angelos kyriou*) into his narrative, he desired to stress God's special presence and activity (Luke 1:11; 2:9; Acts 12:7, 23; cf. Acts 7:30, 35, 38; 10:3, 7, 22; 11:13; 12:11; 27:23).[432] The Lord's direction was evidently clear and precise because Philip had been involved in evangelizing multitudes successfully (v. 6). Now God definitely told him to leave that fruitful ministry to go elsewhere. Luke did not say exactly where Philip was when he received this direction, but he was probably somewhere in Samaria or in Caesarea, where we find him later (v. 40; 21:8).

> "The church did not simply 'stumble upon' the idea of evangelizing the Gentiles; it did so in accordance with God's deliberate purpose."[433]

Luke added for the benefit of Theophilus (1:1), who was evidently not familiar with the geography of Palestine, that this was desert territory. The word "desert" can modify either "road" or "Gaza."

> "The old town was referred to as 'Desert Gaza', and this is probably meant here rather than a desert road, which properly begins only at Gaza on the way to Egypt."[434]

To get from Jerusalem to Gaza, a traveler such as this eunuch would normally route himself west through the hill country of Judah, the Shephelah (foothills), and down to the coastal plain. There he would finally turn south onto the international coastal highway that ran along the Mediterranean Sea connecting Damascus and Egypt. Only as it left Gaza, the southeasternmost city in Palestine, did the road pass through desert. This is in the modern Gaza Strip.

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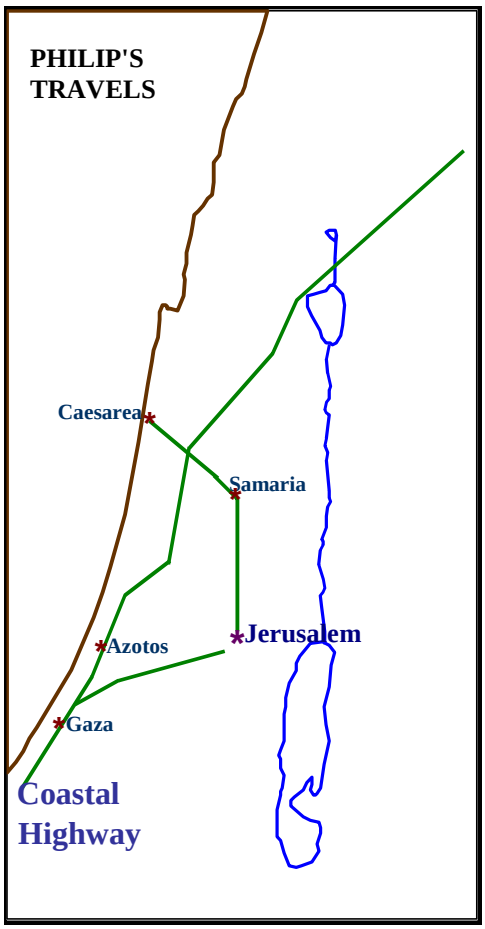
[431]Blaiklock, pp. 80-81.
[432]Longenecker, p. 362.
[433]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 161.
[434]Neil, p. 123.

The Ethiopian's spiritual condition when Philip met him was as arid as the desert. However, when the two men parted, the eunuch had experienced the refreshing effects of having been washed by the Water of Life.



8:27-28 We can see Philip's yieldedness to the Spirit's control in his obedience. Traveling down the road, he met the man who was evidently "in charge of all" of Queen Candace's (i.e. the Ethiopian nation's) treasury (cf. Isa. 56:3-8; Ps. 68:31). The name "Ethiopia" at this time described a kingdom located south of modern Egypt in Sudan (i.e., Nubia). It lay between the first Nile cataract at Aswan and the modern city of Khartoum, many hundreds of miles from Jerusalem.

> "When told that a man was Ethiopian, people of the ancient Mediterranean world would assume that he was black, for this is the way that Ethiopians are described by Herodotus and others."[435]

There is no evidence that there was prejudice based on skin color in antiquity.[436]

> ". . . in ancient Greek historiographical works there was considerable interest in Ethiopia and Ethiopians precisely because of their ethnic and racially distinctive features. . . . Furthermore, in the mythological geography of the ancient Greek historians and other writers as well, Ethiopia was quite frequently identified with the ends of the earth . . . in a way that Rome most definitely was not. We are entitled, then, to suspect that Luke the historian has decided to portray in miniature a foreshadowing of the fulfillment of the rest of Jesus' mandate (Acts 1:1) in Acts 8 . . ."[437]

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[435]Tannehill, 2:109. See Herodotus 2.22, 3.101; and Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius* 6.1. See also J. Daniel Hays, "The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):408.

[436]Witherington, p. 295.

[437]Ibid., p. 290.

"Candace" was the dynastic title of the queen mother, who at this time served as the head of the government in Ethiopia. Her personal name was evidently Amanitare (sometimes spelled Amantitere; A.D. 25-41).[438] The king of Ethiopia did not involve himself in the routine operations of his country, since his people regarded him as the "Child of the Sun."

It was not uncommon for men in high Near Eastern government positions to be castrated. This prevented them from impregnating royal women and then making claims on the throne. However, the word "eunuch" (Gr. *eunouchos*) appears often in the Septuagint (e.g., of Potiphar, Gen. 39:1) and in other Greek writings, as describing a high military or political figure.[439] This eunuch, therefore, might not have been emasculated but simply a high official. Some scholars believe he was both.[440] Luke repeatedly referred to him as a "eunuch" (vv. 27, 34, 36, 38, 39). Emasculated men could not participate fully in Israel's worship (Deut. 23:1).

This official had made a pilgrimage "to worship" Yahweh. Somehow he had heard of Him, and had come to reverence Him. He was making the trip home, probably to the capitol city of Meroe, in his "covered wagon."[441] While traveling, he was reading the Septuagint translation of Isaiah's prophecy (i.e., Isa. 53:7-9; cf. Isa. 56:3-8). Perhaps he had purchased this roll of Isaiah in Jerusalem.

> "The chariot would have been in fact an ox-drawn wagon and would not have moved at much more than a walking pace, so that it would cause no difficulty for Philip to run alongside it and call out to the occupant."[442]

It was unusual for a non-Jew to possess a personal copy of the Old Testament.[443] Scrolls were expensive in the first century, but this man could afford one. Perhaps he was able to do so because of his high government position, or perhaps he had only a part of Isaiah's prophecy, that he or someone else had copied. In any case, his great interest in the Jews' religion is obvious.

> "In those days the world was full of people who were weary of the many gods and the loose morals of the nations. They came to Judaism and there they found the one God and the austere moral standards which gave life meaning. If they accepted Judaism and were circumcised

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[438]Piers T. Crocker, "The City of Meroe and the Ethiopian Eunuch," *Buried History* 22:3 (September 1986):67.

[439]Longenecker, p. 363.

[440]E.g., Barrett, pp. 425-26; Witherington, p. 296; and Bock, *Acts*, p. 341.

[441]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on . . .*, p. 186.

[442]Marshall, *The Acts . . .*, p. 162.

[443]Longenecker, p. 363.

> and took the Law upon themselves they were called *proselytes*; if they did not go that length but continued to attend the Jewish synagogues and to read the Jewish scriptures they were called *God-fearers*. So this Ethiopian must have been one of these searchers who came to rest in Judaism either as a proselyte or a God-fearer."[444]
>
> "Some of the God-fearers were only one step from becoming converts [to Judaism], while others just added the Jewish God to their pantheon. So long as they showed some kind of sympathy with the Jewish religion they were considered God-fearers."[445]

8:29-31 Philip felt compelled by the Holy Spirit's leading to approach ("join") the wagon (cf. v. 26). The Spirit's leading is essential in evangelism; He sometimes directs us to people whom He has prepared to trust in Jesus Christ.

> "An especial stress is placed throughout this narrative on God's engineering of this conversation, and thus that it is part of God's plan."[446]

Quite possibly this important official was part of a caravan that was heading to Africa, and Philip joined it temporarily.[447] Evidently the eunuch's vehicle was either standing still or moving slowly down the road. Luke's comment that Philip "ran up" to the wagon may reflect the evangelist's willing compliance, or simply the fact that he needed to run to catch up with it. There were probably other people besides Philip who were walking beside the various vehicles in this caravan. As he approached, Philip "heard" the Ethiopian "reading" aloud. This was the common method of reading in ancient times, due to the difficulty of deciphering sentences with no spaces between words and no punctuation marks.[448] Philip recognized what the Ethiopian was reading and struck up a conversation with him. The official was having difficulty understanding what he was reading, so he invited Philip into his wagon to see if he could get some help.

> "The Spirit of God does not eliminate the need for human teachers or diligent study. The Spirit is not given to make study needless but to make study effective."[449]

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[444]Barclay, p. 70.
[445]Levinskaya, p. 78. See also pp. 120-26, "God-fearers in the Book of Acts."
[446]Witherington, p. 293.
[447]Blaiklock, p. 82.
[448]See Henry J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History*, p. 18.
[449]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1833.

8:32-35 Philip responded to the eunuch's perplexity by explaining how Jesus had fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant.

> ". . . there is no evidence that anyone in pre-Christian Judaism ever thought of the Messiah in terms of a Suffering Servant."[450]

Most of the Jews regarded Isaiah 52:13—53:12 as referring either to their nation or to the Gentile nations. Jesus Himself had quoted Isaiah 53 as finding fulfillment in His passion (Luke 22:37). Philip here followed Jesus' interpretation, and from this very passage proceeded to "preach Jesus" to the eunuch.

This is an excellent example of the "Spirit of God" using the "Word of God" through a "man of God," to bring salvation to the "elect of God" (cf. 1 Pet. 1:23-25). Note also the parallels between this story and the one in Luke 24, about Jesus walking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

> "There is evidence that Luke has very carefully structured his narrative [of Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch] in the form of a chiasm. Vv. 32-35, the citation of Isa. 53:7-8, are at the heart of the passage and serve as its hinge."[451]

8:36-38 The road on which this conversation took place crossed several stream beds that empty water from the higher elevations into the Mediterranean Sea during the wetter months. Even though the land generally was desert, water was not entirely absent at some times of the year. The Ethiopian may have already known about water baptism, since he had held an interest in Judaism. The Jews required water baptism of Gentile converts. Philip may have instructed him further on the importance of baptism (cf. 2:38; 8:12). In any case, the official was eager to submit to it. The Jews did not baptize physical eunuchs and take them in as proselytes of Judaism (Deut. 23:1). If the official was a physical eunuch, perhaps this was why he asked Philip if there was some reason he could not undergo baptism as a Christian.

Obviously there was enough water for Philip to immerse the Ethiopian ("they both went down into the water"), the normal method of baptism in Judaism and early Christianity. Some interpreters have argued, however, that the two men may have stood in the water while Philip poured water over or sprinkled the Ethiopian. This is a possibility but, I think, it is improbable. The normal meaning of the Greek word *baptizo* (to baptize) is "to immerse," and this was the common custom. The Ethiopian official testified to his faith in Jesus as the Messiah by submitting to water baptism (cf. 2:38; 8:12).

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[450]Longenecker, p. 364.

[451]Witherington, p. 292.

8:39-40 The Holy Spirit directed Philip to the eunuch (v. 29), and He led ("snatched") him away from him (v. 39). Luke stressed the Spirit's leadership in this evangelism of the first Gentile convert in Acts (cf. Matt. 12:18). God had prepared both Philip (v. 29) and the eunuch (v. 30) for their especially important conversation.

Luke described the Lord leading Philip away from the eunuch very dramatically. Perhaps the Spirit jerked Philip out of the wagon physically (cf. 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16).[452] More likely, I think, this description reflects the Lord's immediate relocation of Philip to the place where He wanted him to serve next.

> "Philip's behavior in this incident is reminiscent of that of Elijah, following impulses which he recognizes as divine prompting, appearing in unexpected places, and disappearing equally unexpectedly. It has also often been noted that there are curious correspondences between Zeph. 2—3 and this passage—among other similarities Gaza, Ethiopia and Azotus are mentioned in both."[453]

> "There is a contrast between Simon Magus and this Ethiopian treasurer which recalls the contrast between Gehazi and the stranger Naaman who was baptized in the Jordan."[454]

The eunuch rejoiced in his new faith (cf. 2:46-47; 8:8; 16:34). Presumably he returned home and became one of the earliest Gentile witnesses and missionaries in Africa. This is what happened according to early Christian tradition.[455]

Philip proceeded north up the coast, probably along the international highway, to "Azotus" (Ashdod), and farther on to "Caesarea." He "preached the gospel" in "all" the intermediate "cities." About 20 years later we find him living in Caesarea (21:8). In the Roman world, the average distance that people would travel in one day on land was about 20 miles.[456]

Philip was the first Jewish Christian in Acts to evangelize a Gentile who lived in such a remote country that the first readers of this book regarded it as "the uttermost part of the earth" (cf. 1:8).

> "The conviction that the Ethiopians lived at the ends of the earth is well documented in ancient literature."[457]

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[452]Kent, p. 82.
[453]Neil, p. 123.
[454]Rackham, p. 120.
[455]See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:12:8-10.
[456]Robert Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life*, p. 138.
[457]Tannehill, 2:109. See Homer, *The Odyssey* 1.23; Herodotus 3.25, 3.114; Strabo, *Geography* 1.1.6, 1.2.24.

The very first Christians were Jews (2:1-8:4). Then Samaritans became Christians (8:5-25). Now, a Gentile, who was either a Jewish proselyte or a near-proselyte, entered the church. Probably all these converts thought of themselves, at this point, as simply religious Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Only later did they learn that what God was doing, was not just creating a group of believers in Jesus within Judaism, or a faithful remnant, but a whole new entity, namely: the Christian church (cf. Eph. 2—3).

C. THE MISSION OF SAUL 9:1-31

The writer next focused our attention on a key figure in the spread of the Christian mission, and on significant events in the development of that mission to the Gentiles. Peter's evangelization of Cornelius (ch. 10) will continue to advance this theme. Luke has given us three portraits of significant individuals in the evangelization of Gentiles: Stephen, Philip, and now, climactically, Saul. He stressed that Saul's conversion and calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles came supernaturally and directly from God, and Saul himself played a passive role in these events. Saul (Paul) retold the story of his conversion and calling twice, in Acts 22 and 26, and a third time in Galatians 1. Its importance in Acts is clear from its repetition.[458]

> "It cannot be stressed enough that these accounts are *summaries* and Luke has written them up in his own style and way."[459]

Saul (as Paul) became God's primary instrument in taking the gospel to the Gentile world.

> "The conversion of Saul was like the call of a second Abraham."[460]

1. Saul's conversion and calling 9:1-19a

Luke recorded the conversion and calling of Saul of Tarsus to demonstrate the supernatural power and sovereign direction of God. Saul's conversion was one of the most miraculous and significant instances of repentance that took place during the early expansion of the church. His calling to be God's main missionary to the Gentiles was equally dramatic.

Saul's conversion on the Damascus road 9:1-9

> "Without question, the story of Saul's 'conversion' is one of the most important events, if not the most important event, that Luke records in Acts."[461]

> "In this passage we have the most famous conversion story in all history."[462]

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[458]See Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 327.
[459]Witherington, p. 309.
[460]Howson, p. 68.
[461]Timothy J. Ralston, "The Theological Significance of Paul's Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:586 (April-June 1990):303.
[462]Barclay, p. 71. Cf. Neil, p. 125.

> "The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch was in a chariot; the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was down in the dust."[463]

9:1-2 Since Stephen's martyrdom (cf. 8:3), Saul had been persecuting Jews who had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.[464]

> "The partitive genitive of *apeiles* [threats] and *phonou* [murder] means that threatening and slaughter had come to be the very breath that Saul breathed, like a warhorse who sniffed the smell of battle. He breathed on the remaining disciples the murder that he had already breathed in from the death of the others. He exhaled what he inhaled."[465]

The Jewish high priest's Roman overseers gave the high priest authority to extradite Jews who were strictly religious offenders and had fled outside the Sanhedrin's jurisdiction.[466] Saul obtained "letters" from the high priest (evidently Caiaphas) giving him the power (legal authority) to arrest Jesus' Jewish disciples from Palestine, who had fled to Damascus because of persecution in Jerusalem. This grand inquisitor undoubtedly believed that he was following in the train of other zealous Israelites who had purged idolatry from Israel (e.g., Moses in Num. 25:1-5; Phinehas in Num. 25:6-15; Elijah in 1 Kings 18; Mattathias in 1 Macc. 2:23-28, 42-48).

> "Saul never forgave himself for that. God forgave him; the Christians forgave him; but he never forgave himself . . . 1 Cor. 15:9[;] Gal. 1:13."[467]

The King of the Nabateans who governed Damascus at this time cooperated with Saul. He was Aretas IV (9 B.C.-A.D. 40).[468] "Damascus" stood about 135 miles to the north-northeast of Jerusalem, about a week's journey. It was within the Roman province of Syria, and was one of the towns of the Decapolis, a league of 10 self-governing cities. "The Way" was one of the earliest designations of Christianity (cf. 18:24-25; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), and it appears only in Acts. It meant the path characterized by life and salvation. This title may go back to Jesus' teaching that He was "the way," and that His way of salvation was a narrow way (John 14:6; Matt. 7:14).

9:3-4 Other passages throw more light on the details of Saul's blinding vision. It took place about midday, when the sun would usually have been shining its brightest (22:6; 26:13). What blinded Saul was not the sun, however,

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[463]McGee, 4:548.

[464]See Appendix 1, "Sequence of Paul's Activities," at the end of these notes; and Carson and Moo, p. 369.

[465]Robertson, 3:113.

[466]Longenecker, p. 369; Kent, pp. 82-83.

[467]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, pp. 203-4.

[468]F. F. Bruce, "Chronological Questions in the Acts of the Apostles," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 18:2 (Spring 1986):275.

but a revelation of Jesus Christ (vv. 17, 27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). He now saw the same Person Stephen had seen while Saul witnessed Stephen dying (7:55). Jesus spoke to Saul "from heaven," addressing him by his Jewish name and in the language of the Jews (cf. 26:14). After riveting his attention, Jesus asked Saul "why" he was "persecuting" Him—not His followers, but Himself. Saul would have understood the voice as God's, since in rabbinism a voice from heaven always connoted a rebuke or instruction from God.[469]

> "Therefore when the voice went on to ask the question 'Why do you persecute me?' Saul was without doubt thoroughly confused. He was not persecuting God! Rather, he was defending God and his laws!"[470]

Jesus' question made Saul begin to appreciate the intimate union that Christians enjoy with Jesus, the Head of the body, the church. He was *in* His disciples, not just with them or ruling over them, by His Spirit (cf. John 14:17). What they suffered He suffered.

9:5-6 In what sense did Saul address Jesus as "Lord" (Gr. *kyrios*)? It seems from Saul's reaction to this vision, and his later descriptions of it, that he believed the Person addressing him was *God*. "Lord" therefore seems to be more than a respectful "Sir." Yet God was Saul's master already, even before he became a Christian, so he probably addressed the voice as his personal master as well as God. The identity of the voice was not completely clear to Saul. When Stephen had a similar vision, he recognized Jesus (7:55-56), but Saul did not recognize Him. This may imply that Saul had never seen Jesus during His earthly ministry. Or perhaps he asked "Who are You?" because, even though he believed "God" was speaking to him, he had never heard a voice from heaven before.

Jesus' self-revelation totally shocked Saul, who until then had regarded Jesus as a blasphemous pretender to Israel's messianic throne. Saul now discovered that Jesus was God, or at least was with God in heaven, yet He was in some sense also present in His followers whom Saul was persecuting. Jesus again referred to Saul's persecution of Himself, a doubly convicting reminder of Saul's erroneous theology and sinful conduct. Jesus did not condemn him, but graciously commanded him to enter Damascus and to wait for further directions from Himself. Saul now learned that Jesus had a mission for him, although he did not know what or how extensive it would be ("it will be told you what you must do").

9:7-9 Evidently Saul's traveling companions heard a voice-like sound, but only Saul understood Jesus' words (cf. v. 7; 22:9; 26:14; cf. John 12:29). They

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[469]Longenecker, pp. 370-71.

[470]Ibid., p. 371.

all fell to the ground when they saw the light (26:14), but now they "stood speechless." The intense light of the vision Saul had just seen blinded him temporarily ("three days"). His companions had to lead him off "into Damascus," where he waited for three days for further instructions: blind, fasting, and praying (cf. 1:14; Luke 1:22).[471]

> "He who had intended to enter Damascus like an avenging fury was led by the hand into that city, blind and helpless as a child."[472]

"In the light of Paul's subsequent career, his single-minded devotion to Christ, his tireless efforts to bring Jews and Gentiles alike face to face with the same Lord as he had encountered on the Damascus road, his remorse for his vindictive cruelty, his atonement for it in selfless service of the Church he had tried to crush, it is frivolous to attempt to explain away Paul's conversion as a hallucination, an attack of sunstroke, or an epileptic fit [as some Bible critics have alleged]. It was as is every genuine conversion experience a miracle of the grace of God."[473]

Saul's calling from the Lord 9:10-19a

9:10-12 Evidently Ananias was not a refugee from Jerusalem (22:12), but a resident of Damascus. He, too, received "a vision" of the Lord Jesus (v. 17), to whom he submitted willingly (cf. 1 Sam. 3:4, 10). Jesus gave Ananias specific directions to another man's house in Damascus where he would find Saul. "Straight Street" is still one of the main thoroughfares running through Damascus east-west. Saul had been "preying on Christians," but now he was "praying to Christ." Saul, like most Pharisees, was a man of prayer, and he continued to give prayer priority after his conversion (cf. 16:25; 20:36; 22:17). Luke recorded that Jesus was also a man of prayer (Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1; 22:41). The Lord sovereignly prepared both Ananias and Saul with revelations of Himself, so that when He brought them together, they would have no doubt about His personal dealings with them (cf. Peter and Cornelius in 10:1-23).

> "The point of all the visions and the miracle is to make clear that God is in control of and directing all these events so that Saul will undertake certain tasks God has in mind."[474]

9:13-14 Ananias wanted to make sure he had heard the Lord correctly, since Saul had become infamous for harming believers in Jesus. He had heard of Saul's reason for visiting Damascus, and his new authority to arrest and to

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[471]On the practice of fasting, see Kent D. Berghuis, "A Biblical Perspective on Fasting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):86-103.

[472]Barclay, p. 73.

[473]Neil, p. 128.

[474]Witherington, p. 318.

extradite, that he had received from the chief priests. Ananias referred to the believers in Jerusalem as "saints," set apart ones, the equivalent of those who call on the Lord's name. This is the first time Luke used the name "saints" for Christians in Acts.

> "The Lord's work is revealed through events that overthrow human expectations. Humans calculate the future on the basis of their normal experience. These calculations leave them unprepared for the appearance of the Overruler, who negates human plans and works the unexpected. This is a problem not only for the rejectors of Jesus but also for the church, which, as our narrative indicates, is led by the Lord into situations beyond its fathoming. The narrator's sharp sense of God (and the exalted Messiah) as one who surprises appears again in this episode, and the reaction of Ananias (and in 9:26 the Jerusalem disciples) shows that the church, too, has difficulty keeping up with such a God."[475]

9:15-16 God revealed (to Ananias) His "purpose for Saul in order to bolster Ananias' courage. The inquisitor (Saul) was to become Jesus' "chosen instrument" (Paul), the proud Pharisee His apostle to "Gentiles and kings," and the poster boy of Judaism a persecuted Christian. "To bear my name" means to bear witness of Jesus. In the Greek text of verse 16, "I" is emphatic. Jesus meant that Ananias need not fear going to Saul, because Jesus *Himself* would show Saul "how much" he would "suffer" (i.e., he was now a friend of Ananias and no longer his enemy); Ananias would not need to balk at his mission. This assurance would have given Ananias added encouragement to go to Judas' house in search of Saul.

> "In highlighting these features of being a 'chosen instrument,' sent to 'the Gentiles,' and to 'suffer for my [Jesus'] name,' Luke has, in effect, given a theological précis of all he will portray historically in chapters 13—28—a précis that also summarizes the self-consciousness of Paul himself as reflected in his own letters."[476]

9:17 Ananias communicated his Christian love for his new Christian brother with a touch ("laying his hands on him") and a loving word of greeting: "Brother." He then explained his double purpose for coming to Saul. It was to restore his "sight," as well as to enable Saul to experience the filling of "the Holy Spirit." Ananias' purpose was not to commission Saul. Saul's commission came directly from the Lord, though Ananias announced it (22:14-16).

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[475]Tannehill, 2:117.

[476]Longenecker, p. 373.

> "The choice of Ananias for this task made it clear that Saul of Tarsus was not dependent upon the Twelve, and also that an apostle was not required for bestowing the Spirit (as might have been concluded from the case in Samaria)."[477]

The Holy Spirit filled Saul as he responded to God's Word appropriately. We may infer that Saul's conversion happened on the Damascus road and that he received the baptism of the Spirit at the same time.[478] Notice again the importance of being "filled with (under the control of) the Holy Spirit." This is the first time that Luke wrote about the Spirit coming on someone outside of the land of Israel.

9:18-19a God then restored Saul's sight. The impression given in the text is that the first thing he did ("he got up") was identify with Christ ("and was baptized") and the disciples of Christ by water baptism (cf. 8:12, 38). He did this even before breaking his fast of three days. Then he ate ("took food") and received strength physically.

Saul later wrote that immediately following his conversion, he did not consult with others about the Scriptures, but went into Arabia—and later returned to Damascus (Gal. 1:15-17). "Arabia" describes the kingdom of the Nabateans that stretched south and east from Damascus beyond Petra. Damascus was in the northwest sector of Arabia. After Saul's conversion and baptism, he needed some time and space for quiet reflection and communion with God. He had to rethink the Scriptures, receive new understanding from the Lord, and revise his Pharisaic theology. So, like Moses, Elijah, and Jesus before him, he retired into the wilderness. These were Saul's "Arabian nights."[479]

2. Saul's initial conflicts 9:19b-30

The changes that took place in Saul were important because of his subsequent activity. Luke wrote this pericope to note those changes, so that his readers would understand why Saul acted as he did afterward. Luke stressed the genuineness of Saul's conversion by showing next the radical change it made in him.

Saul's preaching in Damascus 9:19b-22

9:19b-20 How verses 19b-20 fit into the chronology of events in Saul's life is not perfectly clear. They could fit in any number of ways. We should probably understand "immediately" in a general sense. As soon as Saul became a Christian ("at once," NIV) he began to contend that Jesus was the Messiah when he attended synagogue worship, which he did regularly (cf. 13:5, 14;

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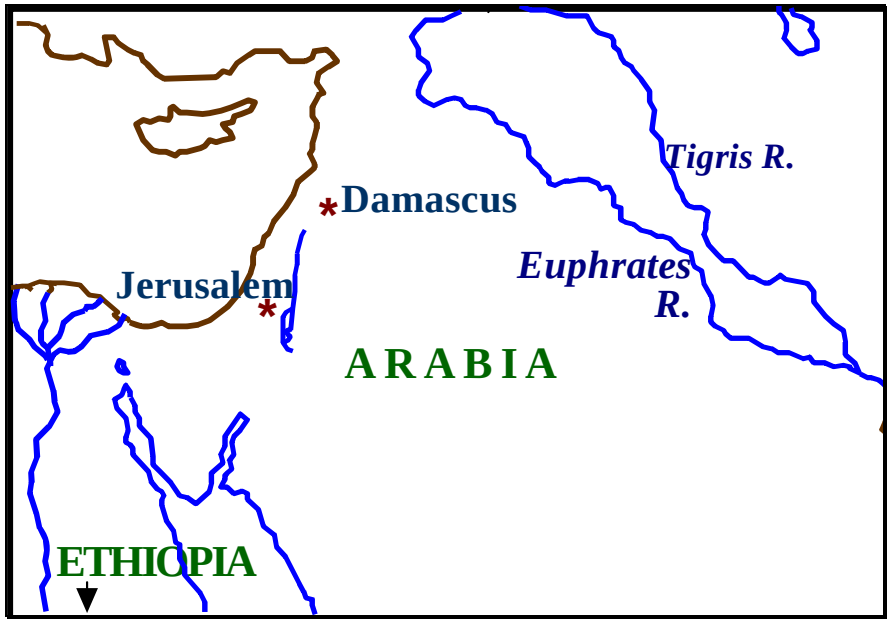
[477]Kent, pp. 83-84.
[478]Ibid., p. 85.
[479]Witherington, p. 323.

14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). This proclamation was the result and evidence of his being filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 17), as well as the result of his conversion.

This is the only mention in Acts of someone proclaiming Jesus as the "Son of God" (but cf. 13:33). This fact reflects the clear understanding of Jesus that Saul had—even shortly after his conversion. As used in the Old Testament, this title referred to Israel (Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1), Israel's



anointed king (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:26), and Messiah (Ps. 2:7). Saul recognized that Jesus was the Son of God predicted there. He used this title of Jesus frequently in his epistles (Rom. 1:3-4, 9; 5:10; 8:3, 29, 32; 1 Cor. 1:9; 15:28; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 1:16; 2:20; 4:4, 6; 1 Thess. 1:10).

9:21-22 Saul's unexpected and extreme conduct, understandably bewildered the Jews who lived in Damascus. Instead of persecuting the Christians, he was proving that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. This is what people—then and now—need to believe to obtain salvation (cf. 1 John 5:1). Saul had made a 180-degree change in his thinking and in his conduct; he had truly repented. Saul's understanding and commitment kept growing as he continually sought to convince the Damascus Jews that Jesus was their Messiah. Perhaps Saul's sojourn in Arabia occurred between verses 21 and 22 or between verses 22 and 23.

Saul's escape from Damascus 9:23-25

Luke included this incident to prove the genuineness of Saul's conversion. He, who had been persecuting "to the death" believers in Jesus, had now become the target of deadly persecution because of his changed view of Jesus.

9:23-24a It is hard to determine how "many days" had elapsed, but evidently Saul remained in Damascus several months. F. F. Bruce dated his return to Jerusalem about A.D. 35 and his conversion in 33.[480] This would mean that Saul was converted just a few months after Jesus' ascension to heaven.[481] I think it is more probable that Saul became a Christian a little later, perhaps in 34, and returned to Jerusalem in A.D. 37. Regardless of the dates, we know that he finally left Damascus for Jerusalem "three years" after his conversion (Gal. 1:18).

> "No one persecutes a man who is ineffective and who obviously does not matter. George Bernard Shaw once said that the biggest compliment you can pay an author is to burn his books. Someone has said, 'A wolf will never attack a painted sheep.' Counterfeit Christianity is always safe. Real Christianity is always in peril. To suffer persecution is to be paid the greatest of compliments because it is the certain proof that men think we really matter."[482]

9:24b-25 It would have been natural for Saul's enemies to be "watching the gates" of Damascus, since he would have had to pass out of one of them to leave the city under normal circumstances. "Disciples" everywhere but here in Acts refers to followers of Jesus. Here it describes followers of Saul, probably to indicate that his preaching had resulted in some people coming to faith in Christ. Perhaps it was one of these disciples who owned the house on the wall from which Saul escaped the city.

Paul described his escape from Damascus in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33, and it is there we learn that someone lowered him "in a basket" from a house built on the city wall ("through a window in the wall"). The fact that Paul did not minimize this ignominious exit in his writings says a lot for his humility and the transformation God effected in this once self-righteous Pharisee. The local Jews arranged this attempt on his life, and their Nabatean governor supported them.

> "Saul's plans for persecuting Christians in Damascus took a strange turn; he had entered the city blind and left in a basket! Ironically *he* became the object of persecution."[483]

Saul's reception in Jerusalem 9:26-30

Luke concluded each of his narratives of the Samaritans' conversion (8:4-25), Saul's conversion (9:1-31), and Cornelius' conversion (10:1—11:18), with references to the mother church in Jerusalem. He evidently wanted to stress the fact that all these

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[480]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on . . .*, p. 205. Cf. Gal. 1:18.
[481]Cf. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, p. 143.
[482]Barclay, p. 77.
[483]Toussaint, "Acts," pp. 377-78.

significant advances were part of one great plan that God orchestrated, and not just independent occurrences (cf. Matt. 16:18; Acts 1:8).

9:26 Perhaps the fact that Saul had not sought out the apostles, and other Christians in Jerusalem—for three years following his conversion—made the believers there suspicious of him (cf. Gal. 1:18). They had not met him personally, and since they were being persecuted, they may have wondered if Saul had adopted clandestine methods to oppose them.

9:27 "Barnabas" willingly reached out to the new convert in Jerusalem, as Ananias had done in Damascus. His behavior here is consistent with what we read of him elsewhere in Acts (cf. 4:36-37; 11:22-30; 13:1—14:28; 15:2-4, 12, 22). Barnabas proved to be a true "Son of Encouragement" (4:36) for Saul.

> "First, the Church owed Paul to the prayer of Stephen. Then the Church owed Paul to the forgiving spirit of Ananias. And now we see that the Church owed Paul to the large-hearted charity of Barnabas. . . . The world is largely divided into people who think the best of others and people who think the worst of others; and it is one of the curious facts of life that ordinarily we see our own reflection in others, and we make them what we believe them to be."[484]

The "apostles" whom Saul met were Peter and James, the Lord's half-brother (Gal. 1:17-19). Paul wrote later that he stayed with Peter for 15 days (Gal. 1:15), but he may have been in Jerusalem somewhat longer at this time. James was an apostle in the general sense of that term. He was not one of the Twelve.[485]

Barnabas pointed out three indications that Saul's conversion was genuine for the benefit of the Christian skeptics: Saul "had seen the Lord," he "had talked with" Him, and "he had witnessed (spoken out) boldly" in Damascus "in Jesus' name." Imagine how difficult it must have been, for those Christians who had relatives whom Saul had persecuted, to sit down with him in church meetings and share the Lord's Supper.

9:28-29 While Saul was in Jerusalem, he resumed Stephen's work of debating the "Hellenistic Jews." He was himself a Hellenist, as Stephen apparently was, having been born and reared in Tarsus. Paul described himself as "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5; cf. 2 Cor. 11:22), by which he meant that his training in Jerusalem and his sympathies were more in line with the Hebrews than with the Hellenists. At first he enjoyed freedom in the city, but soon the unbelieving Jews as well tried to silence him. Evidently

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[484]Barclay, p. 78.

[485]See my comments on 14:4.

Saul continued evangelizing in Jerusalem, until it became obvious to the other believers that he must leave immediately, or suffer death as Stephen had. They probably envisioned a recurrence of the persecution of the disciples that followed Stephen's martyrdom.

9:30 Saul's concerned Christian brethren traveled with him "to Caesarea." We do not know how long he stayed there, but Luke's account gives the impression that it was not long. Saul then departed, apparently by ship, "to Tarsus" in Cilicia, his hometown (21:39; Gal. 1:21), probably to tell his family and others about Jesus.[486] Saul traveled about 690 miles in these trips: from Jerusalem to Damascus, back to Jerusalem, then to Caesarea and home to Tarsus, excluding his trip into Arabia, which cannot be calculated (cf. Gal. 1:17-19).[487]

In 22:17-21, Saul later testified that during this first visit to Jerusalem as a believer, he had received a vision of Jesus telling him to leave Jerusalem, because God wanted to use him to evangelize the Gentiles. Thus his departure from Jerusalem was willing rather than forced.

Saul remained in the province of Cilicia until Barnabas tracked him down and brought him to Syrian Antioch (11:19-26). This was some six years later. We have no record of Saul's activities during this period (probably A.D. 37-43), except that many of his experiences that he described in 2 Corinthians 11:24-27 and 12:1-9, seem to fit into these silent years. If they do, we know that Saul was active in ministry gaining experience that fitted him for what we read he did later in Acts on his missionary journeys.

There are some interesting similarities between the beginning of Saul's ministry and the beginning of Jesus' ministry (cf. 9:20-35 and Luke 4:16-30). Both men began their ministries by entering a synagogue and delivering a salvation message. The audiences in both cases reacted with shock and astonishment. In Jesus' case, the audience asked if He was not the son of Joseph, and in Saul's case, the audience asked if he was not the violent persecutor of Christians. Then both men escaped a violent response to their messages.[488]

3. The church at peace 9:31

Notice that "church" is in the singular here. This is probably a reference to the Christians throughout Palestine—in "Judea," "Galilee," and "Samaria"—not just in one local congregation, e.g. in Jerusalem, but in the whole body of Christ. Saul's departure from Palestine brought greater peace to the churches there. He was an extremely controversial figure among the Jews because of his conversion. Peaceful conditions are conducive to effective evangelism and church growth (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-4). The church continued to experience four things: inward strengthening, a proper attitude and relationship to God (in contrast to Judaism), the comfort (encouragement, Gr. *paraklesis*) provided by the Holy Spirit, and numerical growth.

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[486]See Finegan, *Light from . . .*, pp. 334-36, for more information about Tarsus.

[487]Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, p. 177.

[488]Witherington, p. 320.

Besides this verse, there are few references to Galilee in Acts (cf. 10:37; 13:31). This has led some commentators to speculate that Galilee had been evangelized during Jesus' ministry and was, by this time, fully Christian. The evidence from church history, however, indicates that there were few Christians in Galilee at this time and in later years.[489]

This statement is Luke's third major progress report on the state of the church (cf. 2:47; 6:7; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31). It closes this section dealing with the church's expansion in Judea and Samaria (6:8—9:31). The Lord had first added about 3,000 new believers to the core group of disciples (2:41). Then He added more who became Christians day by day (2:47). Shortly after that, He added multitudes of new believers (5:14). Then we read that the number of disciples increased greatly (6:7). Now we read that the church ". . . continued to increase" (9:31).

> "When the Spirit of God has His way in the hearts and lives of believers, then unsaved people are going to be reached and won for Christ."[490]

III. THE WITNESS TO THE UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH 9:32—28:31

Luke next recorded the church's expansion beyond Palestine to the "uttermost parts of the earth" (1:8). The Ethiopian eunuch took the gospel to Africa, but he became a Christian in Judea. Now we begin to read of people becoming Christians in places farther from Jerusalem and Judea.

A. THE EXTENSION OF THE CHURCH TO SYRIAN ANTIOCH 9:32—12:24

As Jerusalem had been the Palestinian center for the evangelization of Jews, Antioch of Syria became the Hellenistic center for Gentile evangelization in Asia Minor and Europe. The gospel spread increasingly to Gentiles, which Luke emphasized in this section of Acts. He recorded three episodes: Peter's ministry in the maritime plain of Palestine (9:32-43), the conversion of Cornelius and his friends in Caesarea (10:1—11:18), and the founding of the Antioch church (11:19-30). Luke then looked back to Jerusalem again to update us on what was happening there (12:1-23). He concluded this section with another summary statement of the church's growth (12:24).

1. Peter's ministry in Lydda and Joppa 9:32-43

Luke now returned to Peter's continuing ministry in Judea. Luke apparently recorded the healing of Aeneas and the raising of Tabitha in order to show that the gospel was being preached effectively in a region of Palestine that both Jews and Gentiles occupied. Peter, the apostle to the Jews, was responsible for its advancing farther into Gentile territory. Luke thereby helped his readers see the equality of Gentiles and Jews in the church as it continued to expand (cf. Eph. 2:11—3:12).

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[489]See Barrett, pp. 473-74.

[490]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, p. 228.

The healing of Aeneas at Lydda 9:32-35

Peter continued his itinerant ministry around Palestine (cf. 8:25).

9:32 "Lydda" (modern Lod, the site of Israel's international airport) lay on the Mediterranean coastal plain, about 10 miles from the sea. It was about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It stood at the junction of the roads from Joppa to Jerusalem and the highway from Egypt to Syria.[491] There were already "saints" there (cf. vv. 13, 41).

9:33 Peter healed another lame man in Lydda (cf. 3:6-8; Luke 5:17-26).[492] "Aeneas" is a Greek name. He was probably a Hellenistic Jew. We do not know if he was a Christian. The fact that Luke called him "a man," but referred to Tabitha as "a disciple" (v. 36), may imply that he was not a believer.

9:34 Peter announced that the healing was Jesus Christ's work (cf. 1:1; 3:6): "Jesus Christ heals you." Jesus had also told a paralytic in Capernaum to take up his pallet and walk (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:11; Luke 5:24). He later told another paralytic who lay at the Bethesda pool in Jerusalem to do the same thing (John 5:8). The Greek clause *stroson seauto* literally means "spread for yourself," and can refer to making a bed or preparing a table. The power of Jesus was still at work through Peter. The formerly paralyzed man arose "immediately." Later Paul healed Publius' father (28:8).

> "I think every one of the different diseases mentioned in Scripture was intended by God to illustrate in some way the effects of sin."[493]

9:35 "Sharon" was the name of the section of maritime plain that stretched from Joppa to Mt. Carmel. Lydda was near its southeastern edge, and Caesarea was at its center on the Mediterranean coast. As with the healing of the lame temple beggar, and Jesus' healings of the paralytics at Capernaum and Jerusalem, the healing of Aeneas resulted in many people hearing the gospel and believing in Jesus ("all who lived at Lydda and Sharon").

One of the reasons Luke included this healing in his book, seems to have been because the results of this healing affected "all" the people living in this area of Palestine. One of these people was the Gentile Cornelius, who will figure significantly in the next chapter.

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[491]See the map near my comments on 8:4-8 above.
[492]See Joshua Schwartz, "Peter and Ben Stada in Lydda," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 391-414.
[493]Ironside, *Lectures on* . . ., p. 231.

The raising of Tabitha at Joppa 9:36-43

9:36 The site of "Joppa" (modern Yafo, a suburb of Tel Aviv) was on the Mediterranean coast, 10 miles west and a little north of Lydda. It was the ancient seaport for Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chron. 2:16; Jon. 1:3). "Tabitha" (lit. "Gazelle") was a Jewish Christian, and she was a "disciple" (Gr. *mathetria*). This is the only place in the New Testament where the feminine form of the Greek word translated "disciple" appears. "Tabitha" was her Aramaic name, whereas "Dorcas" was her Greek name. She had a marvelous reputation for helping people in her community ("abounding in deeds of kindness and charity")—because she had a servant's heart.

9:37-38 When "she . . . died," the believers sent word to Peter in nearby "Joppa," asking him to come. Apparently they expected him to raise her back to life, just as Jesus had done, since they "washed her body," and "laid it in an upper room."

9:39 Luke told this story with much interesting detail. Peter accompanied the two men, who came to Lydda for him, back to Joppa (cf. 10:7, 23). The "widows" were evidently *wearing* the clothing Tabitha had made for them. The middle voice of the Greek verb translated "showing" in verse 39 suggests this. She had made these clothes for the poor widows. This was her ministry.

> "She had the gift of sewing. Do you mean to tell me that sewing is a gift of the Holy Spirit? Yes, it was for this woman. May I suggest seeking a gift that is practical?[494]

9:40-41 Peter's procedure here was almost identical to Jesus' when He raised Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:41; Luke 8:51-56). Peter's praying shows that he was relying on Jesus for his power, just as his previous announcement, "Jesus Christ heals you," had manifested that attitude when he healed Aeneas (v. 34). There is only one letter difference in what Peter said (*Tabitha qumi*) and what Jesus had said (*Talitha qumi*, lit. "Little girl, get up"). This miracle is yet another evidence of Jesus' working powerfully through His witnesses in word and deed (1:1-2; cf. John 14:12). Tannehill pointed out many similarities between this story and the stories of Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus raising dead people.[495] Jesus had given the Twelve the power to raise the dead (Matt. 10:8).

9:42 "Many" people "all over Joppa" became believers because of the news of this miracle, too. The phrase "believed in the Lord" (v. 42) is similar to "turned to the Lord" (v. 35; cf. 11:21; 15:19). It is another way of saying they "became Christians," and emphasizes that the Person they believed in

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[494]McGee, 4:552.

[495]Tannehill, 2:126-27.

was the Lord Jesus. Notice that "turning" is equated with "believing," and that Luke mentioned no other conditions for salvation.

9:43 This verse provides a geographical and ideological transition to the account of Peter's visit to Cornelius (10:1—11:18). Evidently Peter remained "in Joppa" for quite some time ("many days") to confirm these new converts and to help the church in that town. His willingness to stay "with a tanner" shows that Peter was more broad-minded in his fellowship than many other Jews. Many Jews thought that tanners practiced an unclean trade because they worked with the skins of dead animals, so they would have nothing to do with them. However, Peter was about to receive a challenge to his convictions, similar to the one that Saul had received on the Damascus road.

Note how God used the invitation of the people of Joppa to bring Peter there. Likewise God often uses, what initially appear to be incidental occurrences, to open up great ministries. Luke illustrated this divine method repeatedly in Acts.

> "It was important to demonstrate that Peter was in the full stream of his usefulness, and the agent of miracles curiously like those performed by his Master (Mt. ix. 23-26; Mk. v. 38-43; Jn. v. 6-9), when the call came to him to baptize a Gentile."[496]

2. The conversion of Cornelius 10:1—11:18

Many people consider healing a lame person a great miracle, and raising a dead person back to life an even greater one. But the spiritual salvation of a lost sinner is greater than both of them. The Lord performed the first two miracles through Peter (9:32-35, 36-43), and now He did the third (ch. 10).

> "In a sense this scene is the book's turning point, as from here the gospel will fan out in all directions to people across a vast array of geographical regions, something Paul's three missionary journeys will underscore."[497]

The episode concerning Cornelius is obviously very important, since there are three lengthy references to it in Acts (chs. 10, 11, and 15). It deals with an important issue concerning the mission that the Lord gave His disciples. That issue is how the Christians should carry out that mission in view of the obstacle of Gentile uncleanness. Gentiles were ritually unclean and communicated ritual uncleanness to Jews, according to the Mosaic Law, mainly because they did not observe Jewish dietary distinctions (Lev. 11). This obstacle kept Jews and Gentiles separate in society.

Luke stressed four things in this conversion story particularly: First, the Christians initially resisted the ideas of evangelizing Gentiles, and of accepting them into the church apart from any relationship to Judaism (10:14, 28; 11:2-3, 8). Second, God Himself led

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[496]Blaiklock, p. 94.

[497]Bock, *Acts*, p. 380.

the way in Gentile evangelism and acceptance, and He showed His approval (10:3, 11-16, 19-20, 22b, 30-33, 44-46; 11:5-10, 13, 15-17). Third, it was Peter, the leader of the Jerusalem apostles, whom God used to open the door of the church to Gentiles—rather than Paul (10:23, 34-43, 47-48; 11:15-17). Fourth, the Jerusalem church accepted the conversion of Gentiles—apart from their associating with Judaism—because God had validated this in Cornelius' case (11:18).[498]

> "Although Paul is the primary agent in the mission to the Gentiles, Luke wishes to make it plain, not only that Peter was in full sympathy with his position, but that, as head of the Church, Peter was the first to give its official blessing to the admission of Gentiles as full and equal members of the New Israel [i.e., the church] by his action in the case of a Roman centurion and his friends . . ."[499]

Cornelius' vision 10:1-8

10:1 "Caesarea" stood on the Mediterranean coast, about 30 miles north of Joppa. Formerly its name was Strato's Tower,[500] but Herod the Great built it into a major seaport and renamed it in honor of Augustus Caesar,[501] his patron who was the adopted heir of Julius Caesar. "Sebaste" is the Greek equivalent of the Latin "Augustus." Herod the Great had modernized the city, made it the provincial capital of Judea (Pilate lived there), and built its magnificent harbor. It was at that time the major Roman seaport for Palestine, and its most important center of Roman government and military activity.[502]

"Cornelius" was a common Roman name.[503] Centurions were non-commissioned officers of the Roman army, who each commanded 100 soldiers, and had about the same level of authority as a captain in the United States army. A "cohort" contained 600 soldiers, and Cornelius' "Italian cohort" had connections with Italy.[504] Every reference to centurions in the New Testament is positive (Matt. 8:5-10; 27:54; Mark 15:44-45; Acts 22:25-26; 23:17-18; 27:6, 43). These men were "the backbone of the Roman army."[505] Cornelius was similar to the centurion of Luke 7:1-10 (see especially v. 5).

> "The legion was the regiment [cf. an American division] of the Roman army, and it consisted nominally of 6000 men. Each legion was divided into ten cohorts [Amer. battalion],

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[498]Longenecker, p. 383.

[499]Neil, p. 137. See Howson, p. 77, for parallels between the conversion of Saul and the conversion of Cornelius.

[500]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 13:11:2; 14:4:4; idem, *The Wars* . . ., 1:7:7.

[501]Idem, *Antiquities of* . . ., 15:8:5; 15:11:4; idem, *The Wars* . . ., 1:21:5-8.

[502]See Hengel, pp. 55-58.

[503]See Longenecker, pp. 384-85.

[504]See Barrett, p. 499.

[505]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 215. Cf. Barclay, p. 82.

> and again each cohort contained six centuries or 'hundreds' of men [Amer. company]. The officer in command of a cohort was called a *tribune* or in the Greek *chiliarch*: Such was Claudius Lysias of xxi 31 and xxiii 26. A century was under a *centurion* or *kekatontarch*."[506]

Cornelius represents a new type of person to whom the gospel had not gone before, as recorded in Acts. The Ethiopian eunuch, as well, was a Gentile, but the Jews viewed *his* occupation favorably. There was nothing about his occupation that would have repulsed the Jews. However, Cornelius, in addition to being a Gentile, was a member of Israel's occupying army. The Jews would have avoided him solely because of his occupation, even though he possessed an admirable character and was friendly to the Jews.

It is interesting to note that the first Gentile whom Jesus dealt with during His ministry was a Roman centurion, and that he, too, believed. In response to that man's faith, Jesus announced that many would come from among the Gentiles to join Jews in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 8:11).

10:2 Cornelius lived a moral life because he "feared God," as did "all" the other members of "his household." His generosity ("alms") to the people (Gr. *to lao*, i.e., to the Jews), and his continual prayers (Gr. *deomai*, lit. "begging"), were further evidences of his respect for Israel's God. His relations with God and people were admirable (cf. Matt. 22:37-39). Cornelius had not become a full Jewish proselyte (11:3), but he did *pray to* the Jews' "God." The Jews called full Gentile proselytes who had undergone circumcision "proselytes of righteousness." They referred to Gentiles who adhered to Judaism to a lesser extent, without submitting to circumcision, "proselytes of the gate." Luke called these latter people "God-fearers." Cornelius may have been one of the latter proselytes or "God-fearers," and the Ethiopian eunuch may have been another (cf. 8:27). This type of Gentile constituted fertile soil for the gospel seed (cf. 8:26-40). It was mainly such God-fearing Gentiles who responded to Paul's ministry.

Scholars debate the existence of the "God-fearers" as a distinct group.[507] The scriptural evidence points to their existence (cf. Acts 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26, 43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7), and this has been the opinion of the majority of scholars over the years.

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[506]Rackham, p. 147.

[507]See, for example, the series of articles featured in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12:5 (September-October 1986) under the general title, "The God-Fearers—Did They Exist?": Robert S. MacLennan and A. Thomas Kraabel, "The God-Fearers—A Literary and Theological Invention," pp. 46-53; Robert F. Tannenbaum, "Jews and God-Fearers in the Holy City of Aphrodite," pp. 54-57; and Louis H. Feldman, "The Omnipresence of the God-Fearers," pp. 58-63.

Some students of Acts have contended that Cornelius was a believer (i.e., an Old Testament saint) before he sent for Peter.[508] Some scholars argue that Cornelius was righteous before he heard Peter's gospel message, so it is unnecessary for people to hear the gospel to be saved.[509] It seems to many others, and to me, that in view of what we read in this chapter and the next he was not truly saved (i.e., justified) until verse 44 (cf. 11:14).

10:3-4 The "ninth hour" (3:00 p.m.) was the Jewish hour of prayer (cf. 3:1),[510] so Cornelius may have been praying. Again God would prepare two people to get together by giving each of them a vision (Cornelius and Peter; cf. Saul and Ananias). Cornelius saw "an angel," not Jesus (vv. 7, 22, 30; 11: 13; cf. 1:20). "Lord" here is a respectful address such as "Sir," but the centurion undoubtedly felt great awe when he saw this supernatural visitor (cf. v. 30). Cornelius was not calling the angel his "Savior" or his "Sovereign." God had noted Cornelius' piety (his prayers Godward, *proseuchai*, and his alms manward, cf. v. 2), and was now going to give him more revelation.

> "Luke is suggesting that the prayers and the alms of this Gentile were accepted by God in lieu of the sacrifices which he was not allowed to enter the Temple to offer himself. In other words, God had acted to break down barriers between Jew and Gentile by treating the prayers and alms of a Gentile as equivalent to the sacrifice of a Jew."[511]

Modern missionaries have told stories of similar seekers after God. After they penetrated some remote tribe and preached the gospel, the natives explained how they had previously worshiped the God the missionary preached, and had prayed for more light. Romans 3:11 means that no one seeks God unless God draws him or her to Himself, which is what God did with Cornelius.

10:5-6 God told Cornelius to "send (dispatch)" some "men to Joppa" for "Simon (also called) Peter," who was staying there with another "Simon," the "tanner" (cf. 9:43). Tanners used quite a bit of water in practicing their trade, and this may be the reason this Simon lived by the Mediterranean Sea.

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[508]E.g., Calvin, 3:24:10; Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, pp. 245, 268.

[509]E.g., John Sanders, "Inclusivism," in *What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, p. 40; but see 10:43; 11:14). For refutation of this view, see Ramesh Richard, "Soteriological Inclusivism and Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):85-108.

[510]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 14:4:3.

[511]P. F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology*, p. 162.

10:7-8 Cornelius immediately (v. 33) "sent . . . two of his servants," probably to assist Peter, plus a spiritually "devout" military aide ("soldier") to ask Peter to come. These servants appear to have been God-fearing individuals, and members of his household (cf. v. 2), who were in sympathy with Cornelius' purpose.

Peter's vision 10:9-16

> "Though Peter was not by training or inclination an overly scrupulous Jew, and though as a Christian his inherited prejudices were gradually wearing thin, he was not prepared to go so far as to minister directly to Gentiles. A special revelation was necessary for that, and Luke now tells how God took the initiative in overcoming Peter's reluctance."[512]

The original Greek, Roman, and Jewish readers of Acts all put much stock in dreams, visions, and oracles. They believed they came from "the gods," or from the "one true God" in the case of Jews. So it is not surprising that Luke put much emphasis on these events in his conversion stories of Saul and Cornelius. This would have put the divine sanction for Christianity beyond dispute in the readers' minds.[513]

10:9-10 Most Jews prayed twice a day, but pious Jews also prayed at noon ("the sixth hour"), a third time of prayer (Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10). However, Peter may have been praying—more because of the recent success of the gospel in Joppa (cf. 9:42)—than because praying at noon was his habit. The aorist tense of the Greek verb *proseuchomai* suggests that Peter may have been praying about something definite rather than general. This Greek word also sometimes refers to worship. He probably "went up on the" flat "housetop" for privacy and the fresh sea air. Luke's reference to Peter's hunger, which God evidently gave him, explains partially why God couched his vision in terms of food. Food was what was on Peter's mind. Peter's "trance" (Gr. *ekstasis*, v. 10) was a vision (*horama*, vv. 17, 19; 11:5).

> ". . . on weekdays Jews ate a light meal in mid-morning and a more substantial meal in the later afternoon."[514]

10:11-13 The sheet-like container, similar perhaps to an awning on the roof or a ship's sail, was full of "all *kinds* of animals," clean and unclean (cf. 11:6). The issue of unclean food was the basic one that separated observant Jews like Peter from Gentiles.

> "Milk drawn by a heathen, if a Jew had not been present to watch it, bread and oil prepared by them, were unlawful.

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[512]Longenecker, p. 387.
[513]Witherington, p. 341.
[514]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 185.

> Their wine was wholly interdicted—the mere touch of a heathen polluted a whole cask; nay, even to put one's nose to heathen wine was strictly prohibited!"[515]

> ". . . the point is that the Lord's command frees Peter from any scruples about going to a Gentile home and eating whatever might be set before him. It would be a short step from recognizing that Gentile food was clean to realizing that Gentiles themselves were 'clean' also."[516]

The Jewish laws distinguishing between clean and unclean animals appear in Lev. 11.

10:14 Peter protested the Lord Jesus' command, strongly but politely (Gr. *Medamos, kurie*), as Ezekiel had done when he received similar instructions from God (Ezek. 4:14). Peter may have remembered and recognized the voice as that of Jesus.[517] He had either not understood or not remembered Jesus' teaching in which He had declared *all foods clean* (Mark 7:14-19, cf. Rom. 14:14). Peter's "No, Lord," is, of course, an inconsistent contradiction. Nevertheless Peter's response was very consistent with his impulsive personality and former conduct. He had said, "No," to the Lord before (cf. Matt. 16:22; John 13:8). His reaction to this instruction reminds us of Peter's similar extreme reactions on other, earlier occasions (e.g., John 13:8-9; 21:7). Saul's response to the voice from heaven on the Damascus Road, however, had not been negative (9:5-8).

> "The cliché, 'If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all' is simply that—a cliché and not a biblical or theological truth. He can be Lord of aspects of my life while I withhold other areas of my life from His control. Peter illustrated that as clearly as anyone that day on the rooftop when the Lord asked him to kill and eat unclean animals. He said, 'By no means, Lord' (Acts 10:14). At that point was Christ Lord of all of Peter? Certainly not. Then must we conclude that He was not Lord at all in relation to Peter's life? I think not."[518]

Watch out for the teaching that Christians should observe the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law. This is a modern form of legalism. Some of what God forbade for Israel had nothing to do with guaranteeing good health (e.g., wearing mixed fiber clothing, not yoking an ox with a donkey, etc.).

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[515]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:92.
[516]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 186.
[517]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 220.
[518]Ryrie, *So Great* . . ., p. 73.

10:15-16 Peter's Jewish cultural prejudices were overriding the Word of God in his thinking. For this reason God repeated the vision two more times, so Peter would be sure he understood God's command correctly.

> "The threefold repetition might also remind Peter of an interview on a familiar beach [cf. John 21:15-17]."[519]

> "The message pervading the whole [of Peter's vision] . . . is that the disciples are to receive the Gentiles, not *before* cleansing, but *after* God has cleansed them as He will do later through the *cleansing* Gospel which Peter will share with them the next day."[520]

> "The particular application had to do with nullifying Jewish dietary laws for Christians in accord with Jesus' remarks on the subject in Mark 7:17-23. But Peter was soon to learn that the range of the vision's message extended much more widely, touching directly on Jewish-Gentile relations as he had known them and on those relations in ways he could never have anticipated."[521]

I wonder if Peter remembered Jonah as he thought about the mission God had given him of preaching to the Gentiles. God had also called that prophet to carry a message of salvation to the Gentiles in Nineveh, but Jonah had fled from that very city, Joppa, to escape his calling. Now Peter found himself in the same position.

> "Because Jonah disobeyed God, the Lord sent a storm that caused the Gentile sailors to fear. Because Peter obeyed the Lord, God sent the 'wind of the Spirit' to the Gentiles and they experienced great joy and peace."[522]

The invitation from Cornelius' messengers 10:17-23a

10:17-18 Peter did not understand what the vision meant. While he pondered the subject, being "greatly perplexed in mind," Cornelius' messengers called out below, inquiring about Simon Peter's presence in the house.

10:19-20 Somehow the Holy Spirit convinced Peter that God wanted him to accompany the messengers to Cornelius' house.

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[519]Blaiklock, p. 96.
[520]Harm, p. 35.
[521]Longenecker, p. 388.
[522]Wiersbe, 1:443.

> ". . . it is both exegetically and experientially difficult, if not impossible, to draw any sharp lines between 'an angel of God [vv. 3, 22],' the Holy Spirit [v. 19], and the ascended Christ [vv. 4, 14]."[523]

We could also add "God" (v. 28; cf. 8:26, 29, 39; 16:6-7; Rom. 8:9-11; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

> "A God-fearer had no objection to the society of Jews, but even a moderately orthodox Jew would not willingly enter the dwelling of a Gentile, God-fearer though he were."[524]

Peter was to feel free to ("without misgivings") enter the house of Cornelius, since the centurion was *not unclean*. Quite possibly while Peter "was reflecting" (v. 19), he remembered Jesus' teaching in which He terminated the clean/unclean distinction (cf. v. 29; Mark 7:19).

10:21-22 Peter probably descended from the roof by using a stairway on the outside of the house, as was common, and met the messengers outside the door where they had been standing. They described Cornelius as a "man well spoken of by the whole (entire) nation (Gr. *ethnos*) of the Jews," as well as "a righteous and God-fearing man" (cf. v. 2). They obviously wanted their description of their master to influence Peter to accompany them back to Caesarea.

10:23a After learning their intent, Peter invited them inside and acted as their host. This was very unusual, since Jews normally did not provide hospitality for Gentiles. Peter had apparently already begun to understand the meaning of the vision he had seen, and right away began to apply it in his relationships with these Gentiles.

> "There may also be some intended irony here, since Peter had earlier protested his scrupulousness about food, all the while staying in the house of a man whose trade made him unclean!"[525]

Peter's visit to Cornelius 10:23b-33

10:23b-24 Peter wisely took six other Jewish Christians with him (11:12). A total of seven believers witnessed what took place in Cornelius' house. The trip from Caesarea to Joppa took part of two days (v. 30). Cornelius was so sure Peter would come, that even before the apostle arrived, he gathered a group of "his relatives and (close) friends" to listen to him. The text gives

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[523]Longenecker, p. 389. See also Neil, p. 139.
[524]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 217.
[525]Witherington, p. 351.

no reason to assume that Cornelius knew Peter was the foremost apostle among the early Christians (cf. v. 5). Cornelius had an exemplary concern for the spiritual welfare of others even before he became a Christian (cf. v. 27).

10:25-26 Cornelius met Peter just like, on another occasion, the Apostle John responded to God's angelic messenger: he "fell at his feet and worshipped him." Nevertheless Peter, like the angel, refused this unwarranted veneration (cf. Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9).

> ". . . Simon Peter would never have let you get down to kiss his big toe [as pilgrims to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome do to the statue of Peter there]. He just wouldn't permit it."[526]

Later, Paul and Barnabas received a similar reception from the Lystrans, and likewise refused worship (14:11-15).

10:27-29 It was taboo for Jews "to associate with Gentiles (a foreigner)" and or "to visit" them in their homes.[527] Gentiles did not observe the strict rules Jews followed in eating, preparing, and even handling food, nor did they tithe or practice circumcision. Any physical contact with Gentiles laid a Jew open to becoming ceremonially unclean because of the Gentiles' failure to observe these Mosaic laws.

> "It may be safely asserted, that the grand distinction, which divided all mankind into Jews and Gentiles, was not only religious, but also social."[528]

> "There is nothing more binding on the average person than social custom."[529]

Food was the crux of the issue that separated them. However, Peter had gotten the message of the sheet full of food: food does not make a person unholy or unclean. Consequently he had come "without" further "objection." Peter's explanation in these verses stressed the fact that God had convinced him to go against traditional Jewish custom, which was well-known among the Gentiles.

> "If the food laws of the Jews no longer were valid, there was no real reason to avoid social contact with gentiles, for those distinctions lay at the heart of Jewish clannishness."[530]

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[526]McGee, 4:556.
[527]Mishnah *Demai* 3:4.
[528]Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., p. 86.
[529]Robertson, 3:141.
[530]Kent, p. 93.

> "He [Peter] violates the first rule of homiletics when he begins his message with an apology. What he says is not a friendly thing to say. In fact, it is an insult. . . . How would you feel, especially if you are a lady who is a housekeeper, if some visitor came into your home and his first words were, 'I am coming into your home, which I consider dirty'?"[531]

Nevertheless Peter quickly and humbly explained that he had been wrong about how he formerly felt about Gentiles (v. 29).

> ". . . the Christian preacher or teacher must call no man common or unclean."[532]

10:30-33 Cornelius then related the vision he had seen to Peter. The angel in Cornelius' vision (v. 2) had looked like "a man" dressed "in shining garments" (v. 30). The vision God had given him was a response to the centurion's prayers ("prayer") and "alms."

> ". . . there are certain things that do count before God. These are things which can in no way merit salvation, but they are things which God notes. . . . Wherever there is a man who seeks after God as Cornelius did, that man is going to hear the gospel of the grace of God. God will see that he gets it."[533]

Cornelius had responded to God admirably, by sending for Peter "immediately" (cf. Peter's "By no means, Lord," v. 14). Cornelius then invited Peter to tell him and his guests what God wanted him to say to them. What a prepared and receptive audience this was!

Luke stressed the significance of Cornelius' experience by repeating certain details (cf. 11:4-10). This is another example of his doublet style, which increases emphasis. Other examples are: the repetition of Jesus' miracles by His followers, and the repetition of the same types of miracles—that Peter performed—by Paul.

Peter's message to Cornelius 10:34-43

Peter's sermon on this occasion is the first sermon in Acts addressed to a Gentile audience (cf. 14:15-17; 17:22-31). It is quite similar to the ones Peter preached in 2:14-40 and 3:11-26, except that this one has more information about Jesus' pre-crucifixion ministry. This emphasis was appropriate, since Peter was addressing Gentiles who would

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[531]McGee, 4:557.
[532]Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 218.
[533]McGee, 4:555.

have known less about Jesus' ministry than the Jews did. Also this speech contains no quotations from the Old Testament, though there are many allusions to the Old Testament.

10:34 "Opening his mouth" is a phrase that typically introduces something very important (cf. 8:35; 18:14; Matt. 5:2; 13:35).

> ". . . in Luke's eyes what Peter was about to say was indeed momentous in sweeping away centuries of racial prejudice."[534]

What Peter confessed that he now understood, was something God had revealed throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Amos 9:7; Mic. 6:8), but that most Jews had not grasped due to centuries of ill-founded pride. God had now clarified this revelation.

Since "God is not one to show partiality" (cf. Deut. 10:17; 2 Chron. 19:7; Job 34:19), certainly Christians should not do this either. Peter proceeded to prove that God deals with all people equally through His Son (cf. vv. 36, 38, 42, 43), not on the basis of their race (cf. John 10:16). Whenever Christians practice racial discrimination, they need to reread Acts 10.

10:35 God requires faith in Jesus Christ for *total* acceptance (v. 43; cf. 11:17). However, anyone who "fears" God, and "does what is right" in harmony with His will, as Cornelius did, meets with His *initial* acceptance ("is welcome to Him").

10:36 All of this verse is a kind of caption for what Peter proceeded to announce to Cornelius and his guests. Its three main emphases are: first, that the message to follow was a presentation of revelation that God had sent to the Jews. Second, it was a message resulting in "peace" that comes through Jesus Christ. Third, Jesus Christ is Lord of *all*, both Jews and Gentiles. "Lord of all" was a pagan title for deity, which the Christians adopted as an appropriate title for Jesus Christ.[535] "He is Lord of all" expressed Peter's new insight. It is probably the main statement in the verse.

> "Since Jesus is Lord over all, Peter could proclaim to Cornelius and other Gentiles that the gospel is available to all. This is one of the most central points in Luke-Acts."[536]

> "What is the nature of Jesus' lordship [v. 36]? Because of His lordship, He had a ministry of power as He healed all who were oppressed by the devil (v. 38). As Lord, He was

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[534]Longenecker, p. 392.
[535]Ibid., p. 393; Barrett, p. 522.
[536]Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 105

> the object of a testimony that declared Him to be the Judge of the living and the dead (v. 42). He is the one of whom all the prophets testified that forgiveness of sins is found in His name (v. 43). Again [as in 2:21, 32-39; 5:14; and 9:42] lordship described the authority that Jesus has as the Bearer of salvation—an authority that involves work in the past (exorcising demons), present (granting forgiveness of sins), and future (serving as Judge)."[537]

That "lord" does not always mean "master" should be clear from this chapter. In verse 4, it is simply a respectful address and means "Sir." In verse 14, it means "God." And in this verse, it means "sovereign." The context helps us to interpret the meaning in each case. Also in each case, however, the idea of respect is present.

10:37 Peter proceeded to outline Jesus of Nazareth's career for his listeners, assuming some knowledge that was common, but adding more details than Luke recorded in Peter's previous speeches. This is the most comprehensive review of Jesus' career found in any speech in Acts. These details would have been appropriate since Peter's hearers here were Gentiles. Peter's sketch followed the same general outline as Mark's Gospel, which, according to early Christian tradition, Peter influenced.

Luke undoubtedly summarized Peter's message, as he did most, if not all of the other addresses in Luke-Acts, and stressed points important to his readers. These points included the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1 (in v. 38, cf. Luke 4:14-30), the importance of apostolic witness (in vv. 39-41, cf. Acts 1:8), and Jesus' post-resurrection eating and drinking with His disciples (v. 41, cf. Luke 24:41-43). "The thing" to which Peter referred was the earthly ministry of Jesus.

10:38 Jesus' anointing by God "with the Holy Spirit" took place at His baptism by John the Baptist (cf. Luke 3:21-22), when He became God's officially Anointed One (i.e., the Messiah). The "all" whom Jesus healed were the *many* He healed. This is hyperbole, since Jesus did not heal every needy person He met.[538] However, Peter probably meant that Jesus healed all Jews and Gentiles alike. This is another verse which advocates of the "prosperity gospel" cite, attempting to prove their case.[539] Jesus' good deeds and supernatural miracles testified to God's presence with Him (cf. Gen. 39:2).

10:39 The apostles regularly mentioned in their preaching that they were eye "witnesses" of Jesus' ministry (2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:41; 13:30-31). This had tremendous persuasive appeal to their hearers. Peter divided Jesus'

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[537]Idem, "Jesus as . . .," p. 149.

[538]See my comment on 3:2.

[539]See my comments on 5:16.

acts into those that He performed "in the land of the Jews," and the ones "in Jerusalem," their capital city. Those who "put Jesus (Him) to death" were the Jews (3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52) and the Gentiles (4:27). Here Peter referred generally to all those involved in the Crucifixion. "Hanging him on a cross" emphasizes the horrible way the enemies of Jesus killed Him.

> "It is difficult, after sixteen centuries and more during which the cross has been a sacred symbol, to realize the unspeakable horror and loathing which the very mention or thought of the cross provoked in Paul's day. The word *crux* was unmentionable in polite Roman society (Cicero, *Pro Rabirio* 16); even when one was being condemned to death by crucifixion the sentence used an archaic formula which served as a sort of euphemism . . ."[540]

> "The cross of Christ reveals the love of God at its best and the sin of man at its worst."[541]

10:40-41 In contrast to man's treatment of Jesus, God "raised Him" from the grave after three days (cf. 17:31). Jesus also appeared to selected individuals whom God chose to be "witnesses" of His resurrection. Among these was Peter himself, who even "ate and drank with" the risen Lord, proof that He really was alive!

> "The resurrection appearances were not made to the people at large. The reason appears to have been that those who saw Jesus were constituted to act as witnesses to the many people who could not see him, and this obligation was not laid on people who were unfit for it but only on those who had been prepared by lengthy association with Jesus and by sharing his work of mission."[542]

10:42-43 Peter referred to the Great Commission, which Jesus gave His disciples after His resurrection (v. 41), in verse 42.

> "This entire experience is an illustration of the commission of Matthew 28:19-20. Peter went where God sent him and made disciples ('teach') of the Gentiles. Then he baptized them and taught them the Word."[543]

Jesus Christ will one day judge all people ("the living and the dead") as forgiven or not forgiven (cf. Acts 17:31). To be forgiven one must "believe in Him" (cf. 5:14; 9:42; 11:17). Peter said this is what the Old

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[540]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 271.
[541]Anonymous.
[542]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 193.
[543]Wiersbe, 1:447.

Testament prophets taught (e.g., Isa. 53:11; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25-26; et al.). The Messiah (Christ) would be the "Judge" of all people, and Jesus of Nazareth is that Messiah (cf. John 5:27). The Lord of all (v. 36) is also the Judge of all (v. 42).

Note how Peter stressed the universal benefit of Jesus' ministry in this message to Gentiles; it was for Gentiles as well as Jews. Not only is Jesus Lord of all (v. 36), but He went about healing all (v. 38). Furthermore He is the Judge of all (v. 42) to whom all the prophets bore witness (v. 43a), and God forgives all who believe in Him (v. 43b).

> "This simple outline [vv. 34-43] . . . is perhaps the clearest NT example of the *kerygma*, the earliest form in which the apostolic proclamation of the gospel was apparently couched."[544]

The giving of the Holy Spirit to Gentiles 10:44-48

10:44 Peter did not need to call for his hearers to repent on this occasion (cf. 2:38; 3:19). As soon as he gave them enough information to trust in Jesus Christ, they did so. Immediately "the Holy Spirit fell on (upon) them, filling them (v. 47; 11:15; cf. 2:4) and baptizing them (11:16; cf. 1:5).

God gave His Spirit to individuals from both groups, Jews and Gentiles, solely because of their faith in Jesus Christ (11:17). The Gentiles did not have to do anything but believe on Jesus. They did not need to become Jewish proselytes, experience baptism in water, undergo circumcision, turn from their sins, or even say they were willing to turn from them.[545]

Note that Spirit baptism took place here without the laying on of an apostle's hands. The identification of Spirit baptism with the apostles was not necessary here, as it had been with the Samaritans (cf. 8:17-19). However, the important point was the connection between *faith in Jesus Christ alone*, apart from any external Jewish rite, and *Spirit baptism*.

> "Through Peter's experience with Cornelius it is made plain that the norm for this age for both Jews and Gentiles, is for the Holy Spirit to be given without delay, human mediation, or other conditions than simple faith in Jesus Christ for both Jew and Gentile."[546]

10:45 The outward evidence that God had given His Spirit to these Gentile believers as a gift, was that they spoke in tongues and praised God (cf. 11:15-16). This amazed Peter's Jewish companions, because it proved that

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[544]Kent, p. 94.

[545]See Roy B. Zuck, "Cheap Grace?" *Kindred Spirit* 13:2 (Summer 1989):4-7, for a popular critique of "Lordship Salvation."

[546]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1179.

God was not making a distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus regarding His acceptance of them.

10:46a Probably Peter and his Jewish companions heard these Gentiles praising God in Aramaic (and classical Hebrew?), which these Gentiles would not have known previously, since Aramaic was a language the Jews understood. The Jews present would have understood Aramaic immediately, and would have recognized that the ability to speak in an unstudied language was an evidence of Spirit baptism, as it was at Pentecost.

10:46b-48 There was no reason to withhold "water" baptism from these Gentile converts; they could undergo baptism in water as a testimony to their faith immediately. They had believed in Jesus Christ and had experienced Spirit baptism. Baptism with the Spirit was Jesus' sign of His acceptance of them, and baptism with water was their sign of their acceptance of Him. They had done everything they needed to do. They did not need to experience anything more such as circumcision, or admission into the Jewish community, or the adoption of traditional Jewish dietary laws, or anything else.

> "I have heard people say sometimes that if you are baptized with the Holy Ghost you do not need to be baptized in water. It is not a question of what you need—it is a question of what God has commanded."[547]

The events Luke recorded in 9:32—10:48 prepared Peter for the Lord's further expansion of His church to include Gentiles. Peter had unlocked the door of the church to Jews on Pentecost (Matt. 16:19; cf. Eph. 2:14). What happened in Cornelius' house was "the Pentecost of the Gentile world."[548] By pouring out His Spirit on these Gentiles, God showed that—*in His sight*—Jews and Gentiles were equal. The Jew had no essential advantage over the Gentile in entering the church. God observes no distinction in race when it comes to becoming a Christian (cf. Eph. 2:11—3:12).

The Ethiopian eunuch was probably a descendant of Ham, Saul was a descendant of Shem, and Cornelius was a descendant of Japheth (cf. Gen. 10).[549] Thus, with the record of *their* conversions in chapters 8—10, Luke told us that the church is equally accessible to all branches of the human family.

Why was the conversion of Cornelius, rather than the earlier conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, the opening of the church's door to the Gentiles? The conversion of the Gentile eunuch was a case of individual private salvation. The conversion of Cornelius, on the other hand, involved several Gentiles, and it was public. God had saved individual

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[547]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, p. 257.
[548]F. H. Chase, *The Credibility of the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 79.
[549]McGee, 4:545.

Gentiles by faith throughout history (e.g., Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, et al.). With the conversion of Cornelius, He now, for the first time, publicly brought Gentiles into the church, the new creation of God, by Spirit baptism. The eunuch had become a Christian and a member of the church, but that was not evident to anyone at the time of his conversion. With Cornelius' conversion, God made a public statement, as He had at Pentecost, that He was doing something new, namely, forming a new body of believers in Jesus. In chapter 2, He had shown that it would include Jews, and here in chapter 10, He now clarified that it would also include Gentiles. The sole prerequisite for entrance into this group (the church) was faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of ethnicity, which had separated Jews from Gentiles for centuries. The distinctive difference between becoming a Christian and becoming a Jew (religiously), was that God gave the Holy Spirit to *every* Christian. The sign of this, for the benefit of the Jews, was that He enabled those to whom He gave the Spirit to speak in tongues. In the rest of Acts, Luke proceeded to narrate the conversion of various kinds of Gentiles in various parts of the Mediterranean world.

The response of the Jerusalem church 11:1-18

Peter's actions in Caesarea drew criticism from conservative Jews. Luke wrote this pericope to enable his readers to understand and appreciate more fully God's acceptance of Gentiles into the church *as Gentiles*. An additional purpose was to present this acceptance as essential to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The leaders of the Jerusalem church recognized what God was doing in bringing Gentiles into the church, as they had done formerly with the Samaritan believers in Jesus (8:14-25). Luke documented this *recognition*, in this pericope, because it plays an important role in proving the distinction between Israel and the church and explaining the worldwide mission of the church.

Criticism of Peter's conduct 11:1-3

News of what had happened in Cornelius' house spread quickly throughout Judea. "The brethren" (v. 1) and "those who were circumcised" (v. 2) refer to Jewish Christians, not unsaved Jews. Peter's response to their criticism of him makes this clear (e.g., v. 15). They objected to his having had contact with "uncircumcised" Gentiles, particularly eating with them (v. 3). Apparently Peter "ate with" his host while he was with him for several days (10:48), though Luke did not record this. The same taboo that had bothered Peter was bothering his Jewish brethren (cf. 10:28). They undoubtedly would have felt concern over the non-Christian Jews' reaction to themselves. Peter's actions in Caesarea could only bring more persecution on the Jewish Christians from the unsaved Jews (cf. 7:54—8:3).

> "It is possible to hear a subtile echo of Jesus' critics in 11:3. Jesus was also accused of eating with or lodging with the wrong kind of people. . . . Now Peter must face the kind of criticism that Jesus faced, arising this time from the circle of Jesus' disciples."[550]

[550]Tannehill, 2:137.

> "It is plain that Peter was not regarded as any kind of pope or overlord."[551]

Peter's defense of his conduct 11:4-17

Luke recorded Peter's retelling of these events to his critics, in order to further impress the significance of this incident on his readers. Peter particularly stressed God's initiative (vv. v. 8, 9, 12, 15, 16, 17a), as well as his own inability to withstand God (v. 17b).

Cornelius and "all" his "household" were not "saved" from God's wrath until they heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ that Peter proclaimed to them (v. 14; cf. 10:43).

Peter was speaking of the day of Pentecost when he referred to "the beginning" of the church (v. 15, cf. 2:4). Clearly the baptism of the Holy Spirit is what he referred to (v. 16). Peter justified his actions in Caesarea (eating with Gentiles) by appealing to what God had done (v. 17a). Note that Peter identified "believing in the Lord Jesus Christ" as the only necessary prerequisite to receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit (v. 17a). Spirit baptism ("the same gift as *He gave* to us") was not an experience subsequent to salvation for Cornelius and his household, but something that happened simultaneously with salvation.

> "Peter's defense did not rest on what he himself did, but on what *God* did. God had made no distinction between Jew and Gentile, so how could Peter?"[552]

The verdict of Peter's critics 11:18

Peter's explanation was satisfactory to his critics. His Jewish brethren agreed that God was saving Gentiles simply by faith in Jesus Christ—just as He was saving Jews—and that they should no longer regard Gentiles as "unclean." They recognized and yielded to God's initiative in this event. As a result, the bonds between Jewish and Gentile Christians became stronger, and the bonds between unbelieving Jews and believing Jews became weaker.

> "The word 'repentance' summarizes Cornelius' conversion in Acts. 'Repentance' can be a summary term for conversion stressing that a change of orientation has taken place when one believes. Faith stresses what the object of belief is. Faith is directed toward a Person, namely, Jesus. Repentance stresses what belief involves in that it is a change of mind or of orientation from oneself and his own works to a reliance on Jesus to save him. The repentant man of faith recognizes that, as the hymnwriter puts it, his 'hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness' and that he is to 'wholly lean on Jesus' name.' *Metanoeo* ('to repent') is used in Acts 2:38 and 3:19 to call Jewish audiences to come to

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[551]Robertson, 3:152.

[552]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 382.

> Jesus, and it is used in the same way in Acts 17:30 and 26:20 to describe the call to or response of Gentiles. *Metanoia* ('repentance') is the summary term of the Great Commission in Luke 24:47. It is also used in salvation contexts in Acts 5:31 (to Jews); 11:18 (of Cornelius); 20:21 (of Jews and Gentiles who believe on the Lord Jesus); and 26:20 (in Paul's message to Jews and Gentiles)."[553]

It is clear, however, that not all of those who accepted Peter's explanation also understood the larger issue. Probably few of them did. The larger issue was that God had created a new entity, the church, and that He was dealing with humankind on a different basis than He had for centuries. Those whom God accepted by faith in Christ were now under a new covenant, not the old Mosaic Covenant, so they did not need to continue to observe the Mosaic Law. It was no longer necessary for Gentiles to come to God through Judaism, or to live within the constraints of Judaism. Opposition to this larger issue, the implications of what happened in Cornelius' home, cropped up later (15:1; cf. Gal.). Even today, many Christians do not understand the implications of this change, and or their application in daily life.

> "It is clear that Christianity was accepted [by Peter's critics] as a reformed Judaism, not as Judaism's successor."[554]

Whereas the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem did come to agree with Peter, the non-Christian Jews did not. They still regarded Gentiles as outside the pale of God's favor. The Christian Jews' new attitude toward Gentiles, on the one hand, had opened them up to the Gentiles. However, it also resulted in non-Christian Jews excluding Christian Jews, increasingly, from the life of Judaism.

> "Even though Peter does not convert the first Gentile [in Acts, i.e., the Ethiopian eunuch], the Cornelius episode is a breakthrough for the Gentile mission. The conversion of the Ethiopian was a private and isolated event that had no effect [in Acts]. The conversion of Cornelius has consequences in the following narrative, as the reference back to it in Acts 15 makes clear. It is a breakthrough not simply because Peter and the Jerusalem church now accept Gentiles for baptism but also because they recognize the right of Jewish Christians to freely associate with Gentiles in the course of their mission."[555]

3. The initiatives of the Antioch church 11:19-30

The scene now shifts to Antioch of Syria. Antioch was a very significant town, because from there the church launched its major missionary offensives to "the uttermost parts of the earth."[556] Luke recorded events in the early history of this church because of its

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[553]Bock, "Jesus as . . .," p. 154.
[554]Blaiklock, p. 97.
[555]Tannehill, 2:137.
[556]See Finegan, *Light from* . . ., pp. 337-40, for more information about Antioch of Syria.

significant initiatives. The disciples in Antioch reached out to Gentiles with spiritual aid, and they reached out to their Jewish brethren in Jerusalem with material aid.

> "With the ratification by the Jerusalem mother church of Peter's action in admitting the first group of Gentiles into the Church as his preface, Luke now launches into the main theme of the book of Acts—the expansion of the Church into the whole Gentile world. Again he emphasizes the part played by anonymous believers in spreading Christianity."[557]

The spiritual initiative of the Antioch church 11:19-26

11:19 Luke's reference back to "the persecution" resulting from Stephen's martyrdom (7:60) is significant. It suggests that he was now beginning to record another mission of the Christians that ran parallel—logically and chronologically—to the one he had just described in 8:4—11:18.[558]

Luke had already pointed out that as a result of Stephen's execution, the gospel had spread throughout Judea and Samaria (8:4). Now we learn that it was that event that also led to its being taken to the uttermost parts of the earth. While Philip went to Samaria, other refugees went to the country of Phoenicia north of Caesarea, the island of "Cyprus" (cf. 4:36; 21:16), and the city of "Antioch." Those disciples, who were *Jews*, were evangelizing other "Jews" exclusively ("alone").

Persecution was good for the church. It frequently causes the church to grow rather than die. However, peaceful conditions are normally more conducive to effective evangelism than persecution (1 Tim. 2:2-4).

11:20 Some Jews from "Cyprus," Barnabas' homeland not far from Antioch, and "Cyrene," in North Africa (cf. 2:10; 6:9; 13:1), visited Antioch (cf. 13:1). Antioch was at this time the third largest city in the Roman world, after Rome and Alexandria.[559] These Jews may have traveled there on business. Antioch was about 15 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea, on the Orontes River, and 300 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the capital of the Roman province of Syro-Cilicia, north of Phoenicia, and it was one of the most strategic population centers of its day. It contained between 500,000 and 800,000 inhabitants, about one-seventh of whom were Jews.[560] Many Gentile proselytes to Judaism lived there.[561] Antioch was also notorious as a haven for pleasure-seekers.[562]

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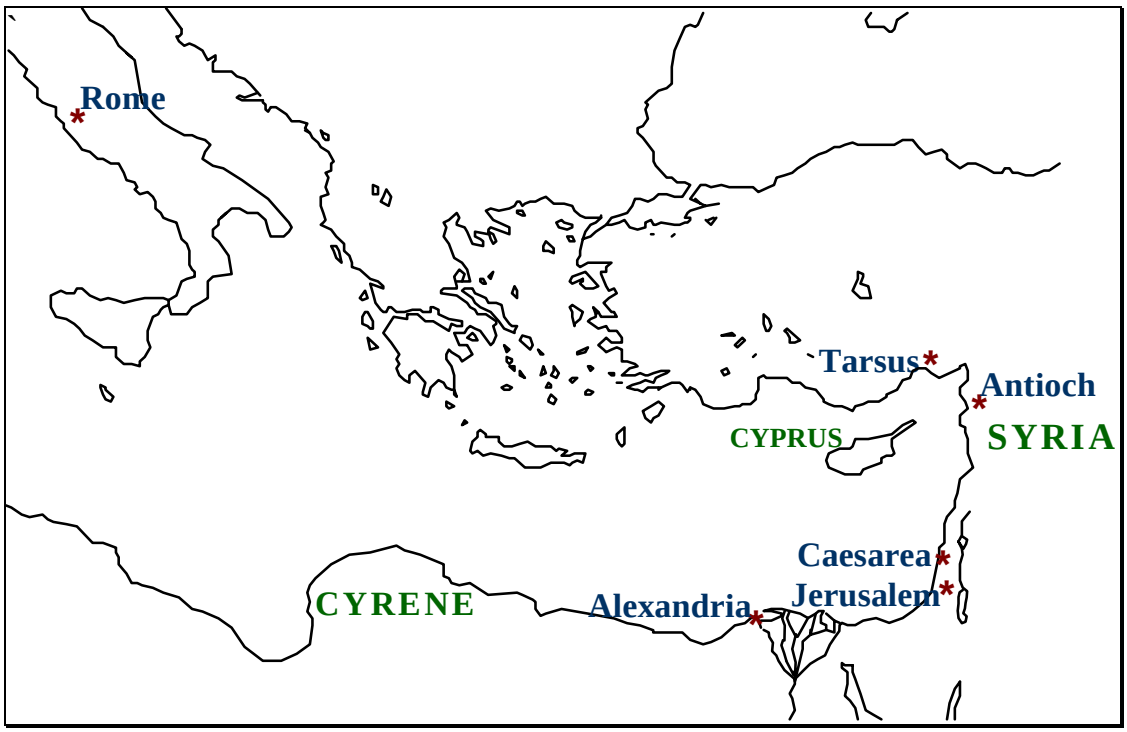
[557]Neil, p. 143.
[558]Longenecker, p. 400; Kent, p. 97.
[559]Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 3:2:4.
[560]Longenecker, p. 399; Neil, p. 143.
[561]Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 7:3:3.
[562]Longenecker, p. 399; Barclay, pp. 93-94. See Rackham, p. 165, for a background sketch of this city.



> "The Roman satirist, Juvenal, complained, 'The sewage of the Syrian Orontes has for long been discharged into the Tiber.' By this he meant that Antioch was so corrupt it was impacting Rome, more than 1,300 miles away."[563]
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> "It seems incredible but nonetheless it is true that it was in a city like that that Christianity took the great stride forward to becoming the religion of the world. We have only to think of that to discover there is no such thing as a hopeless situation."[564]
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> "In Christian history, apart from Jerusalem, no other city of the Roman Empire played as large a part in the early life and fortunes of the church as Antioch of Syria."[565]

Some of the Hellenistic Jews also began sharing the gospel with Gentiles ("speaking to the Greeks also"). This verse documents another significant advance in the mission of the church: For the first time, Luke recorded Jews aggressively evangelizing non-Jews. The Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius, who were both Gentiles, had taken the initiative in reaching out

[563]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 383.
[564]Barclay, p. 94.
[565]Longenecker, p. 399.

to Jews and had obtained salvation. Now believing Jews were taking the initiative in reaching out to Gentiles with the gospel.

The Antiochian evangelists preached "the Lord Jesus." For Gentiles "Christ" (Messiah) would not have been as significant a title as "Lord" (sovereign, savior, and deity). Many pagan Gentiles in the Roman Empire regarded Caesar as "Lord."

11:21 Luke stressed the Lord Jesus' blessing of their witness. "The hand of the Lord" is an Old Testament anthropomorphism that pictures God's power (cf. Isa. 59:1; 66:14). The early disciples put Jesus on a par with Yahweh; His deity was not a late (recent) development read back into the early history of the church.[566] Response to this evangelistic work was very good. Perhaps these Gentiles were "God-fearers" similar to the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius.[567] Perhaps they were pagans who were not Jewish proselytes, but were open to the message of life because of their dissatisfaction with paganism.[568] Probably both types of Gentiles responded.

> "The combination of faith (*pisteusas*) and of turning (*epestrepsen*) is another common way to express salvation in Acts."[569]

11:22-24 As the apostles had done previously, when they had heard of the Samaritans' salvation, they once again investigated when word ("news") of the salvation of Gentiles "reached . . . Jerusalem" (8:14-15). They chose a representative to visit the scene to evaluate what was happening. The Lord obviously controlled these men in their choice of an observer. "Barnabas" (cf. 4:36-37) was an excellent man for this mission since he, like some of the evangelists in Antioch, was from Cyprus. He was also a more broad-minded Hellenist. Furthermore he was a positive, encouraging person (4:36), and he was "full of the Holy Spirit," "faith," and goodness ("a good man").

> "Although he came of a Dispersion family, he was regarded with complete confidence in Jerusalem and acted as a pivot point or link between the Hebrew and Hellenistic elements in the church."[570]

Barnabas "rejoiced" when he observed God's grace at work in Antioch, and, true to his name ("Son of Encouragement," 4:36), he "encouraged" the new converts "to remain faithful (*true*) to the Lord." Even more people

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[566]Robertson, 3:157.
[567]Longenecker, p. 401.
[568]Neil, p. 144.
[569]Bock, "Jesus as . . .," p. 149.
[570]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 202.

("considerable numbers") became believers because of Barnabas' ministry to these Christians. According to tradition, Luke came from Antioch. The second-century *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* to Luke's Gospel referred to Luke as an Antiochian of Syria.[571] Also, Eusebius wrote in the fourth century, ". . . Luke, who was born at Antioch . . ."[572] So perhaps he was one of the converts.

Discipling in Acts was not done mainly "one on one," but in community. We see the same emphasis in Ephesians 4. One-on-one discipling is certainly all right, but it can become self-centered. Growth in a group is much more conducive to the discovery and development of spiritual gifts.

Luke may have described Barnabas in such glowing terms, partly because this situation was such a serious crisis for the early church. Much depended on how Barnabas would react, what he would do, and what he would report back to the mother church in Jerusalem. The evangelization of Gentiles was at stake.

11:25 As the church in Antioch continued to grow, Barnabas and perhaps others sensed the need for Saul's help. Consequently, at this time, Barnabas set out to track him down in "Tarsus," where Saul had gone (9:30). "Saul" was an ideal choice for this work, since God had given him a special appointment to evangelize Gentiles (22:21). Moreover, he had considerable experience in ministry already, probably about nine years of it since his conversion.[573]

Some Bible scholars have deduced that Saul's family in Tarsus had disinherited him (cf. Phil. 3:8). Some also believe that he endured some of the afflictions, that he described in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, while he ministered in and around Tarsus. These included persecution by the Jews, probably for trying to evangelize Gentiles. Furthermore, some say that Saul had the revelation, to which he referred in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, while he was ministering near there. He was undoubtedly very active in missionary work around Tarsus during his residence there, even though we have no record of it.

11:26 Barnabas had earlier sponsored Saul in Jerusalem (9:27). Now Barnabas "brought" Saul from Tarsus "to Antioch," a distance of about 90 miles, where they ministered together "for a (an entire) year," teaching and leading the church. This was probably in A.D. 43, ten years after the death and resurrection of Jesus and the day of Pentecost.

Luke noted another advance for the church in that observers called the believers "Christians" (lit. "those belonging to Christ's party," i.e., "Christ followers") "first . . . in Antioch." In other words, people now

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[571]See T. W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, p. 49, for an English translation of the text.

[572]*The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, p. 85 (bk. 3, ch. 4).

[573]See Appendix 1 "Sequence of Paul's Activities," at the end of these notes.

distinguished the Christians as a group, both from religious Jews as well as from pagan Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor. 10:32).[574] Howson argued that it was probably the Romans in Antioch who first gave the Christians this name.[575] There are only three occurrences of the name "Christian" in the New Testament, and in each case Christians did not use it of themselves (cf. 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). Similarly, biblical references indicate that the name "Jew" is one that people other than the Israelites used to describe them.

> "Note the three elements in the name [Christian]. (i) It contains Jewish *thought*, as the equivalent of *Messiah*, the Anointed. (ii) It shows the *Greek language* in the substantive—'Christ.' (iii) It also includes the *Latin language* in the adjectival ending 'ians' (Latin, *iani*). This universality is a reminder of the language of the title on the Cross."[576]

For Gentiles, however, the title "Christ" became a personal name for Jesus.

> "They [those who used this name for believers in Jesus] . . . voiced an insight that the Christians themselves only saw clearly later on: Christianity is no mere variant of Judaism."[577]

The material initiative of the Antioch church 11:27-30

11:27 Official "prophets" were still active in the church, apparently until the completion of the New Testament canon. A prophet was a person to whom God had given ability to speak for Him (forth-telling, cf. 1 Cor. 14:1-5), which in some cases included the ability to receive and announce new revelation (fore-telling). Prophesying also equaled praising God (1 Chron. 25:1).

> "The Jews believed that with the last of the [Old Testament] writing prophets, the spirit of prophecy had ceased in Israel; but the coming Messianic Age would bring an outpouring of God's Spirit, and prophecy would again flourish. The early Christians, having experienced the inauguration of the Messianic Age [i.e., the age of fulfillment], not only proclaimed Jesus to be the Mosaic eschatological prophet (cf. 3:22; 7:37) but also saw prophecy as a living phenomenon within the church (cf.

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[574]See Stephen J. Strauss, "The Significance of Acts 11:26 for the Church at Antioch and Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):283-300.

[575]Howson, p. 99.

[576]Thomas, p. 47.

[577]Longenecker, p. 402.

> also 13:1; 15:32; 21:9-10) and ranked it among God's gifts to his people next to that of being an apostle (cf. 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11)."[578]

11:28 God fulfilled Agabus' prophecy (cf. 21:10). "In the *reign* of" Emperor "Claudius" (A.D. 41-54), there was a series of severe famines and poor harvests in various parts of the Roman Empire.[579] The Romans used the Greek word *oikoumene* ("world," lit. "inhabited world") as an exaggerated reference for the Roman Empire (cf. Luke 2:1).

11:29 The Christians in Antioch demonstrated love for and unity with their brethren in Jerusalem by sending them some "relief" money. Luke previously documented the love and generosity of the Jerusalem Christians for one another (2:42; 4:32-35). Now he revealed that the Antioch Christians surpassed even their sacrifice by sharing what they had with *another* congregation. The giving was voluntary and according to the ability that each Christian possessed (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7).

11:30 The church leaders chose "Barnabas and Saul" to carry the gift to Jerusalem. There they gave it to the "elders" (Gr. *presbyteroi*). This is the first use of that word in Acts. It can refer to older men, chronologically (cf. 1 Tim. 5:1), or to officers in the church (Tit. 1:5). Probably the latter meaning is in view here, since official leaders would probably have been responsible to distribute the gift. Evidently the apostles had set up elders, even as they had set up "the Seven," in order to facilitate the ministry there. Elders were common in Jewish synagogue worship where they served as overseers. As time passed, this organizational structure became normal in Christian churches as well.

The visit to which Luke referred here probably took place about A.D. 46, when Judea suffered from a severe famine.[580] This so-called "Famine Visit to Jerusalem" is probably the one Paul referred to in Galatians 2:1-10.[581]

As the Jerusalem church had ministered to the church in Antioch by providing leadership and teaching, the Antioch church now was able to minister to the Jerusalem church with financial aid (cf. Gal. 6:6). Luke probably included this reference to this relief to illustrate, among other things, the strength of the Gentile church outside Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.

> "The summary of the establishment of the church in Antioch presents an important new development, both geographically and ethnically. The gospel reaches a major city of the empire and finds a ready response from

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[578]Ibid., p. 403.

[579]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 243. See also idem, "Chronological Questions . . .," pp. 278-79; and Longenecker, pp. 403-4.

[580]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 3:15:3; 20:2:5; 20:5:2.

[581]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 244; Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 205; Longenecker, p. 405; Neil, p. 146; Witherington, p. 375.

> people of Greek culture, including Gentiles. The narrator pulls together threads from the preceding narrative, especially chapters 2 and 8, and weaves them into a tapestry to describe the new phase of the mission."[582]

4. The persecution of the Jerusalem church 12:1-24

The saints in Jerusalem not only suffered as a result of the famine, they also suffered because Jewish and Roman governmental opposition against them intensified as time passed. Luke recorded the events in this section to illustrate God's supernatural protection and blessing of the church, even though the Christians suffered increased persecution, and Israel's continued rejection of her Messiah. Looked at another way, this section confirms Israel's rejection of her Messiah. This is why the church advanced more dramatically in Gentile territory, as the rest of Acts shows. Contrasts mark verses 1-23: James dies, God delivers Peter, and Herod dies.

The supernatural deliverance of Peter 12:1-19

> "Peter's rescue from prison is an unusually vivid episode in Acts even when simply taken as a story about Peter. Because it is not connected with events in the chapters immediately before and after it, however, it may seem rather isolated and unimportant for Acts as a whole. Yet it becomes more than a vivid account of an isolated miracle when we probe below the surface, for this story is an echo of other stories in Luke-Acts and in Jewish Scripture. An event that is unique, and vividly presented as such, takes on the importance of the typical when it reminds us of other similar events. It recalls the power of God to rescue those chosen for God's mission, a power repeatedly demonstrated in the past."[583]

12:1-2 "About that time" probably harks back to the famine visit of Barnabas and Saul mentioned in 11:30. If that took place in A.D. 46, and Herod died in A.D. 44, then the events Luke related in chapter 12 must have antedated the famine visit, and probably all of 11:27-30, by about two years.

> ". . . Luke seems to have wanted to close his portrayals of the Christian mission within the Jewish world (2:42—12:24) with two vignettes having to do with God's continued activity on behalf of the Jerusalem church."[584]

"Herod the king" was Herod Agrippa I, whom the Roman emperor Gaius appointed king over Palestine in A.D. 37. When Claudius succeeded Gaius as emperor, he added Judea and Samaria to Agrippa's territories so that Agrippa governed all that his grandfather, Herod the Great, had ruled.[585] Agrippa ruled Judea for three years, A.D. 41-44[586] (cf. v. 23), and moved

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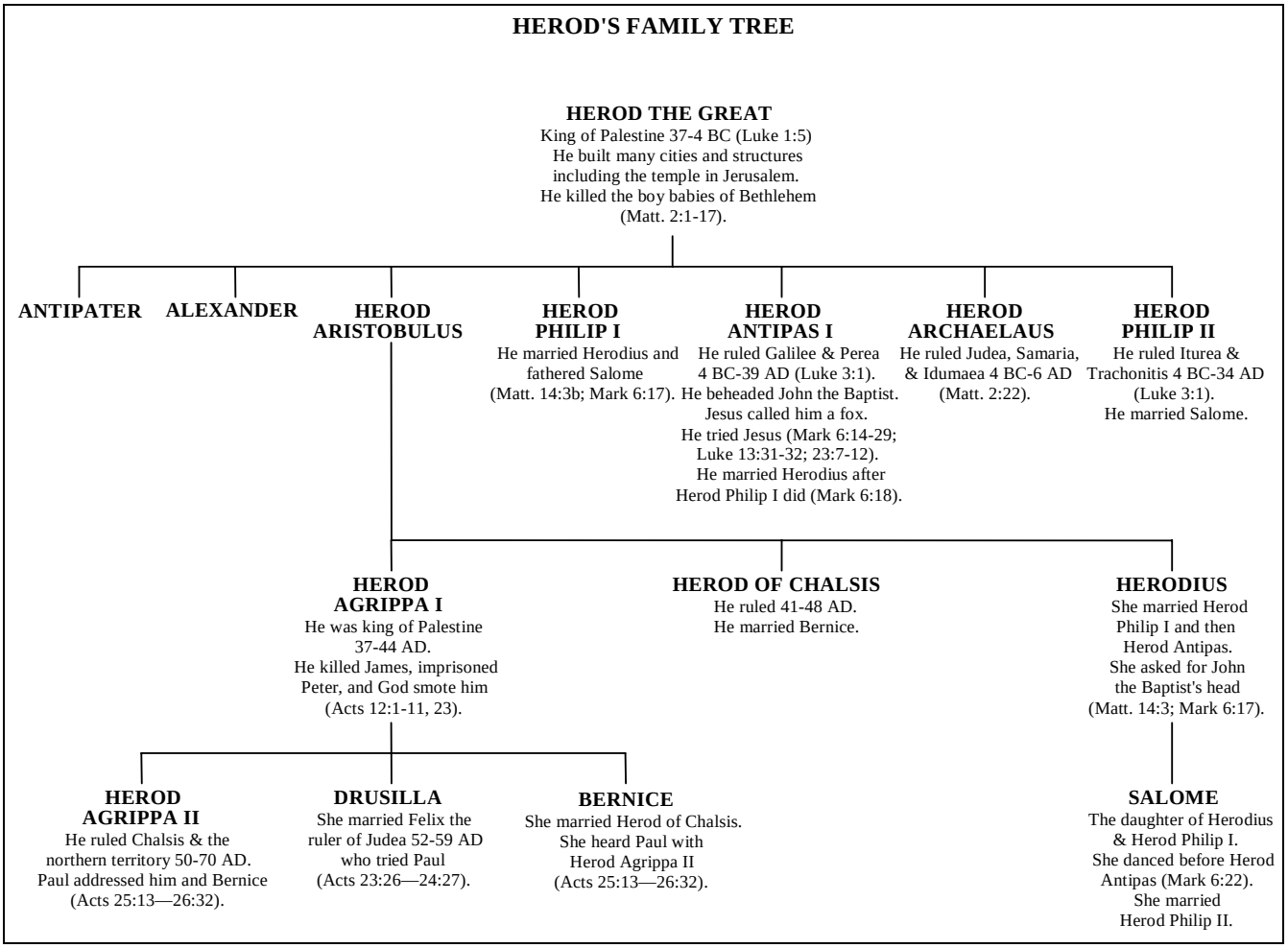
[582]Tannehill, 2:146.
[583]Ibid., 2:151.
[584]Longenecker, p. 407.
[585]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 19:5:1.
[586]Ibid., 19:8:2; idem, *The Wars . . .*, 2:11:6; F. F. Bruce, "Chronological Questions . . .," pp. 276-78.

his headquarters to Jerusalem. Herod Agrippa I had Jewish blood in his veins and consistently sought to maintain favor with and the support of the Jews over whom he ruled, which he did effectively.[587] Josephus referred to Agrippa positively as "a person that deserved the greatest admiration."[588] Herod Agrippa was the friend of Caligula, as Herod the Great had been the friend of Augustus.[589] As the Christian Jews became increasingly offensive to their racial brethren (cf. 11:18), Herod took advantage of an opportunity to please his subjects by mistreating some believers, and by executing (beheading) the Apostle "James," the "brother of John" (cf. Matt. 20:23). Josephus wrote that "Ananus" (Ananias), the high priest, was responsible for James' death, but this seems to be inaccurate.[590] This is the only apostle's death that the New Testament recorded. James was the second Christian martyr whom Luke identified (cf. 7:54-60). Persecution of the Christians now swung from religious to include political motivation.



[587]Josephua, *Antiquities of* . . ., 19:7:3-5; idem, *The Wars* . . ., 2:16:4; See Longenecker, pp. 407-8, for a brief biography of Herod Agrippa I.

[588]Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1:9.

[589]Howson, p. 23.

[590]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 20:9:1:footnote b.

ROMAN EMPERORS IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES		
Emperor	**Important Events**	**Bible Books Written**
Augustus (31 B.C.-A.D. 15)	Ordered the census that took Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1).	
Tiberius (A.D. 15-35)	Jesus' earthly ministry conducted during his reign (Luke 3:1; 20:22, 25; 23:2; John 19:12, 15).	
Gaius (A.D. 35-41)	Appointed Herod Agrippa I king over Palestine (Acts 12:1).	Matthew (A.D. 40-70)
Claudius (A.D. 41-54)	Extensive famines (Acts 11:28). Expelled the Jews, including Priscilla and Aquilla, from Rome (Acts 18:2).	James (A.D. 45-48) Galatians (A.D. 49) 1 & 2 Thess. (A.D. 51)
Nero (A.D. 54-68)	Paul appealed for trial before him (Acts 25:11). Favored Christianity early in his reign, but when Rome burned in 64 A.D. he blamed the Christians and from then on persecuted them.Had Paul and Peter executed (according to early Christian tradition).	1 & 2 Cor. (A.D. 56) Romans (A.D. 57) Luke (A.D. 57-59) Prison Epistles (A.D. 60-62) Acts (A.D. 60-62) 1 Tim. (A.D. 62-66) Titus (A.D. 62-66) Mark (A.D. 63-70) 1 Pet. (A.D. 64) 2 Tim. (A.D. 67) 2 Pet. (A.D. 67-68) Jude (A.D. 67-80)
Galba (A.D. 68-69)		Hebrews (A.D. 68-69)
Otho (A.D. 69)		
Vitellius (A.D. 69)		
Vespasian (A.D. 69-79)	Crushed the Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 66-70).[591]	
Titus (A.D. 75-81)	Vespasian's son, who assisted his father in the wars against the Jews, and destroyed Jerusalem (A.D. 70).[592]	
Domitian (A.D. 81-96)		John (A.D. 85-95) 1, 2 & 3 John (A.D. 90-95) Revelation (A.D. 95-96)
Nerva (A.D. 96-98)		

[591]See Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, books 3 and 4.

[592]Ibid., books 3-7.

It is noteworthy that the Christians evidently did not seek to perpetuate the apostalate by selecting a replacement for James as they had for Judas (ch. 1). They probably believed that God would reestablish The Twelve in the resurrection.[593]

12:3 The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a seven-day celebration that began on the day after Passover each spring. This was one of the three yearly feasts in Jerusalem that the Mosaic Law required all Jewish males to attend. As on the day of Pentecost (ch. 2), the city would have been swarming with patriotic Jews when Herod made his grandstand political move of arresting Peter. These Jews knew Peter as the leading apostle among the Christians, and as a Jew who fraternized with Gentiles (ch. 10). This was the third arrest of Peter that Luke recorded (cf. 4:3; 5:18). Note that this persecution of the Christians did not arise from anything they had done, but simply because Herod wanted to gain popularity with ("when he saw that it pleased") the Jews.

12:4 "Four squads of soldiers"—four soldiers made up each squad—guarded Peter in six-hour shifts, so he would not escape as he had done previously (5:19-24). Evidently two of the soldiers on each shift chained themselves to Peter, and the other two guarded his cell door (vv. 6, 10). "Passover" was the popular term for the continuous eight-day combined Passover and Unleavened Bread festival.

12:5 His captors probably imprisoned Peter in the Roman Fortress of Antonia. It stood against the north wall of the temple enclosure, and on the western end of this wall.[594] Prisons are no match for prayers, however, as everyone was to learn. The Christians prayed fervently about Peter's fate, believing that God could effect his release again.[595]

> "The church used its only available weapon—prayer."[596]

12:6 The night before Peter's trial and probable execution, he lay sound asleep in his cell. How could he sleep soundly when God had allowed James to die? Peter, of course, had a record of sleeping when he should have been praying (cf. Matt. 26:36-46). He had no problem with insomnia. Nevertheless on this occasion God may have wanted him to sleep. Perhaps he did not fear for his life because Jesus had implied that he would live to an old age (John 21:18). Normally the Romans chained a prisoner by his right hand to his guard's left hand, but each of Peter's hands was chained to a different guard on either side of him.[597] Herod wanted to make sure Peter did not get away.

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[593]Bock, *Acts*, p. 422.

[594]See the diagram of Herod's Temple Area near my comments on 3:12-15 above.

[595]See Hiebert, pp. 30-32, for some helpful and motivating comments on their praying.

[596]Kent, p. 102.

[597]Barclay, p. 101; Longenecker, p. 409.

12:7 Again "an angel of the Lord" (Gr. *angelos kyriou*) visited Peter in prison (5:19; cf. 8:26; 12:23). "A light" also illuminated ("shone in") his cell (cf. 9:3). The angel instructed him to "Get up quickly," and when he did, "his chains fell from (off) his hands." Peter's guards slept through the whole event.

> "Luke clearly regards Peter's escape as a miracle, a divine intervention by a supernatural visitant (cf. Lk. 2:9) . . ."[598]

Thomas Watson, the Puritan preacher, reportedly said, "The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel."[599]

12:8-9 The angel coached Peter, like a parent, to get dressed ("gird" himself) and to "follow" him out of the prison. Peter was so groggy that "he did not know" that he was really being set free. He thought he might be having another "vision" (10:10, cf. 9:10).

12:10-11 Luke related this incident as though God was orchestrating Peter's release (cf. 5:18-20; 16:23-29). There is no reason to take the account as anything less than this. Once outside the prison, and left alone by his angelic guide, Peter realized that his release was genuine. God did here for Peter what He had done for the Israelites in leading them out of their Egyptian prison in the Exodus. God's enemies can never frustrate His plans (Matt. 16:18).

Why did God allow Herod to kill James but not Peter?

> "The answer is that this is the sovereign will of God. He still moves like this in the contemporary church. I have been in the ministry for many years, and I have seen the Lord reach in and take certain wonderful members out of the church by death. And then there are others whom He has left. Why would He do that? If He had asked me, from my viewpoint as the pastor, I would say that He took the wrong one and He left the wrong one! But life and death are in the hands of a sovereign God. . . . This is His universe, not ours. It is God's church, not ours. The hand of a sovereign God moves in the church."[600]

12:12 Peter went directly to a home where he may have known that Christians would be praying for him. This was "the house of Mary, the mother of John (Jewish name) Mark" (Greek name). Barnabas sold his land and gave it to the church (4:37), but Mary kept her house. This shows that communal living was not required among the early Christians. John Mark

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[598]Neil, p. 149.
[599]Wiersbe, 1:452-53.
[600]McGee, 4:562.

was the man who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (13:5). He was also Barnabas' cousin (Col. 4:10) who traveled with Barnabas to Cyprus when Paul chose Silas as his companion for his second missionary journey (15:37-39). Mark later accompanied Paul again (Col. 4:10; Phile. 24), as well as Peter (1 Pet. 5:13). According to early church tradition, he wrote the Gospel that bears his name, served as Peter's interpreter in Rome, and founded the church in Alexandria, Egypt.[601]

12:13-16 This amusing incident is very true to life. Rhoda's (Rosebud's) "joy" at finding Peter "standing in front of the gate," which admitted people from the street into a courtyard, overpowered her common sense. Instead of letting him in, "she . . . ran" inside the house "and announced" his arrival. The believers could not believe that God had answered their prayers so directly and dramatically, and told Rhoda: "You are out of your mind!" Peter, meanwhile, stood outside "knocking," still trying to get in. Finally they let him in, hardly able to believe that it really was Peter.

Evidently the Christians at first believed it was Peter's guardian angel, or an "angel" especially sent to guard him, who had appeared (v. 15; Dan. 10:21; Matt. 18:10).[602] Another explanation is that we should understand "angel" as a reference to a human messenger that Peter had sent. A third possibility is that the Christians thought that Herod had executed Peter, and that the apostle's spirit had come to visit them.[603] This is a problem that we cannot solve for sure.

12:17 The "James" Luke mentioned here was the half-brother of Jesus (cf. 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12: James 1:1). He became the foremost leader of the Jerusalem church after Peter's departure. Peter proceeded to disappear from Jerusalem. Scripture does not tell us where he went next. Probably he left Judea (cf. 1 Cor. 9:5). Many other believers in Jerusalem were not present in Mary's house that night. Peter wanted to be sure they learned of his release, too.

Earlier, Peter had returned from prison to the temple, and had resumed preaching at the Lord's command (5:19-21). Now the Jews were much more hostile to the Christians. Saul had previously left Jerusalem for his own safety (9:29-30), and this time Peter followed his example. Peter had become infamous among the Jews in Jerusalem for associating with Samaritans and Gentiles, as well as for being the leader of the Christians. Corinth and Rome are two places that Peter evidently visited (1 Cor. 1:12; 9:5; 1 Pet. 5:13), and various church fathers wrote that he ministered throughout the Jewish Diaspora.[604] Peter also may have gone to Antioch

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[601]*The Ecclesiastical History* . . ., pp. 34-35, 79, 188.

[602]See Calvin, 1:14:7.

[603]See Witherington, p. 387, for additional options.

[604]For many sources, see Longenecker, p. 411.

(Gal. 2:11-21), and we know he was in Jerusalem again for the Jerusalem Council (15:7-11, 14), though perhaps only as a visitor.

12:18-19 Understandably there was "no small disturbance" (a litotes, cf. 14:28; 15:2; 17:4, 12; 19:23-24) when the authorities found Peter's cell empty. Herod evidently concluded that the guards had cooperated with Peter's escape, or at least had been negligent. Roman guards who allowed their prisoners to escape suffered the intended punishment of those prisoners.[605] These guards died (were "led away *to execution*"). Herod then left Judea (the old Jewish name for the area around Jerusalem) and returned "to Caesarea," the nominal capital of the Roman province of Judea. One wonders if Peter's escape played a role in Herod's decision to leave the center of Jewish life so he could save face. Even a Roman authority could not prevent the church from growing.

> "In the New Testament there is a distinction made between Caesarea and the province of Judaea (Acts xii, 19; xxi. 10). This affords one of the indirect evidences not only of the intimate acquaintance of the writer with strictly Rabbibical views, but also of the early date of the composition of the Book of Acts. For, at a later period Caesarea was declared to belong to Judaea . . ."[606]

The supernatural death of Herod Agrippa I 12:20-23

Herod viewed Peter as the enemy of the unbelieving Jews, which he was not. Really Herod was the enemy of the believing Christians. Having set the innocent Christian leader free, God now put the guilty Jewish Roman leader to death.

12:20 King Herod had become displeased ("very angry") with his subjects who lived in "Tyre and Sidon," on the Mediterranean coast north of Caesarea. Because these towns depended on Galilee, part of King Herod's country, for their food supply, they were eager to get on his good side again. One writer pointed out parallels between King Herod and the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 27:17 and 28:4.[607] "Blastus," Herod's "chamberlain" (Gr. *koitonos*), was one of the king's trusted servants.

12:21-23 Josephus recorded this incident in more detail than Luke did. He added that Herod appeared in the outdoor theater at Caesarea. He stood before the officials from Tyre, Sidon, and his other provinces on a festival day dressed in a silver robe. When the sun shone brilliantly on his shiny robe, some flatterers in the theater began to call out words of praise, acclaiming

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[605]Barclay, p. 101; Witherington, p. 389, footnote 107.
[606]Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., p. 71.
[607]Mark R. Strom, "An Old Testament Background to Acts 12. 20-23," *New Testament Studies* 32:2 (April 1986):289-92.

him "a god." Immediately severe stomach pains attacked him. Attendants had to carry him out of the theater, and five days later he died.[608] Doctor Luke saw Herod's intestinal attack as a judgment from God, and gave a more medical explanation of his death than Josephus did. One writer suggested that Herod suffered from appendicitis that led to peritonitis complicated by roundworms.[609] Another diagnosed him as having a cyst caused by a tapeworm.[610] More important than the effect was the cause, namely, Herod's pride (cf. Isa. 42:8; Dan. 4:30).

> "The pride of man had ended in the wrath of God."[611]

> "The angel of the Lord who had delivered Peter was now to smite Herod the persecutor. He had 'smitten' Peter, and we see that the same divine visitation may be for life or for death. Herod Agrippa is the NT antitype of Pharaoh and Sennacherib, the oppressor smitten by the angel of the Lord."[612]

McGee regarded him as a miniature of Antichrist.[613]

The continuing growth of the church 12:24

In contrast to Herod, but like Peter, "the word of the Lord," the gospel, "continued to grow" and "multiply" through God's supernatural blessing. Therefore the church continued to flourish in Jewish territory as well as among the Gentiles. This verse is another of Luke's progress reports that concludes a section of his history (cf. 6:7; 9:31). Nothing seemed capable of stopping the expansion of the church. Corruption and contention in its ranks did not kill it (5:1-11; 6:1-7). Its religious enemies could not contain it (4:1; 8:1, 3; 11:19). Even Roman officials could not control it (vv. 1-23). In the next section, we see that it broke out into Asia Minor. Jesus' prediction that even the "gates of Hades" could not overpower it was proving true (Matt. 16:18; Acts 1:8). God's purposes will prevail!

B. The extension of the church to Cyprus and Asia Minor 12:25—16:5

Luke recorded that Jesus came to bring deliverance to the Jews and to the whole world (Luke 4:14-30). In his Gospel, Luke told the story of Jesus' personal ministry, primarily to the Jews. In Acts the emphasis is mainly on Jesus' ministry, through His apostles, to the Gentile world. As the mission to the Gentiles unfolds in Acts, we can see that Luke took pains to show that the ministry to the Gentiles paralleled the ministry to the Jews.

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[608]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 19:8:2; cf. 18:6:7; idem, *The Wars* . . ., 2:11:6.
[609]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 213; cf. Longenecker, p. 413.
[610]Neil, p. 152.
[611]Barclay, p. 103.
[612]Rackham, p. 381.
[613]McGee, 4:565.

He did this by relating many things that the missionaries to the Gentiles did, that were very similar to what the missionaries to the Jews did. This demonstrates that God was indeed behind both missions, and that they are really two aspects of His worldwide plan: to bring the gospel to all people and to build a worldwide church.

The present section of text (12:25—16:5) does more than just present the geographical expansion of the church into Asia Minor (modern western Turkey). Primarily it shows the legitimacy of dealing with Gentiles *as Gentiles*—rather than through Judaism—before and after their conversion. It becomes increasingly clear that the church and Judaism are two separate entities. God was not renewing the remnant in Israel by replenishing it with Gentiles who believed in Jesus. He was creating a new body: the church. This section culminates in the Jerusalem Council (ch. 15), in which the issue of the Gentiles' relationship to the church came to a head. The last verse (16:5) summarizes these events and issues.

1. The divine appointment of Barnabas and Saul 12:25—13:3

Luke recorded these verses to set the stage for the account of Barnabas and Saul's first missionary journey that follows.

> "The world ministry which thus began was destined to change the history of Europe and the world."[614]

12:25 After delivering the Antioch Christians' gift to the church in Jerusalem (11:27-30), Barnabas and Saul "returned" to Antioch, "taking along with them John (also called) Mark" (12:12), who was Barnabas' cousin (Col. 4:10). The round trip between Antioch and Jerusalem would have been a distance of about 560 miles. This verse bridges what follows with the earlier account of the virile Antioch church (11:19-30). The reference to "John Mark" here also connects the preceding section about the Jerusalem church (12:1-24) with what follows. The effect is to give the reader the impression that what follows has a solid basis in both the *Gentile* Antioch church and the *Jewish* Jerusalem church—which it did.

13:1 There were five prominent prophets and teachers in the Antioch church at this time. The Greek construction suggests that Barnabas, Simeon, and Lucius were prophets (forthtellers and perhaps foretellers), and Manaen and Saul were teachers (Scripture expositors). The Greek particle *te* occurs before "Barnabas" and before "Manaen" in this list, dividing the five men into two groups.

> "A teacher's ministry would involve a less-spontaneous declaration and preaching than that of the prophets, including instruction and the passing on to others of the received apostolic teaching (. . . 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph.

[614]Blaiklock, p. 102.

> 4:11). This was how the church taught its doctrine before the use of the books that later became a part of the NT."[615]

"Barnabas" (cf. 4:36-37; 9:27; 11:22-30) seems to have been the leader among the prophets and teachers. The priority of his name in this list, as well as other references to his character qualities, suggests this. "Simeon" is a Jewish name, but this man's nickname or family name, Niger, is Roman and implies that he was dark skinned, possibly from Africa. The Latin word *niger* means black. Some people think this Simeon was Simon of Cyrene (in North Africa), who carried Jesus' cross (Luke 23:26). There is not enough information to prove or to disprove this theory. "Lucius" was a common Roman name; "Luke" was his Greek name. He was from North Africa (cf. 11:20). It seems unlikely that he was the same Luke who wrote this book. Since Luke did not even identify himself by name as a member of Paul's entourage, it is improbable that he would have recorded his own name here. Some scholars believe that this Luke was the writer, however.[616] "Herod the tetrarch" refers to Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist and tried Jesus (Mark 6:14-19; Luke 13:31-33; 23:7-12).[617] Saul was evidently the newcomer (cf. 7:58—8:3; 9:1-30; 11:25-30). This list of leaders shows that the church in Antioch was cosmopolitan, and that God had gifted it with several speakers who exhorted and taught the believers.

> "There in that little band there is exemplified the unifying influence of Christianity. Men from many lands and many backgrounds had discovered the secret of 'togetherness' because they had discovered the secret of Christ."[618]

13:2 It was "while" these men were serving ("ministering") that God redirected them. Many have observed that it is easier to direct a ship that is in motion than one that is standing still. Similarly, God often uses His servants who are already serving Him, as they have opportunity, rather than those who are not serving Him, but just sitting by idly waiting for direction. Notice also that the ministry of these men, while to the church, was primarily "to the Lord" (cf. Col. 3:24). "Fasting" in this context, undoubtedly involved going without food temporarily, to give attention to spiritual matters of greater importance than eating.

> "Pious Jews of the time fasted twice each week, and early Christians may have continued the custom."[619]

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[615]Bock, *Acts*, p. 439.
[616]E.g., John Wenham, "The Identification of Luke," *Evangelical Quarterly* 63:1 (1991):32-38.
[617]See Howson, p. 109, for more information about "Manaen."
[618]Barclay, p. 105.
[619]Kent, p. 108.

The Holy Spirit probably revealed His "call" through one or more of these prophets (cf. 8:29; 10:19; 13:4). *How* He did it was less important to Luke than *that* He did it (cf. v. 4). God leads His people though a variety of means that His disciples who are walking with Him can identify as His leading. If Luke had revealed just how the Spirit gave this "missionary call," every missionary candidate that followed might expect exactly the same type of leading. One commentator speculated as follows.

> ". . . this would seem to suggest that at a service of divine worship one of the prophets was moved by the Spirit to propose the mission of Paul and Barnabas."[620]

13:3 "They" probably refers to the entire congregation together with its leaders (cf. 14:27; 15:2). The other church leaders did several things for Barnabas and Saul. They "fasted and prayed," presumably for God's blessing on them (cf. 14:23; Neh. 1:4; Luke 2:37). They probably fasted *while* they prayed, indicating the priority they placed on seeking God's blessing in prayer.[621] They also "laid their hands on them," evidently not to bestow a spiritual power, but to identify with and encourage them (cf. 9:17). Then they released them from their duties in Antioch so they could depart. This was a commissioning for a particular work, not ordination to lifetime service.[622]

> "In commissioning Barnabas and Saul by the imposition of hands, the other office-bearers invest them with authority to act on behalf of the Christian community at Antioch, and symbolically identify the whole congregation with their enterprise."[623]

"This short paragraph [13:1-3] marks a major departure in Luke's story. Up to this point, contacts with Gentiles (one might almost say, missionary activity in general) have been almost fortuitous [happening by chance]. Philip was despatched along an unusual road not knowing that he would encounter an Ethiopian eunuch reading Scripture; Peter was surprised by the gift of the Holy Spirit to an uncircumcised and unbaptized Gentile; the missionaries to Antioch did not set out with the intention of evangelizing Gentiles. Here, however, though the initiative is still ascribed to the Holy Spirit (v. 2), an extensive evangelistic journey into territory in no sense properly Jewish (though there was a Jewish element in the population, as there was in most parts of the Empire) is deliberately planned, and two associates of the local church are commissioned to execute it."[624]

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[620]Neil, p. 154. See George W. Murray, "Paul's Corporate Evangelism in the Book of Acts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):189-200.

[621]See Calvin, 4:12:16.

[622]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 216.

[623]Neil, p. 154.

[624]Barrett, pp. 598-99.

2. The mission to Cyprus 13:4-12

Luke recorded the events of Paul's first missionary journey, in order to document the extension of the church into new territory, and to illustrate the principles and methods by which the church grew. He also did so to show God's supernatural blessing on the witness of Barnabas and Saul.

> ". . . the account of Paul's ministry has two parts: his journeys (Acts 11—20) and his trials (Acts 21—28)."[625]

Peter had encountered Simon, a sorcerer, when the Jerusalem church initiated its first major outreach in Samaria (8:9-24). Similarly, Barnabas and Saul ran into Bar-Jesus, a false prophet and sorcerer, when the Antioch church conducted its first major outreach to Gentiles. Luke undoubtedly wanted his readers to note the parallel, and to draw the conclusion that God was behind the second outreach to Gentiles, just as He had been behind the first one to Samaritans.

13:4 Luke carefully noted that the Person ultimately responsible for the venture that followed was "the Holy Spirit" (cf. 1:1-2). This mission was another of God's initiatives in building His church. Barnabas and Saul departed from Antioch's port, "Seleucia," located about 15 miles to the west, near where the Orontes River flowed into the Mediterranean Sea. The island of Cyprus (Kittim, Gen. 10:4; et al.) was Barnabas' homeland (Acts 4:36).[626] On a clear day, the mountains of Cyprus are visible from Seleucia.[627]

> "Cyprus was an island of great importance from very early times, being situated on the shipping lanes between Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece. In 57 B.C. it was annexed by Rome from Egypt and in 55 B.C. incorporated into the province of Cilicia. In 27 B.C. it became a separate province governed on behalf of the emperor Augustus by an imperial legate. In 22 B.C. Augustus relinquished its control to the senate, and, like other senatorial provinces, it was administered by a proconsul."[628]

13:5 "Salamis" was the largest town in eastern Cyprus, about 60 miles from Seleucia. It lay on the coast, and there were enough Jews there to warrant more than one "synagogue" (from the Greek meaning "gathering together"). Salamis' population was mainly Greek, but many Jews lived there as well.[629] Barnabas and Saul habitually visited the Jewish

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[625]Bock, "A Theology . . .," p. 151.

[626]See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "On the Road and on the Sea with St. Paul," *Bible Review* 1:2 (Summer 1985):38-47, for some very interesting insights into travel conditions over land and water in the first century Roman world.

[627]Howson, p. 110.

[628]Longenecker, p. 419.

[629]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 13:10:4.

synagogues when they preached the gospel. They undoubtedly did so because this was where the people who were God-fearers and anticipators of the Messiah assembled, both Jews and Gentiles.

> ". . . the main object of the synagogue was the teaching of the people."[630]

Of course, this was not the first time the Christian gospel had come to Cyprus, but the Christians had only evangelized *Jews* earlier (cf. 11:19). "John" Mark probably provided assistance in many ways, since they "had [him] as their helper." Timothy served in a similar capacity when Paul and Silas left Lystra on Paul's second missionary journey (cf. 16:1-3).[631]

13:6-8 Barnabas and Saul traveled west across Cyprus, coming eventually to "Paphos," the provincial capital of the island. Paphos was 90 miles west of Salamis, and lay on the western coast of Cyprus. Evidently word reached "Sergius Paulus" of the missionaries' preaching. Since he was "a man of intelligence" (Gr. *aner syneton*, an understanding or sagacious man, cf. v. 12), he ordered them to meet with him so he could hear their message personally.

> "In the Greek world it was the custom for philosophers, rhetoricians, or religious propagandists, to travel about from city to city and give public orations. By this means they often secured permanent professorships. So when Sergius Paulus heard of Barnabas and Saul, he took them for similar professors, and having an interest in these matters he *summoned* them to give a declamation before his court."[632]

He was a "proconsul," the highest Roman government official on the island—who was there by appointment of Rome's senate.[633] In contrast, *procurators* were appointed by the emperor. Procurators mentioned in the New Testament were Pontius Pilate, Antonius Felix, and Porcius Festus. Evidently "Bar-Jesus" (lit. "Son of a Savior") was "a Jewish false prophet," in the sense that he claimed to be a prophet of God but was not. He was only a so-called "magician," who may have had some Satanic power (cf. 8:9).

> "And we may also fitly remember that Satan has his miracles, which, though they are deceitful tricks rather than true powers, are of such sort as to mislead the simple-

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[630]Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., p. 267. See his whole seventeenth chapter: "The Worship of the Synagogue."

[631]See the map of Paul's first missionary journey in Longenecker, p. 248; Toussaint, "Acts," p. 386; or *The Nelson* . . ., p. 1843.

[632]Rackham, p. 200. See Longenecker, p. 419, for personal background on Lucius Sergius Paulus.

[633]See F. F. Bruce, "Chronological Questions . . .," pp. 279-80.

> minded and untutored [cf. II Thess. 2:9-10]. Magicians and enchanters have always been noted for miracles. Idolatry has been nourished by wonderful miracles, yet these are not sufficient to sanction for us the superstition either of magicians or of idolaters."[634]

The Mosaic Law forbade Jews from practicing magic (Deut. 18:10-11). "Elymas" (wise) seems to have been a nickname. It describes a "sorcerer," "magician," or "fortune-teller" (Gr. *magos*, cf. Matt. 2:1, 7, 16). He may have "opposed" the missionaries because they brought the true message of God. (Moses and Aaron had similarly withstood magicians in Pharaoh's court [Exod. 7:11, 22; 8:7].) Additionally, he may have felt that if Sergius Paulus believed the gospel, his relationship to the proconsul would suffer.

> "It was not usual for such a character to be attached to the household of a Roman dignitary."[635]

Roman officials were notoriously superstitious.

13:9 Luke now introduced Saul's Greek name "Paul," by which he referred to him hereafter in Acts, and by which Paul always identified himself in his epistles (cf. 2 Pet. 3:15). This indicates an important change in the career of Paul. (Compare the changing of Abram's name to Abraham, and Simon's to Peter.) The reason for Luke's change *at this point*, seems to be that it was here that Paul's ministry to the Gentiles really began (cf. 22:21). "Paul" means "little," perhaps an allusion to his physical stature, and obviously rhymes with his Jewish name "Saul" (lit. "asked"). "Paul" may have been a cognomen (nickname). Howson believed that "Paul" was the apostle's Roman name.[636] Others believed that Paul's first and family *Roman* names appear nowhere in Scripture.[637]

> "Both names, Saul and Paul, were probably given him by his parents, in accordance with Jewish custom, which still prevails, of giving a child two names, one religious and one secular."[638]

Note Luke's reference to Paul's being "filled with the Holy Spirit." We have seen that Spirit-filling marked the early believers (v. 9; 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17). Paul was about to announce a divine miracle designed to frustrate Satan's work in hindering the progress of the gospel (cf. 8:9-

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[634]John Calvin, "Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France," sec. 3, in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.
[635]Neil, p. 155.
[636]Howson, pp. 39, 121.
[637]Longenecker, p. 420.
[638]Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 341.

23; 16:16-18; 19:13-17). A *true* prophet of the Lord was getting ready to pronounce a curse on a "false prophet" (cf. 2 Chron. 18:9-27). This fresh filling (Gr. *plestheis*, an aorist participle) empowered him for the task.

13:10 Instead of being full of wisdom, Paul accused Elymas of being "full of all deceit and fraud." Instead of being the "son of a savior" or the "follower of Jesus," Bar-Jesus was a "son of the devil" and a fraud. Instead of being the promoter of righteousness, this magician was making the straight way of the Lord crooked. This is the second of four incidents involving victory over demonic powers in Acts (cf. 8:9-23; 16:16-18; 19:13-17).

13:11 Paul's stern words recall Peter's, when he dealt with Ananias and Sapphira, and with Simon the sorcerer (5:3-4, 9; 8:20-23). Perhaps Paul hoped that when God darkened Elymas' physical eyesight, He might restore his spiritual eyesight, as had been his own experience (ch. 9).

13:12 This show of superior power convinced Sergius Paulus of the truth of Paul's gospel, and he "believed" it. Notice again that belief is all that was necessary for his salvation (cf. 14:1; 17:34; 19:18). It was Paul's "teaching" concerning the Lord that Sergius Paulus "believed." There is some extrabiblical evidence that Sergius Paulus' daughter and other descendants also became Christians.[639]

> "This blinding of the false prophet opened the eyes of Sergius Paulus."[640]

The "blinding" of Elymas shows that Paul possessed the power of "binding" that God had also given to Peter (cf. Matt. 16:19). God validated Paul's message by granting a miracle. This was especially helpful in evangelism before the completion of the New Testament. Here a Roman Gentile responded to the gospel, whereas a Jew did not.

This incident is significant in the unfolding of Luke's purpose, because at Paphos Paul assumed the leadership among the missionaries (cf. v. 13). The mission of the church also became more Gentile oriented. Jewish response continued to be rejection, symbolized by Elymas' blindness (cf. 28:26-27). Furthermore, this was the first appearance of Christianity before Roman aristocracy and high authority, a new benchmark for the advance of the mission. Paul's conflict with Elymas is also reminiscent of others, in the Old Testament, in which prophets with rival messages made presentations to kings and people (cf. 1 Kings 22; Jer. 28—29).

> "The conversion of Sergius Paulus was, in fact, a turning point in Paul's whole ministry and inaugurated a new policy in the mission to Gentiles—viz., the legitimacy of a direct approach to and full acceptance of Gentiles

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[639]See William M. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, pp. 150-72.

[640]Howson, p. 120.

> apart from any distinctive Jewish stance. This is what Luke clearly sets forth as the great innovative development of this first missionary journey (14:27; 15:3). Earlier Cornelius had been converted apart from any prior commitment to Judaism, and the Jerusalem church had accepted his conversion to Christ. But the Jerusalem church never took Cornelius's conversion as a precedent for the Christian mission and apparently preferred not to dwell on its ramifications. However, Paul, whose mandate was to Gentiles, saw in the conversion of Sergius Paulus further aspects of what a mission to Gentiles involved and was prepared to take this conversion as a precedent fraught with far-reaching implications for his ministry. It is significant that from this point on Luke always calls the apostle by his Greek name Paul and, except for 14:14; 15:12; and 15:25 (situations where Barnabas was more prominent), always emphasizes his leadership by listing him first when naming the missioners. For after this, it was Paul's insight that set the tone for the church's outreach to the Gentile world."[641]

3. The mission to Asia Minor 13:13—14:21a

Having evangelized Barnabas' homeland, the missionaries next moved into southern Asia Minor (modern western Turkey).

> "The contact with Sergius Paulus is the key to the subsequent ininerary of the first missionary journey. From Cyprus Paul and Barnabas struck east [*sic* north] to the newly founded colony of Pisiddian Antioch, miles away from any Cypriot's normal route. Modern scholars have invoked Paul's wish to reach the uplands of Asia and recover from a passing sickness. . . . We know, however, that the family of the Sergii Pauli had a prominent connection with Pisidian Antioch . . . the Sergii Pauli's local influence was linked with their ownership of a great estate nearby in central Anatolia: it is an old and apt guess that these connections go back to the time of Paul's governor. They explain very neatly why Paul and Barnabas left the governor's presence and headed straight for distant Pisidian Antioch. He directed them to the area where his family had land, power and influence. The author of Acts saw only the impulse of the Holy Spirit, but Christianity entered Roman Asia on advice from the highest society."[642]

Arrival in Pamphylia 13:13

"Pamphylia" was a Roman province that lay west of the kingdom of Antiochus, which was west of Cilicia, Paul's home province. "Perga" (modern Perge) stood 12 miles inland from the major seaport of Attalia (modern Antalya, cf. 14:25-26), but it had an inland harbor on the Cestrus River. In Perga, John Mark left Paul and Barnabas to return to Jerusalem. Paul did not approve of his decision (15:38), but Luke did not record Mark's

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[641]Longenecker, pp. 420-21.

[642]R. L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, pp. 293-94.

motives. The commentators have suggested several reasons, including: homesickness (cf. 12:12), fear of illness (cf. Gal. 4:13), and fear of danger in the Taurus Mountains north of Perga. Paul purposed to cross these mountains to get to Antioch of Pisidia. Others have cited the changes that were taking place in the mission's leadership from Barnabas to Paul. Another probable explanation is disagreement over the validity of a direct approach to and full acceptance of Gentiles. John Mark, of course, had strong ties to the Jerusalem church and could well have resisted this approach, as so many other Jews did.

Ministry in Antioch of Pisidia 13:14-52

Paul and Barnabas proceeded north, inland from the coast, about 100 miles to Antioch of Pisidia. The road took them from sea level to 3,600 feet elevation through bandit-infested country.[643] They arrived on a lake-filled plateau. Paul later wrote to the Galatians that he had preached the gospel to them at first because of a weakness of the flesh (Gal. 4:13). This seems to indicate that Paul was not in good health when he ministered in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Many commentators followed the theory of William Ramsay, who argued that Paul suffered from malaria, which he contracted on the lowlands of Perga.[644] Antioch of Pisidia was a Roman colony, as were Lystra, Troas, Philippi, and Corinth. Roman colonies stood at strategic places in the empire along frequently traveled roads. As such, Antioch would have been a good place to plant a church. The Via Sebaste, the Roman road that ran from Ephesus to the Euphrates River, passed through this Antioch.

> "Antioch was the most important city of southern Galatia and included within its population a rich amalgam of Greek, Roman, Oriental, and Phrygian traditions. Acts tells us that it also had a sizeable Jewish population."[645]

> "In bringing the gospel to Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were planting Christianity in the communication nerve center and heart of Asia Minor."[646]

People referred to this town as "Pisidian Antioch" (Antioch of Pisidia), because it was close to the geographical region of Pisidia, though its site was in the geographical region of Phrygia. They called it "Antioch of Pisidia" to distinguish it from another "Antioch" also located in Phrygia.

> "It was founded by Seleucus I Nicator about 281 B.C. as one of the sixteen cities he named in honor of either his father or his son, both of whom bore the name Antiochus."[647]

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[643]Blaiklock, p. 105; Howson, p. 130.
[644]William M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, p. 93.
[645]Longenecker, pp. 422-23.
[646]Merrill F. Unger, "Pisidian Antioch and Gospel Penetration of the Greek World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 118:469 (January-March 1961):48.
[647]Longenecker, p. 422.

This town was in the Roman province of Galatia and was the chief military and political center in the southern part of the Galatian province.[648] Luke recorded that the missionaries had contact with seven different types of people here: synagogue officials, Jews, proselytes, God-fearers, devout women of high standing, Gentiles, and leading men of the city. They reached all levels of society.

The visit to the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia 13:14-15

Paul and Barnabas attended the Sabbath service in a local synagogue.

> "In the Hellenistic and Roman periods Asia Minor had a substantial Jewish population. . . .
>
> "The massive influx of a Jewish population into Asia Minor took place at the end of the third century BC, when Antiochus III settled two thousand Jewish families from Mesopotamia and Babylonia in Lydia and Phrygia, in order to maintain the security of his hold over this region."[649]

Normally the synagogue service began with the Shema ("Hear, O Israel, . . .") and the Shemoneh Esreh (a liturgy of benedictions, blessings, and prayers). Then the leaders would read two passages from the Old Testament aloud, one from the Mosaic "Law," and a related passage from the "Prophets" section of the Hebrew Bible. Then some competent person whom the synagogue rulers designated would give an address. The service would conclude with a benediction. On this occasion the synagogue leaders, who were local Jewish laymen, invited Paul and Barnabas to give an address if they had some encouraging word to share.

Paul initiated his typical pattern of ministry in Antioch of Pisidia. In every town with a sizable Jewish population that he visited, except Athens, according to Luke, the apostle first preached in the synagogue to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. When the Jews refused to listen further, he then went to Gentiles directly with the gospel. Evidently Paul went to the synagogues first, because his audience there had a theological background that made it easier for them to understand and believe the gospel.

> "There was, of course, a practical matter involved. If they had begun evangelizing among gentiles first, the synagogue would have been closed to them."[650]

Paul's synagogue sermon in Antioch of Pisidia 13:16-41

Luke recorded three of Paul's evangelistic messages to unbelievers: here in Pisidian Antioch, in Lystra (14:15-17), and in Athens (17:22-31). This is the longest of the three, though Luke quite certainly condensed all of them. This one takes most people less than a minute to read.

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[648]See Ramsay, *St. Paul . . .*, p. 92.
[649]Levinskaya, p. 138.
[650]Kent, p. 115.

> "He [Paul] may have written out notes of this sermon afterwards for Luke. The keynotes of Paul's theology as found in his Epistles appear in this sermon."[651]

This sermon is very similar to Peter's sermon in 2:14-40, and Stephen's in 7:2-53.[652] It contains three parts, marked off by three occurrences of direct address: preparation for the coming of Messiah (vv. 16-25), the rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection of Messiah (vv. 26-37), and the application and appeal (vv. 38-41).[653]

> "The variety in these missionary sermons and the speeches of Christians on trial before Jewish and Roman bodies is no doubt meant to illustrate the different ways in which the gospel was presented to different groups of people, Jews and Greeks, cultured and uncultured, and it is hard to resist the impression that the sermons are presented as models for Luke's readers to use in their own evangelism."[654]

Luke probably recorded this address to help us see how Paul preached to people who knew the Hebrew Scriptures.[655]

> "Speeches in Acts are differentiated less with reference to the speakers than with reference to the audience."[656]

Since this speech is carefully crafted to be persuasive to a Diaspora Jewish audience, it not only has the form of deliberative rhetoric but it reflects the patterns of early Jewish augumentation."[657]

13:16 Paul "stood up" and "motioned with his hand," both gestures being typical of synagogue exhortations. He addressed his Jewish hearers as "Men of Israel," and he called the Gentile God-fearers who were present "you who fear God."

13:17-22 Paul first reviewed God's preparation for Israel's redemption from Abraham through David (cf. 7:2-50; Matt. 1:2-17). He highlighted five important points that the Jews often stressed in their confessions: (1) God was the God of the Israelites ("of this people Israel"; v. 17). (2) God "chose" the patriarchs ("our fathers"; v. 17). (3) God created the Israelite nation ("made the people great"), redeemed His people out of Egypt, and

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[651]Robertson, 3:187.

[652]For comparison with two other important initiation speeches, namely, Jesus' in Luke 4:18-21 and Peter's in Acts 2, see Tannehill, 2:160-62; or Witherington, p. 408. For comparison of this address with Stephen's, see Rackham, pp. 208-9.

[653]Toussiant, "Acts," p. 389.

[654]Marshall, *The Acts . . .*, p. 33.

[655]See also David A. deSilva, "Paul's Sermon in Antioch of Pisidia," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):32-49.

[656]Barrett, p. 623.

[657]Witherington, p. 408.

patiently led them through the wilderness (vv. 17-18). (4) He then gave them Canaan ("distributed their [the Canaanaites'] land") "as an inheritance" (v. 19). The "about" 450 years mentioned (v. 19) probably refers to: Israel's 400 years in Egypt, plus the 40 years in the wilderness, plus the 10 years of conquest and settlement in the Promised Land (1845—1395 B.C.; cf. 7:6).[658] (5) Finally, God gave the Israelites faithful King David after a succession of lesser leaders (vv. 20-22). It was particularly David's heart for God, resulting in his carrying out God's will, that Paul stressed (v. 22). These qualities marked David's successor, Jesus Christ, too.

13:23 Paul then announced that the "promised" Messiah had come—"a Savior"—and that He was "Jesus." The promise in view seems to be the one in Isaiah 11:1-16, which speaks of Messiah coming from David's descendants.

13:24-25 Most of the Jews of the dispersion knew of "John" the Baptist's ministry ("baptism of repentance to all the people"). Often the early Christian preachers began the message of Jesus with John the Baptist, who announced and prepared for His coming (cf. Mark 1:2-8). John clarified that he was "not" the Messiah, but was His forerunner (Luke 3:15-18).

> "It may be that followers of John the Baptist, believing him to have been the Messiah, and constituting a sect which had spread outwards from Palestine, presented more of a problem to Christian missionaries about this time than the NT evidence would suggest; a hint of this is given in 19:3-5. If such were the case, it would account for Paul's strong emphasis here on John's role as merely the herald of the Messiah."[659]

13:26 Before proceeding to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, Paul paused to address his hearers by groups again (cf. v. 16), and to personalize the gospel message to them. He noted that the gospel is for both Jews ("sons of Abraham's family") and Gentiles ("those . . . who fear God").

13:27-31 He then proceeded to narrate the rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-5). He pointed out that all these events were fulfillments of Old Testament predictions, which most of the Jews living in Jerusalem did not recognize at the time (vv. 27, 29). He also noted Jesus' innocence of the charges ("no ground for . . . death") brought against Him (v. 28). Paul stressed Jesus' resurrection particularly as God's

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[658]See the diagram "References to Israel's Years in Egypt" at my notes on 7:2-8. For a different explanation based on a different textual reading, see Eugene H. Merrill, "Paul's Use of 'About 450 Years' in Acts 13:20," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:551 (July-September 1981):246-57.

[659]Neil, pp. 158-59.

vindication of Him (v. 30), and he highlighted the apostles' personal witness of His resurrection (v. 31; cf. 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-41). God had vindicated and prepared Him to reign by raising Him from the dead. This is the fifth time in Acts that the apostles claimed to be personal "witnesses" of Jesus Christ's resurrection (cf. 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-41; 13:30-31). Paul's point was that David's promised heir, the Messiah, had come (cf. v. 33).

13:32-37 Paul supported the fulfillment of this promise by quoting three Old Testament Messianic passages: Psalm 2:7 (v. 33), Isaiah 55:3 (v. 34), and Psalm 16:10 (v. 35; cf. 2:27). These Old Testament texts all found fulfillment in the *raising up* of Jesus. However, Paul used "raised up" in two different senses in this speech. In verses 33 and 37, he spoke of God raising up Jesus *as the promised Messiah*. Psalm 2:7 refers to God similarly raising up David as Israel's king. Second, Paul spoke in verses 30 and 34 of God raising up Jesus *from the dead*.

> "The 'virgin tomb' (John 19:41) was like a 'womb' that gave birth to Jesus Christ in resurrection glory."[660]

Jesus was always the "Son of God" ontologically (with regard to His being), but God *declared* Him to be His "Son" when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him the Davidic ruler (Ps. 2:7). Similarly, God had declared Solomon His "son" when He gave David the Davidic Covenant (cf. 2 Sam. 7:10-14).

Progressive dispensationalists believe that Paul meant that Jesus is now ruling over David's kingdom.[661] Though there are connections with Jesus' enthronement as the Davidic King in these Old Testament passages, it seems clear from Paul's emphasis on God raising up Jesus, in verses 30-37, that he was using these passages to show that Jesus' resurrection proved that He *is* the Davidic King, not that He has *begun to reign* as the Davidic King. Here Paul said nothing explicitly about Jesus' *reigning* as Israel's King, but he said much about Jesus' *being* Israel's King.

> "Paul did not say Jesus is now ruling over the kingdom of David, but only that the Son of David is now in a position to rule forever when He returns."[662]

Since Jesus rose from the dead, God can give people the blessings that He promised would come through David (v. 34; Isa. 55:3; cf. 2:25-32). The blessings mentioned in this Old Testament passage are those of the New Covenant. The facts that Jesus was "raised from the dead," and "did not

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[660]Wiersbe, 1:458.

[661]See Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 177; and Saucy, *The Case* . . ., p. 68.

[662]Rogers, "The Davidic . . . Acts-Revelation," p. 75.

undergo decay," prove that He is the "Holy One" of whom David spoke in Psalm 16:10 (v. 35).

Paul's argument was that God had first raised up David, and had promised *a Savior* from his posterity. God then fulfilled that promise by raising up Jesus as the Messiah, whom He identified as "His (My) Son" by raising Him from the dead.[663]

13:38-39 Paul ended his historical review with an exhortation and appeal to his readers (cf. v. 15). He now addressed his two types of hearers collectively as "men brethren" (v. 38, Gr. *andres adelphoi*). When it comes to responding to the gospel, all people, Jews and Gentiles, are on the same level. Through Jesus, Paul asserted, "everyone who believes" (the only condition) has "forgiveness of sins" (cf. 2:38; 10:43) and justification ("is freed from all things"; God's judicial declaration of righteousness, cf. Deut. 25:1). Justification could not come through the Mosaic Law, he reminded his hearers. This is the only reference in Acts to justification by faith in Jesus.

> "The apostle so connects forgiveness of sins with righteousness that he shows them to be exactly the same."[664]

> "What we have in the application of Paul's message (despite its cumbersome expression in its précis form) are his distinctive themes of 'forgiveness of sins,' 'justification,' and 'faith,' which resound in this first address ascribed to him in Acts just as they do throughout his extant letters."[665]

Paul later developed the truth of justification, or the forgiveness apart from the Mosaic Law, in his epistle to the Galatians. He probably wrote Galatians to the same people he spoke to here, shortly after he completed this first missionary journey. Later he set forth these themes more fully in his epistle to the Romans. These verses summarize the arguments of Galatians and Romans in one sentence.

13:40-41 Paul concluded his message by applying Habakkuk's warning to all who reject the good news about Jesus Christ. God's working in their day (i.e., providing the Messiah) was something they could not afford to disbelieve and scoff at, or they would "perish."

> "Habakkuk 1:5, which Paul quoted here, refers to an invasion of Judah by a Gentile nation that would be used as God's disciplinary instrument to punish Judah for her

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[663]Cf. Neil, p. 159.
[664]Calvin, 3:11:22.
[665]Longenecker, p. 427.

> disobedience. Paul evidently saw his generation in Israel under a similar disciplinary judgment. Paul's message, like Peter's [on the day of Pentecost] was delivered to a generation in Israel under the judgment Christ had predicted [in Luke 21:24, i.e., the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70]."[666]

In a larger sense, of course, unbelieving "scoffers . . . perish" eternally for rejecting the gospel.

> "Parallel with the positive theme of the preparation for the coming of the Christ through Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David and John the Baptist, he [Paul] has interwoven an admonitory reminder of those who have failed to recognize the divine plan and purpose—the Canaanites, Saul, the Jerusalem Jews and Pilate. Now he presents the Dispersion Jews with a similar challenge to accept or refuse the Gospel message."[667]

The consequences of Paul's message 13:42-52

13:42-43 Paul's message created great interest in the hearts of many people who listened to him. Paul possessed great powers of persuasion (cf. 18:4; 19:8, 26; 26:28; 28:23; 2 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 1:10), but the Holy Spirit was at work too. Paul and Barnabas continued clarifying the gospel for their inquirers during the following week. The English translators supplied "Paul and Barnabas" (NASB, NIV) or "Jews" (AV), and "the people" (NASB, NIV) or "Gentiles" (AV), for the third person plural that appears in the best ancient Greek manuscripts. Here "the grace of God" refers to the sphere of life into which one enters by believing in Jesus Christ.

13:44-45 One reason for the unsaved Jews' antagonism was the large crowd ("nearly the whole city") that Paul's message attracted. "Jealousy," rather than the Holy Spirit, filled and controlled these unbelieving Jews—and again led to persecution (cf. 5:17).

> "Knowing (as we unfortunately do) how pious Christian pew-holders can manifest quite un-Christian indignation when they arrive at church on a Sunday morning to find their places occupied by rank outsiders who have come to hear a popular visiting preacher, we can readily appreciate the annoyance of the Jewish community at finding their synagogue practically taken over by a Gentile congregation on this occasion."[668]

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[666]Pentecost, "The Apostles' . . .," p. 140.
[667]Neil, p. 160.
[668]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 281.

> "The majority of the Jews, including undoubtedly the leaders of the Jewish community, were apparently unwilling to countenance a salvation as open to Gentiles as it was to Jews."[669]

Another reason for the Jews' hostile reaction was that, like other Jews elsewhere, most of the Jews in Pisidian Antioch did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They were "blaspheming" by saying that He was not.

13:46 As the apostles in Jerusalem had done, Paul and Barnabas responded to the opposition with bold words (cf. 4:29). It was necessary for the gospel to go to the Jews before the Gentiles, not only because Jewish acceptance of Jesus is a prerequisite to the messianic kingdom (cf. 3:26). It was also necessary because Jesus was the Messiah whom God had promised to deliver the Jews. The gospel was good news to the Jews in a larger sense than it was to the Gentiles. Paul almost always preached the gospel to the Jews first in the towns he visited (cf. 13:50-51; 14:2-6; 17:5, 13-15; 18:6; 19:8-9; 28:23-28; Rom. 1:16). The Jews' rejection of the gospel led him to offer it next to the Gentiles.

> "Now for the first time Dispersion Jews follow the example of their Jerusalem counterparts in rejecting Christ, and for the first time Paul publicly announces his intention of turning his back on them and concentrating on the purely Gentile mission."[670]

By rejecting Jesus, these Jews were in actuality, though not consciously, judging themselves "unworthy" of salvation. In irony, Paul said those who rejected ("repudiated") the gospel were really judging themselves to be "unworthy of eternal life" (i.e., salvation and its benefits).[671] Usually most of the Jews who heard Paul's preaching would reject it, and only a few of them would believe, but usually many Gentiles accepted the gospel.

13:47 Paul quoted the Isaiah commission because he was addressing Jews. Isaiah explained their duty. He and Barnabas were only carrying out God's will. The "servant of the Lord" is the person addressed in Isaiah 49:6. Jesus Christ, the perfect Servant of the Lord, was the ultimate "light to (for) the Gentiles" who would "bring salvation to the end of the earth" (cf. Luke 2:28-32). As Israel and Christ had been lights to the Gentiles (Gen. 46:3; Luke 2:29-32), so now were Paul and Barnabas (cf. Matt. 5:14-16). Not only had the Jews received a commission to reach out to the Gentiles with blessing (Exod. 19:5-6; Isa. 49:6), but so had Jesus' disciples (Matt. 28:19-20).

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[669]Longenecker, p. 429. Cf. Blaiklock, p. 106.
[670]Neil, p. 160. Cf. 18:5-6; and 28:25-28.
[671]Witherington, p. 415.

13:48-49 Luke again stressed that the results of the preaching of the gospel were due to God's work (1:1-2). The Christian evangelists were only harvesting the wheat that God had already prepared. Verse 48 is a strong statement of predestination: those whom God had previously "appointed to eternal life believed" the gospel (cf. Eph. 1:4, 11).

> "Once again the human responsibility of believing is shown to coincide exactly with what God in his sovereignty had planned."[672]

Good news spreads fast, and the good news of the gospel "spread through that entire (the whole) region."

> "This spreading of the word, along with the apostles' own outreach to the cities named in chapters 13 and 14, probably led to the agitation of the so-called Judaizers that resulted in the problem Paul dealt with in Galatians."[673]

13:50 The "Jews" secured Paul and Barnabas' explusion "from (out of) their district." They did this through influential local residents who "brought persecution" on the missionaries. Some of these people were "devout women," evidently God-fearers whom the unbelieving Jews turned against Paul and Barnabas (cf. 10:2).

> ". . . synagogue worship attracted many Gentile women as adherents of Judaism; in Asia Minor wealthy matrons exercised much more influence than was the case in most other parts of the Empire."[674]

13:51 Shaking the dust off one's feet was a graphic way that Jews illustrated separation from unbelievers (cf. Matt. 10:14; Luke 9:5; 10:11). "Iconium" (modern Konia) stood about 90 miles to the southeast of Antioch, also in Phrygian Galatia. Paul and Barnabas undoubtedly traveled the southeast branch of the Via Sebaste to arrive there. Another branch of this major road went from Antioch to Comana, about 120 miles to the north.

13:52 The identity of the "disciples" in verse 52 is not clear. They could be Paul and Barnabas or the new converts in Antioch. I tend to think the word refers to both groups. Fullness of "joy" and fullness of "the Holy Spirit" marked these disciples.

It is interesting that two references to "joy" (vv. 48, 52) bracket the one reference to "persecution" in this passage (v. 50), suggesting that the missionaries' joy overrode the discomforts of persecution (cf. 16:24-25).

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[672]Kent, p. 114.
[673]Longenecker, p. 430.
[674]Neil, p. 161.

Ministry in Iconium 14:1-7

14:1-2 Iconium was a Greek city-state in the geographic region of Phrygia, the easternmost city in that region.

> ". . . while Rome chose Antioch of Pisidia and Lystra as bastions of its authority in the area, Iconium remained largely Greek in temper and somewhat resistant to Roman influence, though Hadrian later made it a Roman colony."[675]

"Iconium" comes from *eikon*, the Greek word for "image." According to Greek mythology, Prometheus and Athena recreated humanity there after a devastating flood by making images of people from mud and breathing life into them.[676]

> Iconium was, ". . . a garden spot, situated in the midst of orchards and farms, but surrounded by deserts. . . . Iconium, too, owed its bustling business activity to its location on the main trade route connecting Ephesus with Syria and the Mesopotamian world, as well as its orchard industries and farm produce."[677]

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas followed the same method of evangelizing that they had used in Antioch (13:14). They visited the synagogue first. They also experienced the same results: many conversions among both Jews and Gentiles, but also rejection by some of the Jews (cf. 13:43). These unbelieving Jews "stirred up" unbelieving Gentiles, and these Gentiles joined them in opposing the missionaries (13:50).

14:3 Because God was saving many people, the missionaries stayed on in Iconium "a long time," regardless of opposition that evidently increased gradually. They testified "boldly" (cf. 13:46), and relied on the Lord Jesus for their success. The phrase "the word of His grace" (v. 3) describes the gospel message, stressing the prominence of God's grace in it (cf. 20:24-32). They did many miracles ("signs and wonders") there, too, thus confirming their message (cf. 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 15:12; Gal. 3:5, 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4).

> ". . . the couplet 'miraculous signs and wonders' places the ministry of Paul and Barnabas directly in line with that of Jesus (cf. 2:22) and the early church (cf. 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36) in fulfillment of prophecy (cf. 2:19)—as it does

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[675]Longenecker, p. 431.

[676]Ibid., pp. 431-32.

[677]Merrill F. Unger, "Archaeology and Paul's Visit to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 118:470 (April-June 1961):107-108.

> also in 15:12. Later when writing his Galatian converts (assuming a 'South Galatian' origin for the letter), Paul appeals to these mighty works performed by the Spirit as evidence that the gospel as he preached it and they received it was fully approved by God (cf. Gal 3:4-5)."[678]

14:4 The "apostles" were Paul and Barnabas. Luke used the word "apostle" in a technical sense to describe the Twelve apostles plus Paul in Acts. He also used it less frequently, in a non-technical sense, to describe any believer sent out into the world with the salvation message (e.g., v. 14; cf. Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). There were only 13 men with the *office* of apostleship, but there were many others who, with more or less gift, did the *work* of an apostle. Similarly there were some with the prophetic office, but many more with prophetic ministries.[679]

14:5-7

> "The schematic description of the mission in Iconium follows the pattern of the mission in Jerusalem more closely than the pattern of the mission in Antioch of Pisidia."[680]

The Gentiles and the Jewish rulers took the initiative in persecuting the evangelists. The attempt "to stone them" appears to have been an act of mob violence, rather than a formal Jewish attempt at execution (cf. 7:58-59).

> "It would have required a regular Hebrew court to sanction it [a legal stoning], and it would never have been tolerated in a Roman colony."[681]

> "Paul and Barnabas had no idea of remaining to be stoned (lynched) by this mob. It is a wise preacher who always knows when to stand his ground and when to leave for the glory of God. Paul and Barnabas were following the directions of the Lord Jesus given to the twelve on their special tour of Galilee (Matt. 10:23)."[682]

Consequently Paul and Barnabas moved ("fled") south into the geographical "region" of "Lycaonia," which was also in the Roman province of Galatia. "Lycaonia" means "land of the wolf." This became the next area for their ministry. They left one political area to start afresh in another.

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[678]Longenecker, p. 432.
[679]See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.
[680]Tannehill, 2:176.
[681]Foakes-Jackson, p. 128.
[682]Robertson, 3:207.

> "Luke's accuracy was once severely challenged on this point because abundant records exist showing that Iconium was also a Lycaonian city, and thus no border would have been crossed between Iconium and Lystra. It was careful study of this matter which changed the British scholar William Ramsay into a strong defender of Luke's accuracy when he discovered that Iconium was Lycaonian earlier and again later, but that Luke's statement 'was accurate at the period when Paul visited Lycaonia; that it was accurate at no other time except between 37 and 72 A.D.'"[683]

Ministry in Lystra 14:8-20a

14:8 Like Antioch of Pisidia, "Lystra" (modern Zoldera) was a Roman colony.[684] It was the most eastern of the fortified cities of Galatia.[685] Lystra was about 20 miles south of Iconium. Twenty miles was a normal day's travel in the Roman Empire at this time. Luke did not mention synagogue evangelism here. Evidently there were so few Jews that there was no synagogue in Lystra (or in Philippi).

> "The further on Paul and Barnabas went the further they got from civilisation [*sic*]."[686]

Luke stressed the hopeless case of the "lame man" (cf. 3:1-10; 9:33-35).

> "Luke undoubtedly wanted his readers to recognize the parallel between the healing of this crippled man and the healing of another one by Peter (cf. 3:1-8) . . ."[687]

> "In opposition to those who would challenge Paul's claim to apostolic authority based on his direct commission from the risen Christ, Luke is concerned to show that his hero shares with the chief Apostle [Peter] the healing power vested in his disciples by the Lord himself (Jn 14:12) and exemplified in Jesus' own ministry (Lk. 7:22)."[688]

> ". . . it must be remembered that ancient historians looked for and believed in the existence of repeated cycles or patterns in history, such that one could learn from what has gone before and to a certain degree know what to expect

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[683]Kent, p. 116. His quotation is from Ramsay, *St. Paul* . . ., pp. 110-11. Cf. idem, *The Bearing* . . ., pp. 35-52

[684]See my comments on 13:14-15.

[685]See Finegan, *Light from* . . ., pp. 340-45, for more information about the cities of Galatia.

[686]Barclay, p. 115.

[687]Longenecker, p. 435.

[688]Neil, p. 163.

> from the future.[689] This sort of thinking was characteristic of various of the Hellenistic historians, especially Polybius . . ."[690]

14:9-10 As is true of other, similar references to a healed person's "faith," this man's confidence was *in God*. He believed God *could* heal him, not that God *would* do so. Confidence that God *would* heal him, in other words, is not what made him whole. It was confidence that God, through His servant, *could* heal him that constituted his faith (e.g., Matt. 9:28-29; Mark 9:22-24). His faith was a factor in his receiving healing (cf. Mark 6:5-6).

> ". . . Paul and Barnabas had the gifts of an apostle, the sign gifts. They came into these places without any New Testament with the message of the gospel. What were their credentials? How could they prove their message was from God? The sign gifts were their credentials—they needed them. Today we have the entire Bible, and what people need today is to study this Bible and to learn what it has to say."[691]

14:11-12 Why did Luke refer to the fact that the natives spoke in the local "Lycaonian language"? He probably did so to explain why their plans to honor Paul and Barnabas got as far as they did before the missionaries objected (v. 14). People who lived in Asia Minor spoke three languages at least: Latin (the official administrative language), Greek (the *lingua franca* of the empire), and the native vernacular, which in this case was Lycaonian.[692]

Archaeology has turned up evidence of a legend in Lystra that Zeus and Hermes once visited an elderly couple who lived there, a man named Philemon and his wife Baucis.[693] This supposedly took place before Paul and Barnabas' visit. Apparently the locals concluded that these gods had returned. Zeus was the chief god in the Greek pantheon, and Hermes was his herald. The residents of Lystra identified Barnabas with "Zeus" (whom the Romans called Jupiter). Perhaps he looked dignified and authoritative. They called Paul "Hermes" (the Roman Mercury) because he was the chief speaker. According to Greek legend, Hermes invented speech and was an eloquent speaker. The English word "hermeneutics," the science of interpretation, comes from this word.[694]

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[689]Footnote 273: "See the discussion by [G. W.] Trompf, *[The] Idea of Historical Recurrence [in Western Thought]*, of Polybius, pp. 78 ff., and of Luke, pp. 170ff."

[690]Witherington, p. 423.

[691]McGee, 4:571. Cf. 17:11.

[692]Neil, p. 163.

[693]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 291; Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 237; Longenecker, p. 435. See Witherington, pp. 421-22, for a translation of the story, which appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

[694]Robertson, 3:210.

If Satan cannot derail Christian witness with persecution, he will try praise. Too much persecution has destroyed many preachers, and too much praise has ruined many others. One of the problems with miracles is that they often draw more attention to the miracle worker than to God.

14:13 Customarily the pagan Gentiles decorated animals destined for "sacrifice" to the Greek gods, like these oxen, with woolen "garlands"—and then led them to the place of sacrifice.

14:14 Tearing one's robe was a common way Jews expressed grief and, in this case, horror because of blasphemy (cf. Mark 14:63). Usually they tore the robe for about four or five inches from the neckline.[695]

14:15-18 By recording the substance of what Paul and Barnabas said here, Luke preserved a sample of their preaching to pagan audiences (cf. 13:16-41; 17:22-31).

> "With a pagan audience it was necessary to begin a stage further back with the proclamation of the one true God."[696]

In earlier times, God had manifested the knowledge of Himself to Gentiles mainly through creation and Israel (cf. Rom. 1). Now He was giving them more special revelation through the church. This was the first time Luke recorded the preaching of the gospel to a group that was predominantly, if not exclusively, Gentile. Thus this incident became another benchmark of worldwide gospel extension.

Timothy was apparently a native of Lystra (cf. 16:1-2; 20:4; 2 Tim. 1:5). He apparently had a Jewish mother and grandmother (cf. 16:3; 2 Tim. 1:5). This may indicate that there were some Jews who lived there.

> "Paul's speech here, apart from his address to the Athenian philosophers (17:22ff.), is the only example in Acts of his technique in dealing with a purely pagan audience; it is a striking example of his ability to reinterpret the Gospel in terms intelligible to his hearers. It differs widely from his approach to Jews and adherents of Judaism, as illustrated by his sermon in the synagogue at Antioch (13:16ff.), where some knowledge of the scriptures could be assumed on the part of his listeners. Here, as at Athens, he proceeds on the basis of natural revelation—the providential order of the universe—which ought to lead men's thoughts from the cult of idols to the worship of a living God, Creator of all that exists; he expounds this line of argument more fully in

[695]Cf. Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., pp. 173-74, for how the Jews of Jesus' day tore their garments when they heard of a death.

[696]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 238.

> Rom. 1:19ff.; 2:14f., and he writes of its successful outcome at Thessalonica in I Th. 1:9)."[697]

14:19-20a We do not know how long it took the hostile Jews from Antioch and Iconium to turn the tide of popular sentiment against Paul and Barnabas. They convinced the fickle residents of Lystra that the missionaries were deceivers rather than gods and deserved to die (cf. 28:4-6; Matt. 12:24).

> "Disillusioned fanatics are easily led off into contradictory actions."[698]

Some scholars believe that Paul died from this stoning and experienced resurrection.[699] However, the text only says that onlookers supposed that Paul was dead (cf. 2 Cor. 11:25). It is possible that young Timothy was standing in the group of disciples who surrounded the apparently lifeless body of Paul. Ironside believed that this is when Paul was caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2-4).[700] There is no way to prove or to disprove this theory. Luke's description of Paul's speedy recovery (v. 20) stresses God's powerful hand in restoring His servant (cf. 1:1-2). Paul courageously returned to Lystra, but he left town the next day (v. 20b).

> "It was John Wesley's advice, 'Always look a mob in the face.' Paul never did a braver thing than to go straight back into the city which had tried to murder him."[701]

Ministry at Derbe 14:20b-21a

Paul and Barnabas next moved about 60 miles farther to the southeast, to Derbe (meaning juniper, modern Kerti Hüyük), on the eastern border of the Galatian province.[702] Many more people became believers and disciples there (cf. 20:4). Luke did not record what the apostles experienced there, but this was the home of Gaius, one of Paul's later companions (20:4). Perhaps Gaius became a convert at this time.

The larger towns of Antioch and Iconium seem to have produced more influential churches, but the smaller ones of Lystra and Derbe contributed more young men who became leaders (i.e., Timothy and Gaius).

> This is "a pattern not altogether different from today, where the larger churches often capture the headlines and the smaller congregations provide much of the personnel."[703]

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[697]Neil, p. 164.
[698]Kent, p. 117.
[699]E.g., Lumby, p. 264; and McGee, 4:573.
[700]Ironside, *Lectures on* . . ., pp. 341-42.
[701]Barclay, p. 118.
[702]See M. Ballance, *The Site of Derbe: A New Inscription*.
[703]Longenecker, p. 438.

4. Paul and Barnabas' return to Antioch of Syria 14:21b-28

14:21b-22 The missionaries confined their labors to the Galatian province on this trip. They did not move farther east into the kingdom of Antiochus, or the province of Cilicia, that Paul may have evangelized previously during his time in Tarsus. Tarsus stood some 160 miles east of Derbe. Instead they retraced their steps to encourage, instruct, and organize the new converts in "Lystra," "Iconium," and "Antioch" (cf. 18:23).[704] Apparently they did more discipleship ("strengthening the souls . . . encouraging . . . in the faith") than evangelism, on this return trip to the very cities where the apostles' lives had been in danger. They warned the new converts that they too should expect persecution (cf. Gal. 4:13; 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:11). The "kingdom of God" evidently refers to the rule of God generally, including His rule now (in the church) and later (in the messianic kingdom; cf. 1:3; 8:12). Entrance into Christ's messianic kingdom was still in the future, for these "disciples," from when the missionaries gave them this exhortation. Though Christians will not go through *the* Tribulation, we believers will experience "tribulation(s)" before we enter the Millennium (2 Tim. 3:12).

14:23 The "elders" (plural) in every "church" (singular) that the apostles "appointed" must have been the more mature Christians in each congregation. Note that each of these churches had more than one leader (cf. 20:17; Phil. 1:1). There may have been more than one local church in each of these towns eventually, but at this early stage of pioneer evangelism there was probably only one church in each town.

> ". . . it would be unwise to read into this basic administrative necessity later and more developed ideas of church order."[705]

Perhaps some of the elders from the synagogues in these communities, who had become Christians, became elders in the churches. Elder qualifications may have developed and become more specific and somewhat stricter, between the time when these elders assumed office, and when Paul specified their qualifications in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1).

The text does not explain exactly how the appointment of these elders took place. "They" probably refers to Paul and Barnabas, since they are the subjects in view in the context. However, the Greek word used here (*cheirotonesantes*, "appointed") sometimes meant to elect by a vote of raised hands.[706] Consequently some interpreters believe that the Christians

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[704]See David F. Detwiler, "Paul's Approach to the Great Commission in Acts 14:21-23," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:605 (January-March 1995):33-41.

[705]Neil, p. 166. Cf. 1 Tim. 3; and Titus 1.

[706]Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. *cheirotoneo; cheirotoneia*; Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. *cheirotoneo; cheirotoneia*; Kent, p. 118.

in these churches selected the elders (cf. 6:3).[707] I favor the view that Paul and Barnabas made the selections, and that the people in the churches indicated their support of those chosen. The apostles had earlier appointed elders in the Jerusalem church (11:30).

> "Paul showed that it was his conviction that from the very beginning Christianity must be lived in a fellowship."[708]

Note again the importance that Paul and Barnabas placed on prayer. They went without eating in order to pray (cf. 13:3). They also committed ("commended") their new converts "to the Lord" Jesus, the Head of the church, in whom they had believed. These missionaries did not overestimate their own importance and become paternalistic, as church planters sometimes are tempted to do.

14:24-26 "Pisidia" was the southernmost geographic region in the Roman province of Galatia. "Pamphylia" was the province south of Galatia and east of the kingdom of Antiochus. "Perga," like Derbe, was one of the sites the missionaries visited that Luke chose not to comment on extensively (cf. 13:13-14). Perhaps Paul and Barnabas planted a church there, too. The apostles then went down to Attalia, the seaport 10 miles south of Perga, from where they set sail for Syrian Antioch.

> "Ports in antiquity were often satellite towns of larger and more important cities situated some distance inland for protection from pirates. So Luke's mention of Attalia here probably has no more significance than his mention of Seleucia (13:4), the port of Syrian Antioch, and merely identifies the place of embarkation for the voyage back to Syria."[709]

14:27-28 The chronological references in Acts and the Pauline epistles make it difficult to tell just how long it took Paul and Barnabas to complete the first missionary journey. Commentators estimate that it took them from the better part of one year to almost two years. They traveled a minimum of 500 miles by sea plus 700 by land. Beitzel estimated that Paul covered a total of about 1,400 miles on this journey.[710]

Luke was careful to record again the priority of God's initiative in this evangelistic mission (cf. 1:1-2). Paul and Barnabas had accomplished a wonderful work (v. 26), but they were careful to give God the credit for it. He was the One ultimately responsible for their success.

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[707]E.g., Calvin, 4:3:15; Ramsay, *St. Paul . . .*, pp. 121-22; Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 585-86; and Kent, pp. 118-19.
[708]Barclay, p. 119.
[709]Longenecker, p. 439.
[710]Beitzel, p. 177.

> "Paul and Barnabas never thought that it was their strength or their power which had achieved anything. They spoke of what God had done with them. . . . We will begin to have the right idea of Christian service when we work, not for our own honour or prestige, but only from the conviction that we are tools in the hand of God."[711]

> The fact that God had granted salvation to Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews—simply by faith in Christ—would have been of special interest to Luke's early readers. This new phenomenon had taken place before: on the Gaza Road, in Caesarea, and in Syrian Antioch. However, now large numbers of Gentile converts were entering the church through the "door of faith"—without first becoming Jewish proselytes. Paul also used the figure of a door, in 1 Corinthians 16:9, 2 Corinthians 2:12, and Colossians 4:3. This "door of faith" situation constituted the background of the Jerusalem Council that Luke recorded in the next chapter.

It was probably during the time Paul was in Syrian Antioch, after returning from the first missionary journey and before attending the conference in Jerusalem (ch. 15), that he wrote the Epistle to the Galatians. He wrote that letter to instruct the believers in the new churches he and Barnabas had just planted. This would have been in the late A.D. 40s, probably A.D. 49. Galatians appears to have been the first of Paul's inspired epistles.[712]

> "What about Luke's omission of Paul as letter writer? . . . Acts is about beginnings and missionary endeavors. Paul's letters, so far as we know, were written to congregations [and individuals] that were already established. This falls outside the purview of what Luke seeks to describe. Such an omission was only natural since Luke chose not to record the further developments of church life within the congregations Paul founded."[713]

There are many ways in which Paul's ministry and Peter's corresponded. Here are a few of the correlations that Luke recorded, apparently to accredit Paul's ministry—that was mainly to the Gentiles and highly controversial among the Jews. Peter's ministry was primarily to the Jews.

"1. Both Peter and Paul engaged in three significant tours journeys [*sic*] recorded in the Book of Acts. Peter: 8:14ff; 9:32—11:2; 15:1-14 (see Gal. 2:11); Paul: 13:2—14:28; 15:36—18:22; 18:23—21:17.

2. Early in their ministry both healed a lame person. Peter: 3:2ff; Paul: 14:8ff.

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[711]Barclay, p. 120. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:20.

[712]See Appendix 5 "Paul's Epistles," at the end of these notes.

[713]Witherington, p. 438.

3. Both saw extraordinary healings take place apart from physical contact with the afflicted individual. Peter's shadow in 5:15; those who brought handkerchiefs and aprons to Paul in 19:11. [The text does not say Peter's shadow was God's instrument in healing people.]

4. Both were God's instruments to bring judgment on those who hindered the growth and purity of the infant church. Peter condemned Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11); Paul smote Elymas with blindness (13:6-11).

5. Each had at least one long discourse [re]produced in full which gives a summary of his preaching. Peter at Pentecost (2:14-40); Paul at Antioch (13:16-42).

6. Both made the resurrection a primary emphasis in their proclamation. Peter: 2:24-36; 3:15, 26; 5:30; 10:40, 41; Paul: 13:30-37; 17:3, 18, 31; 24:15, 21; 25:19; 26:8, 23.

7. Both exorcised demons. Peter: 5:16; Paul: 16:18.

8. Both communicated the gift of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. Peter: 8:17; Paul: 19:6.

9. Both had triumphant encounters with sorcerers. Peter: 8:18ff; Paul: 13:6ff.

10. Both raised the dead. Peter: 9:36ff; Paul: 20:9ff.

11. Both received visions to direct them into critical witnessing efforts. Peter: 10:9ff; Paul: 16:6ff.

12. Both experienced miraculous deliverances from prison. Peter: 12:7ff; Paul: 16:25ff."[714]

5. The Jerusalem Council 15:1-35

The increasing number of Gentiles who were becoming Christians raised a problem within the church. What was the relationship of the church to Judaism? Some Christians, especially the more conservative Jewish believers, argued that Christianity was a party within Judaism, the party of true believers. They assumed that Gentile Christians, therefore, needed to become Jewish proselytes, which involved being circumcised and obeying the Mosaic Law.

> "In truth, there was no law to prevent the spread of Judaism [within the Roman Empire at this time]. Excepting the brief period when Tiberius (19 A.D.) banished the Jews from Rome and sent 4,000 of their number to fight the banditti in Sardinia, the Jews enjoyed not only perfect liberty, but exceptional privileges."[715]

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[714]Harm, p. 40. See also the chart in *The Nelson* . . ., p. 1841.

[715]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:71.

Other Christians, the more broad-minded Jewish believers and the Gentile converts, saw no need for these restrictions. They viewed the church not as a party within Judaism, but as a distinct group—separate from Judaism—that incorporated both believing Jews and believing Gentiles. This difference of viewpoint led to the meeting Luke recorded in this section. He described it at length, in order to explain the issues involved, and to clarify their importance. Therefore not a few students of Acts believe that chapter 15 is the most crucial chaper in the entire book.[716] It is both structurally and theologically central to Acts.[717]

> "Throughout this commentary [i.e., Witherington's commentary] we have noted the signs that Luke was following ancient historiographical conventions in the way he presents his material, in particular his penchant for dealing with matters from an ethnographic and region-by-region perspective. With these concerns the extended treatment in Acts 15 comes as no surprise. Here the matter must be resolved as to what constitutes the people of God, and how the major ethnic division in the church (Jew/Gentile) shall be dealt with so that both groups may be included in God's people *on equal footing*, fellowship may continue, and the church remain one. Luke is eager to demonstrate that ethnic divisions could be and were overcome, despite the objection of very conservative Pharisaic Christians."[718]

Paul and Barnabas' return to Jerusalem 15:1-5

15:1 The "men . . . from Judea" who "came down" to Antioch appear to have been Jewish Christians who took the former view of Christianity described above. They believed a person could not become a Christian without first becoming a Jew, which included circumcision. Perhaps they based their theology on texts such as Genesis 17:14 and Exodus 12:48-49. Their claim was essentially a denial of the sufficiency of faith in Christ for salvation. They evidently claimed that James, the Lord's half-brother and the leader of the Jerusalem church, endorsed their position (cf. 15:24; Gal. 2:12). Peter, who was in Antioch at this time, compromised with these men, by withdrawing from eating with the Gentile Christians there. Barnabas also inclined to do so. Paul, however, saw the inconsistency and danger in this practice and rebuked Peter (Gal. 2:11, 13-14).[719]

This situation posed the fourth crisis in the history of the early church. The first was selfishness (Ananias and Sapphira, ch. 5), and the second was murmuring (over the treatment of the Hellenistic widows, ch. 6). The third was simony (Simon Magus, ch. 8), and now doctrinal controversy raised

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[716]E.g., H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 121; and Witherington, p. 439.

[717]Marshall, *The Acts . . .*, p. 242.

[718]Witherington, p. 439.

[719]Some scholars—for example, Howson, p. 177—believe that this confrontation took place after Paul returned to Antioch from the Jerusalem Council.

its ugly head (the "Galatian heresy," ch. 15). This was the most serious problem thus far, both in terms of the issue itself, and its potential consequences. It involved the conditions for becoming a Christian, and therefore the gospel message.

15:2 This situation led to hot debate ("dissension") among the Christians generally. It ended with a decision to move the discussion "to Jerusalem," and to place the whole matter before the apostles and elders there for a verdict. This general procedure was common in the Greco-Roman world.[720] Men from Antioch accompanied Paul and Barnabas, as witnesses undoubtedly, to protect Paul and Barnabas from accusations of distorting the facts.

15:3 On the way to Jerusalem, the missionaries recounted to the Christians in "Phoenicia and Samaria" what God had done in Cyprus and Asia Minor. These believers rejoiced because they saw a continuation of what had happened to them.

> "This undoubtedly means that Gentiles were converted on a direct basis apart from any necessary commitment to Judaism, because the presence of proselytes and 'God-fearing' Gentiles in the church was hardly newsworthy in A.D. 49."[721]

15:4 When Paul's party arrived in Jerusalem, the leaders ("apostles and elders") there "received" them and listened to their story. Note again that Luke stressed the Lord's initiative in spreading the gospel (cf. 14:27).

15:5 Some in that meeting, converted "Pharisees" who had a high view of the Mosaic Law, repeated the same objection Paul and Barnabas had encountered in Antioch. These were not necessarily "ex-Pharisees," since a Pharisee could become a Christian without relinquishing his distinctive beliefs concerning Scripture and theology.[722]

> ". . . it is possible that nationalist pressure [against Rome] was increasing in Judea, and that [Jewish] Christians were having to tread carefully to avoid being thought of as disloyal to their Jewish heritage."[723]

Unsaved Jews also believed that keeping the Mosaic Law is essential for acceptance by God (cf. 1 Thess. 2:14-16).

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[720]Witherington, p. 451.
[721]Longenecker, p. 443.
[722]See Kent, p. 122, footnote 3.
[723]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 249.

The Old Testament taught that Gentiles would share in the promises made to Israel (Gen. 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Isa. 49:6; 55:5-7; Zeph. 3:9-10; Zech. 8:22). The Old Testament prophets also spoke of Gentile salvation as happening in the last days (Isa. 2:2; 11:10; 25:8-9; Zech. 8:23) through the witness of a restored Israel (Isa. 2:3; 60:2-3; Zech. 8:23).

> "It [the revelation stated above] was the underlying presupposition for Jewish proselytizing (cf. M[ishnah] *Pirke Aboth* 1:12; Matt 23:15) and was implicit in the sermons of Peter at Pentecost (2:39) and in the house of Cornelius (10:35). But the correlative conviction of Judaism was that Israel was God's appointed agent for the administration of these blessings—that only through the nation and its institutions could Gentiles have a part in God's redemption and share in his favor."[724]

Peter's testimony 15:6-11

15:6 Evidently a large group of people observed the meeting that the church convened to debate the issue (vv. 12, 22). Most commentators took the whole passage as describing public proceedings, but a few understood verse 6 as referring to a private meeting that took place during the public forum.[725]

15:7-9 First, spokesmen for each side presented arguments pro and con. Then Peter rose and reminded those assembled that several years earlier, God had chosen him as the person from whom Gentiles (i.e., Cornelius and his friends) should "hear . . . the gospel." Then God gave these Gentiles His Spirit as soon as they believed in Jesus Christ. They did nothing but "believe," and they received "the Holy Spirit," the sign of their acceptance by God. This was the same thing that had taken place earlier, among the Jews, on the day of Pentecost.

15:10 Requiring that Gentiles become Jews before God would save them would "test" God, in that it would question the rightness of His action in giving the Spirit to Cornelius. When a Gentile became a Jewish proselyte, the Jew in charge of the ceremony said the Gentile now "took up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven" (cf. Matt. 23:4; Gal. 5:1).[726] Peter said this "yoke," the Mosaic Covenant, was an obligation that was both unbearable and unnecessary (cf. Matt. 11:29-30).

15:11 By referring to the Jews being saved in the same manner as the Gentiles, instead of *vice versa*, Peter repudiated any thought of Jewish superiority. Clearly he had recovered from his temporary lapse at Syrian Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14). Salvation is by "grace" (v. 11), through faith (v. 9), plus nothing.

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[724]Longenecker, pp. 440-41.
[725]E.g., Kent, p. 123.
[726]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 307.

Barnabas and Paul's testimony 15:12

The old order of these two names recurs here. "Barnabas," as a respected member of this church (4:36-37; 11:22), took the lead in relating the experiences that he "and Paul" had undergone in ministering to Gentiles. Barnabas emphasized the "signs and wonders" God had performed, because these would have persuaded the Jews that God had been at work in their ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22).

> "It was a report not of their successes but of how God had acted, and its implication was that by his acts God had revealed his will."[727]

James' testimony 15:13-21

15:13-14 "James" was Jesus' half-brother, the writer of the Epistle of James, and the leading figure in the Jerusalem church (12:17; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12).[728] "Simeon" was Peter's older Jewish name. James' use of it would have emphasized Peter's Jewishness as well as implying affection for him. Peter had related the salvation experience of Cornelius, and James' reference to "first" was to that experience near the beginning of the church.

> ". . . he showed how he felt about the question at issue by speaking of believing Gentiles as a 'people' (*laos*) whom God had taken 'for himself' (*to onomati autou*; lit., 'for his name')—thus (1) applying to Gentile Christians a designation formerly used of Israel alone and (2) agreeing with Peter that in the conversion of Cornelius God himself had taken the initiative for a direct Gentile ministry."[729]

15:15 James reminded his hearers that the Old Testament "prophets" supported the salvation of Gentiles apart from Judaism. Note that James did not say the salvation of Gentiles *then* was the fulfillment of these prophecies. He said the prophets' predictions of future Gentile salvation harmonized with the present salvation of Gentiles apart from Judaism (cf. 2:16).[730] James then quoted Amos 9:11-12 as a representative prophecy. Another view is that by "the prophets," James meant the Book of the 12 Minor Prophets, of which Amos was a part. Neither Amos, nor any other prophet, said Gentiles had to become Jews in order to enjoy the blessings of salvation (cf. Rom. 11:12).

> "The passage in Amos refers primarily to the restoration of the Davidic empire, but also the Messiah's Kingdom (['])the throne of David his father,' Luke 1:32)."[731]

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[727]Longenecker, p. 445.

[728]See Richard Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 415-80.

[729]Longenecker, p. 446.

[730]See Heater, pp. 147-57; and Bock, "Evidence from . . .," pp. 195-96.

[731]Robertson, 3:230.

> "James's major contribution to the decision of the council was to shift the discussion of the conversion of Gentiles from a proselyte model to an eschatological one. . . . James is saying, God's people will consist of two concentric groups. At their core will be restored Israel (i.e., David's rebuilt tent); gathered around them will be a group of Gentiles (i.e., 'the remnant of men') who will share in the messianic blessings but will persist as Gentiles without necessarily becoming Jewish proselytes."[732]

15:16-18 Amos predicted the (second) advent of Messiah after "these things" (i.e., the Tribulation, Amos 9:8-10). Messiah would set up His kingdom on the earth, and restore the nation Israel (during the Millennium), under which the Gentiles would seek the Lord. We should understand the "and" in verse 17 in the sense of "even" (the epexegetical use of this conjunction).

> "A close examination of this passage [vv. 14-17] reveals that there is a progression of thought leading to James' conclusion. *First*, God visits the Gentiles, taking from them a people for His name. In other words, God has promised to bless the Gentiles as well as Israel, but each in his own order. The Gentile blessing is first. *Second*, Christ will return—*after* the outcalling of the people for His name. *Third*, as a result of the coming of the Lord, the tabernacle of David will be built again; that is, the kingdom will be established exactly as promised in the Davidic Covenant. Amos clearly declared that this rebuilding will be done 'as it used to be' (Amos 9:11); that is, the blessings will be earthly and national and will have nothing to do with the church. *Fourth*, the residue of men will seek the Lord; that is, all the Gentiles will be brought to a knowledge of the Lord after the kingdom is established. This same truth is taught in passages like Isaiah 2:2; 11:10; 40:5; and 66:23."[733]

There have been three main interpretations of James' use of Amos' prophecy (Amos 9:11-12).[734] Some interpreters believe James meant that the inclusion of Gentiles in the church fulfilled God's promise through Amos.[735] These (generally amillennial) interpreters see the church as fulfilling God's promises to Israel. This view seems to go beyond what Amos said, since his prophecy concerns "the tabernacle of David,, which

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[732]Longenecker, p. 446.

[733]Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom* . . ., pp. 145-46.

[734]See Charles Zimmerman, "To This Agree the Words of the Prophets," *Grace Journal* 4:3 (Fall 1963):28-40; Kent, p. 126.

[735]E.g., Lenski, pp. 608-11.

literally interpreted would involve Israel, not the church. Second, some interpreters believe James meant that God would include Gentiles when He fulfilled this promise to Israel in the future.[736] However, there was no question among the Jews that God would bless the Gentiles through Israel in the future. The issue was whether He would do this apart from Judaism, and this interpretation contributes nothing to the solution of that problem. This view does not seem to go far enough. A third view is that James meant that the present inclusion of Gentiles in the church is consistent with God's promise to Israel through Amos (cf. Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:9).[737] In other words, the present salvation of Gentiles, apart from Judaism, does not contradict anything Amos said about future Gentile blessing. This seems to be the best interpretation.

> "In other words, James says, God is working out His own plan: Israel, His covenant people have been set aside nationally because of their rejection of the Messiah. God is now taking out a people, Jew and Gentile, to constitute the Church of God. When He completes this work, the Lord is coming back the second time. That will be the time of blessing for the whole world [i.e., the millennial reign of Christ]."[738]

James added the quotation from Isaiah 45:21, in verse 18b, probably to add authority to the Amos prophecy.

> "The thought that the church was the divinely intended replacement for the temple is probably to be seen in 15:16-18."[739]

The typical non-dispensational understanding of this text, is that James was saying that the messianic kingdom had come, and that Amos' prediction was completely fulfilled. Progressive dispensationalists believe he meant that the first stage of the messianic kingdom had come, and that Amos' prediction was partially fulfilled.[740] Normative dispensationalists view the messianic kingdom as entirely future. They believe Amos was predicting the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan, and that James was saying that the present situation was in harmony with God's purpose. Thus the Amos prediction has yet to be fulfilled. Deciding between these options depends first on whether or not one believes the church replaces

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[736]E.g., F. W. Grant, *The Numerical Bible*, p. 100.

[737]E.g., Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:267-69; 5:328-29; and *The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1186. See also Kenneth R. Cooper, "The Tabernacle of David in Biblical Prophecy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:672 (October-December 2011):402-12.

[738]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, p. 356. Cf. Wiersbe, 1:463.

[739]Marshall, *The Acts . . .*, p. 131.

[740]See Saucy, *The Case . . .*, pp. 76-80.

Israel in God's plan. If it does, one will side with non-dispensationalists here. If one believes that the church and Israel are distinct in the purpose of God, then one has to decide if there is better evidence that Jesus has begun to rule over David's kingdom now (progressive dispensationalism), or not yet (normative dispensationalism). I believe the evidence points to the fact that David's kingdom is an earthly kingdom, and that Jesus will begin reigning over it when He returns to earth at His Second Coming.[741]

James would have quoted a version of the Old Testament text that would have been acceptable to his audience, which included strict Jews. His quotation from Amos differs from the Hebrew text in meaning, and from the Septuagint in form, but it is identical to the text of 4QFlorilegium (1:12), an Essene rendering.[742]

15:19 "Not" to "trouble" the Gentiles meant not imposing the requirements of Jewish proselytes on them, namely: circumcision and observance of the Mosaic Law.

15:20 To help Gentile converts not put a stumbling block in the path of Jews, James recommended that Christian teachers encourage their disciples to avoid ("abstain from") four things. By the way, Acts presents the apostles as more effective at conflict resolution than the Sanhedrin, and James as a better problem solver than Gamaliel. Filling (control) by the Holy Spirit accounts for these differences. These four things were: first, the "things" (food, etc.) associated with "idols," or idolatry (cf. 1 Cor. 10:14-22); and second, "fornication" (Gr. *porneias*, all kinds of sexual aberrations). The Gentile converts were also to: third, avoid eating "strangled" animals (those with the blood not drained out); and fourth, "blood" (the essence of life; cf. Gen. 9; Lev. 17:11).[743] These four restrictions involved ethical and moral issues, and practices that offended Jews.

One writer argued that smothering rather than strangling is in view, and that the apostles' intent was to prohibit infanticide, which was a normal method of birth control in the Graeco-Roman world.[744] This is a minority view that I do not share.

> "Concerning the nature of the prohibitions the most likely explanation is that all four were associated to some degree with pagan [or Jewish] religious practices. Since this association was highly offensive to Jews, Gentile believers

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[741]See also Toussaint, "Acts," pp. 394-95.

[742]J. A. de Waard, *A Comparative Study of the Old Testament Text in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the New Testament*, pp. 24-26, 47, 78-79.

[743]David Instone-Brewer, "Infanticide and the Apostolic decree of Acts 15," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:2 (June 2009):301-21.

[744]See ibid., p. 395.

> were asked to avoid even the appearance of evil by avoiding such practices altogether. Thus the purposes of the decree and its prohibitions [cf. 15:29; 21:25] were to promote unity among believing Jews and believing Gentiles."[745]

15:21 The reason for these restrictions was this: In the weekly synagogue Scripture readings, teachers of the Mosaic Law had stressed Jewish scruples regarding these matters for generations. Consequently the Jews regarded them as extremely important. If Gentile Christians disregarded the convictions of these Jews, they would only alienate those they hoped to bring to faith in Jesus Christ or to growth in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 8:13).

> "If there was ever a good opportunity to say that the Gentiles were under the law this was it; for that would have settled the matter simply and quickly. But the apostles, who were Jews themselves, recognized that the law had no force any longer, and they did not try to impose it."[746]

James was not putting Gentile converts under the Mosaic Law by imposing these restrictions. He was urging them to limit their exercise of Christian liberty to make their witness to unsaved Jews more effective, and their fellowship with saved Jews more harmonious (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23).

> "To sum up, we may say that two types of 'necessary' questions were raised at the Jerusalem Council. The first had to do with the theological necessity of circumcision and the Jewish law for salvation, and that was rejected. The second had to do with the practical necessity of Gentile Christians abstaining from certain practices for the sake of Jewish-Gentile fellowship within the church and for the sake of the Jewish Christian mission throughout the Diaspora, and that was approved."[747]

The official formulation of the decision 15:22-29

15:22 The Jerusalem leaders chose two witnesses to return to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas, to verbally confirm the decision of this council. The custom of sending four persons, representing the people and the council, with an official document has been attested in ancient Greco-Roman literature.[748]

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[745]Charles H. Savelle, "A Reexamination of the Prohibitions in Acts 15," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:644 (October-December 2004):468.

[746]Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):243. Cf. Mark 7:18-19; Luke 16:16; John 1:17; Acts 10:12; Rom 7:6; 10:4; 14:17; 1 Cor. 8:8; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:19, 23; 4:9-11; 5:1; 6:2; Col. 2:17; Heb. 7:12; 9:10.

[747]Longenecker, p. 448.

[748]Witherington, p. 467.

Likewise, in many places oral testimony was regarded more highly than written.[749] "Judas" had a Jewish name" so he may have been a Hebraic Jew, whereas "Silas" had a Greek name, and probably was a Hellenistic Jew. These men represented both segments of the Jerusalem church.

Judas had the same surname as Joseph Barsabbas, the candidate with Matthias for the vacant apostleship (1:23). Consequently some interpreters have assumed that Judas and Joseph were brothers.[750] We also know Silas by his Roman name, Silvanus, in Scripture (2 Cor. 1:19). He was a Hellenistic Jew who had been a leader in the Jerusalem church (vv. 22, 27). He was a prophet (v. 32), a vocal minister in Antioch (v. 32), a Roman citizen (16:37), and an effective amanuensis (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12). Silas became Paul's primary companion on his second missionary journey (v. 40).

> "When one considers the situation of the Jerusalem church in A.D. 49, the decision reached by the Jerusalem Christians must be considered one of the boldest and most magnanimous in the annals of church history. While still attempting to minister exclusively to the nation, the council refused to impede the progress of that other branch of the Christian mission whose every success meant further difficulty for them from within their own nation."[751]

> "It is interesting to note the process the council followed in resolving this conflict. First, the problem was clarly stated: Each side was presented in a debate. Second, the facts were presented by those who were acquainted with them. Third, the counsel was given by a person who was trusted for his objectivity and wisdom. Fourth, unanimity was sought in the decision. Fifth, the attitude of preserving the unity of the Spirit remained utmost on the council's mind. This same formula would be helpful in resolving conflicts found within the church today."[752]

15:23 The destination of this letter throws light on extensive missionary activity that had taken place throughout "Syria and Cilicia," which activity Luke did not record. We know of the mission to Antioch, but Luke gave no details about the evangelization of the rest of the surrounding area of "Syria." We know that Paul had done missionary work in "Cilicia," but Luke did not tell his readers anything about it. Here we learn that there were churches in these regions already, as we may have assumed, but now

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[749]Ibid., p. 469.
[750]E.g., Kent, p. 127.
[751]Longenecker, p. p. 450.
[752]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1848.

know for sure (cf. v. 41). "Antioch" was the capital city of Syria and Cilicia, which Rome administered as a single province until A.D. 72.[753]

15:24-29 The men who had come to Antioch from Jerusalem, advocating "circumcision . . . " (v. 1) had no authorization ("instruction") to do so from the Jerusalem church (v. 24). They spoke on their own authority. The church in Jerusalem had reached a unified opinion ("become of one mind") on the issue at hand (v. 25). The apostles presented "Barnabas and Paul" as men whom the saints in Jerusalem held in the highest regard (vv. 25-26). The church leaders had sensed the Holy Spirit's control in the decision they had reached (v. 28).[754]

> "It should be noted that the letter traced the unanimity of the decision to the action of the Holy Spirit (15:28), even though the Spirit was not mentioned previously as intervening in the proceedings. This is the way in which the Spirit usually works in the church. There need not be miraculous displays to indicate his direction. Spirit-filled people can detect his presence through the harmony which prevails when men are responsive to his will."[755]

The delivery of the decision to Antioch 15:30-35

The decision reached at the Jerusalem Council was very important. Even though false teachers continued to propagate the view that Gentiles had to undergo the rites of proselytes to Judaism before they could enter the church, this view was now officially unacceptable. The apostles had greatly strengthened the case for salvation by faith alone. Again, the trip that Paul and Barnabas made, from Antioch to Jerusalem and back, consisted of about 560 ground miles (cf. 11:30—12:25; Gal. 2:1-10).

6. The strengthening of the Gentile churches 15:36—16:5

Luke reported Paul and Barnabas' efforts to strengthen the churches they had planted in Cyprus and Asia Minor to emphasize the importance of this phase of church extension. He also did so to set the scene for the next major advance of the church. Paul went next into the provinces around the Aegean Sea, some of which were on what we now call the European continent.

The beginning of Paul's second missionary journey 15:36-41

15:36-39 Some commentators have overestimated the "sharp disagreement" between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark, in my opinion.[756] The text says they disagreed vigorously over this issue, but there is no statement or

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[753]Neil, p. 175; *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Cilicia," by E. M. B. Green.

[754]On the differences between the Old Uncial and the Western textual readings of verse 29, see C. K. Barrett, "The Apostolic Decree of Acts 15:29," *Austrialian Biblical Review* 35 (1987):50-59.

[755]Kent, p. 128.

[756]E.g., Neil, p. 176; Blaiklock, pp. 118-19; Barclay, p. 128; and Robertson, 3:241.

implication that they ended up disliking each other, as some of the commentators have inferred. It seems that they were both led by the Holy Spirit to arrive at their respective conclusions regarding the wisdom of taking John Mark with them. Their separation, I infer, was friendly. Paul later wrote with respectful admiration of Barnabas (1 Cor. 9:6) and John Mark (Col. 4:10; Phile. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). Their decision to go in separate directions certainly resulted in greater gospel expansion, since more people became involved as fellow missionaries, and they covered more area in less time. Some Christians erroneously feel that any disagreement between believers is sinful, but there is no indication in the text that this difference of opinion was sinful.

Barnabas' desire to offer John Mark another opportunity was certainly commendable and godly, even though Paul viewed it as unwise. Many of God's servants would have dropped out of ministry had it not been for a gracious Barnabas who was willing to give us another chance after we failed.

15:40-41 "Paul" and "Silas" departed from Antioch with the church's blessing. This time the missionaries traveled first by land, north through Syria, then through Cilicia where Paul had been born and had previously labored. They strengthened the young churches in those Roman provinces.[757]

The churches of Galatia 16:1-5

16:1 Paul and Silas, now traveling west, probably crossed the Taurus Mountains at a pass called the Cilician Gates (modern Gülek Bogaz). Alexander the Great had marched east through this pass to conquer the vast Persian Empire four centuries earlier.[758] This route would have led them into the kingdom of Antiochus, located west of Cilicia, to the south of Galatia, and to the east of Pamphylia. They proceeded on into Lycaonian Galatia, first to "Derbe," and then to "Lystra."

At Lystra a young believer named "Timothy" impressed Paul. Many Bible students have assumed that Timothy was from Lystra, and had trusted Christ during Paul's first trip to that town (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17). The text does not state these facts, but they are certainly strong possibilities. Mixed marriages between Jews and Gentiles were more common outside Palestine than within it.[759] Timothy's mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois were both sincere Jews, and had instructed Timothy in the Hebrew Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).[760] This young man now filled the place that

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[757]See the map of Paul's second missionary journey in Longenecker, p. 249; Toussaint, "Acts," p. 397; or *The Nelson* . . ., p. 1855.
[758]Blaiklock, p. 120.
[759]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 322.
[760]See Levinskaya, pp. 12-17.

John Mark had occupied on the first journey, before Mark returned to Jerusalem. Timothy was to become one of Paul's closest friends and most faithful fellow workers.

> "He [Paul] was always well aware of the necessity of training a new generation for the work and for the days that lay ahead."[761]

16:2 > "The preoccupation with character in those who assume Christian leadership is a marked feature of the story of the early Church ([verse 2,] vi. 3, x. 22, xxii. 12)."[762]

16:3 Paul obviously did not circumcise Timothy because he believed that rite was necessary for his justification or sanctification (cf. 1 Cor. 7:19). He did so because it was necessary for effective evangelistic ministry among Jews (cf. 1 Cor. 9:20-22; Rom. 14:13-15). Unbelieving Jews would not have given Paul a hearing, if he had traveled with an *uncircumcised Gentile*, even though Timothy was half Jewish (cf. 1 Cor. 9:20). The Jews regarded an uncircumcised son of a Jewish mother to be an apostate Jew, a violator of the Mosaic Covenant.[763] Paul was being culturally sensitive here.

16:4 Part of Paul's ministry included acquainting the churches in Galatia with the directives ("decrees") formulated at the Jerusalem Council.

16:5 This fifth progress report concludes the section on the church's expansion into Asia Minor (12:25—16:5; cf. 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 19:20; 28:31). This part of its history was particularly crucial, since in this phase of its expansion the church changed from predominantly Jewish to predominantly Gentile.

C. The extension of the church to the Aegean shores 16:6—19:20

The missionary outreach narrated in this section of the book took place in major cities along the Aegean coastline that major Roman roads connected.

1. The call to Macedonia 16:6-10

Luke recorded Paul's vision of the Macedonian man to explain God's initiative in encouraging Paul and his companions to carry the gospel farther west into what is now Europe.

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[761]Barclay, p. 129.
[762]Blaiklock, p. 120.
[763]Bock, *Acts*, p. 523.

> ". . . this section [6:6-10] makes it overwhelmingly clear that Paul's progress was directed by God in a variety of ways, so that the missionaries were led into new areas of work."[764]
>
> "His [Luke's] subject is the rapid extension of Christianity among the Gentiles, especially in three great provinces of the empire, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia; and he describes the firm establishment of the church in their capitals, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus . . . These three great provinces embraced respectively the northern, western and eastern coasts of the Aegean Sea, and they were all members of one great Roman empire, and all enjoyed one great Hellenic civilization . . .
>
> "The foundation of the churches of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia was the work of S. Paul, and it was his greatest achievement. Ch. xvi 11-xix 19 is really the record of his life work. It filled a period of five years from 49 to 54; and in the composition of the book it corresponds to the ministry of the Lord in the Gospel (Lk iv 16 to xvii 10 or xviii 30) and of S. Peter in the church of Jerusalem in the first part of the Acts (ii 14-xi 26)."[765]

16:6 Phrygia was a geographical region, and Galatia was a Roman province. Phrygia was part of Galatia, as well as part of the province of Asia that lay west of Galatia. The province of Asia was one of several Roman provinces that occupied the larger district of Asia Minor. Asia Minor was ancient Anatolia and modern western Turkey. Paul evangelized Asia later (18:19—19:20). The time was not right for him to go there yet. Probably Paul intended to follow the Via Sebaste westward to Ephesus, the chief city and capital of Asia. Luke did not record how "the Holy Spirit" closed the door to "Asia" at this time. His emphasis was on the One who directed Paul, not how He did it (cf. 13:1-3).

> "The missionary journeys of Paul reveal an extraordinary combination of strategic planning and sensitivity to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in working out the details of the main goals. This is especially noticeable here."[766]
>
> "Paul may have had visions or dreams (cf. verse 9, 23:11), or inward prompting. Silas, a prophet (15:32), may have been moved to utter words of warning, or they may have had to change their plans by force of circumstances (e.g. Jewish opposition), which they afterwards recognized as the overruling intervention of Providence."[767]

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[764]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 261.
[765]Rackham, p. 272.
[766]Longenecker, p. 456.
[767]Neil, p. 179.

16:7-8 Paul then turned his attention north, and purposed (was "trying") to enter the province of "Bithynia." It lay along the southern shores of the Black Sea, and contained many Roman cities and Jewish colonies. Mysia was another geographical region like Phrygia, but located in northwest Asia, "through" (Gr. *parelthontes*, not "by," v. 8) which Paul's party passed to get to Bithynia. Again the Holy Spirit, whom Luke here called "the Spirit of Jesus" (cf. 1:1-2), prevented their entering that province. This unusual title of the Holy Spirit highlights Jesus' leadership in the mission. Other, unidentified Christian missionaries evangelized Bithynia (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1).[768]

Consequently Paul turned west from where he was, and proceeded to Troas. This city was a Roman colony, like Antioch of Pisidia and Lystra, located at a very strategic site. It was one of the main seaports from which travelers entered Asia Minor from the west, or departed from Asia Minor toward the Roman provinces farther west. It was about 25 miles south of ancient Troy, and 585 miles from Antioch of Syria.

> "To the Greeks, mountains protected but separated people, whereas the sea, while frightening, united people. Therefore Troas, at the mouth of the Dardenelles, was the pivotal port between the land masses of Europe and Asia Minor and the great waterways of the Aegean and Black seas."[769]

16:9 This time God gave positive direction to Paul, and Luke recorded that He did it in "a vision" (cf. 9:10; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 13:4).

> "Paul could have recognized the man in his dream as a Macedonian from what he said; but it has been conjectured that the man might have been Luke himself, who indicates his presence at this point by changing the narrative from 'they' to 'we' in the following verse. If this were so, it would suggest that Luke, a Macedonian or of Macedonian ancestry, had encountered Paul at Troas, perhaps as a medical attendant, and pressed him to preach the Gospel to the Macedonians. In this case, his appearance in Paul's dream would make him seem to be a God-sent messenger, and would clinch the matter. This is, of course, no more than an attractive speculation."[770]

"Macedonia" was a Roman province that comprised roughly the northern half of ancient and modern Greece. Its name honored Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great's father.

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[768]See Blaiklock, p. 123.
[769]Longenecker, p. 458.
[770]Neil, p. 180.

16:10 Luke joined Paul's party, which consisted of Silas, Timothy, and perhaps others, in Troas. This is clear because in his narration he changed from the third to the first person. This is the beginning of the first of four so-called "we" sections in Acts, the sections in which Luke was traveling with Paul (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1—28:16).[771] Paul surrounded himself with a group of disciples, as Jesus had done.

Note that Luke used three terms to stress the fact that the *triune* "God" was leading these apostles by His Spirit. He first referred to the "Holy Spirit" (v. 6), then the "Spirit of Jesus" (v. 7), and then "God" (v. 10)—as leading them.

> "Authentic turning points in history are few. But surely among them that of the Macedonian vision ranks high. Because of Paul's obedience at this point, the gospel went westward; and ultimately Europe and the Western world were evangelized. Christian response to the call of God is never a trivial thing. Indeed, as in this instance, great issues and untold blessings may depend on it."[772]

This passage has become popular because in it, God gave Paul definite guidance concerning where He wanted him to minister. Anyone who wants to propagate the gospel has questions about this kind of guidance. Notice that Paul was actively ministering, and was seeking to do what appeared to him to be the wise thing, when God said "no" or "yes" to his efforts. In providing positive direction, God brought new information to Paul that impressed the apostle with a particular need that God wanted him to meet. It seems to me that we should not concern ourselves mainly with the methods God uses to guide people. These varied in Acts, and were not Luke's primary concern. We should, however, concentrate on where we can be of most use as the Lord's servants. This was Paul's dominant concern. If our choices for places of ministry are equally acceptable to God, He probably will not steer us away from any of them, as was true in Paul's first missionary journey. We can go wherever we please. However, if He does not want us in one or more of these places, I believe He will shut one or more doors for us as He did for Paul. God often guides us by bringing information to our attention that enlightens our judgment when we need to make decisions.

2. The ministry in Macedonia 16:11—17:15

Luke recorded Paul's ministry in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea to continue his history of Jesus' works in Macedonia.

The Macedonians were a distinct national group, though they had strong ties to the Greeks. They had offered the most stubborn resistance against Rome's efforts to extend its influence. In an attempt to break down their strong nationalistic spirit of

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[771]For an evaluation of traditional, source critical, redaction critical, and comparative literary solutions to the problem of first person narration in Acts, see Susan Marie Praeder, "The Problem of First Person Narration in Acts," *Novum Testamentum* 29:3 (July 1987):193-218. See also Witherington, pp. 480-86.

[772]Longenecker, p. 458.

independence, Rome divided Macedonian territory into four districts, each of which had its own local government under Rome. We see this stubborn character in the Macedonians' reaction to Paul's preaching. Nevertheless once won over, the Macedonian converts became just as loyal to Paul as they had been hostile to him at first.

Ministry in Philippi 16:11-40

Luke devoted more space to Paul's evangelizing in Philippi than he did to the apostle's activities in any other city on the second and third journeys, even though Paul was there only briefly. It was the first European city in which Paul preached the gospel.[773]

16:11-12 Traveling by sea from Troas, the apostolic band made its way to the island of "Samothrace." From there they sailed to Neapolis (modern Cavalla), the port of Philippi in Macedonia, a journey of 125 miles. Philippi was 10 miles northwest inland. This town, previously called Crenides (lit. "Fountains"), also received its newer name of "Philippi" from Philip of Macedon. It stood at the eastern end of another major Roman highway that connected the Adriatic and Aegean Seas, the Via Egnatia (Egnatian Road).[774] Macedonia consisted of four parts or districts, and Philippi was the chief city of one of these four districts.

> "After Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, near Philippi in 42 B.C., the city was made into a Roman colony. This gave it special privileges (e.g, [*sic*] fewer taxes) but more importantly it became like a 'transplanted' Rome . . . The primary purpose of colonies was military, for the Roman leaders felt it wise to have Roman citizens and sympathizers settled in strategic locations. So Octavian (who became Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, in 27 B.C.) settled more colonists (primarily former soldiers) at Philippi after his defeat of Antony at Actium, on Greece's west coast, in 31 B.C."[775]

"Augustus" means "the august one" or "the revered one." The best modern equivalent might be "his majesty."

> "Philippi's importance during the NT period . . . resulted from its agriculture, its strategic commercial location on both sea and land routes, its still functioning gold mines, and its status as a Roman colony. In addition, it had a

[773]The ancients did not view the Dardanelles as separating Europe and Asia, as we do today. Luke's original readers would have viewed Paul's crossing the Hellespont as simply moving from one region to another within the Roman Empire.

[774]See Finegan, *Light from . . .*, pp. 350-51, for more information about Philippi.

[775]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 399.

> famous school of medicine with graduates throughout the then-known world."[776]

Luke's mention of Philippi's status as a "Roman colony" is unusual; he did not identify Roman colonies as such elsewhere. Other Roman colonies that feature in Acts, which Luke did not identify as colonies, were Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Troas, Corinth, and Ptolemais. Probably he identified Philippi here as one, because of the events that followed in Philippi—that we can understand more easily with this status in mind. Another possibility is that he did so because of his personal interest in this town. He spent considerable time there. Some scholars conjecture that Philippi was Luke's hometown or the town in which he lived before joining Paul's party. This seems unlikely to me, since Paul and his party stayed with Lydia when they were in Philippi (v. 15). If Luke had a home there, they probably would have stayed with him. A Roman colony was a city that the imperial government had granted special privileges for having rendered some special service to the empire. All of its free citizens enjoyed the rights of Roman citizens. Living in such a colony was similar to being in Rome away from Rome (cf. Phil. 3:20).

16:13 Normally Paul went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and this "place of prayer" may have been a synagogue. On the other hand, Philippi may have had too few Jews to warrant a synagogue. It only took 10 Jewish men to establish a synagogue.[777] Whether or not this "place of prayer" was a synagogue, worshippers of Yahweh met beside the Gangites "River" one and one-half miles west of town, to pray together, and to do what the Jews did in a normal synagogue service. The Greek word *proseuche* describes both prayer and a place of prayer.[778] Sometimes this word for "a place of prayer" was used in Jewish writings as a synonym for "synagogue," since Jewish synagogues were essentially places of prayer. It was customary for Jews and Gentile God-fearers (*sebomene ton theon*, "worshipper of God," v. 14; 13:43; 18:7) to meet in the open air—by a river or the sea—when a synagogue was not available.[779]

> "Where there was no Synogogue there was at least a *Proseuche*, or meeting-place, under the open sky, after the form of a theatre, generally outside the town, near a river or the sea, for the sake of lustrations [i.e., purification rites]."[780]

Evidently no men were there the day Paul found the place. Nonetheless Paul preached the gospel to the women assembled. That Paul, a former Pharisee, would preach to an audience of women reveals much about his

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[776]Longenecker, pp. 459-60.
[777]Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 1:6; Mishnah *Pirke Aboth* 3:6.
[778]See Levinskaya, pp. 213-25, "The Meaning of PROSEUCHE."
[779]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 14:10:23. Cf. Ps. 137:1-6.
[780]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:76.

changed attitude—since the Pharisees commonly thanked God that they were not Gentiles, slaves, or women (cf. Gal. 3:28). This is hardly the picture of a woman-hater that some have painted Paul as being.

> "I wonder whether that prayer meeting had anything to do with Paul coming over to Europe and the vision of the man of Macedonia!"[781]

16:14-15 At least one of the women was a lady who was in Philippi on business. She trusted Christ. "Thyatira," her hometown in the province of Asia, was a city famous for its "purple fabrics," dye, and cloth (cf. Rev. 2:18-29).[782] During the Roman Period, laws restricted who could wear clothes dyed purple because it was the most precious of all colors. Thus "Lydia" undoubtedly dealt with an exclusive and affluent clientele. It had not been the right time for Paul to evangelize Asia (v. 6), but God brought a woman who lived there to him in Macedonia. Her name, "Lydia," may have had some connection with the fact that her hometown stood in an area that was formerly part of the old "kingdom of Lydia." Some scholars have even surmised that Lydia was not her name but only her *place of origin*. We owe coined money to the Lydian kingdom. King Croesus first produced uniform coins there in the sixth century B.C. Wealthy King Croesus may have been the person behind the legend of King Midas, whose touch supposedly turned anything to gold.

Luke again emphasized God's initiative in opening "her heart" to the gospel (v. 14, cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), and the hearts of those in "her household" (cf. v. 33; 11:14). Her "household" included servants as well as her family (cf. 10:24, 44; 16:31; 18:8; Rom. 16:10-11; 1 Cor. 1:16). *Water* baptism is in view (v. 15). It followed her conversion immediately (cf. v. 33; 8:36; et al.).

Lydia offered her large home to Paul and his companions ("come into my house"), as their headquarters ("and stay"), while they remained in Philippi. This was a common practice in the Roman world, especially among Christians, since public housing facilities were few and unpleasant (cf. Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9).

> "Young people sometimes hear a fervent missionary from a distant field tell of the need of young men and young women for work in Africa or China or in some other country. They say, 'I must answer the call.' They arrange to leave everything here and go out to the mission field, only to find that nobody wants them. And they say, 'Isn't that queer? They were pleading that we come, and instead of

[781]McGee, 4:583.

[782]See Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs*, pp. 121-22.

> wanting us they are ready, in some instances, to kill us.' Was the missionary wrong? Did he give a false impression of conditions? Not at all! The heathen do not realize their need often until the preaching of the true God gives them a sense of their real condition, but it is that need, nevertheless, which calls for someone to help."[783]

16:16 Luke probably recorded the conversions of three very different individuals in Philippi (Lydia, the slave-girl, and the jailer), in order to illustrate the appeal and power of the gospel. The demon-possessed "slave-girl" (cf. Rhoda, 12:13), who met the missionaries on their way to the prayer meeting (v. 13), was a tool of her masters who used her to make money ("much profit") through "fortune-telling." The demon (Gr. *pneuma pythona*) within her knew of Paul, and announced through her who he was and what he was doing (cf. Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28).

> "The Python was a mythical serpent or dragon that guarded the temple and oracle of Apollo, located on the southern slope of Mount Parnassus to the north of the Gulf of Corinth. It was supposed to have lived at the foot of Mount Parnassus and to have eventually been killed by Apollo (cf. Strabo *Geography* 9.3.12). Later the word *python* came to mean a demon-possessed person through whom the Python spoke—even a ventriloquist was thought to have such a spirit living in his or her belly (cf. Plutarch *De Defectu Oraculorum* 9.414)."[784]

16:17-18 This girl's screaming recalls the behavior of the demon-possessed people whom Jesus encountered. The title "Most High God" would have had meaning for Greeks, Romans, and Jews. All of these groups had some interest in *a* (not "the") "way of salvation." The Greeks called Zeus the "Most High God."[785] However, it is probable that those who heard this girl associated the Most High God with the God of the Jews.[786] In any case, the girl's crying out would have roused the interest of Greeks as well as Jews. Paul proceeded to take advantage of this situation. She seems to have appointed herself the apostles' *herald*, announcing them wherever they went. Paul did not want her to continue doing that, however. Her presence and public relations work implied that the missionaries were allies of the demon that people knew indwelt her (cf. Mark 1:24-25). Jesus, working through Paul, cast the demon out (Mark 9:14-29; Luke 4:33-35; 6:18; 7:21; Acts 8:9-24; 13:6-12; 19:13-20). Luke did not record

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[783]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, p. 368.
[784]Longenecker, p. 462.
[785]C. Roberts, T. C. Skeat, and A. D. Nock, "The Guild of Zeus Hypsistos," *Harvard Theological Review* 29 (1936):39-88.
[786]Levinskaya, pp. 98-100.

whether this girl became a Christian, though she probably did. His interest lay in what happened as a result of this incident.

> "Possibly one reason why our Blessed Lord Himself forbade the demoniacs to make Him known, was, that His holy cause would be polluted by resting on such evidence."[787]

Verse 18 raises a question about Paul's motivation in exorcising this demon. The text says that he became "greatly annoyed" after the girl had accompanied the missionaries "for many days." Why did he not cast the demon out immediately if he felt compassion for the girl? We can only conclude that God did not lead him to cast the demon out sooner, because He used this witness to bring people to Himself. Undoubtedly Paul felt compassion for her, since there is plenty of evidence elsewhere that Paul was a compassionate person. It was evidently the continued irritation that this girl created in Paul that God finally used to lead Paul to cast the demon out of her.

16:19-21 Clearly the actions of the girl's masters against Paul and Silas, whom the people perceived as Jews, were prejudicial. They wanted to get even for causing them financial loss (cf. 19:24-27), not for preaching the gospel.

> "The slave that had lately been a lucrative possession had suddenly become valueless; but the law had no remedy for property depreciated by exorcism."[788]

Normally only wealthy people took the risk of prosecuting someone in court, since such action was very expensive.[789] This is the first formal indictment against Paul that Luke recorded in Acts. The "market place" was the *agora*.

> "Often, if not always, the greatest obstacle to the crusade of Christ is the selfishness of men."[790]

Two magistrates (praetors) governed each Roman colony.[791] Recently the Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome (18:2). Consequently anti-semitism was running high throughout the empire, and especially in Philippi, which had an unusually large military population. It was contrary to Roman law for local people to try to change the religion of Roman citizens, of which there were many in Philippi. The girl's masters assumed

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[787]Howson, p. 232.
[788]Ibid.
[789]Witherington, p. 496.
[790]Barclay, p. 135.
[791]F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 4:194-95.

that Paul and Silas were proselytizing for Judaism, since the "customs" Paul proclaimed included worship of Jesus—a Jew—rather than the emperor.

> "The accusation against Paul and Silas in 16:20-21 is one of a series. In Acts 16—19 we find four scenes that feature accusations against Christians, and these accusations are parts of similar sequences of events. The sequence contains three basic elements: (1) Christians are forcefully brought before officials or a public assembly. (2) They are accused, and this accusation is highlighted by direct quotation. (3) We are told the result of this attempt to curb the Christian mission."[792]

The Greeks divided humanity into "Greeks" and "Barbarians." But the Romans divided people into "Romans" and "Strangers." "Strangers" were those who had no link to the city of Rome, except that of subjugation.[793]

16:22 The "crowd" got behind the missionaries' accusers. The charges against them seemed so clear, that the "chief magistrates" did not even investigate them, but proceeded to have Paul and Silas "beaten with rods" and imprisoned (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23, 25). Lictors (police officers) would have done the beating (caning; cf. v. 35). Acts records only two instances in which Gentiles threatened or harmed Paul (cf. 19:23-41). In both cases, people were losing money in vested interests, and in both cases, a Roman official vindicated Paul.

16:23-24 The jailer treated his prisoners as dangerous criminals. His treatment surely reflected his own attitude more than the seriousness of their alleged crimes.

> "Jailers commonly were retired army veterans, who could be expected to follow orders and use their military skills as required."[794]

> "He was no mere turn-key, but the governor of the prison,—probably of the rank of a centurion, like Cornelius at Caesarea, of whose history there is much to remind us here."[795]

> "If Lydia came from the top end of the social scale and the slave girl from the bottom, the Roman gaoler was one of the sturdy middle class who made up the Roman civil

[792]Tannehill, 2:201-2.
[793]Howson, p. 224.
[794]Longenecker, p. 464.
[795]Rackham, p. 288.

> service; and so in these three the whole gamut of society was complete."[796]

16:25-26 We can see that Paul and Silas were full of the Spirit by the way they reacted to the pain that resulted from their beating and from being locked in stocks (cf. Ps. 42:8). The other "prisoners" undoubtedly wondered who these men were, and how they could rejoice, while even "praying and singing hymns of praise to God." Perhaps some of them became Christians and members of the Philippian church. If so, Paul's exhortations to "rejoice in the Lord always," in his epistle to the Philippians, would have reminded them of his example on this occasion. Again God miraculously freed His servants from prison (cf. 5:18-20; 12:3-11).

> "This was the first sacred concert ever held in Europe . . .
>
> "The world is watching Christians, and when they see Christians shaken by circumstances as they themselves, they conclude that after all there is very little to Christianity; but when they find Christians rising above circumstances and glorying in the Lord even in deepest trial, then even the unsaved realize the Christian has something in knowing Christ to which they are strangers."[797]

Some ancient writers wrote that earthquakes were not uncommon throughout Macedonia and Greece.[798]

16:27-28

> "In Roman law a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape was liable to the same penalty the prisoner would have suffered (*Code of Justinian* 9.4.4)."[799]

This jailer was about to commit suicide, and so avoid the shame of a public execution. He was certain his prisoners "had escaped." God had restrained the other prisoners from escaping somehow, possibly out of fear or out of respect for Paul and Silas.

> ". . . were the other prisoners as terrified as the jailer at what they believed to be the magical power of two Jewish sorcerers which could bring about an earthquake? This might account for their failure to try to escape."[800]

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[796]Barclay, p. 136.
[797]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, p. 381.
[798]Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.782-83; 15.669-78; Lucian, *Lover of Lies* 22.
[799]Longenecker, p. 464. Cf. 12:19.
[800]Neil, p. 184.

Whatever the other prisoners may have thought, Luke's emphasis was on the love and concern that Paul and Silas demonstrated for the jailer, by remaining in prison when they could have escaped, as well as preventing his suicide. It was primarily this love, I think, that won the jailer over.

16:29-30 Paul and Silas' love for him, in contrast to the hatred they had received from the magistrates, the police, and the jailer, transformed the jailer's attitude. Apparently the jailer had heard the gospel from Paul and Silas previously, or had at least heard what they were preaching (cf. v. 17), but had hardened his heart against it (v. 24). Now, because of his brush with death, he humbled himself, and asked *how* he could ("what" he "must do to") "be saved." Another, less likely possibility, is that the jailer only wanted deliverance from his physical danger.

> ". . . if these were the jailer's exact words they probably meant: 'How can I be saved from the consequences of having ill-treated two obviously powerful magicians?' Paul uses the question as an opening for his Gospel message (verse 31)."[801]

> "The earthquake has presented him with irrefutable evidence that God is at work with Paul's group. He wants to know whatever more Paul can offer. Is there a way to escape God's reaction to the injustice in which the jailer has played a role? In the face of this evidence, the jailer does not want to be found on the opposing side."[802]

16:31 In this context, "Believe" refers to trusting the sovereign God's power to deliver, which events had just pictured for the jailer.[803]

This verse raises the question of Lordship Salvation most clearly in Acts. Must a person make Jesus the "Lord (Master)" of his or her life in order to become a Christian?

Most evangelicals believe that to become a Christian, one need only trust in the Person and finished work of Jesus Christ. Thus, it is not necessary to submit to Him *completely* as one's personal Master to get saved.[804] Some, however, contend that the sinner must also yield his life *completely* to Jesus as *Master*—as well as Savior—to get saved.[805]

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[801]Ibid., p. 185. See Witherington, pp. 821-43, "Appendix 2. Salvation and Health in Christian Antiquity: The Soteriology of Luke-Acts in Its First-Century Setting."

[802]Bock, *Acts*, pp. 541-42.

[803]The NET Bible note on verse 31.

[804]E.g., Lewis S. Chafer, *Salvation*, pp. 42-53; Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*; Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*; Toussaint, "Acts," p. 400; and Constable, "The Gospel . . .".

[805]E.g., John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 95-116; K. L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (1976):49-79; John R. W. Stott, "Must Christ be Lord to be Savior? Yes," *Eternity*, September 1959, pp. 15, 17-18, 36-37; Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 273.

Those who hold the Lordship view insist on the necessity of acknowledging Jesus as Master of one's life in the same act of receiving Him as Savior. According to them, these are not two separate, sequential acts or successive steps, but one act of faith. A few expressions of the Lordship Salvation view are these:

> "The astonishing idea is current in some circles today that we can enjoy the benefits of Christ's salvation without accepting the challenge of His sovereign Lordship."[806]
>
> "In most instances the modern 'evangelist' assures his congregation that *all* any sinner has to do in order to escape Hell and make sure of Heaven is to 'receive Christ as his personal Savior.' But such teaching is utterly misleading. No one can receive Christ as His Savior while he rejects Him as Lord. Therefore, those who have not bowed to Christ's sceptre and enthroned Him in their hearts and lives, and yet imagine that they are trusting Him as Savior, are deceived."[807]
>
> "Where there is no clear knowledge, and hence no realistic recognition of the real claims that Christ makes, there can be no repentance, and therefore no salvation."[808]
>
> "When we teach (whether it is Matthew, or Romans, or any other book in the New Testament—even in comparison to the Old Testament), we teach that when a person comes to Christ, he receives Him as Savior and Lord, and that genuine salvation demands a commitment to the lordship of Christ."[809]
>
> "'Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' means 'Unless you who call yourselves Christians, who profess to be justified by faith alone and therefore confess that you have nothing whatever to contribute to your own justification—unless you nevertheless conduct yourselves in a way which is utterly superior to the conduct of the very best people, who are hoping to save themselves by their works, you will not enter God's kingdom. You are not really Christians.'"[810]

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[806]John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, p. 114.

[807]Arthur W. Pink, *Studies on Saving Faith*, pp. 12-13.

[808]J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, p. 73. Cf. pp. 71-73.

[809]John MacArthur Jr., *Justification by Faith*, p. 10. See also idem, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, and idem, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*, pp. 73-85.

[810]James M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, p. 427.

There are many excellent evangelical scholars and expositors who believe it is not necessary to fully commit one's life to Jesus, when one trusts in Him as Savior, in order to experience salvation. Some of their statements follow:

> "The importance of this question cannot be overestimated in relation to both salvation and sanctification. The message of faith only and the message of faith plus commitment of life cannot both be the gospel; therefore, one of them is false and comes under the curse of perverting the gospel or preaching another gospel (Gal. 1:6-9)."[811]
>
> "The Christian's liberty to do precisely as he chooses is as limitless and perfect as any other aspect of grace."[812]
>
> "A faithful reading of the entire Book of Acts fails to reveal a single passage where people are found to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their personal Lord in order to be saved."[813]
>
> "If discipleship is tantamount to salvation, then one must continue in the Word in order to be saved, for John 8:31 says, 'If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed.' Continuance is absolutely demanded for discipleship. If discipleship and salvation are the same, then continuance is demanded for salvation. Yet the New Testament clearly teaches that salvation is by faith and it is a gift (Eph. 2:8-9). You have eternal life at the point of faith (John 3:36). Continuance is not a requirement for salvation."[814]
>
> "It is an interpretative mistake of the first magnitude to confuse the terms of discipleship with the offer of eternal life as a free gift. 'And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely' (Rev. 22:17), is clearly an unconditional benefaction. 'If anyone comes to me and does not . . . he cannot be my disciple' clearly expresses a relationship which is fully conditional. Not to recognize this simple distinction is to invite confusion and error at the most fundamental level."[815]

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[811]Ryrie, *Balancing the . . .*, p. 170.
[812]Lewis. S. Chafer, *Grace*, p. 345.
[813]Everett F. Harrison, "Must Christ Be Lord to Be Savior? No," *Eternity*, September 1959, p. 16. Cf. also pp. 14 and 48.
[814]G. Michael Cocoris, *Lordship Salvation—Is It Biblical?* p. 16.
[815]Hodges, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 37.

> ". . . I am not a lordship salvation person. I preach the importance of dedication to Jesus Christ. I talk about the works that follow faith. But I believe eternal life is a gift and that I receive it not by anything I do, or am, or promise to become. I take the gift that God offers."[816]

When people trusted Jesus Christ in Acts, what did Luke record they believed about Him?

> "In Acts 2, 10, and 16—passages that present the most material about salvation in the Book of Acts—what one confessed was that Jesus was the Lord in that He was the divine Mediator of salvation with the total capacity and authority to forgive sins and judge men. He is the Lord over salvation because they have turned away from themselves or their own merit to the ascended Lord. He is the divine Dispenser of salvation."[817]

Other New Testament passages corroborate this testimony (2:38-39; 3:19-26; 4:12; 8:12, 35; 10:43; 13:38-39; John 20:28; Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5; James 1:1; 2:1; 1 Pet. 3:15; 2 Pet. 3:18; Jude 4, 21, 25; Rev. 19:16).[818]

Submitting to Jesus' total Lordship is the responsibility of all people, but not even all Christians do it (Rom. 6:12-14; 12:1-2). It is therefore not biblical, and it is unrealistic, to make it a condition for salvation.[819]

> "In many places in the Acts it is impossible to distinguish whether *Lord* stands for Jehovah or the Christ: see Introd. p. lxxii."[820]

The Philippian jailer now believed that Jesus had the power to protect and deliver His own. He saw Him as the One with adequate power and authority to save. Note that he had previously appealed to Paul and Silas as "Sirs" (lit. "Lords," Gr. *kyrioi*, v. 30). Now Paul clarified that there was only one "Lord" (*kyrion*) that he needed to believe in, namely: Jesus.

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[816]Charles Swindoll, "Dallas's New Dispensation," *Christianity Today*, October 25, 1993, p. 15.

[817]Bock, "Jesus as . . .," p. 151.

[818]See also William D. Lawrence, "The New Testament Doctrine of the Lordship of Christ" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968).

[819]S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "How Faith Works," *Christianity Today* 33:13 (September 22, 1989):21-25, compared the writings of Ryrie, MacArthur, and Hodges on the lordship issue. Thomas G. Lewellen, "Has Lordship Salvation Been Taught throughout Church History?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:585 (January-March 1990):54-68, concluded it has not. See MacArthur, *Faith Works*, pp. 235-58, for his interpretation of the history of gospel preaching.

[820]Rackham, p. 462, n. 1.

> "The word 'Lord' in the phrase, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,' is no different than a modern equivalent such as, 'put confidence in President Reagan.' The term 'President' is his title. It indicates his position and his ability to follow through on promises. In a similar fashion, the term 'Lord,' when applied to Jesus Christ, indicates His position as God and thus His ability to save us and grant us eternal life."[821]

Paul did not mean that the jailer's whole household would be saved simply because the jailer believed. Other members of the jailer's household believed individually, and were saved, just like he believed and was saved (cf. v. 15; 8:36). Personal salvation always depends on personal belief (John 3:16; et al.).

Note also in this verse, as in the rest of Scripture, that faith logically precedes regeneration, not the other way around.[822]

> "Paul and Silas did not say to the Philippian jailer, 'Be saved, and you will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ'! They said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved'!"[823]

16:32 Paul went on to explain the gospel more fully. The only condition for salvation was trust in Jesus Christ. As elsewhere, references to household members trusting Christ presuppose the ability to do so. Those who were old enough and capable enough to believe did so.

16:33-34 The jailer proceeded to "wash(ed)" Paul and Silas' "wounds." Then *they washed him* with the water of baptism. The jailer no longer needed to keep his prisoners under lock and key, but only to deliver them at the required time. He believed they would not try to escape, so he "brought them into his house," and treated them as beloved brothers rather than as lawbreakers.

> "One of the evidences of true repentance is a loving desire to make restitution and reparation wherever we have hurt others."[824]

> "The conversion of the jailer is not just one more of the many conversions in Acts but the conversion of a member

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[821]Cocoris, *Lordship Salvation* . . ., p. 15. Cocoris' unpublished critique of John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* entitled "John MacArthur Jr.'s System of Salvation" is very helpful.

[822]See René A. López, "Is Faith a Gift from God or a Human Exercise?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:655 (July-September 2007):259-76.

[823]Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* p. 219.

[824]Wiersbe, 1:469.

> of the oppressive system that is punishing Paul and Silas."[825]

16:35-36 The "policemen" (Roman lictors) returned to the jailer the next morning with orders to "release" Paul and Silas. Lictors carried bundles of rods tied around axes to symbolize their authority. Evidently the "chief magistrates" only intended to teach them a lesson for disturbing the peace, not incarcerate them and bring them to trial.

16:37 The Roman government guaranteed its citizens a public trial and freedom from degrading punishment such as beatings.[826] Paul was now able to use his (and Silas') citizenship to their advantage. He may have tried unsuccessfully to communicate their citizenship earlier during his arrest, or he may have waited for the right moment to do so. Apparently the magistrates did not challenge Paul's claim (cf. 22:27).

> "How would one be able to demonstrate that he or she was a Roman citizen? Though Acts does not mention it, it is possible that Paul carried a *testatio*, a certified private copy of evidence of his birth and citizenship inscribed on the waxed surface of a wooden diptych, in a stereotypical five-part form . . ."[827]

People who made a false claim to having Roman citizenship suffered death.[828] Paul's claim here, resulted not only in his own protection from mistreatment, but in the authorities looking on his fellow believers as well with favor, rather than abusing them. Paul undoubtedly demanded what he did for the progress of the gospel, not for personal glory or revenge (cf. Phil. 1:18).

16:38-39 Roman officials charged with mistreating Roman citizens faced the danger of discipline by their superiors. These magistrates meekly "appealed to" Paul and Silas not to file a complaint. They also wanted them to "leave" Philippi, since popular opinion was still hostile to them because Paul had healed the slave-girl. Furthermore the local magistrates did not want to have to protect Paul's party of foreigners from irate local residents.

16:40 Paul did not leave Philippi immediately. First, he "encouraged" the Christians. This group (that met in Lydia's house) formed the nucleus of the church in Philippi, that forever afterward was a source of joy to Paul and a source of encouragement to other believers (cf. Phil. 1:3; 4:10-16).

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[825]Tannehill, 2:204. Cf. Acts 10.

[826]A. H. M. Jones, *Studies in Roman Government and Law*, p. 54. Cicero, *Pro Rabirio* 12. Cf. Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:14:9.

[827]Witherington, p. 501.

[828]Robertson, 3:264.

Ministry in Thessalonica 17:1-9

17:1 Paul, Silas, and perhaps others, left Philippi and headed southwest on the Egnatian Road. Luke evidently stayed in Philippi, since he once again described Paul's party as "they" instead of "we" (cf. 20:5-6). Timothy may have departed with Paul, or he may have remained in Philippi.[829] We next read of him being with Paul and Silas in Berea (17:14).

Paul and Silas probably stayed overnight in "Amphipolis," which is 33 miles (a day's journey by horse) down the Egnatian Road. It stood at the mouth of the Strymon River. The next day they traveled another 27 miles, farther west-southwest, to "Apollonia." Lastly, a 35-mile day of travel farther west on the Via Egnatia took them to "Thessalonica" (modern Salonika), situated on the Thermaic Gulf of the Aegean Sea.[830] The text does not state that Paul's party stayed only overnight in Amphipolis and Apollonia, but most interpreters have inferred this from the narrative. Luke recorded more information concerning the apostles' ministry in Thessalonica, where they stayed for some time. Thessalonica was the chief city and capital of Macedonia, about 100 miles from Philippi. As such, it was a strategic center for the evangelization of its region (cf. 1 Thess. 1:7-8).

> "Thessalonica [like Tarsus and Athens] was a 'free city,' which meant that it had an elected citizens' assembly, it could mint its own coins, and it had no Roman garrison within its walls."[831]

> "The local magistrates had the power of life and death over the citizens of the place. No stationary garrison of Roman soldiers was quartered within its territory. No insignia of Roman office were displayed in its streets."[832]

17:2-3 Paul evidently "reasoned with them" in the synagogue only "three" Sabbath days (cf. 13:5, 14; 14:1), but he seems to have stayed longer in Thessalonica (cf. 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:5).[833] We know that Paul supported himself there by making tents (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-10), and that the Philippians sent two monetary gifts to him there (Phil. 4:15-16). Perhaps he ministered primarily to Jews for the first three weeks, and then turned to the Gentiles.

Luke described Paul's method of evangelizing in Thessalonica as reasoning (Gr. *dielexato*, cf. v. 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8-9; 24:25) from the Scriptures, explaining (*dianoigon*), giving evidence (proving,

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[829]Howson, p. 240.

[830]See Finegan, *Light from . . .*, pp. 351-52, for more information about Thessalonica.

[831]Wiersbe, 1:470.

[832]Howson, p. 257.

[833]Cf. ibid., pp. 254-55.

paratithemenos), and proclaiming (*katangello*). These terms imply that Paul dealt carefully with his hearers' questions and doubts. He showed that the facts of gospel history confirmed what the Scriptures predicted. His subject was "Jesus," whom Paul believed and proclaimed was "the Christ." His Jewish hearers needed convincing that their "Scriptures" taught that Messiah would "suffer" death "and rise" from the grave (cf. 3:18; 13:30, 34; Luke 24:13-27; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Paul used the Old Testament to prove that Jesus was the Messiah (Christ).

> "Interpretation of the Scriptures plays a key role in Paul's message (17:2, 11)."[834]

17:4 Paul's reasoning "persuaded (*epeisthesan*) some" in the synagogue services (cf. 26:28; 28:23). His converts seem to have been mainly Gentiles (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9), many ("a large number") of whom were God-fearers, or "God-fearing Greeks" (cf. 10:4; 13:43; 16:14), but some of them were Jews. "Jason" (v. 5), Aristarchus (Col. 4:10), and Secundus (20:4) appear to have been among these new believers. The "leading women" could have belonged to the upper classes, or they may have been the wives of the city's leading men.[835] In either case, the gospel had an impact on the leadership level of society in Thessalonica.

17:5 The "Jews" treated Paul harshly here, as they had in Galatia (13:45, 50; 14:2, 19), because they were again "jealous" of the popularity and effectiveness of his message.

> "Loungers of the type employed here by the Jews to attack Paul and Silas were common in the agora or forum of Graeco-Roman cities. They invariably assembled around the rostrum where an orator was speaking, and applauded or heckled according to who paid them . . ."[836]

The AV translators described these men colorfully as "lewd fellows of the baser sort." Jason was evidently Paul's host in Thessalonica, as Lydia had been in Philippi (16:15, 40). This "Jason" may not be the same one Paul named in Romans 16:21, since that name was common among the Greeks. It is the Greek equivalent of "Joshua."

17:6-7 The Jewish antagonists charged the missionaries with revolutionary teaching, namely: that "another king, Jesus," would rule and reign (cf. 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:1-11; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; 2:14).

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[834]Tannehill, 2:206.

[835]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 277.

[836]Merrill F. Unger, "Historical Research and the Church at Thessalonica," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:473 (January-March 1962):41.

> "'Those,' they said, 'who are upsetting the civilised world have arrived here.' That is one of the greatest compliments which has ever been paid to Christianity. . . . When Christianity really goes into action it must cause a revolution both in the life of the individual and in the life of society."[837]

The Jews in Jesus' ministry made similar charges, namely, that He advocated overthrowing the emperor (Luke 23:2; John 18:33-37). These Thessalonian Jews also claimed no king but "Caesar" (cf. John 19:15). Jason was guilty of harboring the fugitives.

Several inscriptions found in Thessalonica describe the rulers of the city as *politarchs*, the very word Luke used to describe them here (cf. v. 8).[838] One of these is on the still-standing Arch of Galerius over the Egnatian Way, which commemorates Roman victories over the Persians in the late third century A.D. Before the discovery of these inscriptions, critics said Luke erred when he wrote that there were politarchs who ruled in Thessalonica. "Politarch" was a title used only in Macedonia to describe city officials.

> "Since the term was unknown elsewhere, the critics of Luke once dismissed it as a mark of ignorance. Sixteen epigraphical examples now exist in modern Salonica, and one is located in the British Museum on a stone which once formed part of an archway. It was evidently the Macedonian term. It was Luke's general practice to use the term in commmonest use in educated circles. Hence he called the officials of Philippi 'praetors', and an inscription has similarly established the fact that this was a courtesy title given to the magistrates of a Roman colony."[839]

17:8-9 The city officials could not find the missionaries (v. 6) to bring them to trial. Consequently they made Jason and his friends pay a bond ("pledge"), guaranteeing that Paul would cause no further trouble but leave town. If trouble continued, Jason would lose his money. If it did not, he would receive it back. Paul *did* leave town, and later wrote to the Thessalonians that Satan hindered his return (1 Thess. 2:18). His inability to return may have been the result of this tactic of his enemies. The Christians, however, carried on admirably, for which Paul thanked God (1 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:14-16).

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[837]Barclay, p. 139.
[838]E. D. Burton, "The Politarchs," *American Journal of Theology* 2 (1898):598-632.
[839]Blaiklock, p. 129.

Ministry in Berea 17:10-15

17:10 For the second time, Paul fled a city under cover of "night" (cf. 9:25; Matt. 10:23). He and Silas left the Via Egnatia, at Thessalonica, and took the eastern coastal road toward Athens. They headed for Berea (modern Verria), about 45 miles west-southwest of Thessalonica. Berea was a very old Mecedonian city situated on the Astraeus River. In spite of continued Jewish antagonism, Paul and Silas launched their ministry in this town, again by visiting "the synagogue."

17:11-12 The Jews in Berea did not react out of jealousy (cf. v. 5), but listened carefully to what Paul preached ("received the word"), and compared it to the teachings of their Hebrew Scriptures ("examining the Scriptures daily"). Their example of daily Bible study has inspired Christians ever since to do the same. Anyone who listens to new religious truth would do well to compare it with Scripture, as these Jews did. Many of these noble skeptics believed because Paul's teaching was consistent with the Old Testament. Here there seem to have been "many" *Jewish* converts, rather than the usual few that resulted from Paul's preaching. Many Gentiles also believed. Among them were "a number of prominent . . . women" (cf. v. 4), as well as "men." "Sopater," who later traveled with Paul, as did Aristarchus and Secundus, evidently was one of the converts (20:4).

17:13 Hearing of Paul's presence in Berea, the Thessalonian Jews followed him there. They evidently adopted the same tactics they had used in Thessalonica ("agitating and stirring up the crowds") in order to force Paul out of Berea (cf. vv. 5, 9). They had charged the missionaries with stirring up trouble (v. 6), but it was really they who were disturbing the peace.

17:14-15 The text is not clear if Paul took a ship to Athens, or traveled there by land. Perhaps his pursuers did not know either. Paul's escorts may have taken him to the sea to give the impression that they intended to put him on a ship, but then they accompanied him to Athens by land instead.[840] On the other hand, he may have traveled by sea[841] In any case he reached Athens, 195 miles south-southwest of Berea—safely—and sent instructions back with the Berean brethren who had accompanied him, that Silas and Timothy should join him soon. They apparently had stayed behind, or had been sent back, in order to confirm the new converts (18:5). They appear to have rejoined Paul in Athens since "they [had] left" Berea as he requested (cf. 1 Thess. 3:1).

> "Then Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:2). Silas, however, seems to have gone back to Macedonia (cf. 18:5)—probably to Philippi, where he

[840]Kent, p. 138.

[841]Howson, pp. 264, 265.

> received from the young congregation there a gift of money for the support of the missioners (Phil 4:15). In the meantime, Paul had moved from Athens to Corinth (18:1) and was joined there by Silas and Timothy on their return from Macedonia (18:5; 1 Thess 3:6)."[842]

Thus Luke's account of Paul's evangelizing in Macedonia concludes. From there the gospel went south to the neighboring province of Achaia.

3. The ministry in Achaia 17:16—18:17

Luke recorded this section to document the advance of the gospel and the church into the pagan darkness that enveloped the province of Achaia, southern modern Greece.

Ministry in Athens 17:16-34

This section of Luke's narrative contains three parts: the experiences of the missionaries that resulted in Paul preaching to the pagan Greeks there, the sermon itself, and the results of the sermon.

Paul's preliminary ministry in Athens 17:16-21

17:16 "Athens" stood five miles inland from its port of Piraeus, which was on the Saronic Gulf of the Aegean Sea. The city had reached its prime 500 years before Paul visited it, in the time of Pericles (461-429 B.C.). During that era, the events of the Book of Nehemiah transpired (ca. 445-420 B.C.), and the post-exilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) ministered. However, Athens was still the cultural and intellectual center of the Greek world.[843] Paul observed many of the temples and statues that still stand there today. Today these objects are of interest mainly for their artistic value, but in Paul's day they were idols and places of worship that the Greeks regarded as holy.

> "It was said that there were more statues of the gods in Athens than in all the rest of Greece put together, and that in Athens it was easier to meet a god than a man."[844]

Paul's Jewish upbringing and Christian convictions made all this idolatry repulsive to him—so while "observing" all the "idols," his "spirit" was "provoked within."

> "The intellectual capital of the world was producing idolatry."[845]

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[842]Longenecker, p. 471.
[843]See Finegan, *Light from . . .*, pp. 352-58, for more information about Athens.
[844]Barclay, p. 141. Cf. Howson, p. 280.
[845]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 402.

> "The Greek religion was a mere deification of human attributes and the powers of nature. It was doubtless better than other forms of idolatry which have deified the brutes: but it had no real power to raise him to a higher position than that which he occupied by nature. It could not even keep him from falling continually to a lower degradation."[846]

17:17 Paul continued his ministry to "Jews" and "God-fearing" Greeks "in the synagogue," but also discussed the gospel with any who wanted to do so "in the market place" (Gr. *agora*; cf. Jer. 20:9). The latter were probably not God-fearing Gentiles but simply pagan Gentiles. The Agora was the center of civic life in Athens. There the philosophers gathered to discuss and debate their views. It lay to the west of the Acropolis, on which the Parthenon still stands, and Mars Hill.

17:18 Epicureans were disciples of Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) who believed that *pleasure* was the greatest good and the most worthy pursuit of man. They meant pleasure in the sense of tranquility and freedom from pain, disquieting passions, and fears, especially the fear of death. Epicurus taught that the gods took no interest in human affairs. Thus organized religion was bad, and the gods would not punish evildoers in the afterlife. They were atheists.[847] Epicurus' followers also believed that everything happened by chance, and that death was the end of one's existence. They were similar to "agnostic secularists."[848] This philosophy is still popular today. One of its fairly modern poets was A. C. Swinburne.

> "A motto, written by Diogenes, an Epicurean, in about A.D. 200, sums up this belief system: 'Nothing to fear in God; Nothing to feel in death; Good [pleasure] can be attained; Evil [pain] can be endured.'"[849]

> ". . . Epicureanism is most fairly described as the ancient representative of modern utilitarianism."[850]

"Stoics" followed the teachings of Zeno the Cypriot (340-265 B.C.). The name "Stoic" comes from "stoa," a particular portico (Gr. *stoa*) where he taught when he lived in Athens. His followers placed great importance on living in harmony with nature. They stressed individual self-sufficiency and rationalism, and they had a reputation for being quite arrogant. Stoics were pantheists, who believed that God is in everything, and everything is

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[846]Howson, p. 281.
[847]Ibid., p. 285.
[848]Bock, *Acts*, p. 561.
[849]Witherington, p. 514.
[850]Rackham, p. 304.

God. They were also fatalistic. Their teaching is also common today. A modern poet who set forth this philosophy of life, W. E. Henley, wrote, "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul," in his poem *Invictus*. Stoics were also idealists.[851]

> "Christianity is the School of Humility; Stoicism was the Education of Pride. Christianity is a discipline of life: Stoicism was nothing better than an apprenticeship for death."[852]

> "The two enemies it [the gospel] has ever had to contend with are the two ruling principles of the Epicureans and Stoics—*Pleasure* and *Pride*."[853]

The Greek word *spermologos*, translated "babbler," refers to someone who picked up the words of others as a bird picks up seeds. Paul's hearers implied that he had put together a philosophy of life simply by picking up this and that scrap of an idea from various sources. Others accused him of proclaiming new gods ("strange deities"), though his critics may have misunderstood his references to the resurrection (Gr. *anastasis*) as being references to a person, perhaps a female counterpart of Jesus. This is less likely than that they simply did not believe in resurrection.[854]

17:19-20 The exact location of the "Areopagus" (Gr., *Areios Pagos*; lit. "Court [or Council] of Ares," the Greek god of war) is difficult to determine. The Athenians used the term in two ways in Luke's day. It first of all referred to the Hill of Ares (i.e., Mars Hill), on which the Council of the Areopagus conducted its business in ancient times. Secondly it also referred to the group of about 30 citizens, known as the Council of the Areopagus, who met in the Royal Portico of the Agora.[855] The question is: Does "the Areopagus" refer to the people or the place? Luke's description is ambiguous, though I favor the people in view of the context.

The Council of the Areopagus had authority over religion, morals, and education in Athens. Its members wanted to know what Paul was advocating. Enemies of Socrates had poisoned him for teaching strange ideas in Athens, so Paul was in some danger.

17:21 Luke inserted this sentence to help his readers, who might not be familiar with Athenian culture, to understand how unusually attracted the Athenians were to "new" ideas. One Athenian wrote the following.

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[851]See David A. deSilva, "Paul and the Stoa: A Comparison," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:4 (December 1995):549-64, for a comparison of Paul's teaching and the Stoics'.
[852]Howson, p. 284.
[853]Ibid., p. 286.
[854]Bock, *Acts*, p. 562.
[855]Barclay, pp. 141-42.

> "We Athenians stay at home doing nothing, always delaying and making decrees, and asking in the market if there be anything new."[856]

They were guiltier of "seed picking" than Paul was, but their interest gave Paul an opportunity to preach the gospel.

Paul's sermon to the Athenians 17:22-31

Luke probably recorded Paul's address (vv. 22-31) as a sample of his preaching to intellectual pagans (cf. 13:16-41; 14:15-18; 20:18-35).[857] In this speech, Paul began his argument with God as everyone's Creator and brought his hearers to God as everyone's Judge.

17:22 Paul was not flattering his audience by calling them "very religious"; this was a statement of fact. The Greek words simply mean that they were firm in their reverence for their gods.

> ". . . every god in Olympus found a place in the Agora. But the religiousness of the Athenians (Acts xvii. 22) went even further. For every public place and building was likewise a sanctuary."[858]

Paul again followed his policy of adapting to the people he was seeking to evangelize, and met them where they were in their thinking (cf. 1 Cor. 9:22).

> "Paul really began with the note of conciliation, and from beginning to end there was nothing calculated to offend, or drive away the men whom he desired to gain."[859]

17:23 Paul may have meant that he was going to tell his audience more about a particular "God," whom they worshipped but did not know much about, namely: Yahweh. This interpretation assumes that there were people in Athens who were worshipping the Creator. Alternatively, Paul may have meant that he would inform them of a God whom they did not know at all, but for whom they had built an altar to honor: "The Unknown God". In either case, Paul began with the Athenians' interest in gods, and their confessed ignorance about at least one "god," and proceeded to explain what Yahweh had revealed about Himself (cf. John 4:10; 7:37-37; et al.).

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[856]Demosthenes (384-322 B.C.), quoted by Clarence E. N. Macartney, *Paul the Man*, p. 107.

[857]See Dean W. Zweck, "The Areopagus Speech of Acts 17," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 21:3 (December 1987):11-22. See also Witherington, p. 518, for a rhetorical analysis of this speech.

[858]Howson, p. 274.

[859]Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 327.

> "As we are told by a Latin writer that the ancient Romans, when alarmed by an earthquake, were accustomed to pray, not to any specified divinity, but to a god expressed in vague language, as avowedly *Unknown*: so the Athenians acknowledged their ignorance of the True Deity by the altars 'with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD,' which are mentioned by Heathen writers [i.e., Pausanias and Philostratus], as well as by the inspired historian [Luke]."[860]

> "An altar has been found at Pergamum inscribed 'to the unknown deities'. Such altars had no special deity in view. The dedication was designed to ensure that no god was overlooked to the possible harm of the city."[861]

> "His point, as in Rom. 2:14-16, is that God has revealed some knowledge of himself and his will to all men, but that this has been clarified and illuminated by his special revelation through the Scriptures and now finally in the Gospel."[862]

17:24 The true God "created (made) all things." Since He is "Lord of heaven and earth," human "temples" cannot contain Him. He is transcendent over all (cf. 7:48-50). This harmonized with the Epicureans' idea of God as above the world, but it corrected the Stoics' pantheism. Some Greek philosophers, including Euripides, agreed that temples did not really house their pagan gods, but many Greeks thought they did.[863]

17:25 The true God also sustains all of creation ("all things"); He does not need people to sustain Him. In other words, He is imminent as well as transcendent. He participates in human existence. This contradicted the Epicureans' belief that God took no interest in human affairs, as well as the Stoics' self-sufficiency.

17:26 The Greeks, and especially the Athenians, prided themselves on being racially superior to all other people. Yet Paul told them that they, like all other people, had descended from one source: Adam. This fact excludes the possibility of the essential superiority of any race. God also determines the "times" of nations—their seasons, when they rise and fall—and their "boundaries." In other words, God is sovereign over the political and military affairs of nations. The Greeks liked to think that they determined their own destiny.

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[860]Howson, p. 281.
[861]Blaiklock, p. 140.
[862]Neil, pp. 190-91. Cf. 14:15-17.
[863]Bock, *Acts*, p. 565.

17:27 God's purpose in regulating times and boundaries was that people would realize His sovereignty and "seek . . . Him" (cf. Rom. 1; John 6:44; 12:32). God, Paul said, is "not far from" human contact ("from each one of us"). This, again, harmonized with *some* Greek philosophy, but it contradicted the teachings of other philosophers.

> "It is implied in Acts xvii that the pagan world had made little progress in searching for its Creator. In Romans it is more vigorously stated that, for all God's visible presence in His creation, the world at large had failed to find Him."[864]

17:28 Here Paul cited lines from two Greek writers who expressed ideas that were consistent with divine revelation. The Cretan poet Epimenides (ca. 600 B.C.; cf. Titus 1:12) had written: "For in thee we live and move and have our being."[865] The Cilician poet Aratus (c. 315-240 B.C.), and Cleanthes (331-233 B.C.) before him, had written: "We are also his offspring."[866] Paul's purpose in citing these quotations was to get his audience to continue to agree with him about the truth.

17:29 Paul's conclusion was that idolatry, therefore, is illogical. If God created people, then God cannot be "an image" or an idol, or comprised of "gold or silver or stone," the earthly materials from which idols are made. Paul was claiming that God's divine nature is essentially spiritual rather than material.

17:30 Before Jesus Christ came, God did not view people as being as guilty as He does *now*, now that Christ has come. People before were guilty of failing to respond to former revelation, but now they are more guilty, in view of the greater revelation that Jesus Christ brought at His incarnation (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). God "overlooked the times of ignorance" (i.e., when people had only limited revelation; cf. 3:17; 14:16; Rom. 3:25; 2 Pet. 3:9) in a relative sense only. Before the Incarnation, people died as unbelievers and were lost, but now there is more light. Consequently people's guilt is greater this side of the Incarnation. Obviously many people have not heard the gospel, and are as ignorant of the greater revelation of God that Jesus Christ brought, as were people who lived before the Incarnation. Nevertheless they live in a time when God has revealed more of Himself than previously. Therefore God demands that "all *people* everywhere should repent."

This makes it all the more important that Christians take the gospel to everyone. Greater revelation by God means greater responsibility for people, both for the unsaved and for the saved. God previously took the

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[864]Blaiklock, p. 142.

[865]From his poem *Cretica*, cited by Longenecker, p. 476.

[866]From Aratus' *Phaenomena* 5, and Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*, also cited ibid.

relative lack of understanding about Himself into consideration as He dealt with people. Now that Christ has come, He will hold people more responsible for their sins.

> "Paul appeals to the relation of Creator and creature, and to God as universal judge, in order to provide a foundation for a gospel that can address the whole of humanity. The internal impulse for this speech (internal to the implied author's perspective) comes from the need to speak of all humanity sharing an essentially similar relation to God as a basis for an inclusive gospel, a gospel commensurate with the inclusive saving purpose of God announced in Luke 2:30-32."[867]

> "The Bible requires repentance for salvation, but repentance does not mean to turn from sin, nor a change in one's conduct. Those are the fruits of repentance. Biblical repentance is a change of mind or attitude concerning either God [Acts 20:21], Christ [Acts 2:38], dead works [Heb. 6:1], or sin [Acts 8:22]. When one trusts Christ it is inconceivable that he would not automatically change his mind concerning one or more or even all of these things."[868]

17:31 The true knowledge of God leads to (encourages) repentance because it contains information about coming judgment. Paul concluded his speech by clarifying His hearers' responsibility.

> "He has presented God as the Creator in His past work. He shows God as the Redeemer in His present work. Now he shows God as the Judge in His future work."[869]

Wiersbe outlined Paul's speech as presenting the greatness of God: He is Creator (v. 24); the goodness of God: He is Provider (v. 25); the government of God: He is Ruler (vv. 26-29); and the grace of God: He is Savior (vv. 30-34).[870]

Note that Paul referred to sin (v. 29), righteousness (v. 31), and judgment (v. 31; cf. John 16:5-11; Rom. 1—3). The resurrected Jesus is God's agent of judgment (cf. 7:13; Ps. 96:13; John 5:22, 27), the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13). Paul stressed that Jesus was a man—rather than an idol or a mythological character such as the Greek gods—and that it was He whom the true God has appointed as His agent of judgment.

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[867]Tannehill, 2:211.
[868]Cocoris, *Lordship Salvation . . .*, p. 12.
[869]McGee, 4:591.
[870]Wiersbe, 1:473.

> The "proof" of Jesus' qualification to judge humanity was His resurrection. Jesus' resurrection vindicated His claims about Himself (e.g., His claim to be the Judge of all humankind, John 5:22, 25-29).

The response to Paul's preaching 17:32-34

Most Greeks rejected the possibility of physical resurrection.[871] Many of them believed that the most desirable condition lay beyond the grave where the soul would finally be free of the body (e.g., Platonists). The response of the Athenians to Paul's preaching was typical: some mocked, others procrastinated, and a few believed. Among the believers were "Dionysius," a member of the Council of the Areopagus that had examined Paul, and "Damaris," a woman about whom we know nothing more. Paul later wrote that the household of "Stephanas" was the firstfruits of Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15), so he and his household may have been other converts that Luke did not mention here. Or perhaps Stephanas lived in Corinth but he and his household became Christians through Paul's early ministry in Achaia.

Some Bible students have interpreted Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 1:18—2:5 as evidence that the apostle believed he had taken the wrong approach in Athens.[872] In that passage, Paul repudiated worldly wisdom. He wrote that he determined to "know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified" when he preached. He also said that he had entered Corinth, his next stop after Athens, with "fear and trembling." In Athens, Paul had preached Christ, but he had spent considerable time, assuming Luke's summary of his sermon accurately reflects the whole, discussing natural revelation and philosophy. I agree with those interpreters who do not think Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians reflect belief that he had taken the wrong approach in Athens. The lack of response in Athens was due to the fact that, although the Athenians loved to discuss issues, they did not like to take action. Moreover, unsaved educated, intelligent people generally tend to be more critical and non-committal than others when they first hear the gospel. Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians seem to reflect his general commitment to elevate Jesus Christ in all aspects of his ministry including his preaching, which he also did in Athens.

The absence of any reference to a church being planted in Athens, in this passage or elsewhere in the New Testament, is hardly an adequate basis for concluding there was none. As we have seen repeatedly in Acts, Luke made no attempt to provide a comprehensive history, but selected only those facts and events he wished to emphasize. In this section (vv. 16-34), he emphasized Paul's preaching to cultured pagans. We do not know if Paul planted a church in Athens; there is no record that he did. I suspect that if he did, Luke would have mentioned it, since the spread of the gospel is such a major theme in Acts. However, there is evidence that the gospel at some point took root in Athens, if not during Paul's visit.

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[871]See N. Clayton Croy, "Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 17:18, 32)," *Novum Testamentum* 39:1 (1997):21-39, for the Epicurean and Stoic views. See also Witherington, p. 532, for the view of Apollo at the founding of the Areopagus, who also rejected the possibility of resurrection.

[872]E.g., Neil, p. 193.

> "In the next century that Church at Athens gave to the Christian church Publius, Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras, and others, bishops, and martyrs; and in the third century the church there was peaceable and pure. In the fourth century the Christian schools of Athens gave to the Christian Church Basil and Gregory."[873]

Donald Meisner argued that the structure of the record of Paul's missionary journeys in Acts 12:25—21:16 is chiastic.[874]

> Chiasm is "a stylistic literary figure which consists of a series of two or more elements (words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or longer sections) followed by a presentation of corresponding elements in reverse order."[875]

Writers used this device to highlight the central elements in the structure, and or to clarify the meaning of paired elements. The central section of the 12:25—21:16 chiasm, as Meisner saw it, is Paul's sermon in 17:16-34.

> "The chiastic structure of the missionary journeys narrative suggests that, of all the places on the itinerary, Athens is the most significant intermediate point as the gospel moves to the end of the earth. . . .
>
> "The Areopagus speech . . . is the only sermon reported by Luke which is preached to Gentiles by 'the apostle to the Gentiles' (except for the brief Lystra sermon [14:15-17]). . . . Now that Paul had preached the word in the spiritual capital of the Greek world, he turned his face toward the imperial capital of the Greco-Roman world. It is only after the Athens climax that Luke noted Paul's expression of his necessity to go to Rome, which he stated both at Ephesus (19:21), and at Jerusalem (23:11)."[876]

To the Philippian jailer, Paul preached Christ as the personal Savior of individuals. To the Jews in Thessalonica, he presented Him as the promised Messiah. To the intellectual Gentiles in Athens, he proclaimed Him as the proven Judge of all humankind—appointed by the One True God.

Ministry in Corinth 18:1-17

Silas and Timothy had evidently rejoined Paul in Athens (1 Thess. 3:1). Before leaving Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2) and Silas back to somewhere in Macedonia (18:5), perhaps Philippi (cf. Phil. 4:16). Paul arrived in Corinth without these brethren, but they joined him in Corinth later (18:5; 1 Thess. 3:6).

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[873]Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 332.
[874]Donald R. Meisner, "Chiasm and the Composition and Message of Paul's Missionary Sermons" (S.T.D. thesis, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1974), pp. 273-322; and idem, "The Missionary Journeys Narrative: Patterns and Implications," in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, pp. 199-214.
[875]Ronald E. Man, "The Value of Chiasm for New Testament Interpretation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:562 (April-June 1984):146.
[876]Meisner, "Chiasm and . . .," pp. 315-16.

Paul's arrival in Corinth 18:1-4

18:1 "Corinth," the largest city in Greece at this time, was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia and a Roman colony. The Romans razed Corinth in 146 B.C., but it was rebuilt a century later in 46 B.C. Its site lay about 50 miles southwest of Athens at a very strategic location. Land traffic from northern Achaia to its southern peninsula, the Peloponnesus, crossed a land bridge very near Corinth. Stevedores hauled smaller ships traveling from one of Corinth's port towns, Lechaeum on the west or Cenchrea on the east, to the other, overland on wooden rollers. They handled the cargoes of larger ships the same way. The distance between the ports was three and a half miles. Sea captains preferred this inconvenience because they did not want to sail 200 miles around dangerous Cape Malea at the southern tip of the Peloponnesus. Consequently Corinth constantly buzzed with commercial activity, and it possessed all the vices that have typically haunted cosmopolitan ports.[877]

> "The city was in many regards the best place possible in Greece for making contacts with all sorts of people and for founding a new religious group."[878]

Corinth was about 20 times as large as Athens at this time, with a population of over 200,000 inhabitants.[879] The city was infamous for its immorality, that issued from two sources: its numerous transients and its temple to Aphrodite. Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of love, and here devotees promoted immorality in the name of religion.[880] Her temple, which boasted 1,000 religious prostitutes, stood on the Acrocorinth, a 1,857-foot flat-topped mountain just outside the city. It is easy to understand why sexual problems plagued the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5; et al.).

> "Beginning with the fifth century B.C., the verb 'to Corinthianize' (*korinthiazesthai*) meant to be sexually immoral, a reputation that continued to be well-deserved in Paul's day."[881]

> "The reputation of Corinth is illustrated by the fact that the verb 'to act like a Corinthian' was used of practicing fornication, and the phrase 'Corinthian girls' designated harlots."[882]

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[877]See Finegan, *Light from . . .*, pp. 358-63, for more information about Corinth.
[878]Witherington, p. 538.
[879]Longenecker, p. 480.
[880]See Dan P. Cole, "Corinth & Ephesus," *Bible Review* 4:6 (December 1988):20-25.
[881]Longenecker, p. 480.
[882]Ladd, "The Acts . . .," p. 1158.

Archaeologists have also discovered the remains of temples dedicated to: Melkart, the god of sailors; to Apollo, the god of music and poetry; and to Asclepius, the god of healing; and there were others.

When Paul entered Corinth he was fearful (1 Cor. 2:1-5), probably because of the wicked reputation of this city and perhaps because his fellow workers were not with him.

> "To move from Athens to Corinth was to exchange the atmosphere of a provincial university city for that of a thriving commercial metropolis . . ."[883]

It was as though Paul had left Boston and had landed in Las Vegas.

18:2-3 "Pontus" was the Roman province in Asia Minor that lay east of Bithynia on the Black Sea coast (in modern northern Turkey).

"Priscilla" had another name, Prisca (Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19), the latter being more formal. Luke normally used the colloquial, diminutive form of names (e.g., Silas, Sopatros, Priscilla, Apollos), but Paul preferred their formal names in his writings (e.g., Silvanus, Sosipatros, Prisca, Epaphroditus). Nevertheless he sometimes used the more popular form of a name (e.g., Apollos, Epaphras). Priscilla's name frequently appears before her husband's—"Aquila"—in the New Testament (e.g., 18:18-19, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19). This may indicate that she came from a higher social class than Aquila, or that others regarded her as superior to him in some respect. Here, however, Luke mentioned Aquila first.

The Roman writer Suetonius referred to an edict by Emperor "Claudius" ordering non-Roman citizen "Jews to leave Rome," and he dated this expulsion at A.D. 49-50.[884] There were other expulsions of Jews from Rome in 139 B.C. and 19 A.D.[885]

> "Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Crestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from the city."[886]

> "It was commonly supposed that Suetonius was referring to riots in the Jewish community over the preaching of Christ, but that he has misspelled the name and has perhaps

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[883]Neil, p. 194.

[884]F. F. Bruce, "Chronological Questions . . .," pp. 280-82. See Blaiklock, pp. 149-50, for an interesting description of Claudius.

[885]Levinskaya, pp. 28-29.

[886]Suetonius, "Claudius," XXV, *Twelve Caesars*, cited by Kent, p. 141.

> erroneously thought that Christ was actually a rebel leader in Rome (Suetonius was born in A.D. 69, and wrote considerably after the event)."[887]

Often tradespeople set up shop on the ground floor of a building and lived on the floor above. We do not know if Aquila and Priscilla were Christians when Paul first met them, but it seems likely that they were, since Luke did not mention their conversion.

Paul evidently had a financial need, so he went to work practicing his trade of tentmaking (cf. 20:34; 1 Cor. 4:12; 9:1-18; 2 Cor. 11:9; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-10).

> "Apart from occasional gifts (Phil. 4:15ff), Paul's practice was to be self-supporting by working at his trade and not to be dependent on the charity of church members . . ."[888]

"Tent-makers" made and repaired all kinds of leather goods, not just tents.[889] It would be more accurate to describe Paul as a "leather-worker" (Gr. *skenopoioi*) than as a "tent-maker." This was a common trade in his home province of Cilicia, which produced a fabric made from goats' skins called *cilicium*. It was common practice for Jewish rabbis to practice a trade as well as study and teach the Hebrew Scriptures.[890]

> "Paul was a Rabbi, but according to Jewish practice, every Rabbi must have a trade. He must take no money for preaching and teaching and must make his living by his own work and his own efforts. The Jew glorified work. 'Love work,' they said. 'He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him robbery.' 'Excellent,' they said, 'is the study of the law along with a worldly trade; for the practice of them both makes a man forget iniquity; but all law without work must in the end fail and causes iniquity.' So we find Rabbis following every respectable trade."[891]

18:4 Paul continued his usual evangelistic strategy in Corinth. He reasoned ("was reasoning") with (Gr. *dielegeto*, 17:2, 17; 18:19; 19:8-9; 20:7, 9; 24:12, 25) and tried "to persuade" (*epeithen*, 13:43; 19:8, 26; 21:14; 26:28; 28:23) both "Jews and Gentiles (Greeks)" in the local synagogue.

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[887]Ibid., pp. 141-42.
[888]Neil, p. 195.
[889]Murphy-O'Connor, p. 41.
[890]Neil, p. 195.
[891]Barclay, p. 147. See also Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., ch. xi: "Trades, Tradesmen, and Trades' Guilds"; and R. F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry*, p. 67.

Paul's year and a half ministry in Corinth 18:5-11

18:5 Maybe Paul was able to stop practicing his trade, and give full time to teaching and evangelizing, if Silas returned from Philippi with a monetary gift, as seems likely (cf. Phil. 4:14-16; 2 Cor. 11:9). Timothy had returned from Thessalonica with encouraging news about the Christians' progress there (cf. 1 Thess. 3:6-10), but they were also having problems (1 Thess. 2:3-6; 4:13—5:11).[892] Paul evidently wrote 1 Thessalonians soon after Timothy's return, and 2 Thessalonians shortly thereafter—both from Corinth, probably in the early A.D. 50s (cf. v. 11).

18:6 Paul's hearers "blasphemed" when they spoke things about Jesus Christ that were not true (cf. 13:45; 26:11; Matt. 12:24-31). Shaking out one's "garments," so that no dust from the place remained on them, symbolized the same thing as shaking the dust from one's sandals (13:51), namely: rejection. Paul felt he had fulfilled his responsibility to deliver the gospel to these Jews (cf. Ezek. 33:1-9). Consequently he turned his attention to evangelizing the Gentiles, as he had done before (13:7-11, 46; 14:2-6; 17:5; cf. 19:8-9; 28:23-28).

18:7 "Titius Justus"—the name is Roman—may have been a God-fearer whom Paul met in the synagogue. He may be the person Paul called "Gaius" elsewhere (cf. Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14), since Gaius is a first name, and "Titius" and "Justus" are given and family names, respectively.[893]

18:8 "Crispus" was another one of the few believers in Corinth that Paul "baptized" personally (1 Cor. 1:14). Yet "many of the Corinthians . . . believed" the gospel "when they heard" it from Paul.

18:9-10 Another "vision" now quieted Paul's fears (cf. 23:11; 27:23-24). His ministry in Corinth was getting off to a rough start, as many ministries do, but it would succeed. He needed encouragement to be courageous, and to "keep (go on) speaking," rather than fall "silent." The Lord could see His elect in Corinth even before their conversions ("I have many people in this city"), though Paul could not.

> "Please note that divine sovereignty in election is not a deterrent to human responsibility in evangelism. Quite the opposite is true! Divine election is one of the greatest encouragements to the preaching of the Gospel. Because Paul knew that God already had people set apart for salvation, he stayed where he was and preached the Gospel

[892]See Howson, pp. 302-3, n. 1, for discussion of Silas and Timothy's unclear movements between the time Paul left them in Macedonia and their rejoining him in Achaia.

[893]William M. Ramsay, *Pictures of the Apostolic Church*, p. 205, footnote 2; Edgar J. Goodspeed, "Gaius Titius Justus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69:4 (December 1950):382-83.

> with faith and courage. Paul's responsibility was to obey the commission; God's responsibility was to save sinners."[894]

18:11 Paul's "year and six months" stay in Corinth probably dates from the fall of 50 to the spring of A.D. 52. This was evidently the entire time Paul remained in Corinth. The church Paul planted in Corinth consisted of a rich mixture of people, some of whom were greatly gifted, but most of whom came from the lower elements of society (cf. Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:4-8, 26-29; 7:18; 12:13).

Paul's appearance before Gallio 18:12-17

18:12 An inscription found at Delphi, in central Greece, has enabled us to date the beginning of Gallio's term, as "proconsul," to July 1, 51.[895] Gallio was a remarkable Roman citizen from Spain. His brother, the Stoic philosopher Seneca, who was Nero's tutor, referred to him as having an unusually pleasant disposition.

> "No mortal is so pleasant to any person as Gallio is to everyone."[896]

> "Even those who love my brother Gallio to the utmost of their power do not love him enough."[897]

Another Greek writer referred to his wit.[898] A "proconsul" was the governor of a Roman province, and his legal decisions set precedent for the other proconsuls throughout the empire. Consequently Gallio's decision in Paul's case affected the treatment that Christians would receive throughout the Roman world. This was the first time that Paul (or any other apostle, as far as we know) stood trial before a Roman provincial governor.

The "judgment-seat" (Gr. *bema*, v. 12) was the place where Gallio made his official decisions.

> It was ". . . a large, raised platform that stood in the agora (marketplace) in front of the residence of the proconsul and served as a forum where he tried cases."[899]

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[894]Wiersbe, 1:477.
[895]See F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 374; and idem, "Chronological Questions . . .," pp. 282-83.
[896]Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones* 4a, Preface 11, cited by Longenecker, p. 485.
[897]Cited by Barclay, p. 148.
[898]Dio Cassius, *History of Rome* 61.35, cited by Longenecker, p. 485. See also Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 297.
[899]Longenecker, p. 486.

Paul used the same Greek word to describe the judgment seat of Christ when he wrote to the Corinthians later (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. Matt. 27:19).

18:13 The Corinthian Jews' charge against Paul was the same as the one the Philippian Jews and the Thessalonian Jews had raised (16:21; 17:6-7, 13). They claimed he was proselytizing for a new religion ("to worship God contrary to the law"). The Romans permitted the *Jews* to do this, except they could not proselytize among Roman citizens.

18:14-16 To Gallio, the accusations of these Jews seemed to involve matters of religious controversy that entailed no violation of Roman law. He was responsible to judge criminal cases, not theological disputations. Consequently he refused to hear the case, and ordered the Jews to settle it themselves. The AV translation, "Gallio cared for none of these things," is misleading. It implies that Gallio had no interest in spiritual matters. That may have been true, but it is not what the text means. In point of fact he was absolutely impartial, and refused to involve himself in a dispute over which he had no jurisdiction. He refused to mix church and state matters.[900]

Gallio's verdict effectively made Christianity legitimate in the Roman Empire. However, it is going too far to say that Gallio's decision made Christianity an officially recognized religion in the Roman Empire.[901] Officially hereafter, for many years, the Romans regarded Christianity as a sect within Judaism, even though the Jews were coming to see that it was a separate faith. Being a proconsul, Gallio's decision in Paul's case was much more impacting than the judgments that the local magistrates in Philippi and elsewhere had rendered.

18:17 "They all" evidently refers to the Gentile audience at this trial. Encouraged by Gallio's impatience with the Jews, they vented their own anti-Semitic feelings. They beat up "Sosthenes," who had either succeeded Crispus as leader of the synagogue (v. 8), or served together with him in this capacity (cf. 13:15). This "Sosthenes" may have become a Christian later, and served as Paul's amanuensis when the apostle wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1), or he may have been a different Sosthenes. Gallio did not interfere, probably concluding that this demonstration might discourage the Jews from bothering him with their religious differences in the future.

Gallio's decision resulted in the official toleration of Christianity, that continued in the empire until A.D. 64, when Nero blamed the Christians for burning Rome. It may also have encouraged Paul to appeal to Caesar, about seven years later, when he felt that the Jews in Palestine were influencing the Palestinian Roman officials against him too much (25:11).

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[900]See McGee, 4:594.

[901]Witherington, p. 555.

4. The beginning of ministry in Asia 18:18-22

Paul had attempted to reach the province of Asia earlier (16:6). Now the Lord permitted him to go there, but from the west rather than from the east. Luke recorded Paul's initial contact with Ephesus, in this section, which set the scene for his ministry there when he later returned from Syrian Antioch (ch. 19).

18:18 Paul stayed in Corinth, and ministered quite a while ("many days longer") after Gallio's decision. Eventually he decided to return to Jerusalem for a brief visit. He departed by ship ("put out to sea") from the Corinthian port town of "Cenchrea," seven miles southeast of Corinth, "for Syria." "Priscilla and Aquila" accompanied him as far as "Ephesus," where they remained (v. 19). Luke did not record what Silas and Timothy did.

> ". . . Paul set sail for Caesarea, giving as his reason for haste, according to the Western text, 'I must at all costs keep the coming feast at Jerusalem'. If, as is likely, the feast was Passover, he was planning to reach Jerusalem by April, A.D. 52. This was a bad time of the year for a sea voyage, and it has been suggested that one of the three shipwrecks which Paul refers to in 2 C. 11:25 may have occurred between Ephesus and Caesarea."[902]
>
> "The Western text (W) is represented by several manuscripts . . . which are written in both Greek and Latin, by the Old Latin versions, and by quotations in Latin church writers such as Cyprian."[903]

This questionable textual reading may explain part of Paul's reason for going to Jerusalem, but Luke definitely recorded that Paul had taken "a vow." This vow, which was optional for Jews, involved, among other things, leaving one's hair uncut. Jews took vows either to get something from God or because God had done something for them (cf. Lev. 27). They were, therefore, expressions of dedication or thanksgiving. Perhaps Paul took this vow out of gratitude to God for the safety He had granted him in Corinth. The Jews often made vows if they had been afflicted with distemper or some other distress.[904] At the end of the vow, the person who made it would cut his hair and offer it as a burnt offering, along with a sacrifice, on the altar in Jerusalem (cf. Num. 6:1-21).[905] Paul, according to one view, "had his hair cut" in Cenchrea, and took it with him to Jerusalem, where he ceremonially burned it in the fire in the Court of the Women.[906]

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[902]Neil, p. 199.
[903]Finegan, *Light from* . . ., p. 441.
[904]Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:15:1.
[905]See Mishnah *Nazir* 1:1—9:5; and Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:15:1
[906]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 374.

> "There are a great many folk who find fault with Paul because he made a vow. They say that this is the man who preached that we are not under Law but we are under grace, and so he should not have made a vow. Anyone who says this about Paul is actually making a little law for Paul. Such folk are saying that Paul is to do things their way. Under grace, friend, if you want to make a vow, you can make it. And if you do not want to make a vow, you don't have to. Paul didn't force anyone else to make a vow. In fact, he said emphatically that no one has to do that. But if Paul wants to make a vow, that is his business. That is the marvelous freedom that we have in the grace of God today."[907]

Even under the Old Covenant, vows were optional. Evidently Paul "had his hair cut," *just before* he made his vow, when he was leaving Cenchrea for Syria. He would have cut it again when he arrived in Jerusalem. It seems less likely that he would have cut his hair at the end of his vow in Cenchrea, and then carried it all the way to Jerusalem. Ironside believed Paul took this vow before his conversion. [908] This seems unlikely. This explanation may be an attempt to separate Paul as a Christian from Jewish customs, but Paul clearly practiced other Jewish customs after he became a Christian (cf. 21:17-36). This was probably a private vow rather than a Nazirite vow.[909]

Cenchrea was the eastern seaport of Corinth on the Aegean Sea. There was a church there later, or perhaps it was already in existence at this time (Rom. 16:1).

18:19-21 Ephesus was the capital and chief commercial center of the province of Asia.[910] At this time it boasted a population of between 200,000 and 250,000, and was the largest city of Asia Minor.[911] It stood near the coast of the Aegean Sea.

> "No voyage across the Aegean was more frequently made than that between Corinth and Ephesus. They were the capitals of the two flourishing and peaceful provinces of Achaia and Asia, and the two great mercantile towns on opposite sides of the sea."[912]

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[907]McGee, 4:594. Cf. Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 300.
[908]Ironside, *Lectures on* . . ., p. 421.
[909]Bock, *Acts*, p. 586.
[910]See Cole, pp. 25-30.
[911]Witherington, p. 563.
[912]Howson, p. 331.

> Priscilla and Aquila remained in Ephesus, but Paul moved on to Syria after he had done some evangelism in the synagogue. The openness of the Jews there to Paul's preaching encouraged him to "tell them: 'I will return.'" Paul's reference to God's will (v. 21) reminds us again that he subordinated his plans to the Lord's leading in his life. The phrase translated "if God wills" was well known among Jews and Gentiles in Paul's day. Both groups used it but with different gods in view.[913]

18:22 Paul's ship "landed at Caesarea," the chief port of Jerusalem (cf. 10:1). He went from there "up" to Jerusalem and greeted the church. To "go up to" and "go down from" are almost technical terms for going to and from Jerusalem in Acts.[914] Likewise "the church," without a modifier, is clearly a reference here to the mother church in Jerusalem.[915] When Paul had finished his business in Jerusalem, he returned ("went down") to Syrian Antioch, and so completed his second missionary journey (15:40—18:22). Paul traveled about 2,800 miles on this trip, compared to about 1,400 on his first journey.[916]

Luke highlighted one major speech in each of Paul's three missionary journeys. During the first journey, Paul preached to Jews in Pisidian Antioch; during the second journey, he preached to Gentiles in Athens; and during the third journey, he preached to Christians at Miletus.[917]

5. The results of ministry in Asia 18:23—19:20

Luke gave considerable information, regarding Paul's significant ministry in Asia Minor, to record the advance of the gospel and the church on the eastern Aegean shores.

The beginning of Paul's third missionary journey 18:23

Luke this time did not record Paul's activities in Antioch, but we may safely assume that he gave another report to the church—as he had done when he returned from his first journey (14:27-28). Paul probably remained in Antioch from the spring or summer of 52 through the spring of A.D. 53.[918] Upon leaving Antioch, now on his third journey, Paul seems to have followed the same route, through the province of Galatia and the district of Phrygia, that he had taken when he began his second journey (15:41—16:6). He stopped to minister to the churches of those areas again, too.

> "The third journey is a journey of new mission only in a limited sense. In the first two journeys the emphasis was on the founding of new churches. In 18:23 Paul begins a journey to strengthen established churches."[919]

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[913]Witherington, p. 558.
[914]Longenecker, p. 489; Neil, p. 199.
[915]F. F. Bruce, "The Church . . .," p. 641.
[916]Beitzel, p. 177.
[917]Witherington, p. 560.
[918]Longenecker, p. 489.
[919]Tannehill, 2:231. Cf. Kent, p. 147. See the map of Paul's third missionary journey in Longenecker, p. 250; Toussaint, "Acts," p. 406; or *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1859.

The ministry of Apollos 18:24-28

The purpose of this pericope seems, primarily, to be: to bring us up to date on what had transpired in Ephesus since Paul left that city.[920] Luke also introduced his readers to another important servant of the Lord to whom Paul referred elsewhere (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6; 16:12; Titus 3:13).

18:24-26a "Apollos," whose formal name would have been Apollonius, may have arrived in Ephesus after Paul had departed for Jerusalem on his previous journey. That is the impression Luke gave. In any case, he was from Alexandria, the capital of Egypt. Furthermore, he was a Christian Hellenistic Jew, "an eloquent man," who had a thorough understanding of the Old Testament, a gift for communicating and defending the faith, and enthusiasm (cf. Rom. 12:11). "The way of the Lord" is another description of the Christian faith (i.e., the gospel; cf. 9:2; 16:17; 18:26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Apollos was proclaiming what he knew of ("speaking and teaching accurately") the gospel ("the things concerning Jesus") in the Ephesian synagogue, but he did not know about Christian baptism. He only knew about "John the Baptist's . . . baptism," that expressed repentance for sins (cf. 19:3).

18:26b Luke named Priscilla here before her husband. He did not explain the reason for this unusual order in the text.[921] This couple wisely "took" Apollos "aside," and privately instructed him ("more accurately") in subsequent revelations about "the way of God" (i.e., the gospel) that he did not know.

> "Before the encounter with Aquila and Priscilla, it is best to regard Apollos in the same class as OT saints. They too hoped for salvation in Messiah and had not rejected him. The entire Book of Acts depicts the transition from Judaism to Christianity. It is not surprising, therefore, to find imperfect forms of faith during those epochal days."[922]

Another possibility is that Apollos was a New Testament Christian who had not yet learned as much as Priscilla and Aquila had about their faith.

Priscilla and Aquila were an outstanding couple who give evidence of having a strong marriage. They always appear together on the pages of Scripture. They were selfless and brave, and even risked their own lives for Paul (Rom. 16:4). They were hospitable and hosted a church in their home (1 Cor. 16:19), and they were flexible, as seen in their moving twice (vv. 2, 18). They worked together as leather-workers (v. 3). They were

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[920]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 302.

[921]See my comment on verse 2 above.

[922]Kent, p. 149.

committed to Christ and to teaching others about Him, which their instruction of Apollos illustrates.

> "It is a needed and delicate task, this thing of teaching gifted young ministers. They do not learn it all in schools. More of it comes from contact with men and women rich in grace and in the knowledge of God's ways."[923]

18:27-28 Armed with his new understanding, Apollos proceeded west, where he ministered at Corinth and "Achaia" by watering the gospel seed that Paul had planted (1 Cor. 3:6). The Christians in Ephesus encouraged him by providing letters of commendation that introduced him ("wrote to the disciples to welcome him") to the Corinthian church (cf. 2 Cor. 3:1). This is the first mention of a church in Ephesus. Perhaps Paul planted it (vv. 19-21), but someone else may have done so, since Paul appears to have been there only briefly—on his second journey—on his way back to Jerusalem. Maybe Priscilla and Aquila planted it.

Apollos was so effective at instructing the Corinthian believers, and refuting Jewish objectors, that he developed a strong personal following in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4). He does not seem to have been responsible for encouraging the party spirit that his presence there generated (1 Cor. 4:6; 16:12). He proved from the Old Testament ("demonstrated from the Scriptures") that "Jesus was the Messiah (Christ)" (cf. 8:35; 18:5; 1 John 5:9).

The word order in the Greek text favors the view that "through grace" modifies "believed" rather than "helped." The Corinthian Christians had believed the gospel through the grace of God (v. 27; cf. Eph. 2:8-9).

Paul's ministry in Ephesus 19:1-20

Luke's account of Paul's third missionary journey is essentially a record of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, the city he probably tried to reach at the beginning of his second journey (cf. 16:6).[924]

The disciples of John the Baptist 19:1-7

This is the first of two incidents taken from Paul's ministry in Ephesus that bracket Luke's description of his general ministry there. The second is Paul's encounter with the seven sons of Sceva (19:13-20).

19:1-2 Two roads led into Ephesus from the east, and Paul traveled the northern, more direct route (cf. 18:23).[925] Ephesus, like Athens, had reached its heyday by this time, and was in decline when Paul visited it.

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[923]Robertson, 3:308.

[924]See Finegan, *Light from . . .*, pp. 345-50, for more information about Ephesus.

[925]Cf. Ramsay, *St. Paul . . .*, p. 265.

> ". . . in the time of St. Paul it was the greatest city of Asia Minor, as well as the metropolis of the *province* of Asia."[926]

Its claim to fame was twofold. Its location on the west coast of Asia Minor near the mouth of the Cayster River made it an important commercial center. As commerce declined, due to the silt buildup in the port at Ephesus, its religious influence continued to draw worshippers to the Temple of Artemis (Greek) or Diana (Roman). This magnificent temple was four times the size of the Parthenon at Athens, and was renowned as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Alexander the Great had contributed much money for its construction in the fourth century B.C., and it lasted until A.D. 263 when the Goths destroyed it.

> "It was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide by 60 feet high. There were 127 pillars, each of them the gift of a king. They were all of glittering Parian marble and 36 of them were marvelously gilt and inlaid. The great altar had been carved by Praxiteles, the greatest of all Greek sculptors. The image of Artemis was not beautiful. It was a black, squat, many-breasted figure, to signify fertility; it was so old that no one knew where it had come from or even of what material it was made. The story was that it had fallen from heaven. The greatest glory of Ephesus was that she was the guardian of the most famous pagan temple in the world."[927]

Emperor Justinian of Byzantium later used some of the pilars for the construction of the Hagia Sophia, where they still stand, in modern Istanbul. Ephesus was a hotbed of religious superstition and occult practices.

> "Ephesus, for all her past splendour, was a dying city, pre-occupied with parasite pursuits, living, like Athens, on a reputation, and a curious meeting-place of old and new religions, of superstition and philosophy, of East and West."[928]

It is difficult to determine whether the "disciples" whom Paul found in Ephesus were Christians or not. They seem quite similar to Apollos (18:25-26), and some students of Acts believe they were either Old Testament saints or untaught Christians.[929] Another possibility is that they were not believers at all but only seekers after the truth.[930] The second alternative seems more probable to me. Elsewhere Luke used the word

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[926]Howson, p. 369.

[927]Barclay, p. 153.

[928]Blaiklock, pp. 154-55.

[929]E.g., Kent, p. 150; Bock, *Acts*, p. 599.

[930]E.g., Longenecker, pp. 492-93; McGee, 4:597; and Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 346.

"disciple" to describe John's followers (Luke 5:33; 7:18-19). Clearly these men were disciples of John the Baptist, not Jesus. This is the fifth reference in Acts to John the Baptist's role as precursor of Jesus (cf. 1:5; 11:16; 13:25; 18:25). Clearly John's influence had been far reaching.

Paul asked these men if they had received the Holy Spirit, probably because he saw some incongruity in their claim to be admirers of John and their evident lack of the Spirit. The correct translation is "when you believed" rather than "since you believed" (AV, cf. 1:8). The Greek text implies no second work of grace.[931] Paul's question assumed two things: they were genuine Christians, since they professed to believe John the Baptist, and everyone who believes in Jesus possesses the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13).

John had predicted the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; cf. John 1:32-33). Their response to Paul's question probably indicates that they did not know that the Lord had given the Holy Spirit as John had predicted. This enabled Paul to see that his first assumption about these disciples was incorrect; they were probably not Christians.

19:3 This discovery led Paul to raise another question to clarify his second assumption: "What" (which) baptism had they experienced, or with whom did they identify in baptism? They replied that they had undergone "John's" water "baptism." This response told Paul that they had not experienced Spirit baptism, and therefore were evidently unsaved. Another view is that they were saved, but they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. I favor the former view, because I believe that by this time in church history, everyone who believed in Jesus received the Spirit at the moment of his or her conversion (cf. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13).

> "Like Apollos (18:25), they had been baptized as a symbol of repentance only."[932]

Apollos seems to have become a Christian by the time he met Priscilla and Aquila, whereas these men, I think, had not yet become believers in Jesus.

19:4 Paul explained to these disciples, as Priscilla and Aquila had undoubtedly explained to Apollos, that John's baptism was good but insufficient. John, similarly, had instructed his disciples "to believe in . . . Jesus," who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit normally accompanied faith in Jesus.

19:5 When these disciples of John "heard" that the Messiah had come, they believed in Jesus and submitted to water baptism in His name ("were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus"). This is the only explicit reference to re-baptism in the New Testament.

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[931]See *The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1192.

[932]Neil, p. 203.

19:6 As with the new converts in Samaria, these Ephesian disciples received "the Holy Spirit" when an apostle, this time Paul, "laid his hands upon them" (cf. 8:17). They did not receive the Spirit by water baptism. In Samaria, this identification of the coming of the Spirit with Peter and John first authenticated God's giving of the Spirit in a non-Jewish context. Here, similarly, the identification of the coming of the Spirit with Paul authenticated God's giving of the Spirit in a town in which demonic religious activity flourished (cf. vv. 13-19). As subsequent events would show, the Jesus whom Paul preached was the more powerful deity. These former disciples of John received the Holy Spirit when Paul laid his hands on them, thus obviously connecting their endowment with Paul's message and apostolic authority. However, there was no delay in the Spirit coming on Cornelius when he believed, and Peter did not have to lay his hands on him to impart the Spirit (10:44).

There are some interesting parallels between Spirit baptism, as it took place in Ephesus in this chapter, and how it occurred in Samaria in chapter 8.

"Chapter 8	**Chapter 19**
1. Word is preached to the Samaritans (by Philip); many become disciples and are baptized (8:4-13).	1. God's Word is proclaimed to the men at Ephesus (earlier by Apollos?); some become disciples and are baptized (John's baptism, 18:24-26).
2. Peter and John come to Samaria and see that the presence of the Spirit is not evident in the disciples' lives (8:14-16).	2. Paul comes to Ephesus and notes that the presence of the Spirit is not evident in the disciples' lives (19:1-5).
3. Peter and John lay hands on the disciples; the Holy Spirit comes upon them (8:17).	3. Paul lays his hands on the disciples; the Holy Spirit comes upon them (19:6).
4. Peter and John's ministry engages the interest of the magician Simon (8:20-24).	4. Paul's ministry stimulates the interest of exorcists; the seven sons of Sceva (19:13).
5. A conflict arises between Peter and Simon. Simon is overwhelmed (8:20-24).	5. A conflict arises between the exorcists and demons. The exorcists are overwhelmed (19:14-16).
6. Peter and John preach in *many* of the Samaritan villages before returning to Jerusalem (8:25).	6. *All* those in Asia hear the Word of the Lord as a result of Paul's teaching (19:10).
7. Many miracles are performed among the Samaritans by Philip (8:6-8).	7. Paul performs special miracles by the power of God (19:11, 12)." [933]

[933]Harm, pp. 35-36.

The phenomenon of the separate conversion and Spirit baptism experiences of some Christians that Luke recorded in Acts may need further clarification. It seems that God wanted to *highlight the fulfillment* of Jesus' promise that He would send the Holy Spirit to be in and with believers (John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26). To do so, God made the coming of the Spirit *obvious* to everyone, until the church generally appreciated the fact that it normally occurred at the time of regeneration.

> "This story has often been used as the basis for doctrines about the reception of gifts of the Spirit subsequent to conversion; but it has no real connection with these. Rather Paul was dealing with an unusual situation which required special treatment. . . .
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> ". . . it is safe to say that the New Testament does not recognize the possibility of being a Christian apart from possession of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5; Acts 11:17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 3:2; 1 Thes. 1:5f.; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 6:4; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13)."[934]
>
> "It should be noted that the reception of the Holy Spirit [by Christians] in Acts does not follow any set pattern. He came into believers before baptism (Acts 10:44), at the time of or after baptism (8:12-16; 19:6), and by the laying on of apostolic hands (8:17; 19:6). Yet Paul declared (Rom. 8:9) that anyone without the Holy Spirit is not a Christian. Quite obviously the transitional Book of Acts is not to be used as a doctrinal source on how to receive the Holy Spirit . . ."[935]
>
> "Ephesus was a polyglot city of the Roman Empire. There were many languages spoken there, just as there had been in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. East and West met all along that coast. . . . These men were now able to give the good news about Christ to the entire city."[936]

This is the last reference to speaking in tongues in Acts (cf. 2:4; 10:46; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14). Is this gift still in the church today? Some charismatic Christians believe that it is. They argue mainly from experience, having heard someone, perhaps themselves, speak in what others refer to as tongues. In most cases, what they call tongues is gibberish, not known languages. This is different from what the New Testament identified as tongues, namely, known languages (cf. 1 Cor. 12; 14). In a few cases, people have apparently spoken in known languages that they have not studied, the type of tongues-speaking that the New Testament describes.

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[934]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 305. See also Wiersbe, 1:481.

[935]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 409. Cf. Harm, p. 38.

[936]McGee, 4:597.

The real issue is what the New Testament says about tongues, not what one may have experienced. It says that they would pass away or cease of themselves, as in petering out (1 Cor. 13:8, middle voice of *pauo*). When would this happen? The New Testament does not specify when, but it implies that they would peter out before prophecy would end (lit. "be terminated" [by God], passive voice of *katargeo*, 1 Cor. 13:8). I do not believe that any one verse indicates that tongues would cease or did cease in the apostolic period. However, I think it is safe to conclude that they did for two reasons. (Similarly we believe the doctrine of the Trinity, not because there is a verse that clearly teaches it, but because many verses lead us to conclude that God exists as a triune being.) First, other New Testament passages imply that they would and did cease then (Eph. 2:20; Heb. 2:3-4). Second, the early church fathers wrote that tongues petered out in the early history of the church, even though there were rare instances of the phenomenon after that.[937]

> "Concerning these [supernatural gifts], our whole information must be derived from Scripture, because they appear to have vanished with the disappearance of the Apostles themselves, and there is no authentic account of their existence in the Church in any writings of a later date than the books of the New Testament."[938]

SPEAKING IN TONGUES IN ACTS				
Reference	**Speakers**	**Audience**	**Time**	**Purpose**
2:1-4	The Twelve and possibly others	Unsaved Jews	After salvation	To validate for Jews the coming of the Spirit
10:44-47	Gentiles	Saved Jews	Same time as salvation	To validate for Jews God's acceptance of Gentiles
19:1-7	Disciples of John the Baptist	Jews and Gentiles	Same time as salvation	To validate for Jews Paul's message

[937]Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254 A.D.), "Against Celsus," 7:8 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:614; Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.), "Homily 12 on Matthew," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 10:77; idem, "Homily 14 on Romans," ibid., 11:447; idem, "Homily 29 on 1 Corinthians," ibid., 12:168; idem, "Homily 6 on 1 Corinthians," ibid., 12:31; Augustine (354-430 A.D.), "On Baptism, Against the Donatists," 3:16:21, ibid., 4:443; idem, "The Epistle of St. John," 6:10, ibid., 7:497-98; idem, "The Epistle of 1 John. Homily," 6:10, ibid., 7:497-98; idem, "The Answer to the Letters of Petition, to Donatist," 2:32:74, ibid., 4:548; and idem, "On the Gospel of St. John, Tractate," 32:7, ibid., 7:195. See also Calvin, 4:19:6, 19; McClain, p. 409; and Dillow, *Speaking in . . .*, pp. 147-64, for further information about the historical cessation of the gift of tongues.

[938]W. J. Conybeare, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 334.

How can we explain the instances of people speaking in languages that they have not studied today? It may be that God occasionally gives people this ability today, though the evidence of this happening is rare. Practically no one, including respected charismatic leaders, claims that the ability to speak in a language that one has not studied exists today as it did in New Testament times. Obviously the ability to grasp a foreign language readily as one studies it is not the New Testament gift of tongues.

God evidently gave the gift of prophesying to each of these Ephesian disciples, in order to enable them to assume leadership of the church and the church's mission. This gift involves speaking forth the Word of God and leading the worship of God.

19:7 Luke may have intended this group of "about 12" to remind the reader of another core group, the 12 apostles, though these were not on the same level of authority. The Ephesian church became the center of Christian witness in western Asia Minor and the Aegean region, as Antioch and Jerusalem had become earlier.

Paul's general approach to ministry in Ephesus 19:8-12

> "The further one proceeds in Acts 19, the clearer it becomes that Luke intends the material in this chapter and the next to depict the climax of Paul's ministry and missionary work as a free man. It is here in Ephesus that he has the longest stable period of ministry without trial or expulsion, here that he most fully carries out his commission to be a witness to all persons, both Jew and Gentile (see 22:15)."[939]

19:8 Paul followed his standard procedure of preaching to the Jews in the synagogue, at Ephesus, as long as possible. Here the Jews were more tolerant than they had been in some other towns that Paul had evangelized, and he was able to continue speaking there "for three months." As usual, Paul was "reasoning and persuading" (Gr. *dialegomenos kai peithon*) people there, meaning he reasoned persuasively. This is probably a *hendiadys*, a figure of speech in which the writer expresses a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and" rather than by using an adjective and a substantive. Paul's general subject was "the kingdom of God" (cf. 1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 20:25; 28:23, 31). This phrase is often a shorthand expression in Acts for the whole message about Jesus Christ, namely: the gospel. It is probably not a reference to the messianic kingdom exclusively, but to the universal kingdom of God, which includes the messianic kingdom and the church.

> "The argument advanced by some, that since the apostles throughout the Acts period preached 'the things concerning the kingdom of God' (19:8), therefore the Kingdom must

[939]Witherington, p. 572.

> have already been established, is not very good logic. Most of us preach and teach many things in the Christian faith which are not yet realized in experience. No sensible person would argue that because the apostles continually preached the resurrection of the dead, therefore, it must have already taken place."[940]
>
> "Three months in a synagogue without a riot was something of a record for Paul. Perhaps the cosmopolitan nature of Ephesus caused the Jews there to be more tolerant."[941]

19:9 Eventually the Jews grew unresponsive and tried to discredit Paul's preaching of "the Way" of salvation. Paul, therefore, "withdrew" from the synagogue to a neutral site. In Corinth, this had been the home of Titius Justice (18:7). In Ephesus, it proved to be a lecture hall owned and or operated by Tyrannus. "Tyrannus" (lit. "Tyrant," probably a nickname of this teacher and or landlord) made his auditorium ("school") available to Paul during the afternoons. The Western text (i.e., Codex Beza), one of the ancient copies of Acts, added that this was from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Normally this was siesta time, when people rested, before resuming work after the heat of the day had subsided.

> "The old sequence of events unfolded, monotonously true to form. It was not lack of sad experience which led Paul in chapters ix—xi of the Epistle to the Romans to speak of the national rejection of Christ by the people privileged first to hear of Him. It was an essential part of Luke's theme to underline that fact. Hence the careful record of Paul's method, his scrupulous regard for the synagogue, his programme of patient teaching and persuasion, the crystallizing of opposition, and the altogether justifiable 'turning to the Gentiles'."[942]

19:10 Evidently Paul taught in Tyrannus' public hall for "two" *more* "years." Later Paul said that he had labored in Ephesus for a total of three years (cf. 20:31). Paul evidently began his third missionary journey, and his three-year ministry in Ephesus, in A.D. 53—twenty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the day of Pentecost. As a result of this three years of work, the local Christians preached the gospel and established churches all over the province of Asia. Among these were the churches of Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis in the Lycus Valley (Col. 4:13), though evidently Paul did not personally plant them (cf. Col. 2:1;

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[940]McClain, pp. 425-26.
[941]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 410.
[942]Blaiklock, p. 156.

4:13). Perhaps the other churches in this area, that are mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 (i.e., Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia), got their start at this time too.

> "We may think of the 'hall of Tyrannus' as the centre of Paul's activity, attracting many Gentile enquirers from the province generally, who in due course became themselves, like Epaphras, faithful ministers of Christ on Paul's behalf (Col. 1:7)."[943]

> "The province was intensively evangelized, and became one of the leading centres of Christianity for centuries afterwards."[944]

Many students of Acts do not adequately appreciate the significance of Ephesus as a center for the spread of the gospel. One must carefully note the clues in Acts and the epistles, as well as later church history, to understand what took place during the years Paul lived there. God had opened a wide door of opportunity for Paul, but there were many adversaries (1 Cor. 16:8-9). Timothy, and later the Apostle John, followed Paul in ministry there. The Christians at Ephesus became the original recipients of at least three New Testament books (Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy), and possibly as many as seven (1, 2, and 3 John, and Revelation).

19:11-12 Jesus continued to work the same supernatural "miracles" through Paul, that He had demonstrated during His own earthly ministry (cf. Mark 5:27; 6:56), and that He had manifested through Peter (Acts 5:15). Luke recorded Paul doing the same types of miracles as Peter. Both healed a lame man early in their ministries (14:8; cf. 3:2). Both exorcised demons (16:18; cf. 5:16), defeated sorcerers (13:6; cf. 8:18), raised the dead (20:9; cf. 9:36), and escaped from prison (16:25; cf. 12:7). Evidently it was because of the multitudes of magicians and religious charlatans, that "worked" Ephesus, that God demonstrated His power in these supernatural ways. It was to the church in Ephesus that Paul later wrote his famous instructions about spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-20). Ephesus was a hotbed of satanic activity.

> "The atmosphere of the city was electric with sorcery and incantations, with exorcists, with all kinds of magical impostors."[945]

> ". . . the phrase 'Ephesian writings' (*Ephesia grammata*) was common in antiquity for documents containing spells

[943]Neil, p. 204.
[944]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 389.
[945]Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 350.

> and magical formulae (cf. Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 12.548; Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 5.242)."[946]

God also healed indirectly, in Ephesus, through Paul's garments. The fact that God used Paul's "handkerchiefs" (Gr. *soudarion*, or "sweat-cloths") and "aprons" (*simikinthion*, lit. "workman's aprons") is unusual, but not without precedent. God had previously healed people who touched Jesus' cloak (Luke 8:44). The fact that some modern charlatans have abused this form of healing should not lead us to conclude that God never used it.

> "Paul is not said to have recommended the use of cloths from his own body as instruments of healing, but God was pleased to honor the faith of these people by granting these miracles."[947]

> "If God never honoured any faith save that entirely free from superstition, how about Christian people who are troubled over the number 13, over the moon, the rabbit's foot? . . . God condescends to meet us in our ignorance and weakness where he can reach us."[948]

> "We are not to suppose that the Apostles were always able to work miracles at will. An influx of supernatural power was given to them, at the time, and according to the circumstances, that required it. And the character of the miracles was not always the same. They were accommodated to the peculiar forms of sin, superstition, and ignorance they were required to oppose."[949]

The seven sons of Sceva 19:13-20

The following incident throws more light on the spiritual darkness that enveloped Ephesus—as well as the power of Jesus Christ, and the gospel, to dispel it. It also presents Paul as not only a powerful speaker (vv. 8-12) but also a powerful miracle worker.

19:13 "But" introduces a contrast to the good miracles that "God was performing . . . by . . . Paul" (v. 11). As had been Peter's experience, some of Paul's observers tried to duplicate his miracles (cf. 8:18-19). They wrongly concluded that the simple vocalization of Jesus' name carried magical power. Some peoples in the ancient world feared the Jews, because they thought the "name" of God, which the Jews refused to utter, was the key to their powers, including their success in business. This was Paul's third contact with demonic powers that Luke recorded (cf. 13:6-12; 16:16-18).

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[946]Longenecker, p. 496.
[947]Kent, p. 151.
[948]Robertson, 3:316.
[949]Howson, p. 371.

> "The use of magical names in incantations to exorcise evil spirits was common in the ancient world, and it seems to have been especially prominent at Ephesus."[950]

Many years earlier, Jesus' disciple John had asked Jesus to rebuke someone who was casting out demons in His name, and Jesus refused to do so. He replied, "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you" (Luke 9:49-50; cf. Mark 9:38-40). This incident exposed an attitude of rivalry among the Twelve that existed toward other disciples of Jesus. This was not a problem of orthodoxy; that exorcist believed in Jesus. It was rather a problem of fellowship or association; he was not one of the Twelve. He appears to have been on the fringe of Jesus' followers. The Twelve wanted to exclude him, but Jesus wanted to include him. Jesus' reply was proverbial. He had stated the reverse truth earlier (Matt. 12:30). Disciples should regard people who do not oppose them as associates rather than as enemies. The exorcists whom Paul encountered in Ephesus, however, appear to have been unbelievers.

19:14-16 "Sceva" may have been a "chief priest" or the head of a priestly family (cf. 5:24), or he may have only claimed to be one.[951] Compare Simon Magus, who claimed to be someone great (cf. 8:9).

> ". . . whoever he [Sceva] was, he was not a Jewish high priest who had held office in Jerusalem, since their names are all known; nor is it likely that he even belonged to a high-priestly family. It is possible that he may have been a self-styled 'high priest' of one of the innumerable pagan cults, who found that it paid him to pass himself off as a Jew."[952]

Apparently two or more—the Greek word *auton* can mean "all" (NIV) as well as "both" (NASB) in verse 16—of Sceva's "sons" participated in the exorcism that backfired. They were fortunate to have escaped from the house with their lives (albeit "naked and wounded").

> "The name of Jesus, like an unfamiliar weapon misused, exploded in their hands; and they were taught a lesson about the danger of using the name of Jesus in their dabbling in the supernatural."[953]

19:17 News reports of this event greatly elevated the reputation ("name") of Jesus among "all" the Ephesians—both Jews and Gentiles ("Greeks").

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[950]Longenecker, p. 497. See Bruce M. Metzger, "St. Paul and the Magicians," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 38 (1944):27-30.

[951]F. F. Bruce, *The Book . . .*, p. 390.

[952]Neil, p. 205.

[953]Longenecker, p. 498.

19:18-19 Some people in ancient times believed that the power of sorcerers' rites and incantations lay in their secrecy, as noted above. Magical secrets supposedly lost their power when they were made public. The fact that the converted Ephesian magicians disclosed these "practices" shows the genuineness of their repentance. Likewise, the "burning" of "their books" symbolizes the public and irreversible repudiation of their contents. Luke did not describe the silver coin to which he referred in enough detail to determine its value, though it was probably a drachma. "Fifty thousand pieces of silver (coins)," in any case, represents much money and many converts. If these were drachmas, the value was 50,000 days worth of wages. That would amount to several million dollars worth of wages in present earning power.

> "It is all too true that too many of us hate our sins but cannot leave them. Even when we do seek to leave them there is the lingering and the backward look. There are times in life when treatment must be surgical, when only the clean and final break will suffice."[954]

19:20 As a consequence of the repentance described in the preceding verses, the church became purer as well as larger (cf. 5:1-11). Luke gave us this sixth progress report to mark the end of another section of his book. The section we have just completed (16:6—19:20) records the church's extension in the Roman provinces around the Aegean Sea.

While in Ephesus, Paul had considerable contact with the church in Corinth. He wrote that church a letter that he called his "former letter" in 1 Corinthians 5:9. Then sometime later he wrote 1 Corinthians, probably near the spring of A.D. 56. Timothy traveled from Corinth to Ephesus, then evidently went back to Corinth, and returned later to Ephesus (Acts. 18:5; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11; Acts 19:22). Following Timothy's visit to Corinth, Paul evidently made a so-called "painful visit" to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2), and then returned to Ephesus. After that he wrote another "severe letter" to Corinth from Ephesus (2 Cor. 2:3-4; 7:8-12; 12:18). These facts come to us through Paul's two epistles to the Corinthians, the first of which he wrote during the years he used Ephesus as his base of operations. He undoubtedly had other contacts with many other churches about which we know nothing. Luke's purpose was not to give us a complete record of Paul's ministry or the church's growth as a whole. It was to document the church's advance to the heart of the Roman Empire (1:8), and to show, by repetition, how Jesus Christ was building His church (Matt. 16:18).

> "Here is the climax of the account of Paul's ministry as a free man; after this it is largely troubles, travels, and trials."[955]

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[954]Barclay, p. 157.

[955]Witherington, p. 583.

D. THE EXTENSION OF THE CHURCH TO ROME 19:21—28:31

"The panel is introduced by the programmatic statement of 19:21-22 and concludes with the summary statement of 28:31. Three features immediately strike the reader in this sixth panel: (1) the disproportionate length of the panel, including one-third of the total material of Acts; (2) the prominence given the speeches of Paul in his defense; and (3) the dominance of the 'we' sections in the narrative portions (cf. 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1—28:16). It cannot be said that the length is related to the theological significance of the material presented. It seems rather to be related to the apologetic purpose of Luke, particularly in the five defenses, and to the eyewitness character of the narrative with its inevitable elaboration of details (cf. the Philippian anecdotes of 16:11-40). The events narrated here span the time from approximately 56 through 62."[956]

> "This ending of the Acts forms a striking parallel to the ending of the [third] Gospel. There the passion of the Lord with all its immediate preparation is related in great detail; so here the 'passion' of Paul is on a scale altogether disproportionate to the rest of the book. The Acts however does not end in fact with S. Paul's death, but with a condition of renewed life; similarly at the end of Part I the 'passion' of S. Peter had ended with a deliverance. Thus in each case there is a parallel to the resurrection in the Gospel."[957]

1. Ministry on the way to Jerusalem 19:21—21:16

At this point in his ministry, Paul began to focus his attention on taking the gospel to Rome. Luke recorded the events that led up to his arrival there, so as to show how Jesus Christ extended His church to the center of the Roman (Gentile) world.

Paul's plans 19:21-22

This pericope gives the reason for what follows in the remainder of Acts.

19:21 Paul evidently sensed that, having laid a firm foundation in Asia Minor and the Aegean Sea region, he needed to press on to Gentile areas yet unreached (cf. Rom. 15:23). Though he had some short-range goals, he ultimately wanted to go to Rome (Rom. 1:15; cf. Luke 4:43; 9:22, 51). In Romans 15:24, he wrote that he intended to go on from Rome to Spain, the westernmost frontier of the Roman Empire. Luke made no reference to Spain. It was evidently his purpose to end his record of the church's expansion when the gospel ultimately reached the heart of the empire, from where it then circulated everywhere.

> "Although the phrase *en to pneumati* ('in the spirit') could refer either to the human spirit or the Holy Spirit, there is reason to believe that the latter is at least included. It would

[956]Longenecker, p. 499.
[957]Rackham, p. 358.

> be strange to attribute the journey to Jerusalem to a human decision while linking the trip to Rome to divine necessity, especially when Paul says he 'must [Gr. *dei*] also' see Rome, implying some comparability between the two trips. Furthermore, in 20:22-23 Paul refers to the same decision and speaks of himself going to Jerusalem 'bound in the Spirit' and of the Holy Spirit testifying in every city of coming suffering. More than a strong human resolve is indicated."[958]

> "By the combination of *en to pneumati* and *dei*, Luke appears to be making the point in this programmatic statement that the aftermath of the Gentile mission and its extension into Rome were likewise under the Spirit's direction, just as the Gentile mission itself had been."[959]

The rest of Acts shows how Paul attained his purpose of reaching Rome—in spite of many obstacles, all of which he overcame.[960]

> "The purpose of S. Paul, which coincided with the will of God, was achieved; but, as in other cases, the means by which he was brought to Rome were far different from what he had wished or arranged. Thus we have presented to us a typical instance of divine overruling of human plans, but to the achievement of one and the same end."[961]

> ". . . in Paul's eyes Rome was designed to replace Jerusalem as the centre of the Christian mission (and to inherit his own apostolic responsibility). Luke's perspective was different from Paul's but from Luke's perspective too, as Jerusalem Christianity was henceforth unable to fulfill God's saving purpose in the world, it was for Roman Christianity to take up the task and carry it forward."[962]

Paul wanted to collect money for the poor Judean saints, from the more prosperous Christians in the Aegean region, and then deliver it to them in Jerusalem (cf. 24:17; 1 Cor. 16:1-4). He realized that returning to Jerusalem would be dangerous for him (cf. Rom. 15:30-32), but he determined to go nonetheless. Paul never let the possibility of danger to his person turn him away from doing God's will.

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[958]Tannehill, 2:239.
[959]Longenecker, p. 500.
[960]F. F. Bruce, "Paul's Apologetic . . .," p. 380.
[961]Rackham, p. 359.
[962]F. F. Bruce, "The Church . . .," p. 661.

19:22 Paul apparently sent "Timothy" (cf. 18:5; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11) and "Erastus" to minister to the Macedonian churches. They also prepared for his coming by laying the groundwork for the collection for the poor Jerusalem saints (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-9). This "Erastus" was probably not the same man Paul mentioned in Romans 16:23, though he may be the one he wrote of in 2 Timothy 4:20.

Others who ministered to Paul included Silas and Titus, though Luke did not mention them here. Silas' name appears in Acts nine times between the events recorded in 15:40 and 18:5, but Luke did not mention him again. Paul wrote that Titus was a faithful and active associate of his (cf. 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6, 13-14; 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18; Gal. 2:1, 3; 2 Tim. 4:10; Titus 1:4), but Luke did not mention him at all.

Paul evidently stayed in Ephesus several more months, and it was probably during this time that the following incident occurred.

The riot in Ephesus 19:23-41

This incident increases understanding about the effects of the gospel on Ephesian society and religion (cf. vv. 13-20).

> "Luke's purpose in presenting this vignette is clearly apologetic, in line with his argument for the *religio licita* status of Christianity (cf. Panel 5 [16:6—19:20]) and in anticipation of the themes stressed in Paul's speeches of defense (Panel 6, esp. chs. 22—26). Politically, Luke's report of the friendliness of the Asiarchs ('officials of the province,' NIV) toward Paul and of the city clerk's intervention on his behalf is the best defense imaginable against the charge that Paul and Christianity threatened the official life of the empire."[963]

19:23 Christianity, "he Way" (cf. v. 9; 9:2; 16:17; 18:25, 26; 22:4; 24:14, 22), had such an influence in Ephesian society that the local pagan worship suffered.

> "Cassidy has rightly pointed out that the use of the phrase 'the Way' 'identifies the disciples as constituting a socially cohesive movement, a movement arising out of and grounded in their shared faith in Jesus.'[964] What is interesting about Luke's use of this terminology is that we find it chiefly in connection with the church in Jerusalem and its environs (see 9:2; 22:4) and with the church in Ephesus and its environs (see 19:9, 23). This emphasizes that the movement is heading west, is translocal, and can

[963]Longenecker, p. 502.

[964]Footnote 106: R. Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 95.

> incarnate itself both at the heart of Jewish culture and at the heart of the somewhat Romanized Hellenistic culture found in Ephesus."[965]

The antagonism that Luke proceeded to record was not opposition to Paul personally; it was a reaction to the effect of the gospel in Ephesus.

> ". . . this is the major unit in Acts showing how the transformation of a community affects the culture at large, making it so nervous that it reacts to stop the progress."[966]

19:24 There were two goddesses named Artemis (Greek), or Diana (Latin), that Gentiles worshipped in the Roman Empire at this time. One was the goddess of the hunt, usually pictured as a young woman carrying a hunting bow. The other was a fertility goddess portrayed as a woman with many breasts. The latter was the one especially venerated in Ephesus. There were at least 33 other places of Artemis worship in the ancient world, but the temple in Ephesus was the chief worship center.[967] Pausanias, who wrote in the middle of the second century A.D., claimed that the Artemis cult was the most widely followed one in the ancient world.[968]

The Temple of Diana, in Ephesus, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and many historians believe it was one of the most beautiful buildings ever built.[969] It stood on the side of Mount Pion, about a mile northeast of the city, and served as a bank as well as a place of worship and cultic immorality. It could accommodate about 25,000 people, and was probably the largest Greek temple ever built.

> "It [the temple] was 425 feet in length and 220 in breadth, and the culumns were 60 feet high. The number of columns was 127, each of them the gift of a king; and 36 of them were enriched with ornament and colour. The folding doors were of cypress-wood; the part which was not open to the sky was roofed over with cedar; and the staircase was formed of wood of one single vine from the island of Cyprus. The value and fame of the Temple were enhanced by its being the treasury, where a large portion of the wealth of Western Asia was stored up. It is probable that there was no religious building in the world in which was concentrated a geater amount of admiration, enthusiasm, and superstition."[970]

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[965]Witherington, p. 584.

[966]Bock, *Acts*, p. 614.

[967]Ladd, "The Acts . . .," p. 1161. Strabo, *Geography* 4.1.5.

[968]Pausanias, *Description of Hellas* 4.31.8, cited by Witherington, p. 587.

[969]See my comments on verses 1 and 2 above.

[970]Howson, p. 423.

The temple's centerpiece was an object that resembled a woman with many breasts. Other objects that had purportedly fallen from heaven, that became sacred cult objects were at Troy, Pessinus, Enna, and Emeas.[971]

> "The figure which assumed this emblematic form above, was terminated below in a shapeless block. The material was wood. A bar of metal was in each hand. The dress was covered with mystic devices, and the small shrine, where it stood within the temple, was concealed by a curtain in front. Yet, rude as the image was, it was the object of the utmost veneration."[972]

The "silversmith(s)" in Ephesus took Artemis as their patron saint and, among their other wares, "made" miniature "silver shrines" containing images of the goddess that they sold to devotees. As Christianity spread, interest in Artemis and the market for her statuettes declined. The leader of the guild that made these trinkets was "Demetrius."

> "When pilgrims came to Ephesus they liked to take a souvenir home. These silversmiths were makers of little silver model shrines which were bought and sold as souvenirs."[973]

Alternatively, worshippers may have presented these model shrines as votive offerings when they visited the temple, as some people today purchase candles that they proceed to light and leave in churches.[974]

19:25-27 Demetrius' words establish the extent to which the gospel had penetrated "Asia," and the effect it had. There is no stronger testimony than the words of a critic who acknowledges the success of his adversary. Obviously his financial loss motivated Demetrius to organize this protest as much as, or perhaps even more than, veneration for the goddess Artemis. Artemis was known as a major supporter of chastity, being a virgin goddess.[975]

> ". . . vested interests were disguised as local patriotism—in this case also under the cloak of religious zeal."[976]

> "In an honor-shame culture such as this one, public humiliation, or being seen as merely mercenary individuals, could ruin reputations and so one's livelihood."[977]

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[971]See Longenecker, p. 502.
[972]Howson, p. 424. See p. 374 for a picture of this image that appears on an ancient Ephesian coin.
[973]Barclay, p. 160.
[974]Witherington, p. 590.
[975]Ibid., p. 587.
[976]Neil, p. 207.
[977]Witherington, p. 592.

> "The guilds, and the problem they presented to the non-conforming Christian, haunt the background of the New Testament. They were societies not trade unions, primarily social, and multitudinous in ancient society. Records exist of guilds of bankers, doctors, architects, producers of woollen and linen goods, dyers, workers in metal, stone or clay, builders, carpenters, pastry cooks, barbers, embalmers and transport workers."[978]

The only other protest by Gentiles against the gospel, that Luke recorded in Acts, also resulted from financial loss (cf. 16:16-24). The profit motive still opposes the spread of the gospel.

> ". . . you cannot step on a man's pocketbook without hearing him say, 'Ouch!'"[979]

19:28-29 The Temple of Artemis was a source of civic pride to the Ephesians. In view of Ephesus' commercial decline, it is easy to see how the silversmiths' protest could have so quickly aroused popular opposition to the Christian missionaries. This was a case of mob violence; many of the protesters did not understand what the issue was. A major boulevard, the Arcadian Way, ran from the harbor to the Great Theater, and it was probably this artery that the ringleaders used to collect citizens on their march to the "theater."

Archaeologists have restored part of the Arcadian Way and the Great Theater at Ephesus. This theater lay on the side of Mt. Pion, in the town, and seated 25,000 people in 66 rows. Its semi-circular design was typical of Roman outdoor theaters.

"Gaius" was a common Greek name. This "Gaius" seems to have been different from the men with the same name, mentioned in 20:4, Romans 16:23, and 1 Corinthians 1:14, since this one was a Macedonian. Some Greek manuscripts, however, indicate that it was only Aristarchus who was a Macedonian, in which case this Gaius may have been the resident of Derbe mentioned in 20:4. "Aristarchus" does appear later in Acts (cf. 20:4; 27:2). He came from Thessalonica.

19:30 Evidently the silversmiths did not lay hands on Paul as they did on "Gaius and Aristarchus." He seems to have been elsewhere in Ephesus when this demonstration broke out. Paul apparently desired to use this occasion to preach the gospel to the assembled throng in the theater. However, the other Christians sensed his danger, and would not allow him to make himself a target of their violence.

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[978]Blaiklock, p. 158.

[979]McGee, 4:600.

19:31 The "Asiarchs" were educated citizens who were the political leaders of the cities of this Roman province.

> They were "men of substance and influence in the cities of the province of Asia who were or had been presidents of the provincial council, which dealt principally with organizing the games and with ceremonial matters connected with Emperor-worship. During his term of office, the Asiarch was styled 'high-priest' of the imperial cult."[980]

Some of these men were "friends" of Paul. This shows again that the attitude of many leaders was friendly to Christianity at this time. Their attitude doubtless reflected what was appropriate in the empire. The Asiarchs, too, wanted to prevent Paul from being injured.

> "A sect whose leader had Asiarchs for friends cannot be dangerous to the state."[981]

Notice that Paul had made friends with leading men of the city; he did not keep a low profile as he evangelized.

19:32 We should probably understand Luke's reference to the "confusion" of the crowd as pertaining to the particular grievance of the silversmiths. Most of the people did not understand "the reason" for the gathering; they just went along for the excitement. The Greek word translated "assembly" (cf. vv. 39, 41) is *ekklesia*, the normal translation of which is "church." This use illustrates the basic meaning of the word, which is an assembly of people called out of the mass for a special purpose.

19:33-34 The crowd's reaction to "Alexander" showed distinct hostility toward him. Apparently Alexander was a leading unbelieving Jew, who wanted the crowd to understand that even though Paul was a Jew, the local Jewish community did not approve of him (cf. 18:12-17). However, like Gallio in Corinth, this crowd did not distinguish between Christianity and Judaism. Both faiths stood against idolatry. Perhaps the crowd assumed that Alexander wanted to defend Paul as a fellow Jew. This Alexander may be the one Paul warned Timothy about (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 4:14), but he may have been someone different, since "Alexander" was a common name among both Jews and Gentiles.[982]

19:35-36 The "town-clerk" (Gr. *ho grammateus*) was the equivalent of a modern mayor, the locally elected executive official most responsible for what took place in the city. Consequently he was eager to end this

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[980]Neil, p. 208. See Longenecker, pp. 503-4; and Lily Ross Taylor, "The Asiarchs," in Foakes-Jackson and Lake, 5:252-62, for fuller descriptions of them.

[981]Haenchen, p. 578.

[982]See Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 4:8:10.

demonstration. He made four points in his address to the assembly. First, there was no danger whatsoever that people would conclude Artemis was a goddess made with hands, since everyone assumed to know that the image of her in her famous temple had fallen from heaven. "Do nothing rash" is still good advice. The town-clerk was not a Christian, but he was a wise and diplomatic man.

The title "temple keeper" (or "guardian of the temple") was an honor that Rome bestowed on selected cities that possessed temples of the imperial cult.[983] Ephesus was one of these.

19:37 Second, Gaius and Aristarchus had done nothing worthy of punishment. They had neither physically damaged anything nor had they spoken against Artemis. Robbing temples and blaspheming other gods were common accusations that Gentiles made against Jews, including Jewish Christians, in antiquity (cf. Rom. 2:22).[984]

19:38-39 Third, "if Demetrius" and his fellow silversmiths ("craftsmen") had "a complaint" against the Christians, they should handle it in the legally authorized way, and take their adversaries to court. The court that would have dealt with this kind of complaint met three times a month in Ephesus.[985] "Proconsuls" were provincial governors.

19:40-41 Fourth, the mayor reminded the citizens that, if the provincial authorities concluded that there was no good reason for their rioting, they could impose penalties on the city. Furthermore this riot was unjustified ("no *real* cause *for it*"). This line of argument proved effective, so the crowd disbursed.

This may have been the occasion when Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for Paul (Rom. 16:4). This event may have been in Paul's mind when he wrote of fighting "wild beasts" at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32), and of despairing of life as he faced a deadly foe (2 Cor. 1:8-11).

One wonders if the cooling of the Ephesian Christians' love for Jesus Christ, that took place in later years, connects to the zeal for Artemis that characterized this community (cf. Rev. 2:1-7).

> "The story [of the riot in Ephesus, vv. 23-41] is in effect a statement that Christians do not constitute a danger to the state and a plea that they be treated with toleration in a pluralistic society; only when properly defined criminal charges can he preferred against them should they be summoned before the courts."[986]

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[983]Neil, p. 208.
[984]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 4:8:10.
[985]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 402.
[986]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 314.

Paul's visit to Macedonia and Achaia 20:1-6

> "This report of Paul's return visit to Macedonia and Achaia is the briefest account of an extended ministry in all of Acts—even more so than the summary of the ministry at Ephesus (cf. 19:8-12). Nevertheless, it can be filled out to some extent by certain personal references and historical allusions in 2 Corinthians and Romans, which were written during this time."[987]

20:1 Evidently soon after the riot, Paul left Ephesus to pursue his plan to return to Jerusalem through Macedonia and Achaia (19:21). He traveled up to "Troas," where he could have ministered for some time, because "a door was opened" for him there (2 Cor. 2:12). Nevertheless he was uneasy about the trouble in the Corinthian church. He had sent Titus to Corinth, evidently from Ephesus, with a severe letter to the church. He was eager to hear what the reaction to it had been (2 Cor. 2:3-4; 7:8-12; 12:18). So rather than staying in Troas, Paul moved west into Macedonia where he met Titus who was returning from Corinth (2 Cor. 7:5-8). After receiving Titus' favorable report of affairs in Corinth, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from somewhere in Macedonia, probably in the fall of A.D. 56 (cf. 2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1-2).

20:2 Paul's ministry to the province of Illyricum, which lay to the northwest of Macedonia, may have taken place while he was in this area, or possibly during his three-year ministry in Ephesus (cf. Rom. 15:19). "Greece" here refers to Achaia. Paul may have sent his Epistle to Titus at this time, but he probably wrote it after his acquittal in Rome, and after he had resumed his missionary travels (Titus 3:12).

> "The word translated *encouraged* [Gr. *parakalesas*] has a full range of meanings, from rebuking to comforting. Encourgement included instruction, appeal, affirmation, warning, and correction."[988]

20:3 The "three months" appear to have been the winter months of A.D. 56-57. Paul probably spent most of this time in Corinth, where Gaius (Titius Justus?) was his host (Rom. 16:23; cf. Acts 18:7). There he wrote the Book of Romans as he anticipated visiting Rome. From Rome he planned to move farther west into Spain (Rom. 15:24). During his time in Macedonia and Achaia, Paul was also busy collecting the gift for the poor saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26). He evidently had planned to travel on a ship from Cenchrea to Caesarea, and from there to Jerusalem, to celebrate one of the spring Jewish feasts there (vv. 6, 16). However, when he learned of the Jews' "plot" to kill him on the way, he changed his plans and decided to go to Jerusalem by way of "Macedonia" (cf. 9:23, 29; 17:14; 23:12; 2 Cor. 11:32).

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[987]Longenecker, p. 506.

[988]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1858.

> "Often from foreign ports Jewish pilgrim ships left for Syria to take pilgrims to the Passover. Paul must have intended to sail on such a ship. On such a ship it would have been the easiest thing in the world for the fanatical Jews to arrange that Paul should disappear overboard and never be heard of again."[989]

20:4 The men Luke identified here were the representatives of the churches—in the provinces of Macedonia, Galatia, and Asia—who accompanied Paul with the gift of money for the Jerusalem church. "Sopater" may be the "Sosipater" of Romans 16:21. Paul himself may have represented the province of Achaia and the church in Corinth, while Luke may have represented the Philippian Christians, but Luke did not make this clear.

20:5-6 Apparently these men traveled from Corinth to Philippi with Paul. In Philippi Paul met Luke, who may have ministered there from the time Paul had founded the Philippian church (cf. 16:10-40). Paul's team celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which followed immediately after Passover, in Philippi. This eight-day festival began with Passover and continued with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Jews commonly referred to the whole holiday as the "Feast of Unleavened Bread," since *it* was the longer celebration. Some of Paul's companions then proceeded on to "Troas." Paul and Luke, and perhaps Titus and two other representatives of the church in Achaia (cf. 2 Cor. 8:6-24), remained in Philippi briefly. Note the recurrence of "we" (vv. 5-15; cf. 16:10-17; 21:1-18; 27:1—28:16). They did so to celebrate the Passover and Unleavened Bread feasts in the spring of A.D. 57. Then they sailed from Neapolis, the port of Philippi (16:11), to Troas and joined the other messengers. This crossing took "five days," whereas previously Paul's ship from Troas to Neapolis made the trip in only two days (16:11).[990]

Paul's raising of Eutychus in Troas 20:7-12

> "From 20:5 through the end of Acts (28:31), Luke's narrative gives considerable attention to ports of call, stopovers, and time spent on Paul's travels and includes various anecdotes. It contains the kind of details found in a travel journal, and the use of 'we' in 20:5-15; 21:1-18; and 28:16 shows its eyewitness character."[991]

> "This claim to be an eyewitness was considered vital in Greek historiography, unlike Roman historiography where being an armchair historian was much more acceptable."[992]

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[989]Barclay, p. 161.
[990]See F. F. Bruce, "Chronological Questions . . .," pp. 288-89.
[991]Longenecker, p. 508.
[992]Witherington, p. 605.

20:7 We do not know if Paul or someone else planted the church in Troas (cf. 16:8-9; 2 Cor. 2:12-13). This is the first clear reference in Scripture to the early Christians meeting to worship on "the first day of the week," rather than on the Sabbath, the seventh day (cf. John 20:19, 26; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). This day has continued to be the generally preferred one for Christian worship. They selected "Sunday" because it was the day on which the Lord Jesus Christ arose from the dead. This group of believers met "to break bread" (Gr. *klasai arton*).

> "The breaking of the bread probably denotes a fellowship meal in the course of which the Eucharist was celebrated (cf. 2:42)."[993]

> "In the early Church there were two closely related things. There was what was called the Love Feast. To it all contributed, and it was a real meal. Often it must have been the only real meal that poor slaves got all week. It was a meal when the Christians sat down and ate in loving fellowship and in sharing with each other. During it or at the end of it the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was observed. It may well be that we have lost something of very great value when we lost the happy fellowship and togetherness of the common meal of the Christian fellowship. It marked as nothing else could the real homeliness, the real family spirit of the Church."[994]

> "Breaking bread is not merely the occasion for the Eutychus story, as v. 7 might suggest. Because Paul is departing, the community's breaking of bread becomes a farewell meal, resembling Jesus' farewell meal with his apostles, when he 'took bread' and 'broke' it (Luke 22:19). The echoes of Jesus' Jerusalem journey and its consequences that begin in Acts 19:21 and continue thereafter may suggest that this resemblance has some importance, even though it is not developed."[995]

Luke did not record when Paul began his address, but the apostle kept speaking all night. Probably some of the Christians present would have been slaves or employees who would have been free to attend a meeting only at night. Paul taught "until midnight," followed by more teaching and discussion ("talked with them until daybreak"; cf. v. 11). Luke's references to time are Roman rather than Jewish. For him days ran from sunrise to sunrise, not from sunset to sunset (cf. vv. 7, 11).

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[993]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 408. Cf. v. 11; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:17-34.
[994]Barclay, pp. 162-63.
[995]Tannehill, 2:250-51.

> "I tell congregations very frankly that I'm a long-winded preacher. I'm known as that. I love to teach the Word of God. I have a system of homiletics that I never learned in the seminary. I picked it up myself—in fact, I got it from a cigarette commercial. This is it: It's not how long you make it but how you make it long. I believe in making it long; my scriptural authority for it is that Paul did it. He spoke until midnight [really until daybreak, v. 11]."[996]

20:8-9 Luke's reference to the "many lamps" (Gr. *lampades hikani*, lit. "many torches") suggests that it was probably the combination of the long message and lack of oxygen that caused Eutychus to fall asleep (sink "into a deep sleep") and fall three floors. The Greek word translated "young man" (*meanias*) elsewhere describes a boy of eight to 14 years old. However, his name suggests that he may have been a slave, in which case he could have been in his thirties.[997] Doctor Luke pronounced Eutychus (lit. "Fortunate") "dead."

> "The length of Paul's preaching may incline us to sympathize with sleepy Eutychus. The well-developed synoptic theme of wakefulness puts a different perspective on the matter. Falling asleep is a serious failure with potentially grave consequences. Paul's dedicated preaching makes demands on his audience. They must be dedicated listeners who hear the word and 'bear fruit with perseverance (*en upomone*)' (Luke 8:15). Eutychus failed and fell."[998]

> "I confess that Paul's experience has always been a comfort to me. When I look out at the congregation and see some brother or sister out there sound asleep, I say to myself, 'It's all right. Just let them sleep. Paul put them to sleep, too.'"[999]

20:10 This seems to be a definite instance of Paul raising a dead person back to life—similar to what Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus had done (cf. 1 Kings 17:21-22; 2 Kings 4:34-35; Matt. 9:23-25; Mark 5:39). If so, the incident shows the miraculous power of Jesus Christ working through His apostle at this time (1:1-2). (If you are a preacher and have the gift of gab, you may also need the gift of healing!) However, many "competent" exegetes have concluded that Eutychus simply swooned and Paul revived him.

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[996]McGee, 4:602.
[997]Witherington, p. 607.
[998]Tannehill, 2:250.
[999]McGee, 4:602.

> "One will believe here as the facts appeal to him."[1000]

There are also several similarities between this incident and Peter's raising of Tabitha (Dorcas) in 9:36-42.

> "Whereas Peter raises Tabitha by a command, following the pattern of resurrection stories in Luke, Paul 'fell upon (*epepesen*)' Eutychus and embraced him and then announced that he was alive (20:10). If there is a healing act here, it is by bodily contact, not by word, and follows the pattern of the Elisha story (2 Kings 4:34 = 4 Kgdms. 4:34). Peter and Paul are similar in part because they fit a common scriptural type. Through both, the prophetic power of Elijah and Elisha continues to be available to the church."[1001]

20:11 The Christians returned to their third-story room and resumed their meeting. The Greek phrase *klasas ton arton kai geusamenos*, "broken the bread and eaten," can refer to an ordinary meal rather than the Lord's Supper.[1002] Or the Lord's Supper may be in view here.[1003] Paul then continued speaking ("talked with them") "until daybreak." He and the Troas Christians realized that this might be their final opportunity to meet together, so in spite of the unusual incident involving Eutychus, they made the most of their opportunity.

20:12 Luke closed his account of this incident by assuring the reader that Eutychus was indeed all right, and that the believers found great comfort ("were greatly comforted") in Paul's ministry of *restoration* as well as in his teaching.

> "These early believers sat up all night listening to Paul. I know someone is going to say, 'If I could listen to Paul, I'd listen all night, too.' Probably Paul was nothing more than a humble preacher of the gospel. We do know that Apollos was an eloquent man, but that is not said of Paul. These believers simply wanted to hear the Word of God. How wonderful that is!"[1004]

The journey from Troas to Miletus 20:13-16

> "In a few business-like words Luke takes his readers over some of the most storied coasts of ancient myth and history."[1005]

[1000]Robertson, 3:342.
[1001]Tannehill, 2:248.
[1002]Longenecker, p. 509.
[1003]Neil, p. 212; Kent, p. 156.
[1004]McGee, 4:603.
[1005]Blaiklock, p. 165.

20:13-14 Ships had to round Cape Lectum to reach "Assos" (modern Bahram Koi) from Troas. This was a more time-consuming route than the road between these two towns, which were 20 miles apart. By taking the "land" route, Paul was able to stay in Troas a little longer. "Mitylene" was the chief city of the island of Lesbos, the largest of the islands of western Asia Minor.

20:15 "Chios" was the major town of a small island by the same name, on which the poet Homer had been born. "Samos" was another island off the coast of Asia, directly west of Ephesus, another day's sail south. Samos' most famous son was Pathagoras, the great mathematician. "Miletus" stood 30 miles south of Ephesus on the mainland. Normally, small ships like the ones on which Paul's company traveled, along the coast, put into port each night when the winds died down.

20:16 Paul evidently concluded that it would be too time-consuming or dangerous to return to Ephesus. He wanted to reach Jerusalem by "the day Pentecost," which was 50 days after Passover (cf. v. 6; 2:1). Paul's visit to Miletus, therefore, must have occurred in late April of A.D. 57.

Paul's address to the Ephesian elders 20:17-35

> "Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders is the nearest approximation to the Pauline letters in Acts. Its general content recalls how in his letters Paul encouraged, warned, and exhorted his converts. Moreover, its theological themes and vocabulary are distinctively Pauline. In his three missionary sermons (13:16-41; 14:15-17; 17:22-31) and five defenses (chs. 22—26), Paul addressed non-Christian audiences. But he was speaking to Christians here. It is significant that, in a situation similar to those he faced in many of his letters, this farewell to the Ephesian elders reads like a miniature letter of his. This becomes all the more significant when we recall that nowhere else in Acts is there any evidence for a close knowledge of Paul's letters.
>
> "The address is constructed in a way familiar to all readers of Paul's letters. The body of it has three parts, which deal with (1) Paul's past ministry at Ephesus (vv. 18-21), (2) Paul's present plans in going to Jerusalem (vv. 22-24), and (3) the future of Paul himself and of the church at Ephesus (vv. 25-31). It concludes with a blessing (v. 32) and then adds further words of exhortation that point the hearers to Paul's example and the teachings of Jesus (vv. 33-35). Heading each section is an introductory formula: 'you know' (*hymeis epistasthe*) at v. 18; 'and now behold' (*kai nyn idou*) at v. 22; 'and now behold I know' (*kai nyn idou ego oida*) at v. 25; and 'and now' (*kai ta nyn*) at v. 32."[1006]

[1006]Longenecker, pp. 511-12. See Witherington, p. 610, for a chart comparing terms and concepts Paul used in this address with similar ones he used in his epistles.

This is probably one of the few speeches in Acts that Luke heard with his own ears. The Greek physician Galen wrote that his students took down his medical lectures in shorthand, so perhaps this is what Luke did on this occasion.[1007]

20:17 Evidently Paul's ship had a several-day layover in Miletus, or he may have changed ships after spending a few days there (cf. 21:3-4, 8). It would have taken at least one day for Paul's message to reach the Ephesian elders, and at least one more day for them to make their way to Miletus to join him.

20:18-21 Paul first reviewed his past three-year ministry among these elders (v. 31). He appealed to the way he had lived among them in order to urge them to remain faithful in the future (cf. 1 Thess. 2:1-12). He emphasized particularly his humble service of the Lord (cf. Eph. 4:2), his sorrows (cf. 2 Cor. 2:4), and the opposition of enemies of the gospel (cf. 19:9; 20:1). He also stressed his faithfulness in proclaiming what they needed to hear (cf. Rom. 1:16), his ceaseless teaching ministry (cf. 19:8-10), and his comprehensive evangelistic efforts (cf. v. 26). "Teaching . . . from house to house" (v. 20) probably included home Bible classes and house churches. This defense of his ministry suggests that critics may have been prejudicing his converts against him in his absence, as they did elsewhere. Notice that several of the words and phrases in this first part of Paul's speech recur as it proceeds.

"Repentance toward God and faith in the (our) Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 21) is a beautifully balanced way of expressing what is essential for justification (cf. 26:20-23; Rom. 10:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:20—6:2). One must change his or her mind Godward and place trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

20:22-23 Next Paul described his present circumstances. Probably Paul meant, by "bound by the Spirit," that he had *committed* himself to visiting "Jerusalem," since he was sure this was what God wanted him to do, even though he realized that trouble ("bonds and afflictions") lay ahead (cf. v. 3; 9:16; 19:21). Perhaps prophets had by this time *already* revealed to him that the Jews would arrest him there (cf. 21:4, 11; Rom. 15:30-31). Paul wanted to be faithful to the Lord more than he wanted to be physically safe or comfortable (cf. Phil. 1:20).

> "It should be noted that the Spirit did not prohibit his going,
> but told him what would happen when he arrived."[1008]

20:24 Paul's "gospel of the grace of God" was a continuation of the good news Jesus had preached, but in a universal context. Thus he equated it with "preaching the kingdom" (v. 25).

[1007]Robertson, 3:346-47.

[1008]Kent, p. 157.

20:25 Paul continued by laying out his plans for the future. "The kingdom" Paul preached is God's rule over His elect. It probably includes both His *spiritual* rule now, and His messianic, *physical*, and earthly rule during the Millennium.

> "Usually in the book of Acts the kingdom of God refers to the eschatological realm of salvation (14:22). But in this passage, the kingdom of God is the summary of Paul's entire message in Ephesus and refers to the present blessings of redemption in Christ."[1009]

> "Paul clearly equated preaching the Gospel of the grace of God with the preaching of the kingdom of God. Once again [cf. 20:22-24] we see that the two terms are used interchangeably [cf. 28:23, 30-31]. . . .

> "Thus as we survey Paul's ministry as recorded in the Book of Acts, we see that he was an ambassador of the kingdom of God—but his message was salvation through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. No reference is made to support the notion that the earthly Davidic kingdom had been established. Rather, the message concerns entrance into a present form of the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus Christ."[1010]

Paul was confident ("I know") that not "all" the men he addressed would "see" him again, though some of them might. He did not plan to return to Ephesus for some time—if ever (cf. Rom. 15:23-29).

20:26 Paul could say he was "innocent" (cf. Jer. 23:1-2), not because he had presented the gospel to every individual *personally*. He had carried out the mission God had given him of evangelizing most of many of the pagan Gentile areas. The Christians remaining in Asia could continue to evangelize more thoroughly (cf. Ezek. 33:1-6).

20:27 Paul had passed on to these elders what was truly profitable to them (cf. v. 20). "The whole purpose of God" refers to God's basic plans and purposes, rather than a verse by verse exposition of the Scriptures. Their responsibility was to instruct the saints in more detail.

> "As I write this, I am a retired preacher. I have made many blunders and have failed in many ways. But as I look back on my ministry, I can say truthfully that when I stood in the pulpit, I declared the Word of God as I saw it. I have the

[1009]Ladd, "The Acts . . .," p. 1163.
[1010]Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom* . . ., p. 280.

> deep satisfaction of knowing that if I went back to any pulpit which I have held, I haven't a thing to add to what I have already said. I don't mean I couldn't say it in a better way, but the important thing is that I declared the whole counsel of God. I have always believed that the important issue is to get out the entire Word of God."[1011]

20:28 Paul concluded his address with a challenge because of the Ephesian elders' future responsibilities (vv. 28-31). The elders were to "guard" their own lives ("yourselves") from the attacks of the adversary, and then the lives of those under their care (cf. Ezek. 34:12-16; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Paul used Jesus' familiar figure of a "flock" of *sheep* to describe His followers (John 10:27; 21:15; et al.).

The term "elder" (v. 17) came from Judaism, and emphasized the *dignity* of the leader of God's people. "Overseer" is Greek in origin, and describes the *responsibility* of this person. "Shepherd" was both Jewish and Greek, and focuses on his *function*. Putting them together, we conclude that these men were older, more mature men in the faith, who were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the church. They fulfilled their responsibility by pastoring (i.e., leading, feeding, guiding, and guarding) the church (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

> "There was in apostolic times no distinction between elders (presbyters) and bishops such as we find from the second century onwards: the leaders of the Ephesian church are indiscriminately described as elders, bishops (i.e., superintendents), and shepherds (or pastors)."[1012]

The Holy Spirit *appointed* these men, in the sense that He led the apostles or others to select them as elders.

A better translation of the last part of this verse would be, "He [God the Father] purchased with the blood of His own [Son]" (cf. Rom. 3:25; 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20). It is important for church leaders to remember that the church belongs to God, not them. This helps balance the tendency to take too little or too much responsibility on oneself. "The church [Gr. *ekklesia*] of God" is a phrase we find elsewhere, in the New Testament, only in Paul's epistles.

20:29-30 Paul may have been certain where future trouble would come from: because of his contacts with that church, by special revelation, or because of his general experience in ministry (cf. Matt. 7:15; John 10:12). What he anticipated materialized (1 Tim. 1:6-7, 19-20; 4:1-7; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17-18;

[1011]McGee, 4:604.

[1012]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on . . .*, p. 415.

3:1-9; Rev. 2:1-7). Most churches face opposition from people outside and inside their fellowship.

20:31 Watchfulness ("Be on the alert") would be imperative for these shepherds. Paul probably labored in Ephesus from the fall of A.D. 52 to the summer of A.D. 55. Some scholars believe that he spent some of this time in prison there (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23), and that he wrote his Prison Epistles—at least Philippians—from Ephesus. This is a minority opinion, however, that does not have as strong support as the Roman origin of the Prison Epistles theory does.

Reference to his "tears" shows that Paul's ministry was not just intellectual but also emotional; he became emotionally involved in it (cf. John 11:35). Specifically he delivered his admonitions feeling the pain that they caused his hearers. The Book of Acts does not generally picture Paul as weeping over the people to whom he ministered or over ministry situations. Rather, it portrays him as equal to any occasion. We only see this human side of his ministry from Paul's own comments here and in his epistles.

20:32 Paul concluded his address with a blessing. Since he was no longer going to be able to build up these men, he committed (or commended) them to God, who would do it, and to the Scriptures ("the word of His grace"), God's tool in this process. God's "grace" is the source of all spiritual growth, and of the ultimate "inheritance" these elders would one day enjoy because they were believing "saints" (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Phil. 1:6; Col. 3:24).

20:33-35 The apostle concluded with an exhortation, as he typically did in his epistles. Was Paul boasting when he reviewed his habits of life in Ephesus? I think not. He was reminding these elders of his example ("in everything I showed you") that they were to follow: as they led the church like he had led them. They were to serve without concern for present material reward. Paul's policy was not to ask others to support him, but to labor at his trade: when he, or his fellow workers, or his converts, needed financial support. He did not hesitate to raise money for others, but there are no references in Acts or in his epistles to his having asked for money for himself. I do not believe Paul would object to modern support-raising efforts by Christian workers, provided the support raisers were willing to work—if their supporters proved unfaithful. Paul emphasized motives (v. 33) and example (v. 35). He wanted to give rather than receive, and to model that attitude, so his converts could see how to demonstrate it in everyday life.

> "The Greco-Roman world was honeycombed by social networks grounded in the priciple of reciprocity, of 'giving and receiving.' Paul's exhortation here is to break that cycle and serve and help those who can give nothing in return.

> This is the practical expression of what being gracious means—freely they had received the good news, and they should freely give with no thought of return."[1013]

The precise saying of Jesus to which Paul referred here (v. 35) is not in Scripture. It may have come down to Paul by oral or written tradition, or he may have been summarizing Jesus' teaching (e.g., Luke 6:38). Paul often related his exhortations to Jesus' teachings or example (cf. Rom. 12—14; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Thess. 4:1-12).

Paul's departure from Miletus 20:36-38

20:36 Prayer for God's grace and protection undoubtedly bonded these men together in Christian love. The kneeling posture here, as elsewhere in Scripture, reflects an attitude of submission to the sovereign Lord. The normal position for praying in that culture was apparently *standing* (cf. Mark 11:25), so *kneeling* implies a particularly solemn occasion (cf. 21:5).[1014]

20:37-38 This record of the Gentile converts' affection for Paul (cf. Gen. 33:4; 45:14; 46:29) contrasts with the hatred of the Jews that he was soon to face in Jerusalem. Luke again obliquely pointed out that the Gentiles received the gospel but the Jews usually rejected it.

> ". . . through all this scene there runs one dominant feeling and that is the feeling of an affection and a love as deep as the heart itself. That is the feeling that should be in any Church. When love dies in any Church the work of Christ cannot do other than wither or fade."[1015]

Paul may have left Timothy in Ephesus at this time. However, it seems more likely that that took place after Paul's release from Rome, his departure from that city, and his return to Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3; 3:14; 4:13).

The trip from Miletus to Tyre 21:1-6

The third "we" section of Acts (21:1-18) is of theological importance because it focuses on Paul's recapitulation of Jesus' passion. Note the similarities between Luke's accounts of Jesus' trip to Jerusalem and Paul's. Both stories involve a plot by the Jews and handing over to the Gentiles. There were triple predictions along the way of suffering in Jerusalem in both cases. Both Jesus and Paul steadfastly resolved to go there despite opposition, and both resigned themselves to God's will.[1016] Luke probably told his story as he did to help the reader appreciate the similarities between Jesus and Paul to authenticate Paul's ministry.

[1013]Witherington, p. 626.
[1014]Neil, p. 215.
[1015]Barclay, p. 166.
[1016]Longenecker, p. 515.

21:1-3 "Cos" was an island 40 miles from Miletus. "Rhodes" refers to the *city* on the island of Rhodes ("Rhodes" meaning "roses"), another 90 miles farther. A gigantic statue of Apollo, "The Colossus of Rhodes," one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, stood astride the entrance to this harbor years earlier, but it was now in ruins. From there, Paul's party continued east to "Patara," a 60-mile journey. Paul could have made these trips in three days. In Patara, the missionaries were able to transfer to a ship bound directly for Tyre 400 miles away, probably a grain or fruit ship.[1017] They sailed to the south of Cyprus. "Tyre" was in ancient Phoenicia, then part of the Roman province of Syria.

21:4 Refugees from the persecution that followed Stephen's martyrdom had evangelized Phoenicia (11:19). Paul and his companions "stayed" in Tyre for "seven days," fellowshipping with the Christians.

> "Sea journeys in the ancient world depended on finding shipping available, and accepting delays arising from loading and unloading. It is therefore not inconsistent that Paul was in haste to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost, yet had stopped for a week at Troas, and now spends a week at Tyre; he would have no choice."[1018]

There is ample evidence in the text that Paul was not disobedient to God in going on to Jerusalem (cf. 9:16; 19:21; 20:22-24; 21:14; 23:1, 11). Nevertheless, some students of Scripture have criticized Paul for proceeding. It seems probable that one or more prophets in the church at Tyre also foretold His arrest in Jerusalem (20:23), and that they, anxious about his safety, urged him not to proceed.

> "Paul, however, regarded it not as a prohibition but a divine forewarning so that he would be spiritually prepared for what would happen."[1019]

> "Duty called louder than warning to Paul even if both were the calls of God."[1020]

21:5-6 As they had done just before leaving the Ephesian elders, Paul and his fellow missionaries knelt down and prayed with these believers before they parted (cf. 20:36). This reflects Paul's ongoing commitment to and dependance on God. Then the missionaries reboarded the ship, and the Christians of Tyre "returned home."

[1017]Robertson, 3:359.
[1018]Neil, p. 216.
[1019]Kent, p. 159.
[1020]Robertson, 3:360.

Paul's advance to Caesarea 21:7-14

21:7 "Ptolemais" (Acco of the Old Testament and modern Acre, located on the north side of the bay of Haifa) lay 25 miles south of Tyre. It was the southernmost Phoenician port. There also Paul met with the local Christians, while stevedores unloaded and loaded his ship.

> "The man who is within the family of the Church is better equipped with friends that [*sic*] any other man in all the world."[1021]

21:8-9 "Caesarea" (Meritima) was 40 miles farther south, and Paul's party could have reached it by sea or by land. It was the capital of the province of Judea and the major port of Jerusalem. Philip may have settled in Caesarea after evangelizing the coastal plain of Palestine 20 years earlier (8:40; cf. 6:5). This man was not the Philip of the Gospels, who was a disciple of Jesus and one of the Twelve. His "four daughters" had the prophetic gift. This may mean that they served as worship leaders (cf. 1 Chron. 25:1). According to early Church tradition, Philip and his daughters later moved to Hierapolis in Asia Minor. There these women imparted information about the early history of the Jerusalem church to Papias, a church father.[1022] It seems unusual that Luke would refer to these daughters as "prophetesses" without mentioning anything that they had prophesied. Perhaps they gave him information as they later did for Papias.[1023]

21:10-11 "Agabus" previously had gone from Jerusalem to Antioch to foretell the famine of A.D. 46 (11:26-27). Now he "came down" to Caesarea and prophesied Paul's arrest in Jerusalem (cf. Mark 9:31; 10:33; John 21:18). He illustrated his prediction graphically, as several Old Testament prophets had done (cf. 1 Kings 11:29-31; Isa. 20:2-4; Jer. 13:1-7; Ezek. 4). "This is what the Holy Spirit says" is the Christian equivalent of the Old Testament's "Thus saith the Lord." His revelation came as no surprise to Paul, of course (v. 4; 9:16). Perhaps another reason Luke emphasized these prophecies was to prove to his readers that Paul's arrest and its consequences were part of God's foreordained will for the church's expansion (1:1-2; cf. Mark 10:33).

21:12 It seemed clearer all the time to Paul's missionary companions, as well as to the "local" Christians ("residents"), that Paul was going to be in great danger in Jerusalem. Consequently they tried to discourage him from proceeding.

[1021]Barclay, p. 168.

[1022]Eusebius, p. 126 (bk. 3, ch. 39).

[1023]Longenecker, p. 517; Neil, pp. 216-17.

21:13 From Paul's response to their entreaty, he seems not to have known whether his arrest would result in his death or not.

Why did Paul avoid the possibility of death in Corinth (20:3), and other places, but not here? Paul's purpose to deliver the collection, and thus to strengthen the unity of the Gentile and Jewish believers, would have failed if he had died on board a ship between Corinth and Jerusalem. However, arrest in Jerusalem would not frustrate that purpose. For Paul, and eventually for his friends (v. 14), the Lord's will was more important than physical safety (cf. Luke 22:42). He believed the Spirit wanted him to go to Jerusalem (19:21; 20:22) so he "set his face" to go there (cf. Luke 9:51).

> "Paul, aware of the suffering and danger ahead, must make the same decision in Caesarea that Jesus made in the prayer scene before his crucifixion. In the prayer scene Jesus expressed the two options himself in internal debate: 'Take this cup from me; nevertheless, let not my will but yours be done' (Luke 22:42). In Paul's case his companions and friends express the option of escape and appeal to Paul to choose it. Paul chooses the other option. The conflict finally ends when Paul's friends recognize that they cannot persuade him and say, 'Let the will of the Lord be done' (21:14)."[1024]

21:14 Unable to dissuade him, Paul's friends stopped urging him ("fell silent"), and committed the situation to the Lord.

> "Perhaps he regarded Caesarea as his temptation and Gethsemane. If so, the congregation, catching the thought, echoed the garden prayer of Christ: *The will of the Lord be done . . .*"[1025]

> "Paul is recognized and welcomed in Tyre and Caesarea as he was at earlier stops on his trip, and the disciples in these places show great concern for Paul's safety. Widespread respect for Paul is also indicated by the attention that he receives from figures associated with the mission in its early days: Philip the evangelist (21:8), Agabus the prophet (21:10; cf. 11:28), and Mnason, an 'early disciple' (21:16)."[1026]

Christians have developed a respect for Paul—that is second only to reverence for Jesus Christ—over approximately 20 centuries of church history. However, when Luke wrote Acts, Paul was a very controversial figure in the church. Luke seems to have gone out of his way to put Paul in the best possible light, so that his original readers would accept and appreciate his ministry.

[1024]Tannehill, 2:264.
[1025]Blaiklock, p. 168.
[1026]Tannehill, 2:262.

The last stage of Paul's trip to Jerusalem 21:15-16

Jerusalem was about 65 miles southeast of Caesarea, a long two-day trip. "Mnason" evidently became a Christian early in the history of the church, perhaps on the day of Pentecost. He was a Hellenistic Jewish Christian from Cyprus, like Barnabas was. As such, he would have been more open to entertaining a mixed group of Jewish and Gentile Christians, than many Hebrew Jewish Christians in Palestine would have been. Apparently he lived about halfway between Caesarea and Jerusalem.

Paul finally achieved the first phase of his plan to visit Jerusalem and then Rome (19:21). In doing so, he brought one chapter of his ministry to a close and opened another. His return to Jerusalem was an essential part of God's plan to send Paul to Rome. This plan unfolds in the rest of chapter 21. In all, Paul traveled about 2,700 miles on his third missionary journey (cf. 14:28; 18:22).[1027]

> "Jesus too journeyed to Jerusalem, and during his journey prophesied concerning his impending sufferings; he was arrested and tried, appearing before the Jews and the Romans . . ."[1028]

2. Ministry in Jerusalem 21:17—23:32

The events that transpired in Jerusalem, when Paul visited the city on this occasion, proved crucial in spreading the gospel to Rome. The events that Luke narrated in 21:17—23:35 took twelve days, whereas those that follow in 24:1—26:32 took two years. Luke wrote these events partially to reveal God's methods to his readers.

> "The geographical extension of the church was not Luke's main interest; it was rather the movement of redemptive history from the Jews to the Gentiles. In keeping with this purpose, Luke devotes considerable space to the record of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, not because the visit was important in itself, but because it showed the final rejection of the Gospel by Jerusalem."[1029]

The advice of James and the elders 21:17-26

21:17-19 As he had done before, Paul related to a group of elders what God had done on his missionary journeys among the Gentiles (14:27; cf. 18:23). This undoubtedly helped the Jerusalem church accept the gift that Paul had brought from their Gentile brethren. I am assuming that the Jerusalem church leaders received the gift, but they may not have done so. Perhaps Luke did not comment on the giving and receiving of the gift, because that was not something he wanted to draw attention to, even though by not explaining this he left his readers with an unanswered question.

[1027]Beitzel, p. 177.

[1028]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 337. Cf. Rackham, pp. 403-4.

[1029]Ladd, "The Acts . . .," p. 1164.

"James," the Lord's half-brother, was still the recognized leader of the Jerusalem church (cf. 12:17; 15:13), but this church also had *elder leadership* (cf. 11:30). Herod Agrippa I had killed James, the brother of John, earlier (12:2), not James the half-brother of Jesus. Luke mentioned nothing about Paul's delivery of the monetary gift, Paul's main reason for going to Jerusalem (cf. Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-4). His purpose was primarily to emphasize the spread of the gospel. The Gentiles had remembered the poor as Paul had urged them to do (Gal. 2:10).

Even though the third "we" section ends with verse 18, Luke may have remained with Paul in Jerusalem. Possibly he stopped including himself in the narrative in order to stress Paul's leadership. Alternatively, he may have departed for some other destination.

21:20-21 Having rejoiced ("glorified") over Paul's account of the Gentiles' conversion, the elders also added that "thousands" of "Jews" had become believers, many of them in Jerusalem. Estimates of the population of Jerusalem at this time range between 30,000 and 50,000.[1030] The elders explained that these Jewish Christians had some misgivings about Paul's ministry, about rumors they had heard. The word on the streets was that Paul was going beyond his actual practice of not requiring Gentile converts to undergo circumcision or to obey the Mosaic Law. They had heard he was instructing Jewish converts not to practice circumcision or to observe the customs of Judaism. This was a false report. Paul did not teach that these customs were evil, just unnecessary for justification and sanctification.

> "The Jerusalem elders were in somewhat of a bind. On the one hand, they had supported Paul's witness to the Gentiles at the Jerusalem Conference. Now they found Paul a *persona non grata* and his mission discredited not only among the Jewish populace, which they were seeking to reach, but also among their more recent converts. They did not want to reject Paul. Indeed, they praised God for his successes. Still they had their own mission to the Jews to consider, and for that Paul was a distinct liability."[1031]

From here to the end of Acts, Paul argued before various audiences that he was a loyal Jew, and that his mission to the Gentiles was not anti-Jewish. He insisted that he did not oppose the Jews or their keeping of the Mosaic Law.

21:22-24 The elders' plan aimed to prove to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and to all the Jews there, that Paul had not abandoned the customs of the Jews. He had, of course, ceased to believe and teach that salvation came by

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[1030]Bock, *Acts*, p. 646.

[1031]Polhill, p. 447.

obeying the Mosaic Law. He was no longer a Jew in religion, but he was still a racial Jew, and as such observed Jewish cultural practices (e.g., a ritual of purification for those who came from foreign, unclean lands; cf. Num. 19:12). Many commentators believed the "vow" in view here was a Nazarite vow, but that vow could not be taken for less than 30 days.[1032]

The "four men" in question had taken (and were "under," or obligated to keep) a temporary "vow," as Paul had done recently (18:18). At the end of the vow, each of them had to bring an offering to the temple (cf. Num. 6:14-15). The elders suggested that Paul go with them to the temple, purify himself with them for temple worship, and show his support of the Jewish custom by paying for their offerings. King Agrippa I had recently, on his arrival from Rome to take possession of his throne, similarly demonstrated his sympathy for the Jews.[1033] Paul could do this, and did so without compromising his convictions, since the Jews did not regard taking a vow as essential for acceptance by God. It was strictly voluntary. They regarded circumcision, on the other hand, as essential. However, Paul did not even object to circumcision as a custom (16:3), though he did object to it as a rite essential for God's acceptance (Gal. 2).

21:25 James and the elders repeated their former conviction regarding the instruction of Gentile converts. This was simply a point of clarification designed to emphasize that the decision of the Jerusalem Council still stood (cf. 15:20, 29). Their counsel to Paul on this occasion did not contradict their strong commitment to salvation by grace.

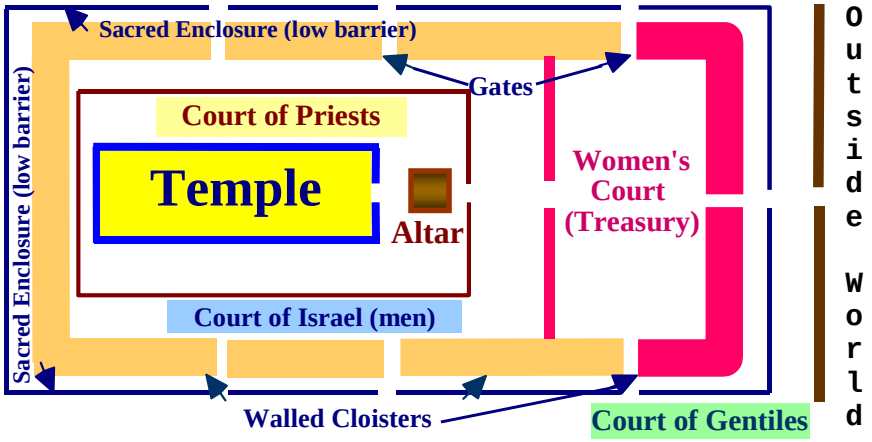
21:26 A Jew would normally *announce* the "completion" of his vow to the priest, and then seven days later present his offerings (cf. Num. 6:13-20). The Law did not prescribe a week's wait, but it was customary. Paul accompanied the four men "into the temple," and underwent the rites of "purification" with them, because he was paying the expenses of their vow. A few expositors believed Paul compromised his convictions here.[1034] But this is a minority opinion that I do not share. The Jews considered paying the charges for votive offerings an act of piety and a symbolic identification with the Jews.

The riot in the temple 21:27-36

21:27-28 The "Jews from Asia," possibly from Ephesus, were obviously unbelievers. They charged Paul with the same kind of crimes the unbelieving Jews had accused Stephen of committing (6:11, 13-14). The Jews permitted Gentiles in the outer court of the temple, the court of the Gentiles. They could not go in beyond the sacred enclosure: into the

[1032]Mishnah *Oholot* 2:3; 17:5; 18:6. See Haenchen, p. 612.
[1033]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 19:6:1.
[1034]E.g., Morgan, *The Acts . . .*, p. 485.

women's court, or into the court of Israel, much less into the court of the priests.



Jewish men like Paul, who were not priests or Levites, could go no farther than the court of Israel. The priests had posted notices prohibiting Gentiles from entering the sacred enclosure, the area that included the courts of the women, Israel, and the priests.[1035] These were in Latin and Greek, and were on the barrier, the "Soreg," at the foot of the steps leading to this area of the temple. Archaeologists have discovered two of these notices.[1036] One reads as follows:

> "No man of another nation to enter within the fence and enclosure round the temple. And whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues."[1037]

The Romans allowed the Jews to execute any Gentile, even a Roman citizen, for proceeding beyond this low, stone barrier.[1038]

21:29 "Trophimus the Ephesian" was Paul's Gentile traveling companion from Asia (20:4). The Asian Jews had previously seen them together in the city, and had assumed that Paul had brought this Gentile into the sacred enclosure of the temple.

> "The possibility that Trophimus might have wandered of his own freewill into the forbidden area is about as likely as that somebody should wander into private rooms in the Kremlin for the purpose of sightseeing."[1039]

[1035]See Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 15:11:5; idem, *The Wars* . . ., 6:2:4; Finegan, *Light from* . . ., pp. 325-26.

[1036]See Riesner, p. 194.

[1037]C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, p. 50. See Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*, p. 81, or Kent, p. 163, for a photograph of this limestone block.

[1038]Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 5:5:2; 6:2:4.

[1039]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 348.

21:30 The rumor of Paul's alleged capital offense traveled quickly throughout Jerusalem, and brought a mob of zealous Jews into the temple courtyard. "All the city was aroused" is probably hyperbole.

> ". . . the Temple was a fetish for all Jews, but for none more so than fanatically devout pilgrims from the Diaspora, who had travelled far to celebrate the festival of Pentecost in the holy city."[1040]

> "The perspective of the Jews toward the temple was strikingly similar to that of Gentile worshipers of gods and goddesses like Artemis."[1041]

Evidently the priests (Levites, temple police) "dragged" Paul "out of" one of the inner courts, and into the court of the Gentiles. The "doors" that Luke referred to, separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts that were accessible only to Jews. The priests now closed these doors to prevent the defiling of the inner courts by the tumult and bloodshed.[1042]

21:31-32 The Jews proceeded to beat Paul ("seeking to kill him") in the court of the Gentiles. This was the "rebel's beating" that the Jews commonly executed on people who supposedly openly defied the Mosaic Law or the teachings of the elders (cf. Luke 4:29; John 8:59; 10:31).[1043] News of this commotion reached the Roman "commander" of the Fortress of Antonia, which connected with the temple area on the northwest. Herod the Great had built this fortress to house the soldiers of the Tenth Legion. The commander's name was Claudius Lysias (23:26). He was responsible for the 1,000 soldiers stationed there. When he saw the riot, he summoned "soldiers and centurions" (commanders of 100 soldiers each) and "ran down" the steps of the fortress and into the court of the Gentiles.

> "We know for certain of only a subterranean passage which led from the fortress Antonia on the 'north-western angle' of the Temple into the Temple Court, and of the cloisters with stairs descending into the porches, by one of which the chief captain Lysias rushed to the rescue of Paul, when nearly killed by the infuriated multitude."[1044]

Levites constituted the temple police (cf. 4:1), but the Roman troops were responsible to keep peace in the whole city.[1045] The Jews "stopped beating Paul" when they "saw the commander and the [other] soldiers."

[1040]Neil, p. 220.
[1041]Thomas A. Golding, "Pagan Worship in Jerusalem?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:679 (July-September 2013):316.
[1042]Jeremias, *Jerusalem in* . . ., pp. 209-10.
[1043]Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 66-67.
[1044]Ibid., p. 37.
[1045]Ibid., pp. 211-12.

> "One thing Rome insisted on—civil order. A riot was an unforgivable sin both for the populace who staged it and the commander who allowed it."[1046]

This is the sixth time in Acts that Paul's ministry had ignited a public disturbance (cf. 14:19; 16:19-22; 17:5-8, 13; 19:25-34).

21:33-34 The "commander" arrested ("took hold of") Paul, assuming that he was a criminal. The "two chains" the Roman guards placed on Paul probably bound him to two soldiers (cf. 12:6). When the commander tried to learn "who" Paul "was," and "what he had done," from some members of the crowd, he received conflicting information. So he ordered Paul brought into the "barracks," the Fortress of Antonia.

21:35-36 Stairs led up to the fortress from the city, both on its west side, and from the temple courtyard on its south side.[1047] Probably the "stairs" in verse 35 were one of the two south stairways leading from the temple courtyard into the fortress.

The fury of the Jews was evident in their desire to tear Paul apart ("violence of the mob") immediately. Their cry ("Away with him!") recalls their words about Jesus some 27 years earlier (Luke 23:18; John 19:15; cf. Acts 22:22). Probably the Antonia Fortress was where the soldiers took Jesus for trial before Pilate. It was also the prison from which the angel had freed Peter (12:5).

Paul's defense before the Jewish mob 21:37—22:22

> "In this first of Paul's five defenses, Luke's apologetic interests come to the fore in highlighting the nonpolitical character of Christianity (contrary to other messianic movements of the day, cf. 21:38) and in presenting Paul's mandate to the Gentiles as being the major reason for Jewish opposition to the gospel (cf. 22:10-22)."[1048]

Paul's request to address the people 21:37-40

21:37-38 The commander had assumed that Paul was a certain "Egyptian" who had appeared in Jerusalem three years earlier. This man claimed to be a prophet of God and announced that the wall of Jerusalem would collapse at his command. He further claimed that he would lead his followers from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem where they would defeat the Romans and throw off their yoke.[1049] The Romans, however, attacked this man's followers first, killing many of them, but he himself had escaped.

[1046]Barclay, p. 172.

[1047]Foakes-Jackson and Lake, 4:136.

[1048]Longenecker, p. 523.

[1049]See Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 20:8:6; and idem, *The Wars* . . ., 2:13:5.

The Egyptian's followers came from the ranks of "The Assassins" (lit. "The Daggermen"). These were radicals who would secretly mingle with crowds, holding daggers hidden under their cloaks, and would stealthily stab to death Romans and pro-Roman Jews in an attempt to gain Jewish independence from Rome.[1050]

Claudius Lysias evidently thought this Egyptian "freedom fighter" had returned to the temple area to recruit more followers, and that the people who now recognized him as an impostor had turned against him.

21:39 Paul explained that he was "a Jew," and thus had a right to be in the temple court of Israel. He was not a resident of Egypt, but "a Roman citizen" of the well-respected Roman city of "Tarsus." Tarsus was one of the three chief centers of learning in the ancient world (a "no insignificant city"), along with Athens and Alexandria. Strabo, the ancient Greek geographer, wrote that in all that related to philosophy, literature, and general education, the fame of Tarsus was exceeded that of Athens and Alexandria.[1051] Tarsus had several hundred thousand inhabitants and was noted for its textile industry.[1052] It was also the capital "of Cilicia," and a free city in the empire.

> "It is important to recognize that to a great extent in antiquity people were judged by the importance of the place where they were born. Their own personal honor and dignity was in part derived from the honor rating of the place from which they came."[1053]

> "We have good reason to believe that at the period of the Apostle's birth the Jews were unmolested at Tarsus, where his father lived and enjoyed the rights of a Roman citizen. It is a mistake to suppose that this citizenship was a privilege which belonged to the members of the family, as being natives of this city. . . . It is more probable that it came to him as a reward of services rendered, during the civil wars, to some influential Roman. Great numbers of Jews were made slaves in the Civil Wars, and then manumitted. A slave manumitted with due formalities became a Roman citizen."[1054]

[1050]Ibid., 2:13:3, 5; and idem, *Antiquities of* . . ., 20:8:5, 6, 10. See also Richard A. Horsley, "High Priests and the Politics of Roman Palestine," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17:1 (June 1986):42-43; and Mark A. Brighton, "The Sicarii in Acts: A New Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:3 (September 2011):547-58.

[1051]Cited by Howson, pp. 18, 32.

[1052]Bock, *Acts*, p. 658.

[1053]Witherington, p. 663.

[1054]Howson, p. 38.

21:40 These credentials persuaded the Roman commander to let Paul address the mob.

> "Paul had shown respect for the tribune's authority, spoken an educated man's Greek, and made considerable honor and status claims. On these grounds the tribune's action is quite believable. He had no evidence that Paul was not who he claimed to be, and it was always very unwise to refuse or offend someone of equal or higher social status than oneself."[1055]

Paul "motioned . . . with his hand" to the crowd, a gesture designed to quiet them and rivet their attention (cf. 12:17). Paul spoke to the Jews in Aramaic ("the Hebrew dialect"), the vernacular of Palestinian Jews, rather than in Greek.[1056] This would have helped his hearers realize that he was one of them.

Paul's speech in his defense 22:1-21

The speeches in Acts so far have been mainly in the form of deliberative rhetoric, the purpose of which is to make people change their minds and lives in view of the future. In chapters 22—26, however, the speeches are forensic rhetoric, designed mainly for defensive and apologetic purposes.[1057]

Paul needed to defend himself against the charge that he had been disloyal to his people, the Mosaic Law, and the temple (cf. 21:28). His devout Jewish audience was especially skeptical of Paul since he was a Hellenistic Jew who fraternized with Gentiles. This is an excellent example of the Holy Spirit giving the Lord's servant the words to say on the spur of the moment, as Jesus had promised He would do (Matt. 10:16-20; Mark 13:9-11). All of Paul's speeches from here on in Acts concern his defense.

> "It [the rest of Acts] is a mixture of travel narratives and defense speeches and it covers a full quarter of Acts, indicating its importance."[1058]

22:1-2 Paul addressed his audience warmly and respectfully, in the same terms ("Brethren and fathers") Stephen had used (7:2). Using the Aramaic language had the desired effect: The Jews paid even closer attention.

> "The real crime of S. Paul was preaching to the Gentiles, and the real heresy his gospel of equality of privilege. Hence he defends himself by asserting (1) his loyalty to Israel, and (2) that his preaching was simply obedience to a divine command."[1059]

[1055]Witherington, p. 664.
[1056]Cf. Edersheim, *Sketches of . . .*, pp. 20-21.
[1057]See Witherington, pp. 660-61, for further discussion.
[1058]Bock, *Acts*, p. 654.
[1059]Rackham, p. 407.

22:3 Paul began by relating his manner of life before his conversion. He emphasized his orthodox background and education "under" the most respected Jewish teacher of his day, "Gamaliel" (cf. 5:34). We have no record of how old Paul was when he came to Jerusalem in his youth.

> "From a passage in a sermon attributed to St. Chrysostom, it has been inferred that he was born in the year 2 B.C. of our era. This is on the supposition that he died A.D. 66, at the age of 68. The date is not improbable; but the genuineness of the sermon is suspected . . ."[1060]

It is possible that Paul spent his early childhood in Jerusalem.[1061] Others believe he spent this part of his life in Tarsus.[1062] One view is that Paul moved to Jerusalem between the ages of 10 and 12.[1063] Another is that he was 13 or 14 years old when he came to Jerusalem.[1064] The difference in interpretation springs partly from two different ways of punctuating this verse. Paul's point in citing his background was to show his hearers that he was as "zealous" for his Jewish heritage ("for God") as any of them (cf. Gal. 1:14).

22:4-5 His zeal for God was clear in that he "persecuted" Christians ("this Way") "to the death" (cf. 9:1-2). This is precisely what his hearers wanted to do in Paul's case. Paul did so as an agent of the Sanhedrin ("Council"), which gave him authority to pursue Christian Jews as far away as "Damascus."

22:6-9 Paul next related the events of his conversion, and stressed the supernatural revelation God had given him. That revelation accounted for the radical change in his life. This account of Paul's conversion harmonizes with the other two accounts of it that Luke (9:3-19) and Paul (26:12-18) gave us in Acts. On this occasion, as well as in chapter 26, Paul emphasized features that would have been especially significant to his audience. His listeners were Jewish in chapter 22, and Roman in chapter 26.

As in 9:3-6, Paul stressed that his encounter with God was an event that God had initiated. It was not something that Paul or others had sought. Jesus of Nazareth had reached out to him. Therefore Jesus was not only the Messiah, but He was and is the risen Messiah. It was this Messiah who had changed Paul's perspective and understanding. When Paul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" (v. 8), he was probably addressing the Person speaking to him as *God* and as *personal master* (cf. 9:5). Evidently Paul's

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[1060]Howson, p. 37.
[1061]W. C. van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem: The City of Paul's Youth*, pp. 9, 28.
[1062]E.g., Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty*, pp. 25-27.
[1063]Howson, p. 43.
[1064]Robertson, 3:386.

traveling companions heard a voice-like sound, but only Paul understood Jesus' words (v. 9; cf. 9:7; 26:14; John 12:29).

22:10-11 As a good Jew, Paul wanted to obey divine revelation, so he asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" Submissively, he allowed others to lead him to "Damascus," where the Lord had instructed him to "go" to receive further directions.

22:12-13 Paul described "Ananias" as a "devout" Jew who carefully observed the "Law," and one who had a good reputation among his fellow Israelites. Paul related Ananias' words more fully here than Luke did in chapter 9. This respected Jew had also received a revelation from God that he communicated to Paul in distinctly Jewish terms ("Brother Saul . . . the God of our fathers . . ."). Paul sought to impress his hearers with the fact that a pious Jew had communicated God's mission to him. Ananias had even called Paul his "brother."

22:14-15 Ananias explained to Paul that it was "the God of their (our) fathers" who had appeared to Paul (cf. 3:14). This title for God is distinctly Jewish. God wanted Paul to "know His will," to "see the Righteous One" (the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, v. 8), and to receive direct revelation from Him ("hear an utterance from His mouth"). Ananias also said that God had told him that Paul was to be a witness "to all men" of what Paul had seen and heard. This revelation vindicated Paul's ministry to Gentiles.

> "It is important to remember that Paul in Acts is not the apostle to the Gentiles. He has been sent 'to all persons,' [v. 15] which means both Jews and Gentiles. He is the one through whom the Lord has chosen to realize the divine purpose of including both groups in salvation, as announced already in Luke 2:30-32 and 3:6."[1065]

22:16 Verse 16 has been a problem to some readers of Acts because people could understand it to be saying that water baptism washes away sins. The writers of Scripture present water baptism, elsewhere, not as the agent of spiritual cleansing, but as the illustration (symbol) of spiritual cleansing that has already taken place (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 3:21). The agent of spiritual cleansing is faith in Christ. Paul referred to faith in this verse as "calling on His name" (cf. Joel 2:32). Paul evidently experienced regeneration on the Damascus road; he believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the divine Messiah predicted in the Old Testament (v. 10; cf. Gal. 1:11-12; Acts 9:17-18). He experienced baptism in water several days after he had called on the Lord for salvation. The Lord had already washed Paul's sins away when he had called on the Lord. Then *later* Paul arose and received baptism. The Greek word *epikalesamenos*, translated "calling on," is an aorist participle meaning "having called on."

[1065]Tannehill, 2:280.

> "Baptism symbolized the method of salvation (identification with Christ) and washing symbolized the result (cleansing from sin)."[1066]

22:17 Paul next related his mission from God and included some new things that Luke did not record in chapter 9. Evidently Ananias conveyed to Paul God's commission to go to the Gentiles (9:15-16). In "Jerusalem," God confirmed this mission to Paul by special revelation, as he "was praying in the temple" following his return from Damascus (9:26-29; Gal. 1:18-19). That took place in the third year after his conversion. The fact that Paul was *praying in the temple* when God gave him direction would have positively impressed this Jewish crowd even further.

22:18-20 In that vision, the risen and exalted Jesus of Nazareth had instructed Paul to leave Jerusalem. Luke did not mention this instruction earlier (9:29-30), but instead had emphasized the activity of Paul's fellow believers in sending him to Tarsus. Their insistence was in harmony with the Lord's command. Jerusalem was God's originally intended place of witness, and the temple had been His place of revelation. The reason Paul needed to leave Jerusalem, was that the Jews there would "not accept" his testimony about Jesus, even though Paul had formerly persecuted Jesus' disciples.

22:21 Paul was to go to the Gentiles, the Messiah revealed to him, because the Jews would not accept his witness. Specifically, the Lord directed Paul to "go . . . to the Gentiles, who were "far away," namely: Gentiles who had no relationship to Judaism (cf. 2:39).

F. F. Bruce concluded that in narrating Paul's speeches, Luke followed the precedent of the Greek historian Thucydides. Thucydides wrote that, though he hiimself composed the speeches in his history, he nonetheless tried to reproduce the general meaning of what the speakers said.[1067] Under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, Luke received guidance to write exactly what God wanted written. Almost all scholars agree that Luke *summarized* most, if not all, of the speeches that he recorded in Acts.

The Jews' response 22:22

Jews had taken messages from God to Gentiles many times in Israel's past (e.g., Jonah; the Pharisees, Matt. 23:15; et al.). That revelation could not have been what infuriated Paul's audience. What upset them was that Paul was approaching Gentiles directly about the Messiah—without first introducing them to Judaism and its institutions. This was equivalent to placing Gentiles on the same footing before God as Jews, and this was the height of apostasy to the traditional Jewish mind. This is why Paul's hearers reacted so violently and allowed him to say no more.

[1066]Kent, p. 166. See also Robertson, 3:391-92.

[1067]F. F. Bruce, "Paul's Apologetics . . .," p. 379.

> "The bulk of Jerusalem has reacted now against Jesus, Peter, John, Stephen, and Paul. For Acts, this is a final, key rejection of the gospel . . ."[1068]

Paul's defense before Claudius Lysias 22:23-29

22:23-24 Claudius Lysias could not understand why the Jews reacted as they did. If he did not understand Aramaic, his confusion would have been even greater. He could not tolerate a riot, so he decided to get the truth from Paul by threatening him and, if necessary, torturing him. This type of beating ("scourging"), a bloody, violent whipping applied with strips of leather embedded with scraps of bone or metal fastened to a stout wooden handle, usually resulted in death or permanent crippling.[1069] This was the weapon (a "scourge") the Roman soldiers used to punish Jesus, albeit after Pilate had declared Him *innocent* (Matt. 27:26; John 18:38—19:1). This would have been the worst beating Paul ever experienced (cf. 16:22-23; 2 Cor. 11:24-25).

> "In being called as witness to this Jesus, Paul was also called to suffering (9:16), suffering that increasingly looks like Jesus' suffering (cf. 21:11-14; 22:22) and includes an extensive series of trials and threats to Paul's life. The trials, even though extended over much more time and depicted in fuller scenes, resemble Jesus' trials. Both Jesus and Paul must appear before the Jewish council, the Roman governor, and a Jewish king. Both are repeatedly declared innocent yet not released."[1070]

22:25 Roman law protected Roman citizens from the "scourge" (Lat. *flagellum*) before they went on trial, and even if they were found guilty.[1071] The fact that Paul raised a question in his defense, rather than demanding his release, reflects his self-control in this dangerous situation. He was under the Spirit's control.

> ". . . martyrdom is only of value when it cannot be avoided."[1072]

> "Paul waits until he has been chained for the same reason as in 16.37; he now has legal room to maneuver against *them*."[1073]

[1068]Bock, *Acts*, p. 653.
[1069]See Witherington, p. 676, for drawings of four varieties of Roman scourges.
[1070]Tannehill, 2:282.
[1071]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 528. Cf. Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:14:9.
[1072]Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 383.
[1073]Keener, p. 390.

22:26-28 During the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54), it was possible to obtain Roman citizenship for a high price. Claudius Lysias' name probably had some connection with the Emperor Claudius, since the commander had evidently purchased his citizenship under the reign of that emperor. This had not always been possible in the empire. Earlier the government conferred citizenship for rendering valuable service to a Roman general or high official.[1074] This is probably how Paul's father or grandfather received his citizenship. As the son of a Roman citizen, Paul *inherited* this status; it did not come to him because he was a citizen of Tarsus. Tarsus was a free city, not a colony of Rome like Philippi. Born citizens enjoyed greater respect than Romans who had bought their citizenship.[1075]

Roman citizens kept the documents proving their status in secure places, and nothing external identified them as citizens. People normally accepted a verbal claim to being a Roman citizen at face value, since to claim citizenship falsely was a capital offense.[1076] Claudius Lysias took the course of action that was safest for him: he accepted Paul's claim.

> "Perhaps he [Paul] carries his *diploma*, a wooden diptych containing his registration as a citizen."[1077]

22:29 The soldiers should not have bound Paul ("put him in chains") until someone had formally charged him, as a Roman citizen, with a crime.

> "The narrative of an action-packed day ends after this indication that Paul is fully a member of the two worlds to which he has been sent. He is both a devout Jew (22:3) and a Roman citizen."[1078]

Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin 22:30—23:10

> "The irregular structure of Luke's account of Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin evidently reflects the tumultuous character of the session itself. Three matters pertaining to Luke's apologetic purpose come to the fore: (1) Christianity is rooted in the Jewish doctrine of the resurrection of the dead (cf. 23:6); (2) the debate Paul was engaged in regarding Christianity's claims must be viewed as first of all a Jewish intramural affair (cf. 23:7-10); and (3) the ongoing proclamation of the gospel in the Gentile world stems from a divine mandate (cf. 23:11)."[1079]

[1074]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on . . .*, p. 446.
[1075]See Witherington, pp. 679-84, for further discussion of Roman citizenship.
[1076]Suetonius, "The Deified Claudius," in *The Lives of the Caesars*, 2:5:25.
[1077]Bock, *Acts*, p. 664.
[1078]Tannehill, 2:284.
[1079]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," pp 529-30.

22:30 The commander "released" Paul from his chains, but kept him in custody. He decided the Sanhedrin ("Council") should discover why the Jews were accusing Paul, since he himself could not figure this out. He ordered this body to meet to examine Paul, because Claudius himself was responsible for keeping peace in Jerusalem. If Paul's offenses proved inconsequential, Claudius Lysias would release him. If the Jews charged him with some religious crime, the Sanhedrin could try him. If they charged him with a civil crime, the Roman provincial governor would try him.[1080]

This was at least the sixth time that the Sanhedrin had to evaluate the claims of Christ. The first occasion was when it met to consider reports about Jesus (John 11:47-53), and the second was Jesus' trial (Matt. 26:57-68; 27:1-2; Mark 14:53-65; 15:1; Luke 22:66-71). The third meeting was the trial of Peter and John (4:5-22), the fourth was the trial of the Twelve (5:21-40), and the fifth was Stephen's trial (6:12—7:60).

23:1 Evidently Paul intended to give his testimony again, this time to the Sanhedrin ("Council"). He addressed this body using the formal address common among Jews (lit. "Men brothers," Gr. *Andres adelphoi*). He identified himself as a Jew by his manner of speech, since his loyalty to Judaism was in question.

Paul frequently claimed to have lived with a clear ("perfectly good") "conscience before God" (cf. 20:18-21, 26-27; 24:16; Rom 15:19, 23; Phil. 3:6; 2 Tim. 4:7). Paul referred to the "conscience" about 23 times in his epistles. Here this claim meant he believed that nothing he had done, which he was about to relate, was contrary to the will of God contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. Specifically, his Christian beliefs and conduct did not compromise his Jewish heritage.

> "He was not, of course, claiming sinlessness, nor was he referring to the inner spiritual conflicts of Rom. 7. The reference was to the externals of his life, and the blamelessness of his conduct as measured by the demands of the Law (cf. Phil. 3:4-6)."[1081]

23:2 Paul's claim to uprightness so incensed "Ananias the high priest," that he ordered a soldier to "strike Paul (him) on the mouth." Probably Ananias, who was a Sadducee, had already made up his mind that Paul, who had been a Pharisee, was guilty. An officer of another high priest had similarly struck Jesus when He had testified before the Sanhedrin (cf. John 18:20-23).

Ananias became high priest in A.D. 47. The Jewish high priesthood was a political appointment during Rome's occupation of Palestine. Josephus painted Ananias as a despicable person. He seized, for his own use, tithes

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[1080]See my comments on 4:5 for information about the Sanhedrin.

[1081]Kent, p. 168, footnote 19.

that should have gone to the ordinary priests, and he gave large bribes to Romans and Jews. The emperor at one point summoned him to Rome, on charges of being involved in a bloody battle between Jews and Samaritans, but he escaped punishment. He was very wealthy, and resorted to violence and even assassination to accomplish his ends. He was also very pro-Roman, and the Jews finally assassinated him in their uprising against Rome in A.D. 66, nine years after Paul stood before him.[1082]

23:3 Jewish law considered a person innocent until proved guilty, but Ananias had punished Paul before he had even been charged, much less tried and found guilty. Paul reacted indignantly and uttered a prophecy of Ananias' judgment that God fulfilled later. A "whitewashed wall" was one that was frequently inferior on the inside, but looked good outwardly (cf. Ezek. 13:10-16; Matt. 23:27). Paul's reaction was extreme, but as he proceeded to explain, it resulted from misunderstanding.

23:4-5 Paul may not have known that the person who commanded the soldier to strike him was the high priest for any number of reasons: Paul had not been in Jerusalem for an extended visit for over 20 years, and may not have recognized the current high priest by sight. Perhaps Ananias was not wearing his high priestly robes, this occasion not being a regular meeting of the Sanhedrin.[1083] Or perhaps Paul was looking in another direction when Ananias gave the order to strike him. Perhaps Paul had poor eyesight.[1084] However, this seems less likely in view of verse 1. The passage, to which some commentators appeal to argue that Paul had deficient eyesight (Gal. 4:13-15), does not really say that. Another possibility is that Paul was speaking in irony: "I did not think that a man who would give such an order could be the high priest."[1085] Some interpreters believe that Paul simply lost his temper.[1086] Others believe he was apologizing.[1087] Paul voiced similar passionate utterances on other occasions (cf. Gal. 2:11; 5:12; Phil. 3:2).

The high priest was "a ruler of the Jews (your people)" in a higher sense than was true of the rest of the Sanhedrin members. Paul's quotation from Exodus 22:28 showed that he was in subjection to God's revealed will, concerning which he was on trial for repudiating. Being subject to governmental authorities is as much of a requirement under the New Covenant as it was under the Old (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; et al.). Paul quoted the Old Covenant here for the benefit of the Jews who lived under it.

[1082]Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:12:6; 2:17:6, 9; *Antiquities of* . . ., 20:5:2; 20:6:2; 20:9:2, 4. Cf. Wiersbe, 1:494.

[1083]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 531.

[1084]McGee, 4:614.

[1085]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 364; Neil, p. 228.

[1086]Ironside, *Lectures on* . . ., p. 537.

[1087]Kent, p. 168.

23:6 Paul recognized that he could not get a fair trial in a court that did not even observe the law it purported to defend, so he changed his tactics. He decided to divide the jury and began his defense again ("Men brethren"). This time he took the offensive.

The issue of "the (hope and) resurrection of the dead" was fundamental in Paul's case (cf. 17:32). Israel's national hope of deliverance by her Messiah rested on the resurrection of that Messiah as predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures. By raising the old controversy of whether resurrection is possible, Paul divided his accusers.

> "Paul keeps coming back to the theme of hope and resurrection even when it no longer provokes disruption (cf. 24:15, 21; 28:20), and it will be a central theme in Paul's climactic defense speech before King Agrippa (26:6-8, 23). Paul is doing more than injecting a controversial subject into the Sanhedrin hearing. He is trying to change the entire issue of his trial, and he will persist in this effort in subsequent scenes. Therefore, the significance of Paul's statement that he is on trial 'concerning hope and resurrection of the dead' can be understood only by considering the development of this theme in later scenes."[1088]

23:7-8 Paul's belief in the resurrection divided the Sanhedrin. The "Sadducees" denied the "resurrection," as well as the existence of (good) "angels," and (evil) "spirit(s)," but the "Pharisees" believed in ("acknowledge[d]") these things.[1089]

23:9-10 The Pharisees sided with Paul, and the Sadducees opposed him. Their emotional dispute excluded any possibility of a serious examination of Paul's conduct, or even a clarification of the charges against him. The Pharisees morever defended Paul's claim to having received a vision on the Damascus Road (22:6-11) or in the temple (22:17-21), but the Sadducees repudiated it. The Roman commander must have thrown up his hands in dismay, and "was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them." For a second time he could not discover what Paul had done, or why so many Jews hated him. Pilate had a similar problem with Jesus (John 18:28—19:15). Claudius Lysias decided to take Paul into protective custody in the Fortress ("the barracks").

[1088]Tannehill, 2:287.

[1089]See my comments on 4:1 and 5:34. See Bock, *Acts*, pp. 671-2, for six views of what the Sadducees believed about angels, and Witherington, pp. 692-93, for discussion of the view that both terms refer to deceased persons.

The Lord's encouragement of Paul 23:11

Paul was undoubtedly wondering how he would ever get out of the mess in which he found himself. At this critical moment, during the "night of the next day" ("following night"; Gr. *te epiouse nykti*), the Lord appeared to him again (cf. 9:4-6; 16:9; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 27:23-24; Gen. 15:1) and "stood at his side." The Lord's appearances to Paul all occurred at great crises in his life. He assured the apostle that he would bear "witness in (at) Rome," as he had already done in Jerusalem (1:8). This revelation is essential to Luke's purpose in writing Acts, and it certainly must have given Paul confidence as the events that followed unfolded.

> "When Jesus' witnesses were previously imprisoned, prison doors were wondrously opened for them (5:17-21; 12:1-11; 16:23-26). That is no longer the case. The Lord's reassurance must take the place of miraculously opening doors. The divine power that rescues from prison has become a powerful presence that enables the witness to endure an imprisonment that lasts for years."[1090]

> "This assurance meant much to Paul during the delays and anxieties of the next two years, and goes far to account for the calm and dignified bearing which seemed to mark him out as a master of events rather than their victim."[1091]

The Jews' plot to kill Paul 23:12-24

This is the most detailed destription of a plot against Paul in Acts (cf. 9:23-25, 29-30; 20:3).

23:12-15 Paul's adversaries (cf. 21:27-29) evidently agreed together not to "taste" food or drink again until Paul was dead (cf. John 16:2). Their plan was to have the chief priests and elders of Israel ask the Roman commander to return Paul to the Sanhedrin for further questioning. Assassins planned to kill him somewhere on the streets: between the Fortress of Antonia and the Hall of the Sanhedrin. These two buildings were not far apart. The plotters surely realized that Paul's Roman guards might kill some of their number in the process.

> "The oath was not so suicidal as it seems, since provision was made by the rabbis for releasing participants from the consequences of failure to carry out their purpose if external circumstances had made it impossible."[1092]

[1090]Tannehill, 2:292.

[1091]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on . . .*, p. 455.

[1092]Neil, p. 230.

23:16-17 We know nothing more about "Paul's sister" than what Luke stated here. She may have lived in Jerusalem, Tarsus, or elsewhere. Obviously her "son," Paul's nephew, sided with his uncle rather than with the assassins. This is the only reference to Paul's immediate family in the New Testament. Other writers used the Greek word *neanian*, translated "young man" (v. 17), of persons in their twenties and thirties, as well as for younger men (cf. 7:58; 20:9). However, verse 19 suggests that he may have been even younger than a teenager. Paul could receive visitors in the barracks where he was a prisoner, because he was a Roman citizen in protective custody. He could also summon a centurion to do certain favors for him, which he did here.

> "I find today that there is a group of super-pious folk, very sincere and very well-meaning, which tells me I should not go to a doctor concerning my cancer or other illnesses but that I should trust the Lord to heal me. Well, I certainly do trust the Lord; I have turned my case over to the Great Physician, and I believe He provides doctors. It would have been a simple thing for Paul to have told his nephew, 'Thanks for telling me the news, but I'm trusting the Lord—so you can go back home.' But we find here that Paul used the privileges of his Roman citizenship which were available to him. Obviously the Lord provides these means and He expects us to use them. This in no way means that we are not trusting Him. Rather, we are trusting God to use the methods and the means to accomplish His purpose."[1093]

23:18-22 The commander took the advice of Paul's nephew seriously. He probably knew Ananias well enough to know that the high priest would go along with this assassination plot.

23:23-24 The commander also realized that Paul's enemies in Jerusalem would stop at nothing to see him dead. As long as Paul was in Jerusalem there was a danger of rioting. Consequently Claudius prepared to send him to the Roman provincial capital with a heavy guard under cover of night. The total number of soldiers may have been 270 or 470, depending on the meaning of *dexiolaboi*, "spearmen." This word may refer to either foot soldiers or to led horses.[1094] The question is whether there were 200 infantry and 70 cavalry: plus 200 "spearmen," *or* 200 "extra horses." The third hour of the night was 9:00 p.m. This is the third time Paul left a city secretly at night (cf. 9:25; 17:10). Obviously Claudius Lysias did not want the assassination of a Roman citizen on his record, so he took precautions to protect Paul. Paul's guards continued to treat him with the respect due a Roman citizen. The commander even provided horses for him to ride on.

[1093]McGee, 4:616.

[1094]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 535; Neil, p. 231.

> "The size of the escort is not excessive, in view of the troubled times and Jewish fanaticism."[1095]

Lysias' letter to Felix 23:25-30

23:25 The commander had to send a copy of the background of Paul's case along with Paul himself. Luke wrote that what follows in the text was substantially what the "letter" contained.

23:26 This is the first mention of the commander's name in Acts. His Greek name was "Lysias," and when he purchased his Roman citizenship (cf. 22:28), he must have also taken, as his first name, the Roman name of the emperor. "Felix" was the governor of the Roman province of Syria, which included Judea.[1096] Claudius Lysias addressed Felix politely (cf. 1:1; 24:2; 26:25).

23:27-30 The commander put himself in the best light possible in view of the facts. He mentioned his "rescue" of Paul in the temple courtyard, but did not include that he almost flogged Paul. New in this letter is the mention of Paul's arrest by the Jews, evidently the Jewish temple police. Lysias wrote that he had rescued Paul because he knew ("having learned") that Paul was a Roman citizen, but in fact the commander only learned of Paul's Roman citizenship *after* he had arrested ("rescued") him (21:34; 22:26-27). Of particular importance is the notice that in Lysias' judgment, Paul was not guilty of any crime (cf. John 18:38) "deserving death or imprisonment," but his case only involved disputes ("questions") over Jewish theology or "their Law" (cf. Gallio in 18:14-15). This was another judgment, favoring not only Paul but Christianity, by a Roman official, that Luke carefully documented (cf. 19:40; 23:9; 25:25; 26:31-32). Every Roman magistrate before whom Paul appeared (Gallio, Lysias, Felix, and Festus) declared him innocent. Undoubtedly Claudius Lysias told the Jewish leaders to go to Caesarea after Paul had left Jerusalem.

Paul's trip back to Caesarea 23:31-32

The large contingent of Roman soldiers escorted Paul, through the Judean hill country and the Shephelah (foothills), to the town of "Antipatris," about 37 miles northwest of Jerusalem. The remaining 28 miles to Caesarea covered flatter terrain, in an area that had a sparser Jewish population. Paul's party traveled across this distance in daylight. The foot soldiers "returned" to Jerusalem ("the barracks") from Antipatris, and the 70 remaining cavalry soldiers ("horsemen") escorted Paul the rest of the way to Caesarea.

Paul's departure from Jerusalem was the first leg of his journey to Rome. God had used Paul as His witness in Jerusalem, once again, and had preserved him to witness to the uttermost part of the earth.

[1095]Ibid.

[1096]Cf. Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 2:12:8.

3. Ministry in Caesarea 23:33—26:32

Paul's ministry in Caesarea was from prison. Luke devoted about three chapters to Paul's ministry in Caesarea, primarily to reemphasize the legality of Christianity while various Roman officials scrutinized it, and to repeat major themes in Paul's addresses.

Paul's introduction to Felix 23:33-35

23:33 The "governor" (procurator) of Judea at this time was Antonius Felix (A.D. 52-59).[1097] Pontius Pilate occupied this office from A.D. 26 to 36. Felix had a reputation for being a harsh ruler who had risen from a lowly background. The Roman historian Tacitus described him as follows.

> ". . . Antonius Felix, practiced every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of [a] king with all the instincts of a slave."[1098]

He was apparently a freed man, someone who had been a bondsman (indentured servant or bondslave) but had received his freedom from an authoritative Roman, who in this case was Emperor Claudius' mother, Antonia. He was the first slave ever to become the governor of a Roman province.[1099] Felix rose to power as a result of his influential brother, his self-serving political maneuvering, and his three calculating marriages. He normally dealt very severely with Jews, especially "The Daggermen," the terrorists who sought to overthrow Roman rule by assassinating key Romans and pro-Roman Jews (cf. 21:38).[1100]

23:34-35 Felix inquired concerning Paul's home "province" for the following reason: If Paul had come from an area in the empire that had its own ruler, in addition to a Roman governor, then that local authority had a right to witness the proceedings (cf. Luke 23:6-12). "Cilicia" was not such a place, however, so Felix could deal with Paul himself. He needed to hear the testimony of Paul's "accusers," of course. Consequently Felix "kept" Paul in the governor's palace, "Herod's Praetorium," which Herod the Great had built, until those Jews arrived and he could conduct a hearing. The governor's palace had cells for prisoners. Paul would have been fairly comfortable there, since he was a Roman citizen who had not even been formally charged with a crime.

Paul's defense before Felix ch. 24

> "The delivery of the prisoner Paul to Caesarea marked the beginning of a two-year imprisonment in that city. During this period he stated his case,

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[1097]Cf. F. F. Bruce, "Chronological Questions . . .," pp. 284-87; David W. J. Gill, "Acts and Roman Policy in Judaea," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 21-25.

[1098]Tacitus, *The Histories*, 5:9.

[1099]Barclay, p. 184.

[1100]Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:13:3.

> and also the case for the Christian gospel, to two provincial governors and a king, fulfilling one aspect of the Lord's prediction about his ministry (9:15)."[1101]
>
> "In his account of Paul's defense before Felix, Luke gives almost equal space to (1) the Jewish charges against Paul (vv. 1-9), (2) Paul's reply to these charges (vv. 10-21), and (3) Felix's response (vv. 22-27). He does this, it seems, because he wants to show that despite the devious skill of the Jewish charges and the notorious cruelty and corruptibility of Felix, no other conclusions can be drawn from Paul's appearance before him than that (1) Christianity had nothing to do with political sedition and (2) Jewish opposition to Christianity sprang from the Christian claim to legitimate fulfillment of the hopes of Judaism."[1102]

The presentation of charges against Paul 24:1-9

24:1 The heat of the Jews' hatred of Paul is obvious from their speedy trip to Caesarea. The "after five days" evidently refers to the period from Paul's arrest in the temple courtyard to this trial (cf. v. 11; 21:27). The Jews' antagonism is also clear in that "Ananias" himself made the trip, and that Paul's accusers had hired a special (prosecuting) "attorney" to present their case. "Tertullus" (a diminutive form of "Tertius"; Rom. 16:22) was probably a Hellenistic Jew, in view of his Roman name, though he could have been a Roman Gentile, and hence a Latin speaker. "Attorney" is the translation of a Greek word that appears only here in the New Testament (*rhetoros*), which means a lawyer who was especially skillful in oratory.

24:2-4 Flattery of officials in formal speeches was fashionable in Paul's day, and Tertullus heaped praise on Felix. The title "most excellent" usually applied to men who enjoyed a higher social rank than Felix. Felix was a *fierce* ruler, and the "peace" that existed was a result of *terror* rather than tranquillity. Tertullus praised Felix for being a peacemaker—in preparation for his charge that Paul was a disturber of the peace (vv. 5-6). Felix's "reforms" were more like purges. Speakers of that day also usually promised to be brief, which promises then—as now—they did not always keep.

24:5 Tertullus leveled three specific charges against Paul: a personal charge (heresy), a political charge (treason), and a religious charge (sacrilege). First, he was a "pest" and a troublemaker ("fellow who stirs up dissension") throughout the Roman Empire, having "stirred up" Jews wherever he went. This was a serious charge because Rome sought to preserve peace in the world, and Jewish uprisings were a perennial problem to Roman officials.

[1101]Kent, p. 172.

[1102]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 538.

Second, Tertullus pictured Paul as the leader of a cult outside mainstream Judaism. The Roman Empire tolerated Judaism, but the "sect of the Nazarenes" was not a part of Judaism to the Jewish leaders. This title is a unique name for Christianity found nowhere else in the New Testament. Tertullus evidently used this name to make "the Way" sound as bad as possible.

> "That [second charge] coupled Paul with Messianic movements; and the Romans knew what havoc false Messiahs could cause and how they could whip the people into hysterical risings which were only settled at the cost of blood."[1103]

The first two charges gave the impression that Paul was guilty of sedition against Rome. The Jews had similarly charged Jesus with political sedition before Pilate (cf. Luke 23:2, 5).

24:6-8 Third, Tertullus claimed Paul had *tried to* "desecrate the temple," allegedly by attempting to bring a Gentile into its inner precincts (21:28). This was a softening of the Asian Jews' earlier charge that Paul had indeed brought Trophimus into the inner precincts of the temple (21:28-29). Tertullus' statement that the Jews had arrested Paul harmonized with Lysias' report (23:27). The Jews had also tried to kill Paul on the spot (21:31-33). Probably Tertullus left that part out because it would have put the Jews in a very bad light. This third charge implied that Felix should put Paul to death, since Rome had given the Jews the right to execute temple desecrators.

24:9 *All* of Paul's accusers ("the Jews") confirmed Tertullus' charges. They undoubtedly expected Felix to dispatch Paul quickly, since Felix had repeatedly crucified the leaders of uprisings for disturbing the peace of Rome.[1104]

Paul's defense before Felix 24:10-21

24:10 Paul's complimentary introduction was sincere and truthful ("for many years you have been a judge to this nation"). Felix had had contact with the Jews in Palestine for over 10 years, first in Samaria and then in Judea. Paul's introduction was also briefer than Tertullus' opening statement.

> "Although Tertullus is supposed to be a skilled orator, Paul demonstrates his superior skill by making use of Tertullus' words to build his own case."[1105]

[1103]Barclay, p. 185.
[1104]Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 2:13:2-5.
[1105]Tannehill, 2:298.

24:11 In response to Tertullus' first charge (v. 5), Paul said that since he had been in Jerusalem only "12 days," implying he had not had time to be much of a pest.

24:12-13 In response to the third charge (v. 6), Paul replied that he had gone to Jerusalem "to worship" (v. 11). He had gone to bring money to the Jews there, and to present offerings to Yahweh (v. 17), not to stir up political trouble (cf. Gal. 2:7-9). His accusers could not "prove" that he had even carried on "a discussion" in the "temple," or in the "synagogues," or even in the "city," much less fomented "a riot." There was, therefore, no evidence to support these two charges against him.

24:14 Paul rebutted the second charge of leading a cult (v. 5), by explaining that his beliefs harmonized with the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures ("the Law and . . . the Prophets"). This would have helped Felix see that the real conflict between Paul and his accusers was religious, and not political, as Tertullus had made it appear.

Paul was not claiming that the church is the continuation of Israel (cf. Eph. 2:11-22). His point was that his beliefs did not contradict anything predicted in the Old Testament.

24:15 Ananias was a Sadducee, and the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (23:8). Therefore Felix must have seen that Paul and Ananias disagreed strongly on this theological point. The Jews who accompanied Ananias to Caesarea evidently included Pharisees, who *did believe* in the resurrection. Belief in "the resurrection" was the theologically conservative position of the Jews as a whole, since the Old Testament teaches it (e.g., Ps. 16:10-11; Dan. 12:2).

This verse contains the only New Testament reference that Paul believed in both the resurrection of "the wicked" and the resurrection of "the righteous." Nevertheless the Scriptures speak elsewhere of God raising all people to face judgment (e.g., Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:31-33, 46; John 5:28-29; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rev. 20:12-15).

24:16 Since Paul believed God would resurrect him, he sought to maintain "a clear (blameless) conscience" while he lived. Conscience is the capacity to feel guilt.

24:17-18a Rather than desecrating the temple (v. 6), Paul said he had returned to Jerusalem to give money ("alms") to the Jews there, and to "present" worship "offerings" in the temple. His gift was for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Yet at the same time, since Paul's desire was that they (the Jewish Christians) would evangelize the unsaved Jews there, he could honestly say that he had brought alms "to his (my) nation."[1106] "Alms" refers to the collection for the poor Jewish Christians, and "offerings" to

[1106]Adolph Harnack, *The Date of the Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels*, p. 74.

Paul's paying the expenses of the four men who had taken a vow (21:23-26). He had just completed the purification rites in an orderly manner, when some other Jews ("from Asia," v. 18b) stirred up dissension and started a riot.

24:18b-19 Paul pointed out that his original accusers were *not* "present" at his hearing. They "should (ought to) have been." Probably the Sanhedrin ruled that out because, in view of the facts, it would have been clear that there was no basis for their charges.

> "Roman law imposed heavy penalties upon accusers who abandoned their charges (*destitutio*), and the disappearance of accusers often meant the withdrawal of a charge. Their absence, therefore, suggested that they had nothing against him that would stand up in a Roman court of law."[1107]

24:20-21 Paul's present accusers ("these men"; i.e., Ananias, the Sadducees, plus several Pharisees) could not even testify that the Sanhedrin ("Council") had found him guilty ("tell what misdeed they found") when he appeared before that body. Some of them had disagreed with his belief about "resurrection." Therefore, Paul concluded, he was on trial over the issue of the resurrection. This put Felix in the awkward position of having to decide a theological issue over which his Jewish subjects disagreed.

> "One of the greatest things about Paul is that he speaks in his own defence with force, with vigour and sometimes with a flash of indignation—but there never emerge the accents of self-pity or of bitterness, which would have been so natural in a man whose finest actions had been so cruelly and deliberately misinterpreted and mis-stated."[1108]

The conclusion of Paul's hearing 24:22-23

24:22 Felix probably gained his "knowledge" of Christianity ("a more exact knowledge of the Way") from several sources: his current Jewish wife (who was a Herodian), Romans and Jews from Judea, and many types of individuals from other parts of the empire. He sought to preserve the peace by delaying the trial, and by separating Paul from his accusers. "Lysias" had already given his testimony in his letter to Felix (23:26-30), so Felix was stalling for Paul's benefit.

24:23 While Paul waited for Lysias to appear in Caesarea, the apostle continued to enjoy considerable personal "freedom"—as well as *Roman* protection from his *Jewish* enemies. Paul's friends probably included Aristarchus, Luke, and Philip the evangelist who evidently lived in Caesarea (27:2; 21:8).

[1107]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 541.

[1108]Barclay, p. 186.

Paul's subsequent ministry to Felix 24:24-27

24:24 Sometime later Felix, along with his current wife, sent for Paul. "Drusilla" was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I, who had been king over Palestine from A.D. 37-44. It was he who had authorized the death of James, the son of Zebedee (12:1-2), and had imprisoned Peter (12:3-11). Drusilla was Felix's third wife, whom he had married when she was 16 years old. She was now (A.D. 57) 19. She had previously been the wife of Azizus, the king of Emesa, a state within Syria, but Felix broke up that marriage to get her.[1109] Felix himself had been married twice before, to princesses, the first of which was the granddaughter of Anthony and Cleopatra. Felix used his marriages to advance his political career. The Herods were, of course, Idumeans, part Israelite and part Edomite. Drusilla eventually died when Mt. Vesuvius erupted, along with her child by Felix.[1110]

Something about Paul and or his gospel seems to have fascinated Felix. Someone commented that when Paul talked to Felix and Drusilla, enslaved royalty was addressing royal slaves.[1111]

24:25 Paul's emphases in his interview with Felix and Drusilla were the same three things—that Jesus Christ had predicted the Holy Spirit would convict people about—that would bring them to faith. These things were: sin ("self-control"), "righteousness," and "judgment" (John 16:8-11). Felix and Drusilla were notoriously deficient in all three of these areas. It is not surprising that Felix became uneasy. He apparently was willing to discuss theology but not personal morality and responsibility. These subjects terrified him (Gr. *emphobos*).

Felix's decision to postpone making a decision about his relationship to God is a common one. Often people put off this most important decision until they cannot make it. This is probably why most people who make decisions for Christ do so when they are young. Older people normally become hardened to the gospel.[1112] We do not know if Felix ever trusted in Christ; there is no evidence that he did.

24:26 We do not know for sure where Paul got the "money" that Felix hoped Paul would give him (bribe him with), or even if he had it. Perhaps the Christians who heard of his imprisonment contributed to his support (cf. v. 23; 27:3).[1113]

[1109]Ibid., p. 187.
[1110]Howson, p. 601.
[1111]Cf. Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 405.
[1112]See McGee, 4:620-21.
[1113]See Ramsay, *St. Paul* . . ., pp. 310-12.

> ". . . although provincial governors were prohibited by law from taking bribes from prisoners, the practice was common and, in the case of Felix, quite in character."[1114]

24:27 The "two years" to which Luke referred were evidently the years of Paul's detention in Caesarea. Felix's superiors relieved him of his position, because he had handled a conflict in Caesarea too harshly, between the Jewish and Gentile residents, which resulted in the suffering and death of innocent people. Too many Jews had died or been mistreated.[1115] His replacement, "Portius Festus," served as procurator of Judea from A.D. 59 to 61.[1116] To appease the Jews, Felix "left Paul imprisoned." The apostle had become a political pawn in the will of God.

It is quite likely that, if Luke was with Paul at this time, he used these two years to do some of the research he referred to at the beginning of his two-part work (i.e., Luke-Acts; cf. Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). He may have even written his Gospel then, and some of Acts. A minority of scholars believes that Paul wrote some or all of his Prison Epistles during his Caesarean imprisonment. One expositor believed Luke wrote the Book of Hebrews under Paul's tutelage during this time.[1117] This is quite unlikely.

Paul's defense before Festus 25:1-12

This is the shortest of Paul's five defenses that Luke documented. Paul made his five defenses to: (1) the Jewish mob on the Antonia Fortress stairway (22:1-21); (2) the Sanhedrin (23:1-6); (3) Felix (24:10-21); (4) Festus (25:8, 10-11); and (5) Herod Agrippa II (26:1-26). This hearing is quite similar to Paul's defense before Felix, except that here the apostle appealed to the emperor.

> "Luke's apologetic purpose is to show that only when Roman administrators were largely ignorant of the facts of the case were concessions made to Jewish opposition that could prove disastrous for the Christian movement."[1118]

Festus' visit to Jerusalem 25:1-5

25:1 Portius Festus was a more moderate and wise governor than Felix.[1119] We can see his wisdom in his decision to meet with the Jewish leaders in "Jerusalem" soon after he took office ("three days later"). The "province" in view was Syria, which contained Judea.

[1114]Neil, p. 236. Cf. Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:14:1.
[1115]Ibid., 2:13:7; Idem, *Antiquities of* . . ., 20:8:7.
[1116]Idem, *The Wars* . . ., 2:14:1; F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 474; cf. Gill, p. 25.
[1117]Morgan, *The Acts* . . ., p. 394.
[1118]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 544.
[1119]Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:14:1; *Antiquities of* . . ., 20:8:10-11.

25:2-3 These Jews realized that they did not have much hope of doing away with Paul through the Roman courts. The Jews' case against Paul was too weak. Consequently they urged the new governor to return Paul "to Jerusalem" so they could "kill him on the way" there (cf. 23:12-15). Ishmael had succeeded Ananias as high priest during the final days of Felix's governorship.[1120]

25:4-5 Festus did not agree to their request but promised to try Paul in Caesarea if his accusers would go down there with him.

Paul's hearing before Festus and the Jewish leaders in Caesarea 25:6-12

25:6-8 The "judgment seat," or "seat on the tribunal" (Gr. *bema*, v. 6, cf. vv. 10, 17; 12:21; 18:12; Matt. 27:19; John 19:13; 2 Cor. 5:10), on which Festus sat was customarily in a public place. In regard to Paul's defense (v. 8), the serious charges made by the Jews appear to have been the same ones as those that Tertullus had presented (24:5-6). However, the Jews could not prove them, and they produced no witnesses, so all Paul had to do was deny them categorically. This trial seems to have proceeded very much as the one before Felix had (ch. 24). Luke summarized the proceedings.

25:9 As the new governor, Festus did not want to do anything that would turn the Jewish authorities against him, especially in view of Felix's bad record. He did not know how to proceed (v. 20), but he wanted to stay in the Jews' good graces by doing them "a favor." Therefore he somewhat naïvely asked Paul if he was "willing" to move his trial to Jerusalem, the site of some of his alleged crimes. The fact that he asked Paul's permission indicates that Paul was not a common criminal, but an unconvicted Roman citizen with rights that the governor had to respect.

25:10-11 Paul turned this offer down, perhaps because he feared that in Jerusalem, popular opinion against him might sway his judge even more strongly than it had in Caesarea. His "appeal" for a trial in Rome, "to Caesar," was the right of every Roman citizen who believed he was in danger of violent coercion or capital punishment in a lower court.[1121] Only Roman citizens who were murderers, pirates, or bandits caught in the act could not make this appeal.[1122]

At this time, Nero was emperor, but in the early years of his rule (A.D. 54-62) he was a relatively admirable emperor, and Paul had no reason to fear him (A.D. 59). Only after A.D. 62 did Nero begin to rule erratically and to turn against Christianity.[1123]

[1120]See ibid., 20:8:8, 11.

[1121]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 545.

[1122]Barclay, p. 189.

[1123]Cf. Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:19:1.

Nothing in the New Testament indicates that Paul's appeal to Caesar was contrary to God's will. Paul probably considered this appeal as the only way he could reach Rome, having been detained in Caesarea for two years.

25:12 Paul's appeal got Festus off the hook with the Jews, so the governor willingly granted it. He could have released Paul because he was innocent (cf. 26:32), but the charges against him were political sedition and profaning the temple, both of which were capital offenses.

> "The narrator shows unusual interest in Felix and Festus. They are complex characters with conflicting tendencies. Felix is attracted to Paul and his message, yet seeks a bribe and leaves Paul in prison to appease Paul's enemies. Festus presents a favorable image of himself to the public, but his handling of Paul's case is tainted with favoritism. Neither one is willing to offend the high priests and elders by releasing Paul. The narrator's characterization of the Roman governors contributes to a portrait of Paul as one caught in a web of self-interested maneuvers by people who vie for support within the political jungle. However, Paul is not just a helpless victim. As opportunity comes, he continues to bear witness to his Lord. Although Paul continues to be denied justice and freedom, the saving purpose of God still has use for this resourceful and faithful prisoner."[1124]

Jesus had also stood trial before two Roman officials: Pontius Pilate and Herod Antipas I.

Herod Agrippa II's visit to Festus 25:13-22

The charges against Paul, and particularly his innocence, are the point of this pericope.

25:13 This "King Agrippa" was Marcus Julius Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I (12:1-11), the grandson of Aristobulus, and the great grandson of Herod the Great (Matt. 2:1).[1125] Herod the Great had tried to destroy the infant Jesus. One of his sons, Antipas, Agrippa II's great uncle, beheaded John the Baptist and tried our Lord. Agrippa II's father, Agrippa I, executed James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John. He also imprisoned Peter and died in Caesarea (ch. 12). His son, Agrippa II, is the man Paul now faced. He had grown up in Rome, and was a favorite of Emperor Claudius. He was the last in the Herodian dynasty, and has been considered the best of the Herods. He was also a friend to Flavius Josephus, who served as governor of Galilee and a Roman general about this time.[1126] Among his other powers, Agrippa II was superintendent of

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[1124]Tannehill, 2:314.

[1125]See the diagram "Herod's Family Tree" above at 12:1-2, and Bruce, "Chronological Questions . . .," pp. 283-84.

[1126]See Josephus, *The Life* . . ., par. 65, et al.

the Jerusalem temple, and he had the power to appoint Israel's high priests.[1127]

At the time he visited Festus, Agrippa was the king whom Rome had appointed over the territory northeast of the Judean province. He lived in Caesarea Philippi (Dan of the Old Testament), which he renamed "Neronias" in honor of Nero. Agrippa was about 30 years old at this time, and his sister, "Bernice" (Lat. Veronica), was one year younger. He ruled this region from A.D. 50 to 70. Drusilla, Felix's wife, was Agrippa and Bernice's younger sister. Bernice was first married to her uncle Herod, King of Chalcis, and after he died, she lived with her brother, Agrippa, in a suspicious relationship.[1128] She concluded her profligate life by a criminal connection with Titus, the conqueror of Jerusalem.[1129]

Agrippa and Bernice evidently visited Festus on this occasion to "pay their respects" to the new governor of their neighboring province. Agrippa and Bernice were essentially favorable to the Jews. They both tried to avert the Roman massacre of the Jews in A.D. 66-70.[1130]

25:14a Festus apparently wanted to discuss Paul's "case" with Agrippa because he needed to clarify the charges against Paul (v. 27). Agrippa had a reputation for being an expert in Jewish matters, since he was part Jewish and had grown up in the Herodian family. He was the person to whom Rome had given the authority: to appoint the Jewish high priest, and to preserve the temple treasury and vestments.[1131]

25:14b-21 Festus reviewed Paul's situation, and confessed his own surprise at the nature of the "charges" the Jews had brought against him. They were matters concerning the Jewish "religion" (cf. 18:15; 23:29), and the resurrection of Jesus. Luke did not previously record that Paul had spoken to Festus about Jesus' resurrection, but apparently he had. Festus did not know "how" to deal with ("investigate") these charges (v. 20).

> "It is interesting that by this stage the question of Paul's alleged desecration of the temple has quite disappeared from sight, and the topic of the resurrection (23:4; 24:21) has replaced it. . . . The real ground of dispute is that Paul preaches the resurrection of Jesus, something which the Sadducees refused to believe on principle and which the Pharisees likewise refused to believe although they admitted the fact of a final resurrection of all men."[1132]

[1127]Howson, pp. 601, 617.
[1128]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 20:7:3.
[1129]Howson, p. 600.
[1130]Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 2:15:1; 2:16:4
[1131]Idem, *Antiquities of . . .*, 20:9:4, 7.
[1132]Marshall, *The Acts . . .*, p. 388.

25:22 The case interested Agrippa, and he asked "to hear" Paul. Festus readily agreed, hoping that Agrippa would be able to help him understand Paul's situation, and provide information he could use in his report to the emperor.

Jesus had also appeared before a Jewish king, Herod Antipas I, who similarly wanted to meet Him (Luke 23:8). However, Paul's interview with Agrippa proved to be more satisfying to this king than Jesus' appearance before Antipas had been to that king (cf. Luke 23:6-12).

Paul's defense before Agrippa 25:23—26:32

This is the longest of Paul's five defenses. It centers on the gospel with an evangelistic appeal, rather than on the charges against Paul. This emphasis harmonizes with Luke's evangelistic purpose in Luke and Acts, and is a fitting climax to that purpose. It also documents God's faithfulness in allowing Paul to witness before kings (cf. 9:15).

> "Inherent in Luke's account are at least three apologetic themes: (1) Paul's relations with the Roman provincial government in Judea did not end in dissonance but with an acknowledgment of his innocence (cf. 25:25; 26:31); (2) even though the Jewish high priests and Sanhedrin opposed Paul, the Jewish king who in Rome's eyes outranked them agreed with a verdict of innocence (cf. 26:32); and (3) Paul's innocence was demonstrated not only before Roman and Jewish rulers but also publicly before 'the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city' (25:23)."[1133]

The preliminaries of the hearing 25:23-27

25:23 Festus used this occasion to honor Agrippa and Bernice before the local Caesarean leaders ("prominent men of the city"). There were five "commanders" based in Caesarea, each with responsibility for 1,000 soldiers. They all had equal authority to Claudius Lysias, the commander of the cohort based in Jerusalem (cf. 21:31—23:30; 24:22). Besides these commanders, many prominent men of the city were present in the "auditorium" of the governor's palace.

> "Everyone who was anyone would have been there."[1134]

Agrippa and Bernice conducted themselves like very important individuals with "great pomp," but Paul was the truly significant person in this gathering, as history has demonstrated (cf. Luke 21:12).

[1133]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 550.

[1134]The NET Bible note on verse 23.

25:24-27 In reviewing the reasons for conducting this hearing, Festus acknowledged that Paul had done "nothing worthy of death" as the Jews had charged (v. 25). Pilate had made a similar observation about Jesus' innocence (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). Festus referred to the Emperor (Gr. *sebastos*, cf. v. 21) as his "lord" (*kyrios*, meaning at least "majesty,"[1135] and perhaps even "deity,"[1136] vv. 25, 26). But Paul would preach *his* "Lord," a higher authority than Nero, to this crowd (cf. John 19:19). Festus "decided to send" Paul to Nero, rather than sending him back to Jerusalem (v. 9; cf. 26:32). After explaining his need in face-saving language, Festus turned the hearing over to Agrippa.

> "This naïve confession of Festus reveals how unjust has been his whole treatment of Paul."[1137]

Luke undoubtedly included Festus' preamble in Acts because it was another testimony by a Roman official that Paul and Christianity were not threats to the empire.

Paul's speech to the dignitaries 26:1-23

Paul was not on trial here. When he had appealed to Caesar (25:11), he had guaranteed that his next trial would be before the emperor. This was just a hearing designed to acquaint Agrippa with Paul's case, so Agrippa could give Festus help in understanding it and communicating it to the emperor.

> "This testimony of Paul is not a defense of himself. It is a declaration of the gospel with the evident purpose of winning Agrippa and the others present to Christ. This is a dramatic scene, and this chapter is one of the greatest pieces of literature, either secular or inspired. . . .
>
> "There is a consummate passion filling the soul of the apostle as he speaks. I think this is his masterpiece. His message on Mars' Hill is great, but it does not compare at all to this message."[1138]

The Lord had told Paul that he would bear His name before the Gentiles and kings (9:15). Jesus had also told His disciples that before the Tribulation, enemies would deliver them to prison and bring them before kings and governors for His name's sake. This, He had said, would lead to an opportunity for their testimony (Luke 21:12-13). This is exactly what happened to Paul, and he used this opportunity to give his testimony, as this chapter records.[1139]

[1135]Werner Foerster, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "kyrios," 3:1054-58.
[1136]Ladd, "The Acts . . .," p. 1171.
[1137]Robertson, 3:441.
[1138]McGee, 4:624, 626.
[1139]See Alister E. McGrath, "Apologetics to the Romans," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:620 (October-December 1998):391.

26:1 Paul apparently stretched out his hand, assuming the pose of an orator. The phrase "stretched out his hand" in Greek differs from the similar ones in 13:16 and 21:40. This "defense" is Paul's fullest, most formal, and climactic of all the ones Luke recorded in Acts (cf. 22:1-21; 23:1-6; 24:10-21; 25:8, 10-11). It is quite similar to the one he delivered from the steps of the Antonia Fortress (22:1-21), but he selected his words here carefully to appeal to Agrippa and the other Romans present.[1140]

26:2-3 Paul began with a customary introduction, in which he complimented the king sincerely ("you are an expert"), and urged him to listen "patiently." He did not promise a short defense (cf. 24:2-4, 10).

> "This was just the kind of situation Paul had longed for during two bleak years in prison—viz., a knowledgeable judge and a not inherently antagonistic audience before whom he could not only make his defense but also proclaim his message."[1141]

26:4-7 The essence of the controversy surrounding Paul's ministry and teaching, he explained, was the *fulfillment* of God's "promise" to Israel, namely: salvation through a Messiah. This promise included personal spiritual salvation, as well as national deliverance and blessing—that the Hebrew prophets had predicted. The agent of that salvation would be a Savior, whom God would both anoint and resurrect from the dead. Paul's conclusions concerning that Savior were the basis for the Jews' antagonism against him.

Paul said that it was because of his Jewish heritage, not in spite of it, that he believed and preached what he did. The Jewish "hope" finds fulfillment in the Christian gospel. It was, therefore, ironic that the Jews, of all people, should have charged him with disloyalty.

> "Paul is arguing that he has been consistent in his loyalty to the Jewish hope, whereas vv. 7-8 imply that his opponents are strangely inconsistent; what the people earnestly desire, the focus of their hope, is rejected when it arrives."[1142]

When Paul referred to his nation (v. 4), he may have had the province of Cilicia or the Jewish community in Tarsus in mind. Personal maintenance of ritual purity and strict tithing marked the lives of Pharisees primarily (v. 5). Paul's mention of the 12 tribes of Israel (v. 7) shows that he did not believe that 10 of the tribes became lost, as some cults today claim, for example: Herbert W. Armstrong's teachings, and British Israelism (cf. 2:9; Matt. 19:28; Luke 2:36; 22:30; James 1:1; Rev. 7:4; 21:12).

[1140]See Witherington, pp. 735-36.

[1141]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 551.

[1142]Tannehill, 2:318.

26:8 Paul's reference to the *resurrection* was appropriate, because Jesus' identification as the Messiah depended on His resurrection. None of Paul's hearers could reasonably doubt the resurrection of the dead since God had raised Jesus from the dead. Furthermore, "why" could not an all-powerful God "raise the dead"?

26:9-11 As a Pharisaic Jew, Paul had opposed the conclusion that "Jesus of Nazareth" was the Messiah. He had disbelieved in the resurrection of Jesus, who did not seem to him to fit the scriptural image of that Savior. "Cast my vote" (v. 10) may be metaphorical (cf. 8:1; 22:20) or, less likely, literal. There is no evidence that Paul was ever a member of the Sanhedrin, but he could have voted to punish Christians in the lower courts, such as the ones that existed in local synagogues. Some scholars believe that Paul may have been elected into the Sanhedrin after Stephen's martyrdom, possibly as a reward for his zeal against Christians.[1143] But there is no solid evidence for this. Paul "tried to force" Christians "to blaspheme," by getting them to say that Jesus was not the Christ or by getting them to curse Him (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3). He was so zealous for his errant belief that he even pursued Christians to "foreign cities" to persecute them.

> "The great Christians have never been afraid to point to themselves as living and walking examples of the power of Christ. The gospel to them was not a form of words; it was not a form of intellectual belief; it was a power unto salvation. It is true that a man can never change himself; but it is also gloriously true that what he cannot do, Jesus Christ can do for him."[1144]

26:12-14 Luke recorded two new bits of information that Paul included here, that he had not mentioned in his previous testimonies (v. 14). On the Damascus Road, "all" of his companions had "fallen to the ground" as a result of the bright light. This shows that the event was real, and not a vision that Paul had seen. Also, the Lord had spoken to him in Aramaic, probably to confirm to Paul that the One addressing him was the God of the Jews.

"Goads" were sharp sticks used to drive cattle. The figure of "kicking against goads" was, and is, a common rural metaphor that describes opposing the inevitable (like "banging your head against a wall"). Such action only hurts the one doing it, not the object of his hostility. This was the case in Paul's antagonism to God that his persecution of Christians expressed.

"In the Greek world this was a well-known expression for opposition to deity (cf. Euripides *Bacchanals* 794-95; Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 324-25; *Agamemnon* 1624; Pindar *Pythia* 2.94-95; Terence *Phormio*

[1143]E.g., Howson, p. 64.

[1144]Barclay, pp. 193-94.

1.2.27). Paul may have picked it up in Tarsus or during his missionary journeys. He used it here to show his Greek-oriented audience the implications of the question 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' Lest he be misunderstood as proclaiming only a Galilean prophet he had formerly opposed, he pointed out to his hearers what was obvious to any Jew: correction by a voice from heaven meant opposition to God himself. So he used a current expression familiar to Agrippa and the others . . ."[1145]

> "A young ox, when it was first yoked, usually resented the burden and tried kicking its way out. If the ox was yoked to a single-handed plow, the plowman would hold a long staff with a sharpened end close to the heels of the ox. Every time the ox kicked, it struck the spike. If the ox was yoked to a wagon, a studded bar with wooden spikes served the same purpose. The point was that the ox had to learn submission to the yoke the hard way."[1146]

Paul related his conversion experience very graphically on this occasion, and he stressed the significance of these events.

26:15-17 Paul brought Jesus' words on the Damascus Road (cf. 9:5-6; 22:8, 10), His instructions through Ananias (cf. 22:14-15), and His command in Paul's Jerusalem vision (cf. 22:18-21), all together in this passage. He did so to summarize and to stress the divine commission that Jesus Christ gave him concerning his particular mission in life (cf. Jer. 1:7-8; Ezek. 2:1, 3). His reference to being sent to "Gentiles" would have drawn a favorable reaction from his Gentile audience.

> "Paul's language here becomes noticeably more biblical; he sees his call as a commission to become one of God's prophets like Ezekiel or Jeremiah and to share the role of the Servant of Yahweh."[1147]

26:18 This verse recalls the divine commission of Messiah (cf. Isa. 35:5; 42:6-7, 16). It is one of the best summary statements of not only Paul's mission, but also the mission of every believer (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Col. 1:12-14). Paul was to do for others what God had done for him, and so should we. The sanctification in view is positional: God sets a person apart for a special purpose—both before and when he or she trusts Christ (cf. Eph. 1:4).

Paul had gone to Damascus as the apostle (i.e., sent one) of the Sanhedrin. He returned as the apostle of Jesus Christ.[1148]

[1145]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," pp. 552-53. See also idem, *Paul* . . ., pp. 98-101.
[1146]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1870.
[1147]Neil, p. 244.
[1148]Barclay, pp. 194-95.

26:19-20 We should probably understand verse 20 as a general description of Paul's ministry, rather than as a strictly chronological reference, in view of 9:20-30 and Galatians 1:18-24.

"Repent" again means essentially to change the mind. Note the distinction between "repenting" ("turning to God"), and "performing deeds appropriate to repentance," that Paul made in verse 20.

> "What is repentance? It is a complete change of attitude. It is a right-about-face. Here is a man who is going on living in open, flagrant sin, and he does not care anything about the things of God and is totally indifferent to the claims of righteousness. But laid hold of by the Spirit of God, that man suddenly comes face to face with his sins in the presence of God, and he turns right-about-face and comes to the God he has been spurning and to the Christ he has been rejecting and he confesses his sins and puts his trust in the Savior. All this is involved in repentance.
>
> "Here is another man. He is not living in open sin, but he has been living a very religious life. He has been very self-righteous. He has been thoroughly satisfied that because of his own goodness and because of his punctilious attention to his religious duties, God will accept him and eventually take him to be with Himself. But suddenly he is brought to realize that all his own righteousnesses are as filthy rags, that nothing he can do will make him fit for God's presence, and he faces this honestly before God. For him too there is a change of attitude. He turns away from all confidence in self, the flesh, his religion, and cries: 'In my hand no price I bring; simply to thy cross I cling.' This is repentance. It is a right-about-face."[1149]
>
> "Faith in Jesus is where the process ends, but to get there, a person changes his or her mind about sin and God and turns to God to receive the offer of salvation through Jesus. So each of these terms ("repent," "turn," "believe") is adequate for expressing the offer of the gospel, since Paul used each of them."[1150]

26:21 "For this reason" refers to Paul's preaching to Gentiles (v. 20). Paul did not explain here exactly *what* he preached to the Gentiles, namely: that they could obtain salvation simply by faith in Christ. This message is what infuriated the Jews and led to Paul's arrest. Nevertheless, Paul did give his audience enough information about Jesus Christ so they could believe in Him.

[1149]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, pp. 613-14.

[1150]Bock, *Acts*, p. 719.

26:22-23 God had stood by Paul and had helped him, as He had promised (v. 22; cf v. 17). Paul preached a message thoroughly in harmony with Israel's faith (cf. 3:18; 17:3). Verse 23 may be Luke's condensation of Paul's exposition of many Old Testament messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled (e.g., Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 53:10; 60:3). Many of the Jews rejected the ideas of a suffering Messiah, His resurrection from the dead, and His direct ministry to Gentiles, but Paul found support for these in the Old Testament.

> "Here in substance is the Gospel that Paul preached and that believers ought always to proclaim, 'that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3-4)."[1151]

Paul's appeal to Agrippa 26:24-29

26:24 Paul's knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures impressed Festus, strongly implying that Paul probably said more than Luke chose to record here. The Greek words *ta polla . . . grammata*, translated "great learning" (lit. "the many writings"), indicate that it was Paul's knowledge of the Scriptures that impressed Festus, not his general knowledge. Perhaps Paul had with him at this time, and was known to study diligently, "the books" and "the parchments" that he later asked Timothy to bring with him to Rome (2 Tim. 4:13). However, the governor did not understand the significance of Paul's beliefs. To him they seemed incomprehensible. He concluded that Paul was a zealous obscurantist, and a bit crazy, to risk his life defending such foolish ideas. The Romans did not believe in the resurrection of the body, just the immortality of the soul (cf. 17:32; 25:19).[1152] So belief in resurrection would have seemed like insanity to Festus.

> "The words were doubtless spoken ironically and in contempt: but Paul took them as though they had been spoken in earnest, and made that noble answer, which expresses, as no other words ever expressed them, that union of enthusiastic zeal with genuine courtesy, which is the true characteristic of 'a Christian.'"[1153]

> "Festus' comment sounds like an interruption while Paul is still in full spate, but in fact the speech has reached its conclusion."[1154]

[1151]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1204.
[1152]Bock, *Acts*, p. 722.
[1153]Conybeare, p. 621.
[1154]Marshall, *The Acts . . .*, p. 398.

> "Down through the ages Festus's response has been echoed by men and women too trapped by the natural to be open to the supernatural, too confined by the 'practical' to care about life everlasting."[1155]

Some of Jesus' accusers also thought that He was mad. People sometimes think that we are mad when we explain the gospel to them and urge them to believe in the Lord.

26:25-27 Paul asserted that what Festus called madness was true and reasonable. What had "not been done in a corner" (v. 26) was the fulfillment of prophecy by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the preaching of the gospel. Jesus' ministry was well known in Palestine. "Done in a corner" was another Greek idiom of the day.[1156] If Agrippa believed the prophets, Paul believed he could not help concluding that Jesus fulfilled what they predicted. Paul was backing the king into a corner with what had not been done in a corner. All of this was beyond Festus, but Agrippa knew the issues, and Paul was aiming his presentation of the gospel at him primarily. The accused had now become the accuser.

26:28 Agrippa was now on the spot. If he agreed with Paul, or even appeared to agree, he would have lost face with Festus and the other Romans present. Festus had just said he thought Paul was mad. On the other hand, if Agrippa said he did not believe the prophets, his influence over his Jewish hearers and subjects would have been damaged greatly. Consequently Agrippa replied noncommittally, "You are trying to make a Christian out of me in such a short interview!" His response does not mean that he was on the verge of becoming a Christian, as the AV translation implies: "Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian."

> "The reply is light-hearted, but not ironic."[1157]

26:29 Paul responded to the king very politely but firmly. He wished that "all" his hearers, not just Agrippa, "might become" Christians. Paul's reference to his "chains" may have been literal—he may have been wearing chains as he spoke, or perhaps metaphorical—he may have been referring to his condition as a prisoner. I am not aware of any evidence that Agrippa ever became a Christian.

> "The speech before King Agrippa is more than a defense speech. It begins as a defense speech (cf. v. 1), and it develops aspects of previous defense speeches, but its functions are broader. It combines themes from the defense speeches with themes from the earlier narrative, reaching back to

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[1155]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 554.
[1156]Ibid.
[1157]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 407.

> the missions of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles, and fashions these into a summary statement of Paul's place in the unfolding purpose of God. Then Paul continues his mission before our eyes as his review of his past message becomes present proclamation, ending with a missionary appeal to King Agrippa."[1158]

The verdict of Agrippa 26:30-32

By rising to his feet, Agrippa signaled the end of the hearing. Everyone else rose out of respect for him. Luke implied that everyone present concurred that Paul was completely innocent. This had previously been the verdict of the Pharisees (23:9), Claudius Lysias (23:29), and Festus (25:25). Now Agrippa, a Roman ruler with Jewish blood in his veins who was sympathetic to the Jews, voiced the same opinion (v. 32). In Agrippa's opinion, Paul did not even need to be in prison, much less die for what he had done.

> "The effect of the scene as a whole is to emphasize the uprightness of Roman legal proceedings over against the partiality and injustice of the Jews, and to show that, when measured by Roman law, Paul's behavior appeared to be free from any guilt; mad he might appear to be, but not a criminal. There is tremendous emphasis on the climax: 'This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.'"[1159]

> "It may finally be asked whether Luke was justified in devoting so much of his limited space to Paul's examinations before the various tribunals of Rome. Paul's case, it should be remembered, was a test case. If he was finally acquitted, and the Pastoral Epistles are solid evidence that he was, Luke's final purpose is clear."[1160]

4. Ministry on the way to Rome 27:1—28:15

Luke apparently described this stage of the gospel's expansion for a number of reasons. He evidently wanted to demonstrate God's protection of Paul, to illustrate the increasingly Gentile nature of gospel expansion, and to document the sovereign Lord's building of His church.

> "Ever since the purpose of going to Rome had been planted in Paul's mind by the Holy Spirit, his plans had been formulated with that goal in view (19:21). No warnings of dangers to come could make him deviate from that ultimate aim, nor from the intermediate stages (Macedonia, Achaia, Jerusalem). The intervening weeks had stretched into months and then into years, and Paul had been confronted with one crisis after another, but he had divine assurance that Rome would yet be reached (23:11). The means were not what Paul could have foreseen nor what he might have chosen,

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[1158]Tannehill, 2:316.

[1159]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 386.

[1160]Blaiklock, p. 186.

> but God was in control and the apostle was fully willing to leave the details in His hands."[1161]

God led Luke to record Paul's journey to Rome in a way that is very similar to the biblical record of Jonah's journey. He may have done this so that Luke's readers would note these similarities, and connect the purposes for both journeys, namely: the salvation of lost Gentiles.

The great amount of detail in this section also raises the possibility that Luke, as a good storyteller, was building to his climax by emphasizing the improbability of Paul ever reaching Rome. He probably did this to produce a feeling of great relief and satisfaction, in the reader, when Paul finally did get there. Ancient Greek novelists often used this literary device for this purpose. Storms and shipwrecks were favorite obstacles that heroes had to overcome in order to win their prizes, as in Homer's *Odyssey*, for example. Luke purposely built to his climax, in this section, as he did in his Gospel. There he described in detail Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem and His last days there, a feature peculiar to the third Gospel.[1162]

> "The story is told with such a wealth of detail that in all classical literature there is no passage which gives us so much information about the working of an ancient ship."[1163]

This story also throws more light on the personality and character of Paul. Though he was a prisoner, he became the leader and savior of all those who traveled with him. Though he was weak, God made him strong (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9-10). He was God's man, the Holy Spirit working in and through him, for the blessing of everyone he touched. Paul is the main subject. Some people on the trip even concluded that "he was a god" (28:6; cf. Luke 8:25; 23:47).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a group of Scottish unbelievers decided to expose errors in the Bible. They designated one of their number to visit all the places Luke mentioned that Paul visited, with a view to proving the record in Acts inaccurate. The man chosen was Sir William Ramsay, who, after thorough study of the matter, concluded that Luke was accurate in every detail.[1164] Ramsay became a Christian, and wrote several books on Acts and Paul in defense of God's Word, some of which appear in the bibliography of these notes.

The voyage from Caesarea to Crete 27:1-8

27:1 Luke appears to have remained with Paul from the time he left Philippi on his third missionary journey (20:5). He may have ministered to him during

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[1161]Kent, p. 184.

[1162]See the map of Paul's journey to Rome in Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 251; Toussaint, "Acts," p. 425; or *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1874.

[1163]Rackham, p. 476.

[1164]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, pp. 618-19.

his entire two-year detention at Caesarea. We know he traveled with Paul to Rome (28:16). Here begins the longest of the four "we" sections of Acts: 27:1—28:16 (cf. 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18).

> "For the sake of the credibility of his work as a piece of Greek history writing, at some point Luke needed to be able not merely to claim but demonstrate that he had participated in at least some of the events he chronicled."[1165]

Scholars have not been able to identify the "Augustan Cohort" (a battalion of 1,000 soldiers, cf. 21:31) with certainty. Some of them believe this was the cohort responsible for communications and service between the emperor and his provincial armies.[1166] However, this group may not have been in existence this early in Roman history.[1167] Since "Augustan" was a title of honor that the government gave to several cohorts, this simply may have been one of the Augustan cohorts that was based in the Syrian province.[1168] These Augustan cohorts served various police and judicial functions.[1169]

Since he was a Roman citizen who had appealed to Caesar, Paul would have enjoyed greater privileges than the other, regular prisoners. "Julius" was another centurion (cf. Cornelius, ch. 10; 22:26; 24:23) who demonstrated fairness, consideration, and mercy, as this story will show. If the "Italian Cohort" of 10:1 was the same as the "Augustan Cohort" mentioned here, as some believe, this "Julius" may have been Julius Priscus, who later became prefect of the Praetorian Guards under the Emperor Vitellius.[1170] Adramyttium was a seaport of Mysia, opposite the island of Lesbos, 110 miles north of Ephesus. Sidon stood on the Mediterranean seacoast about 70 miles north of Caesarea.

27:2 Most likely Paul sailed from Caesarea. His ship originated from the port of "Adramyttium," just south of Troas opposite the island of Lesbos. It was a coastal vessel that docked at most ports along the northeastern Mediterranean shoreline.

Aristarchus, like Luke, seems to have stayed with Paul during his Caesarean imprisonment (cf. 19:29) and traveled with him all the way to Rome (Col. 4:10; Phile. 24). The presence of these companions with the apostle probably contributed to the respect that Paul received as he traveled.[1171]

[1165]Witherington, p. 755.
[1166]E.g., Ramsay, *St. Paul . . .*, p. 315.
[1167]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 557.
[1168]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on . . .*, p. 500.
[1169]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 558.
[1170]Howson, p. 605.
[1171]See Ramsay, *St. Paul . . .*, p. 316.

27:3 "Sidon" stood about 70 miles north of Caesarea. Paul's "friends" were probably members of the church there (cf. 11:19). A soldier would have accompanied Paul wherever he went.

27:4-5 Prevailing winds in the Mediterranean, during spring and fall, usually blow from west to east, and often from the northwest. Consequently this ship sailed north, up the east side of the island of Cyprus (cf. 21:3). Proceeding north, it came to the coast of Cilicia and turned west, passing Pamphylia and landing at "Myra" in "Lysia," the southernmost region in the province of Asia. This was a 14-day journey by ship that spanned about 500 miles.[1172]

27:6 At Myra, Julius transferred his party to another ship, this one bound for Italy. This was a grain ship (v. 38) that had accommodations for at least 276 passengers (v. 37). There were no ships at this time devoted exclusively to passenger travel.[1173] Its port of origin was Alexandria, the capital of Egypt. Egypt was the major supplier of grain for Italy.[1174] A large fleet of these ships sailed between Egypt and Italy, along the coasts of Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor, carrying food. According to a contemporary description, these large ships were usually 180 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 44 feet deep from the deck to the hold.[1175]

27:7-8 "Cnidus" stood on the southwestern tip of the province of Asia, where what we now call the Aegean Sea met the Mediterranean, about 108 miles south of Ephesus. A northwesterly wind forced Paul's ship southwest to the 180-mile long island of "Crete." By sailing along Crete's eastern and southern coasts, it finally reached the port of "Fair Havens" (probably modern Limeonas Kalous) near a town called "Lasea," having rounded Cape "Salmone" at the island's southeastern tip.

The storm at sea 27:9-26

27:9-10 Evidently the captain waited for some ("considerable") "time" for the weather to improve in Fair Havens. The "Fast" refers to the Day of Atonement, that fell in the fall each year, sometimes as late as early October. People considered it dangerous to travel by sea between mid-September and mid-November, and the harbors were closed for the winter from mid-November to mid-February. Paul had already experienced shipwreck three times (2 Cor. 11:25). He recommended staying through the winter at Fair Havens. A strong northerly or northwesterly wind (cf. v. 14), that frequently came up unexpectedly at that season of the year, could blow a ship far from its destination. This is what happened next.

[1172]Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1266.

[1173]Witherington, p. 759.

[1174]Cf. Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 2:16:4; and 4:10:4.

[1175]Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, pp. 158-59.

Haenchen noted that Luke recorded 11 or 12 sea journeys that Paul took in Acts, beginning at 9:30 and ending with 28:10. He calculated that the apostle traveled at least 3,000 miles by sea.[1176] Thus Paul was a seasoned sea traveler whose word those in authority should have heeded.

27:11-12 The "centurion" had the final word. Grain ships of this kind were part of a fleet that was under the control of the Roman government, even though private individuals owned the ships.[1177] The "pilot" (captain) and the owner (not the "captain") carried more influence with the centurion than Paul did. Fair Havens was suitable for wintering, but not as desirable as "Phoenix" (modern Phineka, or possible Lutro[1178]), which stood about 45 miles farther to the west along the southern Cretan coastline.

It is doubtful that Paul had the time or opportunity to plant a church on Crete during this visit. He or others may have planted the church there at another time. He probably visited Crete with Titus after his release from Rome (Titus 1:5).

27:13-15 "Euroquilo" means northeastern. The wind changed from a mild southerly breeze to a "violent" northeasterly gale. This "violent wind" drove Paul's ship southwest, away from Crete and the harbor at Phoenix.

> "Ancient ships could not tack or face heavy seas . . ."[1179]

27:16-17 The "small island" of "Clauda" (modern Gavdos or Gozzo) lay south of Crete about 23 miles.[1180] There appears to have been no adequate harbor there. However, this island did provide enough temporary shelter for the sailors to haul on board the trailing rowboat (dinghy). Another safety measure they applied was to feed ropes over the bow, and to hold them up tightly against the ship's hull from each side. Drawn up tight under the ship, these ropes helped to reinforce the internal braces of the hull.

The "shallows of Syrtis" probably refers to the dreaded quicksand and shoals off the African coast, west of Cyrene (modern Libya), toward which the ship headed.[1181] The Greek word translated "sea anchors" here simply means equipment, and can refer to any gear, perhaps some of the sails and rigging (cf. v. 40). Compasses did not exist at this time. Sailors plotted their courses by the stars, and by using points of reference on land.

27:18-20 Evidently the ship was taking on so much water, "being violently storm-tossed," that the captain decided to "jettison" the wheat as well as the other

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[1176]Haenchen, pp. 702-3.
[1177]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on* . . ., p. 507.
[1178]Robertson, 3:462-63.
[1179]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 408.
[1180]See Howson, facing p. 642, for a map of southern Crete and Clauda.
[1181]See Pliny, *Natural History*, 5:26.

"cargo," and all but the most essential "tackle" (cf. Jon. 1:5). He kept some wheat on board, probably for ballast as well as for food (v. 38).

27:21-26 Paul presumably did not mention his former advice at Fair Havens just to gloat, but in order to encourage his fellow travelers to believe what he was about to tell them. What he had predicted had just come true, and what he was about to predict would as well. An angelic visitor now confirmed God's former assurance to Paul, repeating the promise that he would reach Rome (23:11). Furthermore he told Paul that "all" on board would reach land safely.

> "This announcement that all will survive is remarkable. . . . This announcement is a key to understanding the rest of the episode, for it determines what must happen, and the acts of sailors, soldiers, and Paul are to be judged in light of it. From this point on, no method of escape is acceptable that doesn't include all."[1182]

Paul encouraged his despairing (and perhaps seasick) companions twice (vv. 22, 25). His reference to God's promise would interest the other passengers in his Lord, at least when God later fulfilled this prediction, if not before. Faith in God ("I believe God") gave Paul great confidence and hope, as it always should. Notice also Paul's beautiful expression of his total commitment to the Lord: "to whom I belong and whom I serve" (v. 23).

> "The prisoner had become the captain, for he is the only man with any courage left."[1183]

The shipwreck 27:27-44

27:27-28 The ancient name of the central part of the Mediterranean Sea was "the Adria" or "the Hadria." People referred to then, what we now call the "Adriatic Sea," as the "Gulf of Adria (or Hadria)," or as the "Ionian Sea."[1184] The winds and currents had carried Paul's ship in a northwesterly direction from the south-central Mediterranean. The sailors may have smelled the land, which sailors can do, or they may have heard the waves breaking on shore.

"Took soundings" is literally "hearing the land" in Greek. To determine the depth of the water, the sailors tied a weight to a line and threw it overboard. The depth to which it sank indicated the depth of the water. A fathom is 6 feet, so these depths ("20" and "15 fathoms") were 120 and 90 feet.

[1182]Tannehill, 2:332-33.

[1183]Barclay, pp. 202-3.

[1184]F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on . . .*, p. 515; Longenecker, p. 561.

27:29 "Four . . . stern . . . anchors" kept the ship pointing toward the land, so that when the sun came up, the sailors could beach it prow first. Another rendering of the Greek word for "wished" (*euchomai*, v. 29) is "prayed" (cf. Jon. 1:14). Paul's company had traveled by sea about 475 miles.[1185]

27:30-32 The ship's crew ("the sailors") was about to abandon ship and make for land in the lifeboat, leaving the passengers, Paul, the captain, the soldiers, and the prisoners to fend for themselves. Paul probably realized that anchors in front of the ship were unnecessary—and sensed their plan. The sailors would only be valuable on board, and were needed to help beach the ship safely. They were the experts at maneuvering it. Probably "the soldiers" let the dinghy drift free ("cut away the ropes of the boat") so the sailors would not try another escape. This small boat would have been useful later, however, when the passengers had to swim to land.

> "Verses 24 and 31 provide an interesting illustration of the Biblical viewpoint regarding divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God knew that all on the vessel would be preserved (and if God knows it, it is certain and cannot be otherwise). At the same time God's sovereignty which insured their safety was not intended to discourage human effort, for this was the means by which God would achieve the end in view."[1186]

There is no adequate basis for concluding that simply because God gave Paul insight and wisdom during this voyage, that all Spirit-filled Christians, therefore, have more wisdom than unbelievers. God gave Paul a measure of intelligence and perception that He does not give all His servants. Some Christians think that they can assess situations, and that people should follow their advice simply because they are "Christians" or "Spirit-filled Christians." Jesus taught that often unbelievers demonstrate more wisdom than believers, unfortunately (cf. Luke 16:8).

27:33-37 "All" on board needed to eat ("take some food") to gain strength, for the work of getting ashore that lay ahead. Paul "gave thanks to God" publicly for the food (cf. 1 Tim. 4:4-5). This would have helped all present to connect their deliverance with God. This meal was evidently not a celebration of the Lord's Supper, as some commentators suggested.[1187] The circumstances of the occasion argue against this view, as does the terminology Luke used (v. 35; cf. Luke 24:30). The rest of the people ("All of them") followed Paul's example, and also ate ("took food").

> "It could never be said of Paul as it was said of some people that 'they were so heavenly minded that they were

[1185]Bock, *Acts*, p. 739.
[1186]Kent, p. 189.
[1187]E.g., Neil, p. 252.

> of no earthly use.' He knew that hungry men are not efficient men; and so he gathered the ship's company around him and made them eat."[1188]

27:38 It was necessary to "lighten the ship" so it would ride high into shallow water when the sailors beached it.

27:39-40 A sandy "beach," traditionally St. Paul's Bay, was second best to a harbor.[1189] This type of ship had rudder-like paddles on the sides of the vessel that served to guide it. Evidently the sailors had locked these "rudders" in place when the ship was drifting, but now they put them into use again. The "foresail," on the front of the ship, would have increased its maneuverability.

27:41 Evidently currents from two parts of the sea ("two seas") converged near the entrance to this bay, resulting in an accumulation of sand or mud. The sailors did not see this sandbar, and inadvertently "ran the ship (vessel) aground," and "it (the prow) stuck firmly (fast)." "Reef" implies coral reef in English, but the Greek word (*topon*), plus investigations at the site of St. Paul's Bay, suggest that Luke probably described a sand or mud bar.

27:42-44 The soldiers would have had to pay with their lives if their prisoners had escaped (cf. 12:19; 16:27). The "centurion" was willing to take responsibility for the prisoners' safe-keeping in order to spare Paul's life. This unusual concern for the apostle raises the unanswerable question of whether this man may have become a Christian on this trip. God kept His promise to keep Paul and his fellow travelers safe (cf. v. 24). As the sign on a church marquee put it: "God promises a safe landing, not a calm passage."

A British yachtsman and scholar, who was familiar with the parts of the Mediterranean Sea that Paul covered on this journey, retraced Paul's route in the first part of the nineteenth century. His book relates his experiences and findings. It is fascinating reading, and confirms the accuracy of Luke's references in this chapter.[1190]

This unusually dramatic and vivid chapter stresses God's sovereign control over circumstances in bringing His will to pass, specifically that Paul should minister in Rome. It reminds us of Jesus' ability to control the winds and the waves of Galilee, to accomplish His will and to communicate His identity. He had once sent His disciples into a storm (Luke 8:22-25), just as He now had sent Paul. Jesus had predicted that He would build His church, and that Hades' gates would not overwhelm it (Matt. 16:18). This chapter shows to what great lengths God will go to remain faithful to His promises.

[1188]Barclay, p. 204.

[1189]See Howson, facing p. 658, for a map.

[1190]James Smith, *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul.*

Paul's preservation on Malta 28:1-6

28:1-2 "Malta," also called "Melita" (meaning refuge, which it proved to be for Paul and his companions), lies about 60 miles south of the island of Sicily. It is about 18 miles long and 8 miles wide. It is also about 500 miles west of Crete and 180 miles northwest of Africa. People of Phoenician origin inhabited it in Paul's day. Luke called them "barbarians" (Gr. *barbaroi*), meaning people whose culture was not Greek. These people were not savages or uncultured "natives," however, as is clear from their hospitable treatment of the shipwreck victims.

28:3 Paul made himself useful by gathering firewood; he did not sit around expecting others to take care of him. Evidently he unknowingly picked up a small snake with his wood. It would have been sluggish because of the cold weather, but the heat of the fire woke it up. This snake is a "viper" in Greek. A viper is, of course, a specific variety of poisonous snake. The fact that there are no vipers on Malta now, which has been a stumbling block to some, simply shows that this variety of snake became extinct there after Paul's visit.[1191] Vipers do not normally fasten on what they bite; they strike and then retreat. However in this case, the snake was evidently still somewhat lethargic, and did not behave normally. Perhaps it got hung up on Paul's hand by its fangs.

This was the third life-threatening situation that Paul faced on his journey to Rome, the others being the storm at sea and the shipwreck.

28:4-6

> "These people thought that calamity was proof of guilt, poor philosophy and worse theology."[1192]

People had mistaken Paul for "a god" previously (14:8-18). Perhaps his reaction here was the same as it had been at Lystra. Probably he used the opportunity to preach the gospel. Luke's purpose in recording this incident was probably not to supply a background for what Paul said. It was to show that God would even miraculously heal His servant, in order to enable him to fulfill God's purpose that he bear witness in Rome (cf 23:11; 27:24).

> "Paul did not deliberately pick up this viper. Paul was not tempting God. . . .
>
> "The promise of God in Mark 16:18 [and Luke 10:19] was fulfilled in Paul's experience. He suffered no ill effects from the venom. When folk today deliberately pick up

[1191]See Ramsay, *St. Paul* . . ., p. 343.
[1192]Robertson, 3:479.

> snakes and claim that promise as their protection, they are far afield from what God had in mind."[1193]

The healing of Publius' father 28:7-10

28:7-8 God not only healed Paul miraculously, He also enabled him to heal the father of the island's leading citizen (cf. 3:1-10; Luke 4:38-44). "The leading man of the island" was a title indicating that "Publius" was the Roman governor of Malta.[1194] From 1940 through 1942, British General William Darby was the governor of Malta. He was an outspoken Christian whom I had the privilege of meeting in England in 1949.

This is the only instance in Acts with the combination of praying and laying on hands in a miracle story.

> "This fever was possibly Malta fever, which was common in Malta, Gibraltar, and other Mediterranean islands. The microorganism has since been traced to the milk of the Maltese goats. The fever usually lasted four months, but sometimes could last as long as two or three years."[1195]

28:9 Word of this healing spread across the island, and Paul was able to heal many other sick people ("the rest of the people . . . who had diseases"). Doctor Luke had an obvious medical interest in physical recovery. However, the Holy Spirit seems to have included these healings in the text to show that God's power was still working through Paul. God was working as strongly as ever, in spite of the physical exhaustion caused by the sea voyage and shipwreck. Paul could heal anyone that God wanted healed, though not everyone (cf. 2 Tim. 4:20).

> "Paul could exercise the gift of healing; and yet Paul had forever to bear about with him the thorn in the flesh. He healed others while he could not heal himself. Like his Master, in another sense, he saved others when he could not save himself."[1196]

28:10 Paul was no "god," but he was a messenger of the true God. His ministry to the people of Malta benefited them physically and spiritually, and they expressed their gratitude by honoring him in many ways ("with many marks of respect"). Even though Paul was a prisoner, his service for God resulted in blessing for others and for himself (cf. Matt. 6:33; Phil. 4:19).

[1193]McGee, 4:635, 636.
[1194]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," pp. 563, 564.
[1195]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1873.
[1196]Barclay, pp. 207-8.

> "The account of Paul's healings on Malta is quite similar to the account of Jesus' healings at Capernaum at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:38-40). In both cases the healing of an individual is followed by the healing of 'all' or 'the rest' in a region. The individual, a relative of the healer's host, has been 'seized (*sunexomene, sunexomenon*)' by fever. There is also reference to laying on of hands. The similarities show that Jesus' healing ministry still continues through his witnesses, with benefit both to the host who receives the healer and to the whole community. A scene from the beginning of Jesus' ministry is echoed in the last description of healing in Acts, suggesting a chiastic relationship."[1197]

The trip from Malta to Rome 28:11-15

28:11 Paul and his companions spent the winter on the island of Malta. Ships began to sail again toward the middle of February. The centurion was able to secure passage on another "Alexandrian ship," perhaps another grain ship, that had wintered in one of the Maltese ports. Valetta was the largest of these ports. Paul still had about 210 miles to go before he reached Rome.

Luke's reference to the "figurehead" of this ship, from which it took its name ("Twin Brothers"), is unusual. This is the only ship's name that he recorded in Acts. The "twin brothers" were Castor and Pollux, who were two Greek gods thought to guard the safety of sailors. They were the sons of Zeus and Leda, queen of Sparta, whom Zeus transformed into gods, according to Greek mythology. The constellation Gemini represents them, and anyone who saw it during a storm supposedly would have good luck.[1198] Perhaps Luke mentioned them to contrast God's real protection, as illustrated in the previous chapter and this one, with the protection the pagans superstitiously thought these gods provided. I can imagine Paul saying to Luke, as they got ready to board this ship: "We have a better Protector than the twin brothers!"

28:12 "Syracuse" stood on the east coast of the island of Sicily. It was a busy port and the most important city on the island.

28:13 The site of "Rhegium" (modern Reggio di Calabria) was near the tip of the "toe" of Italy's "boot" opposite Sicily, about 75 miles from Syracuse. It, too, was an important harbor. "Puteoli" (Modern Pozzuoli) stood about 200 miles farther north on the "shin" of the "boot." Its site occupied the most protected part of the bay of Naples. It was a very large port, and the final destination of many Egyptian wheat ships at that time. There dock-hands unloaded the cargo.

[1197]Tannehill, 2:341-42.

[1198]Toussaint, "Acts," p. 429.

28:14 It is not strange that a church existed there. Puteoli had a Jewish colony.[1199] Perhaps Roman Christians had planted this church, or perhaps Jewish converts had done so. The local Christians were very generous with their hospitality to Paul and his companions, having "invited" them "to stay . . . seven days.". "And thus we came to Rome" expresses Luke's eagerness to reach Paul's goal city. They had not really arrived in Rome (cf. vv. 15-16). However, Luke viewed Puteoli as close enough to warrant this enthusiastic announcement of their arrival, even though Paul still had 130 miles to travel.

28:15 News of Paul's arrival preceded him to Rome. An entourage of believers from Rome traveled down the Appian Way, "the oldest and most frequented in Italy,"[1200] 33 miles south to the "Three Taverns (Inns)," a rest stop. There some of them waited, while the more energetic among them proceeded another 10 miles to "Appii Forum (or Market of Appius)," a market town. There Paul met his first Roman Christians. He had sent them his Epistle to the Romans three years earlier (in A.D. 57), from Corinth, during his third missionary journey. This group of greeters was a great encouragement to Paul, who had looked forward so long to ministering in Rome (Rom. 15:22-29); he "took courage" from this welcoming committee. Their reception led Paul to "thank God." The entire trip from Malta probably took three weeks.[1201]

> "It [Paul's growing party of friends proceeding to Rome] becomes almost a triumphal procession [cf. Jesus' triumphal entry]."[1202]

Paul would have passed the tomb of the Roman poet Virgil between Puteoli and Neapolis. In his poems, Virgil anticipated a savior, and Paul came with the message that God had provided one.[1203]

These last verses bring Luke's account of the spread of the gospel to a climax. It had gone from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and now to the uttermost part of the earth (1:8). Paul was now able to bear witness in the capital of the empire.

Tannehill suggested that Luke's purpose in his account of Paul's voyage to Rome was to illustrate the cooperative relationships that are possible between Christianity and pagan society.[1204] This may have been part of his purpose. The journey from Caesarea to Rome probably covered about 2,250 miles and took well over four months.[1205]

[1199]Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:7:1; Idem, *Antiquities of* . . ., 17:11:1.
[1200]Howson, p. 667.
[1201]Bock, *Acts*, p. 746.
[1202]Neil, p. 256.
[1203]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 569.
[1204]Tannehill, 2:341.
[1205]Beitzel, p. 177; Bock, *Acts*, p. 746.

5. Ministry in Rome 28:16-31

Luke's purpose in recording Paul's ministry in Rome included vindicating God's promises to Paul that he would bear witness there (23:11; 27:24). Even though a church already existed there, Paul's ministry in Rome was significant in Luke's purpose, because he was the "apostle to the Gentiles." The "apostle to the Gentiles" was now able to minister in the heart of the Gentile world.[1206]

> "Gentiles saw Rome as the center of the earth."[1207]

Paul's situation in Rome 28:16

Paul was a Roman citizen who had appealed to Caesar and had gained the respect (to say the least) of his centurion escort. Therefore he was able to reside in a private rented residence ("stay by himself") with a Roman guard (v. 30).

This is the end of the last "we" section of Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1—28:16). We know that Luke and Aristarchus remained with Paul for some time, and Paul had other visitors including Timothy, Tychicus, and Epaphroditus. Luke and Aristarchus were with him when Paul wrote his epistles to Philemon and to the Colossians (Phile. 24; Col. 4:14), which he composed during his detention in Rome. This imprisonment probably lasted from A.D. 60 into 62 (cf. v. 30). Thus Acts ends about A.D. 62—29 years after the death and resurrection of the Savior and the day of Pentecost.

Paul's first conference with the Roman Jewish leaders 28:17-22

28:17-20 Paul began immediately to prepare to witness. He wanted to see the leaders of the Jewish community soon for two reasons. He wanted to preach the gospel to them as Jews first. He also wanted to take the initiative in reaching out to them with an explanation of why he was in Rome. He wanted to do so before they arrived at false conclusions concerning his reasons for being there. Estimates of the Jewish population in Rome in the first century vary between 10,000 and 60,000.[1208] Undoubtedly before sending for these Jews, Paul satisfied himself that they were not antagonistic to him already. He would hardly have invited to his house men who might have been just as hostile as the Jerusalem assassins. Paul may have been unable to go to the synagogues because of his prisoner status. On the other hand, he may have chosen to explain his situation to a small group of Jewish leaders on his own turf. He could have done this to preclude another riot, which would have complicated his formal acquittal. So, only three days after his arrival in Rome, Paul sent for these men.

[1206]See Finegan, *Light from . . .*, pp. 363-77, for more information about Rome.
[1207]Bock, *Acts*, p. 726.
[1208]Levinskaya, p. 182.

> "Paul's statement in 28:17-20 is a summary of the preceding trial narrative and imprisonment speeches in Acts 22—26. It presents what the narrator most wants readers to retain from that long narrative."[1209]

Paul emphasized these points in his explanation: He had "done nothing against" the Jews or their "customs" (v. 17). The Roman authorities in Judea had already declared him innocent (v. 18)—"no ground for putting [him] to death." He had "appealed to Caesar" because the Jews in Judea challenged ("objected to") the Romans' verdict, not because Paul had any grievance against the Jews (v. 19). His present condition grew out of the promises God had given Israel ("the hope of Israel," i.e., concerning her Deliverer and deliverance, v. 20; cf. 23:6; 24:21; 26:6-8).

28:21-22 It may be that the Jewish leaders were being completely honest and straightforward with Paul in what they said. If so, God had miraculously kept these Jews from hearing about Paul's case, since Jews in Jerusalem and Rome communicated frequently with each other.

> "Very possibly the Jews in Rome preferred to remain ignorant of the case; they would not have forgotten that earlier disputes over the Messiah had led to their temporary expulsion from the city (18:2 note)."[1210]

Perhaps the Jewish leaders realized that Paul's release was inevitable, since the Jews had no real case against him in Roman courts. They may have decided to start from scratch in their campaign to do away with him. In any case, they were eager "to hear" what Paul had to say.

Paul's second conference with the Jewish leaders 28:23-29

28:23 Luke's concern in this pericope was to emphasize what Paul preached to these men ("God's kingdom" and the things "concerning Jesus"), and their reaction to it. The term "kingdom of God" probably means the same thing here as it usually does in Acts, namely: Messiah's rule, both now and in the messianic age to come (cf. 1:3-8; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:31).

> "He [Paul] was seeking a communal decision, a recognition by the Jewish community as a whole that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Jewish hope. The presence of significant opposition shows that this is not going to happen."[1211]

> "Is there any example of undefeatable hope and unconquerable love like this act of Paul when, in Rome too, he preached first to the Jews?"[1212]

[1209]Tannehill, 2:344.
[1210]Marshall, *The Acts* . . ., p. 423.
[1211]Tannehill, 2:347.
[1212]Barclay, p. 211.

28:24-27 Luke recorded, for the third and last time, what had become the Jews' characteristic response to hearing the gospel (v. 24; 13:46; 18:6; cf. Rom. 11:7-10). Paul's parting word was a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10, in which God told the prophet that his Jewish hearers "would not believe" God's message through him (cf. Matt. 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40-41). Paul saw that this word to Isaiah was as applicable in his own day as it had been in Isaiah's. He also regarded it as inspired by "the Holy Spirit."

> "In every instance in Acts where a scriptural quote is introduced by a reference to the Spirit, the Spirit is described as having spoken (cf. 1.16; 4.25). In this manner the written Word is shown to be a dynamic, 'living' Word."[1213]

> "Note how the failure to respond to the message of the gospel is seen as a failure to *turn*."[1214]

28:28-29 Verse 28 is probably the ultimate climax of Acts. It summarizes the main theme of the book. Having presented the gospel to the Jews in Rome, and having witnessed their rejection of it, Paul now focused his ministry again on the Gentiles (cf. 13:46-52; 18:6; Rom. 1:16). Until "the times of the Gentiles" run their course, and Messiah's Second Advent terminates this era, "Gentiles" will be the primary believers of the gospel (cf. Rom. 11:19-26).

> "Luke-Acts is basically a story about a mission. Acts 28:28 comments on the mission's future. The narrative prepares for this comment by reports of the Gentiles' friendly response to Paul on the voyage and the Roman Jews' contrasting response. When we recognize the careful reflection on the possibilities of mission among both Gentiles and Jews in Acts 27—28, the impression that the ending of Acts is abrupt and unsuitable is considerably reduced."[1215]

Gentile response to the gospel 28:30-31

Paul's officially established innocence of anything worthy of punishment is clear from his living a relatively comfortable life in Rome for the next "two years" (A.D. 60-62).[1216] Paul was able to preach (Gr. *kerysso*, to proclaim as a herald) the kingdom (rule) of God, and to teach (*didasko*, to instruct others) about the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke began Acts

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[1213]Polhill, p. 543.

[1214]The NET Bible note on verse 27.

[1215]Tannehill, 2:343. See also Ladd, "The Acts . . .," pp. 1177-78.

[1216]F. F. Bruce, "Chronological Questions . . .," pp. 289-90.

with one reference to the kingdom of God (1:6), and ended it with another (28:31). Verse 23 clarifies verse 31. "Preaching the kingdom of God" involves solemnly testifying about it, and "teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ" includes persuading people about Him. Paul could do this openly and without hindrance by the Roman authorities. This was Luke's final testimony to the credibility and positive value of the Christian gospel.

> "With this expression [i.e., unhindered], which is literally Luke's last word in Acts, he is saying that largely through Paul's activities, the Church is now on the march, and nothing can stop it. Paul has built the vital bridge from Jerusalem to Rome. The Cross is in the field."[1217]

> "In seeming to leave his book unfinished, he [Luke] was implying that the apostolic proclamation of the gospel in the first century began a story that will continue until the consummation of the kingdom in Christ (Acts 1:11)."[1218]

These verses contain the last of Luke's seven progress reports (2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31).

> "What is the *one outstanding impression* made by the study of the life and work of the Apostle of the Gentiles? Is it not this:—The marvelous possibilities of a wholly-surrendered and Divinely-filled life?"[1219]

What happened to Paul following the events recorded in Acts? There is disagreement among scholars, as one might expect. Some believe the Roman authorities condemned Paul and put him to death. However, most believe they released him and he left Rome. In support of the latter view are references in other New Testament books to Paul's activities. These activities are difficult to incorporate into the events of his life that Acts records. We can only explain them if he continued his ministry. Also Eusebius, the early church historian who died about A.D. 340, wrote the following.

> "After pleading his cause, he is said to have been sent again upon the ministry of preaching, and after a second visit to the city [Rome], that he finished his life with martyrdom."[1220]

> "The tradition from Clement to Eusebius favors two imprisonments with a year [at least] of liberty between them. It has been pointed out that the leaving of Trophemus sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20) could not have been an occurrence of Paul's last journey to Jerusalem, for then Trophimus was not left (Acts 20:4; 21:29); nor could it have been on his journey to Rome to appear before Caesar, for then he did not touch at Miletus. To make this

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[1217]Neil, p. 30. Cf. Matt. 16:18.
[1218]Longenecker, "The Acts . . .," p. 573.
[1219]Thomas, p. 83.
[1220]Eusebius, p. 74 (bk. 2, ch. 22).

> incident possible, there must have been a release from the first imprisonment and an interval of ministry and travel."[1221]

While Paul was in Rome during the two years Luke mentioned (28:30), he evidently wrote the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). After his release and departure from Rome, he wrote the Pastoral Epistles. He probably wrote 1 Timothy between A.D. 63 and 66, to Timothy, who was ministering in Ephesus, but we do not know for sure from where he wrote it, though Macedonia may have been the place.[1222] He spoke of meeting Timothy in Ephesus later (1 Tim. 3:14; 4:13). Paul also wrote the Book of Titus, probably from Illyricum or Macedonia, during the same period, to Titus who was on Crete (cf. Titus 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:10). Perhaps Paul visited Spain, as he longed to do, between A.D. 62 and 67 (Rom. 15:23-24), though there is no Scriptural record that he did or did not do so. There are, however, several statements in the early Church Fathers that he did visit Spain.[1223] From Rome he wrote 2 Timothy to Timothy in Ephesus, shortly before his martyrdom in A.D. 68, during Nero's reign (2 Tim. 1:16-18; 4:14, 19; 1 Tim. 1:20).[1224] Paul was probably tried and executed under the authority of the City Prefect.[1225] He was evidently depatitated outside the city, after being scourged with rods, and was buried in the catacombs under Rome.[1226]

Geographer Barry Beitzel estimated that Paul's travels, between his release in Rome to his return and death there, would have involved a minimum of 2,350 travel miles. He also calculated that Paul probably traveled a total of at least 13,400 airline (as the crow flies) miles during his years of ministry.[1227]

> ". . . the end of Acts directs attention to the missionary situation that Paul leaves behind and to Paul's courage and faithfulness as example for the church. It points to the opportunity among the Gentiles. It underscores the crisis in the Jewish mission. It presents Paul continuing his mission by welcoming all, both Jews and Gentiles, and speaking to them 'with all boldness' in spite of Jewish rejection and Roman imprisonment. This is the concluding picture of Paul's legacy."[1228]

> "What almost seems like the unfinished character of the book of Acts, from a merely literary standpoint, is doubtless intended to teach us that until the fulfillment of the angels' prophecy that 'this same Jesus' shall return even as He went away, the work of evangelization for this age will not be completed. We are to heed the Word—'Occupy till I come.'"[1229]

[1221]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1208.
[1222]Conybeare, p. 747.
[1223]See ibid., pp. 738-39, 746.
[1224]Ibid., p. 741.
[1225]Ibid., p. 767.
[1226]Ibid., pp. 781, 783.
[1227]Beitzel, pp. 176-77.
[1228]Tannehill, 2:356.
[1229]Ironside, *Lectures on . . .*, p. 651.

Appendix 1

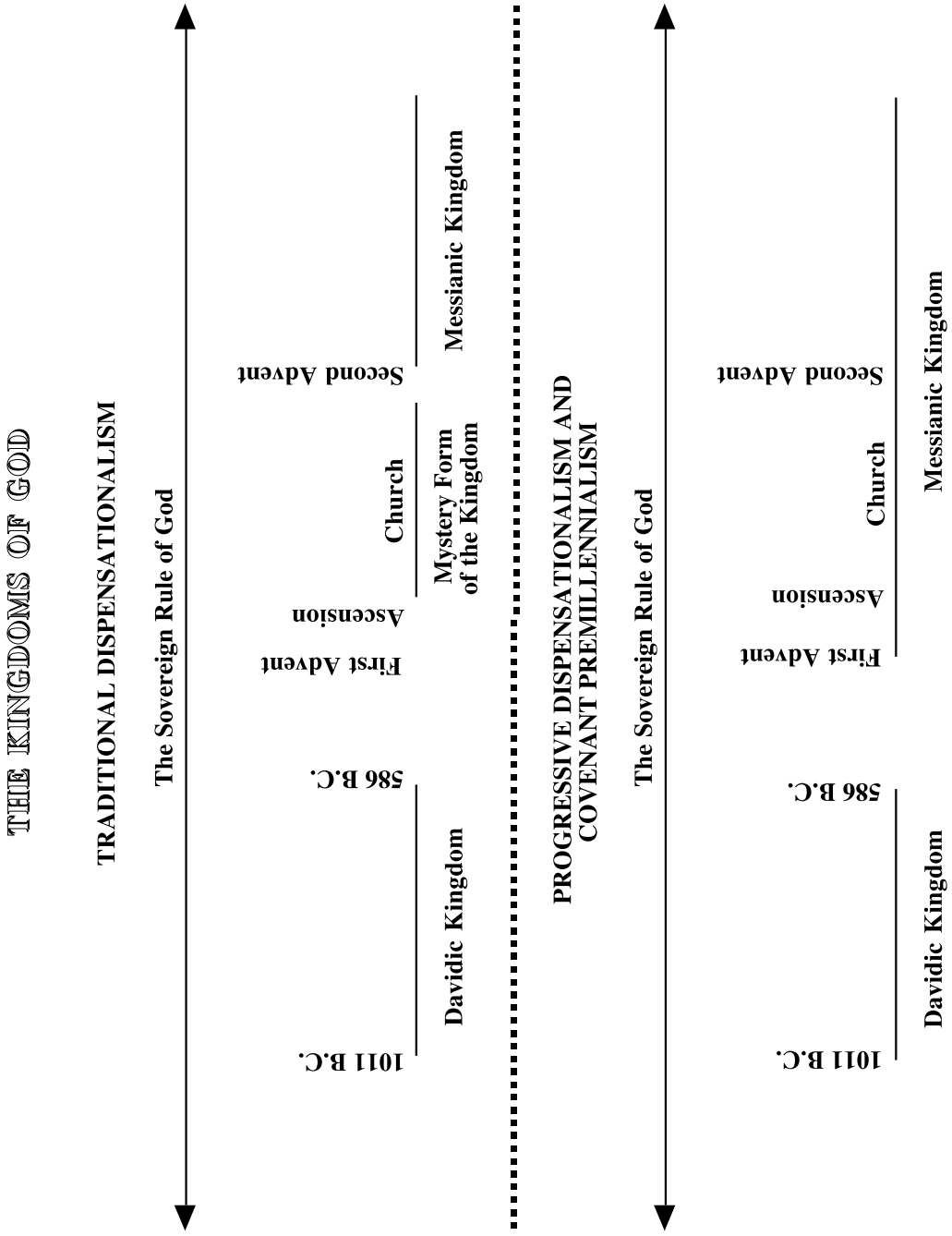
SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES		
Date	**Event**	**Reference**
	Birth in Tarsus	Acts 22:3
	Early life and theological education in Jerusalem under Gamaliel	Acts 22:3
34	Participation in Stephen's stoning outside Jerusalem	Acts 7:57—8:1
34	Leadership in the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem	Acts 9:1
34	Leadership in the persecution of Christians beyond Jerusalem to Damascus	Acts 9:2
34	Conversion on the road to Damascus	Acts 9:3-17
34	Baptism in Damascus	Acts 9:18
34	Preaching in Damascus	Acts 9:19-22
34	Trip to Arabia	Gal. 1:17
34	Return to Damascus	Gal. 1:17
37	Trip to Jerusalem	Acts 9:26; Gal. 1:18
37	Meeting with Peter and James and preaching in Jerusalem	Acts 9:27-29; Gal. 1:18-19
37	Trip to Tarsus via Caesarea	Acts 9:30; Gal. 1:21
37-43	Ministry in and around Tarsus	Acts 11:25
37-43	Caught up to the third heaven	2 Cor. 12:2-4
43	Move to Antioch of Syria on Barnabas' invitation	Acts 11:26
43	Ministry in Antioch of Syria	Acts 11:26
47	Trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus to deliver a famine relief gift	Acts 11:30; Gal. 2:1-10
47	Return to Antioch	Acts 12:25
47-48	Continued ministry in Antioch	Acts 13:1-3
48-49	First missionary journey with Barnabas and John Mark	Acts 13:4—14:27
48	Ministry in Cyprus	Acts 13:4-12
48	Voyage to Asia Minor	Acts 13:13
48	Separation from John Mark who departed at Perga	Acts 13:13
48	Ministry at Pisidian Antioch	Acts 13:14-52
48-49	Ministry at Iconium	Acts 14:1-5
49	Ministry at Lystra	Acts 14:8-19
49	Ministry at Derbe	Acts 14:20-23
49	Return to Attalia	Acts 14:24-25
49	Return to Syrian Antioch	Acts 14:26
49	Ministry in Syrian Antioch	Acts 14:27-15:2
49	Rebuke of Peter	Gal. 2:11-14

SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES (CONT.)		
Date	**Event**	**Reference**
49	**Writing of Galatians**	
49	Trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas via Phoenicia and Samaria	Acts 15:3
49	Jerusalem Council	Acts 15:4-29
49	Return to Syrian Antioch with Barnabas, Silas, and Judas	Acts 15:22, 30
49	Separation from Silas and Judas who returned to Jerusalem	Acts 15:31-33
49-50	Ministry in Syrian Antioch	Acts 15:35
50	Division of opinion with Barnabas over John Mark	Acts 15:36-39
50	Separation from Barnabas and John Mark who returned to Cyprus	Acts 15:39
50-52	Second missionary journey with Silas and others	Acts 15:40—18:22
50	Ministry in Syria and Cilicia	Acts 15:41
50	Ministry in Derbe and Lystra	Acts 16:1a
50	Partnership with Timothy who joined Paul and Silas	Acts 16:1b-3
50	Ministry in other Galatian churches	Acts 16:4-6
50	Exclusion from Asia and Bithynia	Acts 16:7-8
50	Macedonian vision at Troas	Acts 16:9-10
50	Voyage from Troas to Samothrace to Neapolis with Luke	Acts 16:11
50	Ministry in Philippi	Acts 16:12-40
50	Separation from Luke who remained at Philippi	Cf. "we" in Acts 16:12 with "they" in Acts 17:1
50-51	Ministry in Thessalonica	Acts 17:1-9
51	Ministry in Berea	Acts 17:10-15
51	Separation from Silas and Timothy who remained in Berea	Acts 17:14
51	Ministry in Athens	Acts 17:16-34
51	Ministry in Corinth	Acts 18:1-17
51	Association with Aquilla and Priscilla	Acts 18:2-3
51	Reunion with Silas and Timothy	Acts 18:5
51	**Writing of 1 and 2 Thessalonians**	
52	Trip to Ephesus with Aquilla and Priscilla	Acts 18:18
52	Separation from Aquilla and Priscilla who proceeded to Syria	Acts 18:18-19
52	Ministry in Ephesus	Acts 18:19-21
52	Return to Syrian Antioch via Caesarea and Jerusalem	Acts 18:21-22
52-53	Layover in Syrian Antioch	Acts 18:23a

SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES (CONT.)		
Date	**Event**	**Reference**
53-57	Third missionary journey	Acts 18:23b—21:19
53	Ministry in Galatia	Acts 18:23b; 19:1
53	Apollos' ministry in Ephesus	Acts 18:24
53	Aquilla and Priscilla's ministry to Apollos	Acts 18:26
53	Apollos' ministry in Achaia	Acts 18:27-28
53-56	Ministry in Ephesus and Asia	Acts 19:1—20:1
53-56	Writing of the "former letter" to Corinth	1 Cor. 5:9
56	**Writing of 1 Corinthians**	
56	The "painful visit' to Corinth and return	2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2
56	Writing of the "severe letter" to Corinth	2 Cor. 2:3-4; 7:8-12; 12:17-19
56	Sending of Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia	Acts 19:22
56	Trip to Troas from Ephesus	
56	Wait for Titus	
56	Trip to Macedonia from Troas	Acts 20:1
56	Reunion with Titus in Macedonia	
56	**Writing of 2 Corinthians**	
56	Ministry in Macedonia	Acts 20:2
56	Ministry in Greece (Achaia and Corinth)	Acts 20:2-3
56-57	**Writing of Romans**	
57	Return to Macedonia and Philippi with Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus, and Luke	Acts 20:3-4
57	Trip of his companions except Luke to Troas	Acts 20:5
57	Trip to Troas with Luke	Acts 20:6
57	Ministry at Troas	Acts 20:7-12
57	Trip to Assos by land while Luke and another brother travel by ship	Acts 20:13
57	Trip to Miletus by ship with Luke and the other brother	Acts 20:14-16
57	Ministry at Miletus	Acts 20:17-38
57	Trip from Miletus to Caesarea with Luke and the other brother via Tyre	Acts 21:1-7
57	Ministry at Caesarea	Acts 21:8-14
57	Trip to Jerusalem	Acts 21:15-16
57	Ministry at Jerusalem	Acts 21:17—23:30
57	Report to the church	Acts 21:17-26
57	Arrest in the temple	Acts 21:27-40
57	Speech in the temple courtyard	Acts 22:1-21
57	Imprisonment in Jerusalem	Acts 22:22—23:30

SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES (CONT.)		
Date	**Event**	**Reference**
57	Trip to Caesarea	Acts 23:31-35
57-59	Ministry in Caesarea	Acts 24:1—26:32
57	Defense before Felix	Acts 24:1-27
59	Defense before Festus	Acts 25:1-12
59	Defense before Agrippa and Festus	Acts 26:1-32
59-60	Journey to Rome with Luke and Aristarchus	Acts 27:1—28:16
59	Trip to Crete	Acts 27:1-13
59	Shipwreck	Acts 27:14-44
59-60	Ministry on Malta	Acts 28:1-10
60	Trip from Malta to Rome	Acts 28:11-16
60-62	Ministry in Rome	Acts 28:16-31
60-62	**Writing of the Prison Epistles**	
62	Release from Rome	
62	Return to the Aegean area	
62-66	**Writing of 1 Timothy and Titus**	
67	Arrest	
67-68	Imprisonment in Rome	
67	**Writing of 2 Timothy**	
68	Martyrdom in Rome	

Appendix 2


THE KINGDOMS OF GOD
TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONALISM
The Sovereign Rule of God
1011 B.C.
Davidic Kingdom
586 B.C.
First Advent
Ascension
Church
Mystery Form of the Kingdom
Second Advent
Messianic Kingdom
PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM AND COVENANT PREMILLENNIALISM
The Sovereign Rule of God
1011 B.C.
Davidic Kingdom
586 B.C.
First Advent
Ascension
Church
Second Advent
Messianic Kingdom

Appendix 3

Views of the Messianic Kingdom

View	Has it begun?	How many stages?	Jesus' location	Jesus' agent
Non-millennial	Yes	One	Heaven or the New Earth	Church
Covenant Premillennial	Yes	Two	Heaven (already) and Earth (not yet)	Church and Church
Progressive Dispensational	Yes	Two	Heaven (already) and Earth (not yet)	Church and Israel
Traditional Dispensational	No	One	Earth	Israel

Appendix 4

SERMONS AND SPEECHES IN ACTS[1230]			
Speakers	**Occasions and or Hearers**	**Cities**	**References**
Peter (1)	Selection of successor to Judas	Jerusalem	1:16-22
Peter (2)	Signs on the day of Pentecost	Jerusalem	2:14-36
Peter (3)	Healing of lame man in the temple	Jerusalem	3:12-26
Peter (4)	Before the Sanhedrin for preaching the resurrection of Christ	Jerusalem	4:8-12
Gamaliel	Before the Sanhedrin regarding Peter and others	Jerusalem	5:35-39
Stephen	Before the Sanhedrin after his arrest	Jerusalem	7:2-53
Peter (5)	At Cornelius' house to present the gospel to Gentiles	Caesarea	10:34-43
Peter (6)	Defense to the church about what happened in Caesarea	Jerusalem	11:4-17
Paul (1)	Sabbath sermon to Jews in the synagogue	Pisidian Antioch	13:16-41
Paul (2) and Barnabas	Crowd who wanted to worship them	Lystra	14:15-17
Peter (7)	Church council	Jerusalem	15:7-11
James	Church council	Jerusalem	15:13-21
Paul (3)	Athenians on Mars Hill	Athens	17:22-31
Demetrius	Workmen who were disturbed at Paul's preaching	Ephesus	19:25-27
Town clerk	Riot at Ephesus	Ephesus	19:35-40
Paul (4)	Gathering of Ephesian elders	Miletus	20:18-35
Paul (5)	Mob of people who tried to kill Paul	Jerusalem	22:1-21
Paul (6)	Defense before the Sanhedrin	Jerusalem	23:1-6
Paul (7)	Defense before Felix	Caesarea	24:10-21
Paul (8)	Defense before Festus	Caesarea	25:8, 10-11
Paul (9)	Defense before Herod Agrippa II	Caesarea	26:1-23
Paul (10)	Shipmates in a violent storm	Mediterranean Sea between Crete and Malta	27:21-26
Paul (11)	Testimony to Jewish leaders	Rome	28:17-20, 25-28

[1230]Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 355.

Appendix 5

PAUL'S EPISTLES			
Period	**Epistle**	**Origin**	**Date**
After the 1st missionary journey	Galatians	Antioch of Syria	A.D. 49
During the 2nd missionary journey	1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians	Corinth Corinth	A.D. 51 A.D. 51
During the 3rd missionary journey	1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Romans	Ephesus Macedonia Corinth	A.D. 56 A.D. 56 A.D. 57
During the 1st Roman imprisonment	Ephesians Philippians Colossians Philemon	Rome Rome Rome Rome	A.D. 60-62 A.D. 60-62 A.D. 60-62 A.D. 60-62
Between the 1st and 2nd Roman imprisonments	1 Timothy Titus	Macedonia? Macedonia?	A.D. 62-66 A.D. 62-66
During the 2nd Roman imprisonment	2 Timothy	Rome	A.D. 67

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