

Witnesses of the Faith

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).

**A 26-WEEK INTERACTIVE STUDY
BY JASON HARDIN**

(Part 1 of 2)

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A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts (Gareth L. Reese) – College Press
Acts Of The Apostles With Notes By Alexander Campbell – Old Paths Book Club
Jesus And The Victory Of God (N. T. Wright) – Fortress Press
New Commentary On Acts Of Apostles (J. W. McGarvey) – Gospel Light Publishing Company
The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today (Everett Ferguson) – Eerdmans Publishing
The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Craig S. Keener) – InterVarsity Press
The New Testament And The People Of God (N. T. Wright) – Fortress Press
The Pulpit Commentary: Acts & Romans (Edited by Spence and Exell) – Hendrickson Publishers
The Temple: Its Ministry and Services – Updated Edition (Alfred Edersheim)
Truth Commentaries: The Book of Acts (Johnny Stringer) – Guardian of Truth Foundation
Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Clinton E. Arnold, General Editor)

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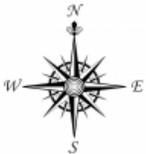
How To Use This Workbook

Welcome to *Witnesses of the Faith*, a 26-week study of *The Acts of the Apostles*. Before you go any further, let me say just a few words about the pages in front of you.

This workbook is designed to function as more than simply a collection of “Fill-In-The-Blank” and “True-False” questions. The intention is that this booklet would serve as a 6-month interactive companion as you walk with the Lord through the exciting and pivotal book of *Acts*. To encourage personal thought and application, you’ll find a number of features throughout this workbook.



Getting Into The Word: at the beginning of each lesson, this icon will indicate the portion of Scripture under consideration, a schedule for the daily reading of Scripture, and a brief summary of the lesson.



You Are Here: we study the Bible, not just to familiarize ourselves with facts, but to learn how to more fully conform ourselves into the image of God’s Son. Whenever you see this icon, you’ll find practical pointers or questions that will orient the Biblical text in a direction of personal application.



Markers Along The Way: this icon indicates that a little bit of time needs to be taken to explore some principle or passage of Scripture beyond the book of *Acts*. The goal is that reading and interpreting other key texts of the Bible will help us come to a deeper understanding of the message of *Acts*.



Dig A Little Deeper: at times, insight into the original meaning of a word or phrase can help us more fully understand the context of a passage. This icon indicates important information that directly relates to the Biblical text.

Finally, each lesson concludes with the **A-C-T-S** acronym. Use this opportunity to make your study even more personal. Read the Biblical text with the goal of discovering reasons for:

- A** - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...
- C** - aution: this passage has reminded me to **take caution** in...
- T** - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...
- S** - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

To God be the glory,

Jason Hardin

- Week 1 -

Introduction To The Book Of Acts



The first three lessons of our study are extremely important, serving as a foundation for the remainder of the book of *Acts*. If you've looked ahead, you've already noted that we aren't covering much textual ground of *Acts* in the first three lessons. However, our daily reading plan for the next three weeks takes us through the entire book of *Acts* to help us grasp "the big picture" before honing in on the details.

Day One: *Acts 1:1-26*

Day Two: *Acts 2:1-47*

Day Three: *Acts 3:1-4:31*

Day Four: *Acts 4:32-6:7*

Day Five: *Acts 6:8-7:60*

Day Six: *Acts 8:1-9:43*

Acts picks up where the Gospels left off, recording the early progress of Jesus' disciples as they spread the "good news" from Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, to the most remote corners of the known world. The story begins with Christ's ascension and the events of Pentecost. As Gentiles begin responding to the gospel, the focus shifts to Paul and his missionary journeys. *Acts* forms a bridge between the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, showing how the apostles carried on Jesus' work and providing a historical background for *Romans* through *Revelation*.

Author and Authenticity

The book of *Acts* is the second of a two-volume set addressed to Theophilus and written by one of Paul's associates named Luke, "the beloved physician" (*Colossians 4:14*). The author of *Acts* was a companion of Paul on many of his journeys, as implied by his use of the word "we" (*Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16*). Luke was with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome (*2 Timothy 4:11, Philemon 24*). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul seems to imply that Luke was a Gentile. He names those "of the circumcision" (Jews) who were with him (*Colossians 4:7-11*), then names others—including Luke—as distinct from those of the circumcision (*Colossians 4:12-14*).

A number of references to the book of *Acts* in early Christian literature indicate that the work was recognized as authoritative:

- Allusions appear in the epistle to Diognetus (130 A.D.) and the Didache (140 A.D.)
- The words of Stephen, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them," appear in the Epistle of the Churches of Vienne and Lyon (177 A.D.).
- Irenaeus (180 A.D.) and Clement of Alexandria (190 A.D.) quote from *Acts*, the latter citing Paul's speech in Athens.
- Tertullian (200 A.D.), Eusebius (325 A.D.), and Jerome (400 A.D.) also quote *Acts*.

Confirming Luke as the author of *Acts*, the Muratorian Canon (170 A.D.) has this note:

But the Acts of all the Apostles were written in one volume. Luke compiled for “most excellent Theophilus” what things were done in detail in his presence, as he plainly shows by omitting both the deaths of Peter and also the departure of Paul from the city, when he departed for Spain.

Irenaeus (180 A.D.) wrote, referencing *Acts 15:39, 16:8ff*, and *20:6*:

And that Luke was inseparable from Paul, and his fellow-worker in the gospel, he himself shows; not indeed boasting of it, but impelled by truth itself. For, says he, when Barnabas and John who was called Mark separated from Paul, and they sailed to Cyprus, “we came to Troas”; and when Paul had seen in a dream a man of Macedonia, saying, “Come over into Macedonia and help us, Paul,” immediately, says he, “We endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them”; therefore, “loosing from Troas, we came in a straight course to Samothrace.” And then he carefully relates all the rest of their course till they arrived in Philippi, and how they spoke their first discourse. “And we sat down,” says he, “and spake to the women that resorted thither”; and who believed, and how many. And again, he says, “And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came to Troas, where we abode seven days.” And many other things he relates in order while he was with Paul.

Clement of Alexandria (190 A.D.) wrote, “As Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, records Paul to have said, ‘Ye men of Athens...’” Tertullian (200 A.D.) quotes *Acts 2:15* and says that Luke wrote it. Eusebius (325 A.D.) tells us that “Luke has left us two inspired volumes – the Gospel and the Acts.

Date

According to *Acts 1:1*, this book was written after the third Gospel had been compiled. Luke’s Gospel is conservatively dated in A.D. 60, since Paul’s two years in prison at Caesarea (which ended in 60 A.D.) would have given Luke the time needed to examine the eyewitnesses to what the Gospel records (*Luke 1:1-4*).

The narrative of *Acts* concludes with Paul under house arrest in Rome (A.D. 62). The final sentence states that he had lived there for two years. The abrupt ending of the narrative may indicate that the book was written at that time (i.e., Luke recorded all the events that had happened up to the time he wrote).

Luke does not tell us about Paul’s death because, it appears, Paul was not put to death at this time. The so called “pastoral” epistles seem to indicate that Paul was released from the first Roman imprisonment and traveled extensively. In this sense, the book of *Acts* does tell (indirectly) what happened to Paul. He had waited two years for his prosecutors from Palestine to come. History tells us that if a man’s accusers didn’t come within two years time, the ancient practice

of the courts was to allow the accused to go free. The accusers themselves could be put to death if they brought a false case, or if Caesar thought they had wasted his time in the court. The Jews hadn't been able to prove their case in Palestinian courts that might have been more inclined to be favorable to them. How could they expect to prove their case before Caesar in Rome? It seems likely that Paul's accusers just weren't willing to risk their own necks to prosecute the case in Rome. Furthermore, the epistles written from the first Roman imprisonment sound as if Paul expected to soon be free (*Philemon 22; Philippians 1:24-26*).

The simplest explanation seems to be that the prosecutors didn't arrive, and after Paul had waited the two years, he was released from his first Roman imprisonment. About that time (A.D. 63-64), Luke wrote *Acts* from Rome. Such would seem to harmonize with the fact that *Acts* gives us no hint of the persecution under Nero (A.D. 64), Paul's death (c. A.D. 68), or the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70).

Themes and Purpose

Luke 1:3-4 offers a clue to the author's purpose: to provide "an orderly account...that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." Luke was a researcher and chronicler of events for the benefit of his friend Theophilus. By the providence of God, his work has provided priceless insight and information for the general reader, even thousands of years later.

Each section of *Acts* (chs. 1-7; 8-12; 13-28) focuses on a particular audience, a key personality, and a significant phase in the expansion of the gospel message. Jesus' expectation was plain: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (1:8). This is the story of the men and women who took that commission seriously and began to spread "the good news" throughout the known world.

Focus	Witnesses in Jerusalem		Witnesses in Judea and Samaria		Witnesses to the end of the earth	
Reference	1:1 ----- 3:1 ----- 8:5 ----- 13:1 ----- 21:17 ---- 28:31					
Division	Power of the church	Progress of the church	Expansion of the church		Paul's three journeys	Paul's trials
Topic	Jews		Samaritans		Gentiles	
	<i>Peter</i>		<i>Philip</i>		<i>Paul</i>	
Location	Jerusalem		Judea and Samaria		Ends of the known earth	
Time	2 years (A.D. 33-35)		13 years (A.D. 35-48)		14 years (A.D. 48-62)	

The resurrected Christ is the central theme of the sermons and defenses in *Acts*. The Old Testament Scriptures, the historical resurrection, the apostolic testimony, and the convicting power of the Holy Spirit all bear witness that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (2:22-36; 10:34-43) and the only way of salvation (4:12).

The growth of the church is highlighted in *Acts*. The development of the body of Christ is traced over the one-generation transition from a primarily Jewish to a predominantly Gentile membership. Luke presents Christianity as distinct from Judaism but also as its fulfillment.

Throughout the book, there is emphasis on the activity of the Holy Spirit and the power of Jesus' resurrection. Because of Luke's strong emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it has been suggested that this book could be regarded as "the Acts of the Spirit of Christ working in and through the Apostles."

While there are four accounts of the life of Jesus, this is the only book that carries on the story from His ascension to the period of the New Testament epistles. *Acts* recounts the founding of the church, the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome, and the first thirty years of the church's growth. Thus, *Acts* is the historical link between the Gospels and the epistles. It provides the historical setting for *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, *Galatians*, *Romans*, *Colossians*, *Philemon*, *Ephesians*, and *Philippians*.

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 1-9*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

Outline Of The Book Of Acts

Introduction (1:1-5)

- A. Mention of the recipient of the letter: Theophilus
- B. Summary of *"the first book"*
 - 1. An account of Jesus' actions and teachings that ends on the day of his ascension
 - 2. Specific commands given to the hand-picked apostles
 - 3. Jesus presents himself alive for forty days and speaks about the kingdom of God
 - 4. At his final appearance, Jesus orders his apostles not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for a baptism with the Holy Spirit

Part One: Witnesses In Jerusalem (1:6-8:4)

I. Preparations For The Proclamation Of The Gospel (1:6-2:13)

- A. The reassurances and ascension of Jesus (1:6-11)
- B. The return of the apostles to Jerusalem (1:12-14)
- C. Matthias chosen to replace Judas (1:15-26)
- D. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (2:1-13)

II. The "Good News" Spreads Throughout Jerusalem (2:14-8:4)

- A. Peter's witness to Jews *"from every nation under heaven"* on Pentecost (2:14-41)
- B. The lifestyle of the early disciples (2:42-47)
- C. First confrontation with the Jewish authorities (3:1-4:31)
 - 1. Peter heals a lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple (3:1-11)
 - 2. Peter's witness connecting Jesus to the Old Testament prophets and the healing of the lame man (3:12-26)
 - 3. Peter and John arrested by the priests and the Sadducees (4:1-4)
 - 4. Peter's witness before the Jewish council (4:5-12)
 - 5. The command of the council to stop teaching in the name of Jesus (4:13-22)
 - 6. The believers' prayer for boldness (4:23-31)
- D. The sharing of resources by the disciples (4:32-5:11)
 - 1. Voluntary efforts (4:32-37)
 - 2. Deceitful efforts of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)
- E. Multitudes are added to the Lord as signs and wonders abound (5:12-16)
- F. Second confrontation with the Sadducees (5:17-42)
 - 1. The apostles arrested and put in public prison (5:17-18)
 - 2. The apostles released and commissioned by an angel of the Lord (5:19-21)
 - 3. The apostles called before the council after preaching in the Temple (5:22-33)
 - 4. Gamaliel's speech to the council (5:34-39)
 - 5. The apostles are beaten, but refuse to cease teaching and preaching (5:40-42)
- G. Seven men are appointed by the disciples to aid in the daily distribution of food (6:1-7)
- H. Stephen's confrontation with the Jewish council (6:8-7:60)
 - 1. Stephen seized and brought before the council (6:8-15)

2. Stephen's witness of Jesus standing in a long line of rejected prophets (7:1-53)
3. The stoning of Stephen (7:54-60)
- I. As great persecution arises against the church in Jerusalem, the disciples scatter (8:1-4)

Part Two: Witnesses In Judea And Samaria (8:5-12:25)

I. The Witness of Philip (8:5-40)

- A. Philip witnesses to the people of Samaria (8:5-25)
- B. Philip witnesses to an Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40)

II. The Conversion Of Saul Of Tarsus (9:1-31)

- A. Jesus speaks to Saul on the road to Damascus and Saul is blinded (9:1-9)
- B. Ananias tells Saul what he must do (9:10-19)
- C. Saul proclaims Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus (9:20-22)
- D. Saul is forced to escape from Damascus under the threat of death (9:23-25)
- E. Saul witnesses in Jerusalem (9:26-31)

III. The Witness Of Peter (9:32-11:18)

- A. Peter heals Aeneas and the residents of Lydda and Sharon turn to the Lord (9:32-35)
- B. Peter raises Dorcas from the dead in Joppa and many believe in the Lord (9:36-43)
- C. Peter's witness to Cornelius and his household in Caesarea (10:1-11:18)
 1. Cornelius is instructed by an angel to send for Peter (10:1-8)
 2. The Lord communicates with Peter through a vision of unclean animals (10:9-16)
 3. Peter responds to the vision and makes his way to Cornelius' house (10:17-33)
 4. Peter's message to the Gentiles (10:34-43)
 5. The Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles and they are baptized (10:44-48)
 6. Peter responds to Jewish criticism in Jerusalem (11:1-18)

IV. The Witness Of The Early Church (11:19-12:25)

- A. The gospel is preached in Antioch (11:19-26)
- B. Disciples in Antioch determine to send relief to brethren living in Judea (11:27-30)
- C. Persecution at the hands of Herod the king (12:1-25)
 1. James is killed and Peter is arrested (12:1-5)
 2. Peter is released by an angel of the Lord (12:6-19)
 3. Herod is killed by an angel of the Lord (12:20-25)

Part Three: Witnesses To The Ends Of The Earth (13:1-28:31)

I. The First Missionary Journey (13:1-14:28)

- A. Barnabas and Saul are sent by the Holy Spirit from Antioch (13:1-3)
- B. Barnabas, Saul (Paul) and John witness on Cyprus (13:4-12)
- C. Paul and Barnabas witness in Antioch of Pisidia (13:13-50)
- D. The work continues at Iconium (13:51-14:5)
- E. The gospel is preached in Lystra and Derbe (14:6-20)
- F. Paul and Barnabas witness on the return trip to Antioch (14:21-26)

- G. Report to the disciples in Antioch on the first missionary trip (14:27-28)
- II. Gentiles And Their Obligation To The Law Debated In Jerusalem (15:1-35)**
- A. Debate over Gentiles being circumcised and keeping the Law (15:1-5)
 - B. Peter's witness of God's impartiality toward the Gentiles (15:6-11)
 - C. The testimony of Paul and Barnabas (15:12)
 - D. James' argument from the prophets (15:13-21)
 - E. An explanatory letter sent to Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (15:22-29)
 - F. Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas report back to the saints in Antioch (15:30-35)
- III. The Second Missionary Journey (15:36-18:22)**
- A. Paul and Barnabas disagree over taking along John Mark (15:36-41)
 - B. Derbe and Lystra: Paul is joined by Timothy (16:1-5)
 - C. Troas: Paul is urged in a vision to come to Macedonia (16:6-10)
 - D. Philippi: personal stories (16:11-40)
 - 1. Lydia and her household obey the gospel (16:11-15)
 - 2. Paul and Silas thrown in prison (16:16-24)
 - 3. The conversion of a jailer and his family (16:25-34)
 - 4. Paul and Silas are released and depart the city (16:35-40)
 - E. Thessalonica: a world turned upside down (17:1-9)
 - F. Berea: many receive the word (17:10-15)
 - G. Athens: the "unknown god" is preached (17:16-34)
 - H. Corinth: one-and-a-half years of testifying (18:1-17)
 - I. Return trip to Antioch (18:18-22)
- IV. The Third Missionary Journey (18:23-21:14)**
- A. Galatia and Phrygia: strengthening the disciples (18:23)
 - B. Ephesus: three years of ministry (18:24-19:41)
 - 1. Apollos speaks boldly in Ephesus (18:24-28)
 - 2. Paul baptizes twelve men in the name of the Lord Jesus (19:1-7)
 - 3. Paul's work in the synagogue and the hall of Tyrannus (19:8-10)
 - 4. The seven sons of Sceva (19:11-20)
 - 5. A riot breaks out in Ephesus (19:21-41)
 - C. Macedonia and Greece: three months of ministry (20:1-5)
 - D. Troas: Eutychus falls from a third story window (20:6-12)
 - E. Miletus: Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders (20:13-38)
 - F. Tyre: Paul is urged not to go on to Jerusalem (21:1-6)
 - G. Caesarea: Agabus' prophecy about coming trouble in Jerusalem (21:7-14)
- V. The Journey To Rome (21:15-28:31)**
- A. Paul witnesses in Jerusalem (21:15-23:33)
 - 1. Paul visits with the elders of Jerusalem and goes to the Temple (21:15-26)
 - 2. Paul is falsely charged and arrested in the Temple (21:27-36)

3. Paul recounts his personal story of conversion before a Jewish mob (21:37-22:21)
4. The Roman tribune discovers that Paul is a Roman citizen (22:22-29)
5. Paul witnesses before the chief priests and the Jewish council (22:30-23:11)
6. A plot to kill Paul (23:12-33)
- B. Paul witnesses in Caesarea (23:34-26:32)
 1. Paul reasons with Felix, governor of Judea, for two years (23:34-24:27)
 2. Paul argues his defense before Porcius Festus and appeals to Caesar (25:1-12)
 3. Paul makes his defense before King Agrippa (25:13-26:32)
- C. Paul witnesses in Rome (27:1-28:31)
 1. Paul sails for Rome (27:1-12)
 2. A storm at sea (27:13-38)
 3. The shipwreck (27:39-44)
 4. Paul on the island of Malta for three months (28:1-10)
 5. Paul arrives in Rome (28:11-16)
 6. Paul witnesses to the local Jewish leaders (28:17-29)
 7. Paul proclaims the gospel to *"all who came to him"* for two whole years (28:30-31)

- Week 2 -

“Speaking About The Kingdom Of God”



This week, while continuing to read through a large chunk of *Acts* so that we can appreciate “the big picture” of Luke’s work, we’re specifically interested in the conclusion of the *Gospel of Luke* and the first three verses of *Acts*. What was going on during this supremely exciting (and perhaps frightening) time? What had happened to Jesus in Jerusalem? What was He doing in the weeks that followed His resurrection from the dead? What was this “kingdom” He continued to speak about? And what must have been going through the minds of His first followers?

Day One: *Acts 10:1-11:18*

Day Two: *Acts 11:19-12:25*

Day Three: *Acts 13:1-14:28*

Day Four: *Acts 15:1-16:40*

Day Five: *Acts 17:1-18:28*

Day Six: *Acts 19:1-20:38*

“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach...” (*Acts 1:1*). Take a moment to thumb through Luke’s gospel. What are some of your favorite accounts of the things Jesus did? What about the teaching preserved by Luke? What discourses really stand out to you?

“...until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen” (*Acts 1:2*). Take the time now to read *Luke 24:36-53*. In your own words, what did Jesus communicate on this occasion?



We will run across the word “apostle” quite frequently in *Acts*. What exactly was an apostle? Can you find Scriptures to fortify your answer?

“To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus

The Lord’s Day, the day of the resurrection

- Mary Magdalene (*Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18*)
- Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (*Matt. 28:9-10*)
- 2 men on the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24:13-35*)
- Peter (*1 Cor. 15:5; Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-23*)
- The apostles (*Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-23*)

The Lord’s Day, one week after the resurrection

- The apostles (*John 20:24-29*)

Other appearances

- 7 disciples by the Sea of Galilee (*John 21:1-23*)
- More than 500 brothers (*1 Corinthians 15:6*)
- 11 disciples on a mountain in Galilee (*Matt. 28:16-20*)
- The 11 in Jerusalem (*Mark 16:14-18*)
- James (*1 Corinthians 15:7*)
- Ascension (*Acts 1:3-11; Mk. 16:19-20; Lk. 24:50-53*)
- Stephen (*Acts 7*)
- Saul of Tarsus (*Acts 9*)

Of all the ways Luke could summarize Jesus’ teachings over the course of nearly six weeks, he uses a simple phrase – “**the kingdom of God.**” In your own words, what is a kingdom?

What kinds of things are necessary to transform an ordinary group of people on an ordinary piece of land into a kingdom?

“**The kingdom**” as preached by Jesus and the apostles. Not only do we find Jesus urgently proclaiming the coming of the kingdom (*Luke 4:42-44; 8:1*), but we also watch as He sends His disciples with the same message (*Luke 9:1-2, 59-60; 10:1, 9-11*). After His ascension, the theme continues (*Acts 8:12; 14:21-22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 30-31; 1 Thess. 2:11-12; 2 Thess. 1:5*).

- ▶ Take a moment to list different “kingdoms” or people in positions of authority that we run across as we read Luke’s Gospel and *Acts*.

- ▶ In contrast to the physical examples readily available to an inhabitant of the first century, what were Jesus and His messengers talking about as they proclaimed an entirely different kingdom? Consider *Matt. 6:9-10,33; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 11:14-23; 17:20-21; John 18:33-37*.



Based upon the passages I've studied this week, what will it mean for me to live, not just as a student of Jesus' teachings, but as a citizen within His kingdom?

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week throughout *Acts*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

- Week 3 -

“You Will Be Baptized With The Holy Spirit”



This week we wrap up our “big picture” reading of *Acts*. Finish strong this week. I know there’s been a lot to read, but the load will lighten significantly next week as we get down to details. In the meantime, this lesson’s specific focus is *Acts 1:4-5*. Jesus had made some wonderful promises to His apostles before His death, and in the early verses of *Acts*, we finally begin to catch glimpses of powerful fulfillment. Much revolves around a promised “baptism” with the Holy Spirit, but who is this Spirit and what will it mean to be “baptized” in Him? Take the time to carefully study this week’s lesson. Its value for your understanding of so many other amazing things in *Acts* cannot be overstated.

Day One: *Acts 21:1-22:29*

Day Two: *Acts 22:30-23:35*

Day Three: *Acts 24:1-27*

Day Four: *Acts 25:1-26:32*

Day Five: *Acts 27:1-44*

Day Six: *Acts 28:1-31*

“And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4-5).

The Bible Describes Many Baptisms

Take a moment to look at each instance and briefly summarize what is being described:

- The children of Israel “*were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea*” (1 Cor. 10:1-2).
- John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4-5).
- John warned of one who would baptize with fire (Matthew 3:11-12; Luke 3:16-17).

Our English word “**baptism**” is from the Greek word *baptizo*, which literally means “to dip,” “to sink,” “to immerse,” “to plunge.” To quote *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*: “baptism consists of the process of immersion, submersion and emergence.”



- Jesus spoke of a baptism of suffering and persecution (*Matthew 20:20-28; Luke 12:50*).
- Jesus commissioned His apostles to preach a baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins (*Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 8:12-13, 35-38; 10:47-48; 22:16*).
- What, then, was this baptism “*with the Holy Spirit*” of *Acts 1:5*? First of all, remember the promises already referenced in *Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16*.

Who Is The Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is a real personality. He possesses the characteristics of a personal being:

- Mind: “*the mind of the Spirit*” (*Romans 8:27*).
- Knowledge: *he knows the mind or thoughts of God* (*1 Corinthians 2:9-11*).
- Affection: “*the love of the Spirit*” (*Romans 15:30*).
- Will: “*who apportions to each one individually as he wills*” (*1 Corinthians 12:11*).
- Goodness: “*your good Spirit*” (*Nehemiah 9:20*).

The things which the Holy Spirit does manifest personality:

- He speaks (*1 Timothy 4:1; Acts 8:29; 10:19; John 16:13*).
- He witnesses or testifies (*John 15:26*).
- He intercedes for the saints with groanings too deep for words (*Romans 8:26*).
- He searches (*1 Corinthians 2:10*).
- He leads or forbids (*Acts 16:6-7*).
- He teaches and brings to remembrance (*John 14:26*).
- He guides into all truth (*John 16:12-14*).
- He invites (*Revelation 22:17*).

The Holy Spirit suffers slights and injuries that can only be ascribed to a personality:

- He can be grieved and vexed (*Ephesians 4:30; Isaiah 63:10*).
- He can be outraged (*Hebrews 10:29*).
- He can be blasphemed or spoken against (*Matthew 12:31-32*).
- He can be lied to (*Acts 5:3*).
- He can be resisted (*Acts 7:51*).

The Holy Spirit Is A Divine Personality

The New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit as having the attributes of divinity, a member of the “Godhead” (NKJV).

- Three personalities that make up the “Godhead” (*Matthew 28:18-20*).
- The Father and Son are life; so is the Spirit (*Job 33:4; John 3:5-6*).
- The Father and Son are light; so is the Spirit (*1 Corinthians 2:9-12*).
- The Father and Son are love; so is the Spirit (*Romans 5:3-5*).
- The Father and Son are eternal; so is the Spirit (*Hebrews 9:14*).

As deity, the Holy Spirit has:

- Incredible knowledge (*1 Corinthians 2:9-11*).
- Incredible power (*Micah 3:8; Acts 1:8*).
- Incredible breadth (*Psalms 139:7-12*).

Baptism With The Holy Spirit Was A Promise

Don't miss that point! No one was ever commanded to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins is the command we are to obey, but baptism in the Holy Spirit was a promise made to a very specific group of people for a very specific purpose.

Christ is the administrator of Holy Spirit baptism. Think back to John's statement in *John 1:33-34*. Before His death, Jesus promised to send “*the Helper, the Holy Spirit*” to His apostles (*John 14:26; 15:26; 16:12-14*). The Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance what Christ had taught while on the earth and guide them to a complete knowledge of the truth. The Spirit would also provide them power to serve as witnesses for Jesus as the Christ (*Acts 1:8*).

The Holy Spirit was “poured out” in fulfillment of those divine promises.

- As Peter was preaching to Cornelius and his relatives and friends (*Acts 10:44-45*).
- Peter then defends his preaching to the Gentiles (*Acts 11:15-16*).
- He is reminded of Pentecost and what had happened “*at the beginning*” (*Acts 2:1-4*).
- What had happened was founded on the promise of Jesus (*Acts 1:5*).
- The power provided by the fulfilled promise had a purpose (*Acts 1:8*).

The Purpose Behind The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

The outpouring of the Spirit on the apostles was to enable them to accomplish the task the Lord had given them. He was a “*Helper*” (or Advocate, Counselor) to the apostles to fill the important void of guidance left when Jesus ascended into heaven (*John 14:16-17*).

In Week 15 of this study, when we have established more context, we will explore in much greater detail the purpose behind the “pouring out” of the Spirit on a specific group of Gentiles. For the moment, note the effect that it had on the Jews that were present: “*the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God*” (*Acts 10:45-46*). Such served as a sign to Peter and Jewish Christians abroad that God was willing to accept Gentiles into the fellowship of Christ (*Acts 11:1-18; 15:1-11*).

Just as promised, what did the Holy Spirit do for the apostles?

- He guided them into all the truth (*John 14:26; 16:12-14*).
- He gave them power to declare the future (*John 16:13*).
- He helped them bear witness of Jesus as the Christ (*John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8; 5:32*).
- He gave them the ability to speak in tongues and perform miracles (*Acts 2:4; Mark 16:15-18; Hebrews 2:2-4*).
- He empowered them to pass along certain miraculous gifts through the laying on of hands (*Acts 8:14-17; 19:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11*).
- He guided them in completing their work of revealing the will of God to mankind (*1 Corinthians 2:1-13; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 1 John 1:1-4*).

Whatever the apostles needed to complete their work as witnesses of the faith was provided by the Holy Spirit. Once again, no one was ever commanded to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. In fact, after the specific baptisms of the Spirit mentioned above had occurred, Paul was moved to write (by the same Spirit) of only “one baptism” (*Ephesians 4:5*) – baptism in water, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for the forgiveness of sins.

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week throughout *Acts*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

- Week 4 -

“You Will Be My Witnesses”



Now that we have hopefully laid a good foundation for the rest of our study, it's time to dig into the text in more detail. *Acts 1:6-26* is our focus this week and the key word of the week (and the rest of our study) is **witness**. What is a witness? What does a witness do? Out of all the words Jesus could use in describing His expectations for His disciples, why this one on this occasion? Additionally, we'll look into the ascension of Jesus and the adding of Matthias to the eleven apostles.

Day One: *Acts 1:1-5*

Day Two: *Acts 1:6-8*

Day Three: *Acts 1:9-11*

Day Four: *Acts 1:12-14*

Day Five: *Acts 1:15-22*

Day Six: *Acts 1:23-26*

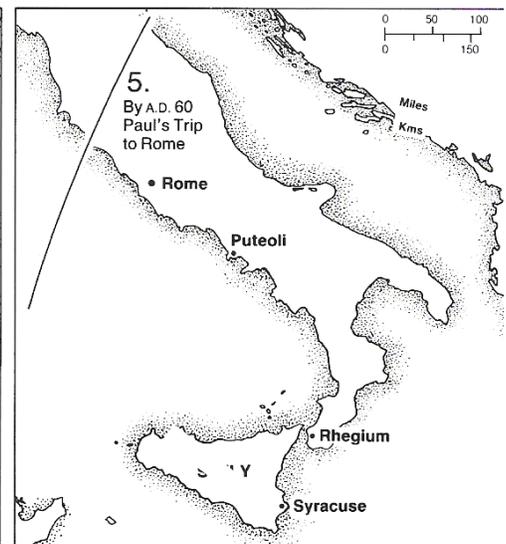
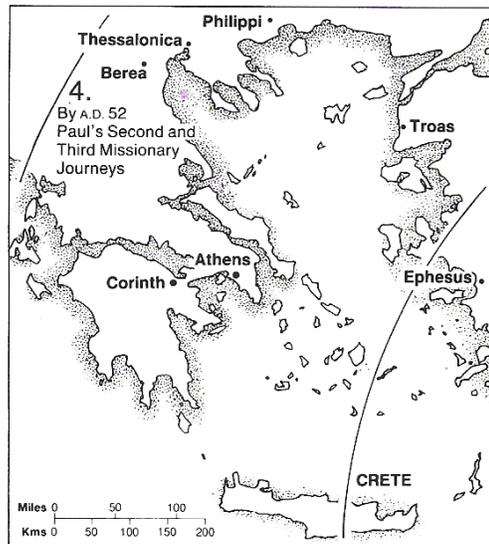
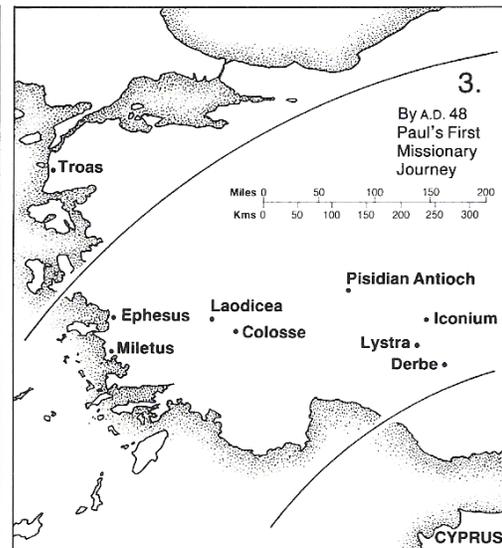
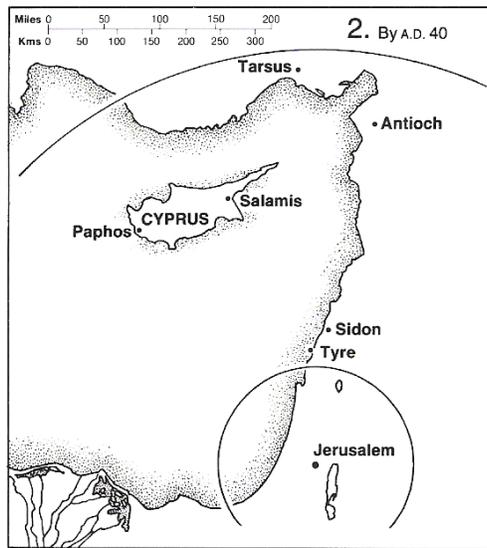
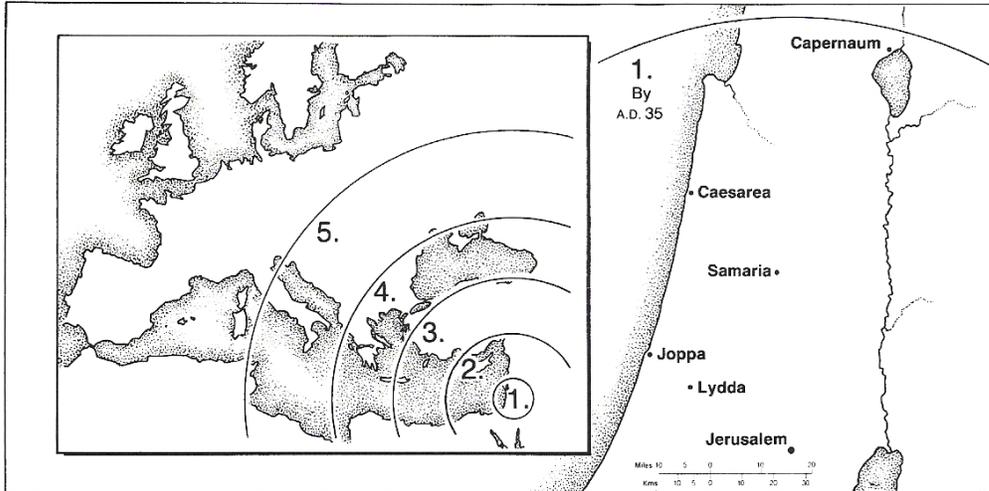
Responding to a question that reveals the apostles' ongoing confusion about the nature of the kingdom of God, Jesus declares what is truly central to God's plan for the immediate future. First, this is not the time that God is coming in judgment on the nations, nor is He working to establish a political earthly reign. Jesus warns His followers even to avoid speculating about the timing of God's plan. What they *do* need to be aware of is the fact that they are being charged with a mission – to serve as witnesses of Christ throughout the world.



Be on the lookout throughout the book of *Acts* for the word “**witness**.” It is used twenty times throughout the book, obviously proving that it is a central theme of Luke's account.

- In your own words, what is a “**witness**”?
- When someone has “**witnessed**” something, what do we typically expect them to do?
- What did it mean for these men to be Jesus' “**witnesses**”? What sort of things from the life of Jesus might readily come to mind that were important to pass along to others?

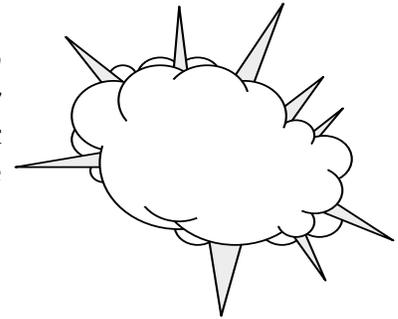
The Spread of the Gospel





While we have taken a little time to explore the word “witness,” what about the second half of the title of this workbook – “*the faith*”? Luke uses that phrase on more than one occasion in *Acts* (6:7; 13:8; 14:21-22; 16:5). What does Luke mean to imply by “the faith”? What does it mean to be a “witness of the faith”? And most importantly, is there any way in which you and I are still to be “witnesses of the faith”? If so, in what way?

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). What should we make of that angelic promise? Can you find other passages of Scripture that point to the fulfillment of this promise?



“A Sabbath day’s journey” – this Jewish expression referred to a distance between a half and three-quarters of a mile. The Rabbinic sources stipulate that a Sabbath day’s journey was not to exceed 2,000 cubits. Given that a cubit was about 22 inches, this would be a limit of 3,666 feet (a mile is 5,280 feet).



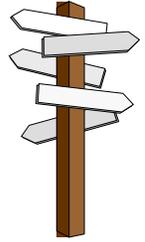
The distance between the Temple and the Mount of Olives was within this range.

In the ten days between Jesus’ ascension and the day of Pentecost, the disciples devoted themselves to prayer. As you place yourself in that private upper room, imagining the high sense of anticipation, what kinds of things would you have been praying for?

Take the time to read Peter's address to the 120 people gathered together (*Acts 1:15-22*). What were the conditions for one of the men to "become with us a witness to his resurrection"?

Why was this even important? Was there some kind of significance attached to having twelve apostles rather than just the eleven?

Jesus' family – this is the final time that Mary is mentioned in the New Testament. It is meaningful that the last image we have of her is in prayer. Jesus' brothers are named in only one place in the New Testament (*Mark 6:3*). They were James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. Before His death and resurrection, they were skeptical of His claims (*John 7:5*), but now they are devoted to Him. James became a leader of the Jerusalem church and Judas (or Jude) was probably the author of a New Testament letter.



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 1:6-26*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Men Of Israel, Hear These Words”



Our study this week focuses in on the Spirit’s coming on the day of Pentecost and on the first proclamation of the new “testament” of Jesus Christ. Jesus had died and His “will” could now go into effect (*Hebrews 9:15-17*). He is revealed as the fulfillment of God’s plan to redeem mankind. Through Him, the Father’s offer of forgiveness is announced and thousands respond. As we have already noticed, the kingdom of Jesus involves His rule in the hearts of people – dominion that is manifested whenever His teaching is proclaimed as the law to govern mankind and someone responds. His reign on the earth sees a powerful beginning on Pentecost in Jerusalem.

Day One: *Acts 2:1-4*

Day Two: *Acts 2:5-13*

Day Three: *Acts 2:14-21*

Day Four: *Acts 2:22-28*

Day Five: *Acts 2:29-36*

Day Six: *Acts 2:37-41*

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, **they** were all together in one place” (2:1). Take a moment to look before and after this verse in an effort to discern who is included in the term “**they**.” How many people were baptized with the Holy Spirit? Was it the entire group of 120 mentioned in *Acts 1:15*, or simply the twelve apostles?

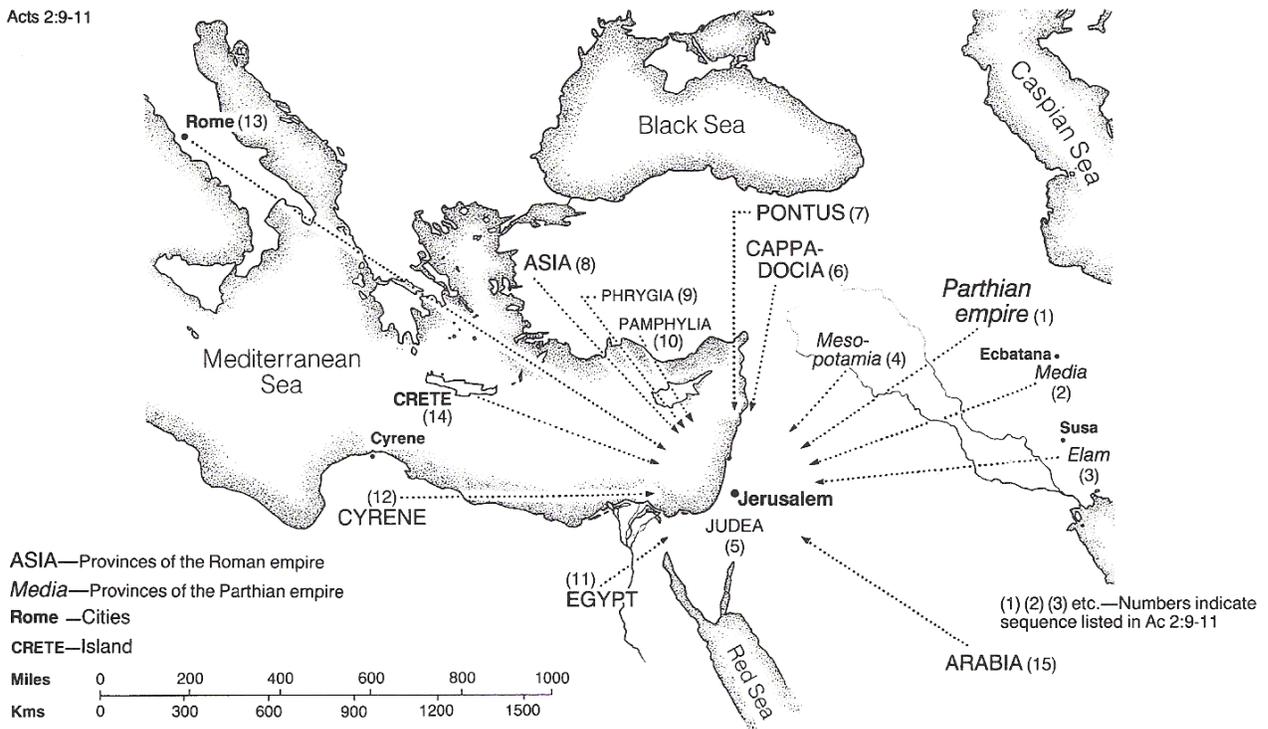
In *Acts 2:2-3*, the Spirit is associated with two symbols that often represented the manifestation of the presence of God. In Ezekiel’s vision of the valley filled with dry bones, the life-giving breath of God comes as a **wind** and makes the dead bodies live again (*Ezek. 37:1-14*). Jesus Himself described the coming Holy Spirit as a wind (*John 3:8*). During the Exodus, God frequently appeared as **fire**. When the LORD first revealed Himself, it was out of the midst of a burning bush (*Exo. 3:1-6*). The Israelites were led in a pillar of fire by night on their wilderness journey (*Exo. 13:20-22*). Finally, the LORD descended on Mt. Sinai in fire to give the law to Moses (*Exo. 19:18*).



“**Pentecost**” is a transliteration of a Greek word, meaning “fiftieth.” It referred to the fiftieth day after the Passover festival when the Jews celebrated the Feast of Weeks – the annual harvest festival (*Lev. 23:15-21; Deut. 16:9-12*). This was the second of three festivals (the others being Passover and Tabernacles) that all Jewish males were required to attend in Jerusalem (*Deuteronomy 16:16*). It occurred in early summer after the conclusion of the grain harvest. This was a joyous occasion when the Israelites expressed their thanks to God for His provisions through the year and renewed their commitment to Him. It was an opportune time since Pentecost was the next occasion after Passover that a large crowd would be assembled in Jerusalem.

Countries of People Mentioned at Pentecost

Acts 2:9-11



A great deal of confusion exists in today’s religious world on the topic of “speaking in tongues.” Take the time to carefully read *Acts 2:1-8*. What is Luke implying in his account? What did it mean to “*speak in other tongues*” on this occasion?

Reversing his previous public denial of Jesus, Peter now stands up in front of this large crowd and boldly declares that Jesus is in fact the awaited Messiah of Israel and the sovereign Lord. But out of the twelve, why Peter? Go back and read *Matthew 16:13-20*, paying special attention to the promise of Jesus in *verse 19*. Think back to what we have already studied concerning Jesus’ view of “*the kingdom*.” What then were “*the keys of the kingdom of heaven*”? Are we watching the fulfillment of that promise in *Acts 2*? If so, in what way?



Peter cites three passages from the Old Testament. Take the time to carefully read through each of them. What did the Spirit expect the original audience (and the modern reader, as well) to take away from the quoting and application of these prophecies?

Acts 2:16-21 [Joel 2:28-32] –

Acts 2:25-28 [Psalm 16:8-11] –

Acts 2:34-35 [Psalm 110:1] –

Notice the general outline followed in Peter's sermon. The same major points were regularly made by the apostles when preaching to Jewish audiences:

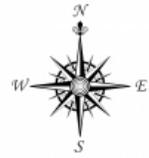
- I. An affirmation that the time of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy had come.
- II. A rehearsal of the ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.
- III. An appeal to relevant Old Testament Messianic prophecies whose fulfillment in these events are evidence that Jesus is the Messiah.
- IV. A call to respond accordingly.

The bottom line of Peter's entire message is contained in *Acts 2:36*. In your own words, what are the great implications contained in the fact that God has made Jesus:

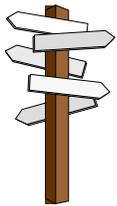
Lord?

Christ?

If I have **repented** of my sins, I have (see *Acts 3:19; 26:18,20; 2 Corinthians 7:8-11*)...



If I have been **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of my sins, I have (see *Acts 8:38; 10:47; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12-13; 1 Peter 3:21*)...



“*The gift of the Holy Spirit*” in *Acts 2:38* could be read as either “a gift from the Holy Spirit” (a gift which He gives) or “a gift which consists of the Holy Spirit.” Since the original language is ambiguous, we are left with the task of discerning which of the two best fits the parallel passages we have that might shed some helpful light. Consider *John 7:37-39; Acts 5:29-32; Rom. 8:1-27; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; Gal. 3:2; 5:22-23; Eph. 1:13-14; 3:14-19; 1 John 4:12-13*. Based on those passages, what seems to be the best interpretation of *Acts 2:38*?

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 2:1-41*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Praising God And Having Favor With All The People”



Our key text this week is *Acts 2:42-47* – not nearly as much reading for the week, but make a special effort to hone in on Luke’s message in each verse. He is giving us the first of a series of summary statements about the life and Spirit-directed vitality of the earliest Christians (see also in *4:32-35; 5:12-16; 9:31; 12:24*). So much was happening so fast, but these new believers were committing themselves to learning more about Jesus, praying, worshiping, and enjoying a vibrant community life. On top of it all, they were committed to proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah to others and God was powerfully at work through their testimony. Every day more people were confessing their faith in Jesus and being added to kingdom of God.

Day One: *Acts 2:42*

Day Two: *Acts 2:43*

Day Three: *Acts 2:44*

Day Four: *Acts 2:45*

Day Five: *Acts 2:46*

Day Six: *Acts 2:47*

Do you have any old photographs hidden away in your house or apartment? Most of us do, but why? Why do we hang on to images from years ago? There is obvious sentimental value attached to certain events in our lives – senior pictures, first dates, wedding photos, blurry ultrasound images, newborn portraits. We hold on to those kinds of pictures because they refresh our memories. Perhaps they remind us of simpler, better days. In a unique way, photographs have the power to stir our memories and even inspire us for the future.



Let me encourage you to look at *Acts 2:42-47* as an ancient photograph. In His communication with us, the Almighty has thoroughly explained, but He has also clearly illustrated. He has provided models to go with His mandates and examples to accompany His explanations. The first picture, the newborn image that our Father has provided of the church, can be found in the closing verses of *Acts 2*. Study it carefully this week. What traits do we find in these newborn children of God?

They Were Unwavering In Their Commitment

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Remember Jesus’ commission at the close of Matthew’s Gospel. Not only were Jesus’ apostles to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them for the forgiveness of their sins, but they were to teach those new converts *“to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20)*. Baptism isn’t the end of the road, it’s our means of entrance into the race (*1 Cor. 9:24-27; Heb. 12:1-2*). These babes in Christ had done what was necessary to take care of the sins of the past, but what about the future? Where were they to go from here?

- They had to “*devote*” themselves. What does it mean to be truly devoted to something? How does one mature from being merely a student of Jesus’ teachings to a fully devoted disciple of Christ?

- Perhaps *2 Peter 1:5-11* would be a good pathway of growth to explore at this point. Take the time to describe each of the stepping stones listed by Peter in your own words. How is each quality built on the one that precedes it?
 - Faith –

 - Virtue –

 - Knowledge –

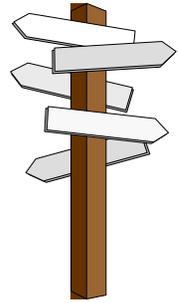
 - Self-control –

 - Steadfastness –

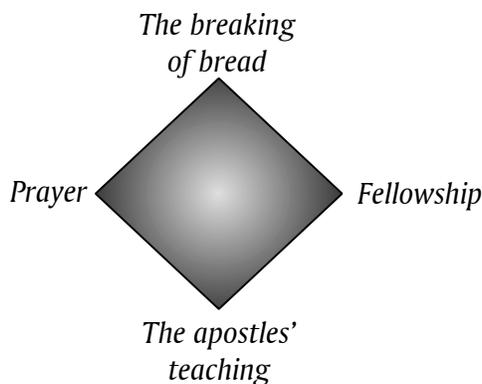
 - Godliness –

 - Brotherly affection –

 - Love –



- The “*knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*” referenced in *2 Peter 1:8* was described by Luke in *Acts 2:42* as “*the apostles’ teaching*” or “*doctrine.*” In your own words, what is this teaching? What kinds of things would the apostles have taught these new Jewish believers? And, just how important was it to be fully “*devoted*” to this teaching? (see *2 John 9*).
- The disciples were “*devoted*” to “*fellowship*” (*Acts 2:42*). What is fellowship? What kinds of things did this diverse body of believers from all over the world now have in common?
- They “*devoted themselves*” to “*the breaking of bread*” (*Acts 2:42*). What should we make of this phrase? Is Luke simply implying that the early Christians steadfastly continued to eat, or is something more intended?
- Finally, they were “*devoted*” to “*the prayers*” (*Acts 2:42*). What kinds of things do you imagine these new citizens of God’s kingdom would have been praying about or for?



As you continue on your journey through *Acts*, one of the things that will undoubtedly stand out is **growth** – the early church grew spiritually and numerically at a staggering rate. Take some time to really think about the four foundational elements of early Christian life mentioned by Luke. How will wholehearted devotion to these four disciplines continue to produce growth in the kingdom of God today?

They Were Unselfish In Their Compassion

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45). Submission to Jesus as Lord meant a radical change in priorities. The original picture of Christ’s church reveals a love and concern for members of a family that transcends material possessions and selfish ambitions. These Christ-followers didn’t hold a “dead” faith (*James 2:17-26; Galatians 5:6*). If I honestly examine myself, are there areas of my faith that could accurately be described as “dead”? What “dry” points in my discipleship need new “breath” of life?



Fellowship and spending time together regularly to deepen relationships and serve one another is a significant challenge facing the church – especially in larger churches of heavily populated areas. Work schedules, the pull of entertainment, and the sheer volume of various activities can severely undermine community. The result is that believers sometimes feel disconnected, uncared for, and unloved. Many Christians even see “church” as something that you “do” only once a week. What steps can be taken to develop more true fellowship among believers?

They Were United In Christ

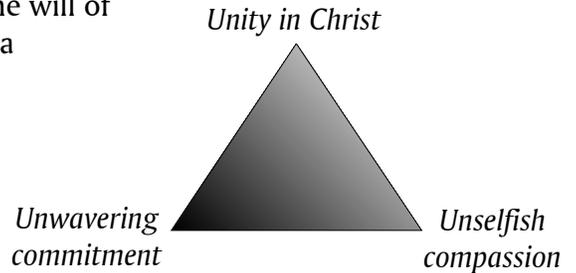
“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:46-47). The Holy Spirit, through obedience to the gospel and daily adherence to the apostles’ teaching, had given the members of Christ’s church a oneness of mind. Paul described it as *“the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:1-16)*. “Unity of the faith” is founded upon:

- † One body
- † One Spirit
- † One hope that belongs to your call
- † One Lord
- † One faith
- † One baptism
- † One God and Father of all

Can a 21st century group of people with different backgrounds, experiences, opinions and ideas enjoy that same kind of unity? If so, how?

They Were The Kind Of People God Can Use To His Glory

“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). The rule of God was manifested in the hearts of people who had yielded to His word and were steadfastly abiding in His teaching. Compassion for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ was evident. There was a real loving concern that considered needy members of the body as having greater significance than even material resources and treasures. Each person had been made one with Christ and was, as a result, one with all other members of Christ’s family. That unity was exemplified and maintained by selfless love and daily adherence to the will of God. Does such exist in the local body of which you are a member? If not, why not?



A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 2:42-47*:

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C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

- Week 7 -

“We Cannot But Speak Of What We Have Seen And Heard”



Some time after the day of Pentecost, an amazing incident happens near a gate in the Temple courts. Two of the apostles, Peter and John, are confronted by a lame beggar who asks them for money. They, in turn, manifest the healing power of Jesus to restore the paralyzed limbs of this destitute man. Cured of his paralysis, the man promptly makes a spectacle in the Temple courts by demonstratively praising God for his healing. A large crowd is attracted and Peter is given another unique opportunity to proclaim the gospel. However, the apostles are also led into the first of several conflicts and opposition to the spread of the “good news.” The reaction of both the crowd and some of the Jewish authorities forms “the rest of the story” for this week.

Day One: *Acts 3:1-10*

Day Two: *Acts 3:11-26*

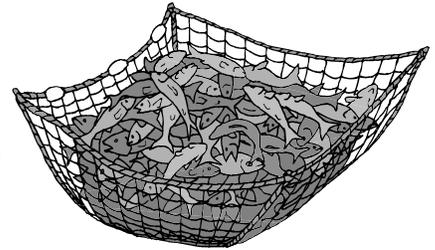
Day Three: *Acts 4:1-4*

Day Four: *Acts 4:5-12*

Day Five: *Acts 4:13-22*

Day Six: *Acts 4:23-31*

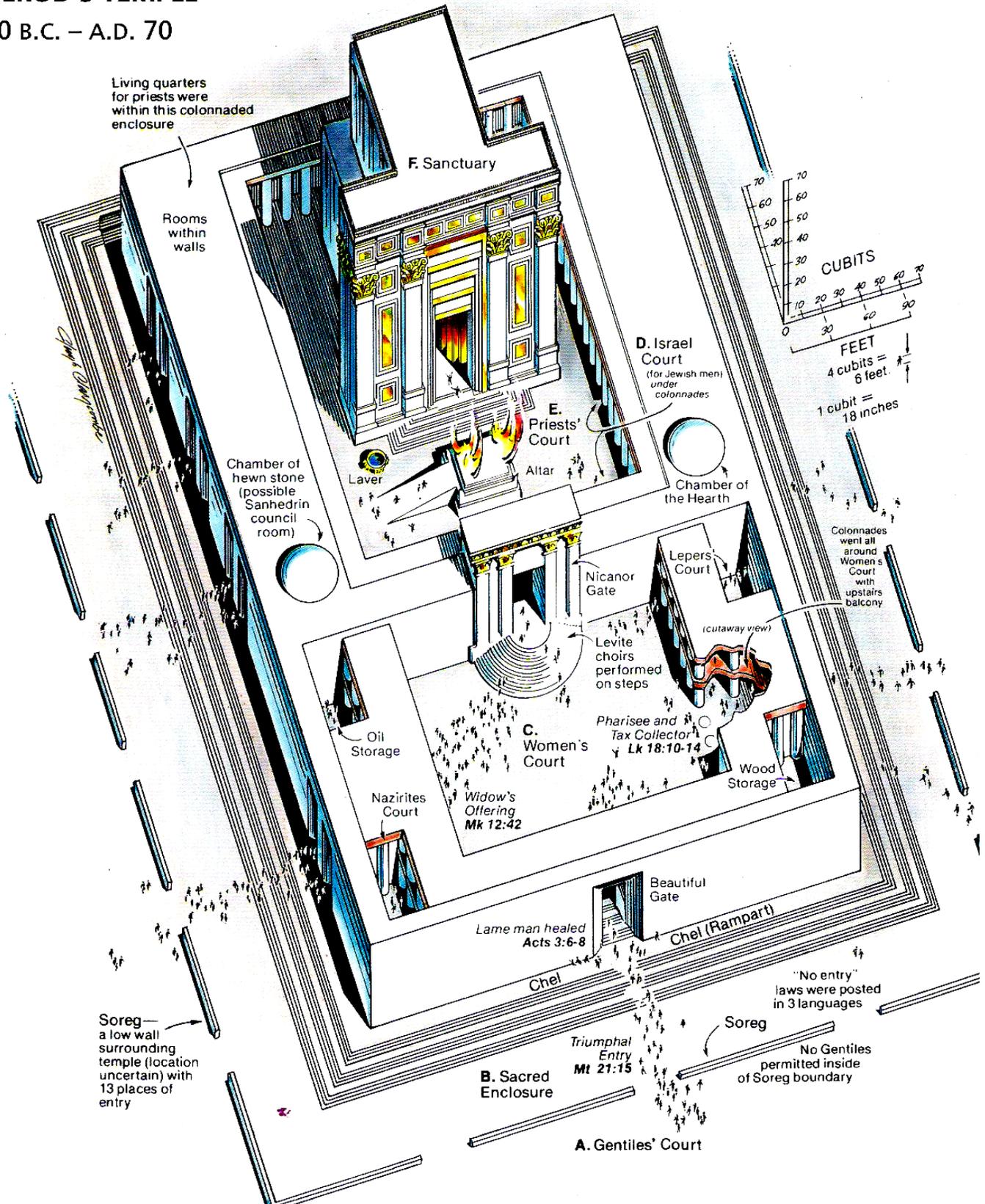
“**Now Peter and John...**” We often find these two associated together. They very well may have been friends from their youth. They had been partners as fishermen on the Sea of Galilee before Jesus called them (*Luke 5:10*). They had been sharers in looking for the “*consolation of Israel*” and had both been baptized by John the Baptist (*John 1:41*). We find James and John associated with Peter in the “inner circle” of Jesus’ disciples at the transfiguration, at the raising of Jairus’ daughter, and at the agony in the garden (*Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37; Matthew 26:37*). They had been sent together to prepare the Passover meal the night Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper (*Luke 22:8*). Later that night, John took Peter into the palace of the high priest, where Jesus had been taken for trial after His arrest (*John 18:16*). It was Peter and John who ran together to the tomb on the resurrection morning (*John 20:3*). These two were in the group fishing together after the resurrection (*John 21:7*). After the account here in *Acts 3*, we will find them together involved in the mission to Samaria (*Acts 8:14*), and in recognizing the work that had been done among the Gentiles by Paul and Barnabas (*Galatians 2:9*).



“**...at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.**” Jews counted time beginning at sunrise. The ninth hour would correspond with approximately 3:00 p.m. Jewish tradition had established several times throughout the day for prayer and sacrifice. It would have been natural for the disciples to continue praying on these customary occasions (*Luke 24:53; Acts 2:46*), but they must have also known that a multitude would be in the Temple and the opportunity for teaching would be great.

HEROD'S TEMPLE

20 B.C. – A.D. 70



Peter heals this lame beggar “*in the name of Jesus Christ.*” We run across that phrase several times throughout *Acts* (2:38; 4:18; 5:40; 9:27; 10:48; 16:18). Notice also Peter’s statement to a man named Aeneas in a similar situation (*Acts* 9:32-35). What were the early disciples conveying by the use of this phrase?

Note the beggar’s reaction in *Acts* 3:8-9. Remembering the setting, was such an exuberant reaction appropriate? Take the time to go back and read the account of Jesus’ healing of ten lepers in *Luke* 17:11-19. Think about your own life experiences. Have there been times that you were dependent upon the care and concern of God and you neglected to praise Him afterward? As we continue studying *Acts* 3, could the witness of what God has done in your life actually lead to evangelistic opportunities, just as in the life of this lame beggar?



“Solomon’s portico” – the entire Temple platform was surrounded by beautiful colonnades on the perimeter of the outer court. The colonnade on the east side was referred to as “Solomon’s portico” (or “porch”) because when the Temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel, fragments of Solomon’s Temple were used in the construction of this section. Josephus provides us with a detailed description: “The colonnades were all double, the supporting pillars were 37½ feet high, cut from single blocks of the whitest marble, and the ceiling was panelled with cedar. The colonnades were 45 feet wide and the complete circuit of them measures three quarters of a mile.” These huge covered porches would provide protection for worshipers during the rainy season and shade during the hot summer months. Jesus had taught here a year or so before (*John* 10:23), and this porch evidently became a popular meeting spot for the first Christians in Jerusalem (*Acts* 5:12).

Read Peter’s address in *Acts* 3:12-26. How would you summarize his major points?

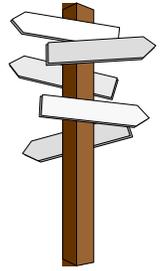
Peter uses several terms to describe Jesus of Nazareth in his address. In your own words, what should we glean from these descriptions:

- ★ “*Servant*” (see *Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 52:13-53:12*) –

- ★ “*The Holy and Righteous One*” (see *Psalms 16:10; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:1; 3:7*) –

- ★ “*The Author of life*” (see *John 1:1-4; Hebrews 2:10; 12:2*) –

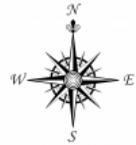
- ★ “*Prophet*” (see *Deuteronomy 18:15-19; John 1:19-27; 12:44-50*) –



“That your sins may be blotted out” – an expression taken from the practice of creditors charging their debtors, and when the debt is paid, the record is cancelled or blotted out, removed from the record. “Blotted” refers to the practice of writing such records on tablets covered with wax, and then by inverting the stylus, or instrument of writing, smoothing the wax again with the blunt end, thus removing every trace of the writing. Paul uses the same word in *Col. 2:14* to describe the forgiveness of sins. A similar concept is contained in the word “*propitiation*” (*Rom. 3:25*). The blood of Christ has so worked that God doesn’t “see” the sins of the believer when it comes time for justification.

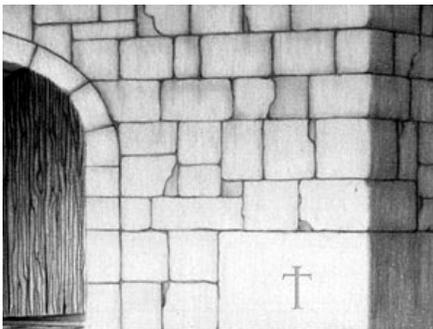


“I know deep down that I will still pay for some of the terrible things I’ve done.” This is the sentiment that some Christians cling to in their hearts (often secretly) because of sinful choices and behaviors prior to their conversion, or even after becoming a Christian. Yet this notion is patently false. God wipes away the *entire* record of our sinful misdeeds. Peter described “*times of refreshing*” that follow. In what ways have you experienced spiritual “refreshment” as a child of God?



“Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (Acts 3:20-21). It’s evident that Peter believes (and would have others to believe) that Jesus will come again. But what sort of things are in need of restoration?

Take special note of Peter’s response in Acts 4:11-12. He claims that their rejection of Jesus is a fulfillment of Psalm 118:22. By appealing to this passage, Peter follows the lead of Jesus Himself (Matthew 21:42-46). The force of this rebuke is clear when we realize that the scribes were described as “builders” in ancient Jewish literature. But what is a “cornerstone”? Of what, and in what way, is Jesus “the cornerstone”?



“**The Sadducees**” (4:1) – making several appearances in the Gospels, this was a wealthy group of politically influential Jews, many of whom were priests. Later, in Acts 23:8, Luke tells us that the Sadducees refused to accept the belief in a future resurrection of the dead. The apostles’ preaching about Jesus’ resurrection was obnoxious to them.

The three groups of officials mentioned in Acts 4:5 made up the body called “**the Sanhedrin.**” The Sanhedrin was the high court of the Jews. It was composed of 70 people plus the high priest, who presided over the council. Although Palestine was ultimately under the control of the Romans, the emperor had granted the Jews a great deal of self-governing power. The Sanhedrin was essentially a senate that directly governed the eleven districts of Judea. But the decisions of the Sanhedrin carried substantial weight for Jews scattered throughout the Mediterranean world. It was the final board for deciding on matters connected with Jewish law.

Annas (4:6) retired from the high priesthood some twenty years earlier and bore the title “high priest” only in an honorary sense. Nevertheless, his age, experience, and family associations gave him significant personal authority. Annas became high priest in A.D. 6 and served in that capacity for nine years. He played a significant role in the trial of Jesus (John 18:12-14, 19-24).

Caiaphas (4:6) became high priest in A.D. 18 and was able to retain his position for nineteen years. He was the son-in-law of Annas (John 18:13). As high priest, he not only officiated at the Temple, but served as president of the Sanhedrin and as the political head of the Jewish nation.



The response of Peter and John to the Sanhedrin's demands was, "*For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard*" (4:20). Take a moment to reflect on the things that you have "seen" and "heard" as a disciple of Christ. Which of those things could have an impact on others around you if you served as a faithful witness of God's working in your life? Are you willing to speak up about those things? If not, why not?

Let me encourage you to make the disciples' plea in *Acts 4:29* a part of your own prayers this week: "*Grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness*"!

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 3:1-4:31*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Those Who Believed Were Of One Heart And Soul”



Luke now turns our attention from the apostles to the multitude of believers in Jerusalem. God continued to be powerfully at work in transforming individual people into an extraordinary fellowship. Unity, generosity, and powerful witness characterized these Christ-followers. As bonds grew stronger and needs continued to arise, unselfishness and sensitivity continued to increase. Sadly, however, not all acted out of sincerity and the time came when sin had to be forcefully nipped in the bud. A deadly combination of greed and the desire for praise led to sin, and sin led to consequences that struck fear into the hearts of all who heard of it.

Day One: *Acts 4:32-5:11*

Day Two: *Acts 4:32*

Day Three: *Acts 4:33-35*

Day Four: *Acts 4:36-37*

Day Five: *Acts 5:1-6*

Day Six: *Acts 5:7-11*

Luke begins with a beautiful description of unity – “*Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul*” (*Acts 4:32*). In your own words, what would it mean to be “*of one heart*”? And “*of one soul*”? Perhaps Jesus’ prayer in *John 17:20-21* would be a helpful place to begin.

There are a multitude of Bible passages that describe the unity we are to exhibit, but Luke’s real-life summary in *Acts 4:32* is perhaps best encapsulated by Paul’s instruction in *Philippians 1:27-2:11*.

- What does it mean to “*let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ*”?

- Let’s break down the “*So if there is any*” elements of the equation in *Philippians 2:1*. What do they mean?
 - “*Encouragement in Christ*” –
 - “*Comfort from love*” –
 - “*Participation in the Spirit*” –
 - “*Affection and sympathy*” –

- “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit...” (Philippians 2:3). How will those self-centered snares keep me from living as the fully-devoted followers described in Acts 4?
- “But in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). Do you know anybody who lives according to those guidelines? If so, who is it? Can you name more than one?
- Now, what are the biggest obstacles in *your* way to living as that kind of person?

Luke proceeds by giving us both a positive and negative example of contributions for the needy. We begin with **Joseph**, “who was also called by the apostles **Barnabas**” (4:36-37). Clement of Alexandria (190 A.D.) reports that Barnabas was one of the seventy disciples sent out by Jesus (Luke 10:1ff). We will only learn more praiseworthy things about Barnabas as Acts continues.

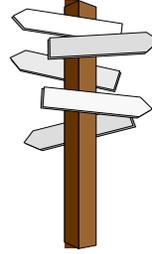


One who possessed a particular quality was often called the “son” or “child of” that quality (Mark 3:17; John 17:12). For example, a disobedient person was called a “child of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). If you were able to come up with a handful of such phrases, how would you like to be remembered by others? “He/she was a child of...”



Paraklesis is the Greek word used by Luke in Acts 4:36 and it is not easily translated into English. Sometimes it means “exhortation” and sometimes it means “encouragement,” “consolation,” or “comfort.” Joseph is given the nickname *Barnabas* because it expresses some of the things he did best. If it is translated “**consolation**,” we are reminded of how he helps introduce Saul of Tarsus to the Jerusalem Christians after his conversion (Acts 9:22-27). Such would have been a great encouragement to Saul at that particular time in his life. On the other hand, if we translate it “**exhortation**,” we are reminded that Joseph was known for his willingness and ability to spread the “good news” (Acts 11:23; 13:1). Either way, here was a man who was willing to do what he could to touch the hearts of the people around him in order to comfort, encourage and move them.

Unfortunately, the story doesn't end there. We already hinted at the fact that Luke also notes a negative example – that of **Ananias** and **Sapphira**. As you read *Acts 5:1-11*, summarize in your own words how this couple got themselves into trouble.



The relatively uncommon word that Luke uses for “*kept back*” highlights a similarity between this episode and the sin of Achan in *Joshua 7*. Joshua gave the people of Israel firm instructions not to take as personal plunder any of the articles of the city of Jericho that had been dedicated to the LORD (*Joshua 6:18-19*). Achan sinned by taking some of the devoted materials and hid them in his tent. He lied and deceived the community, suffering his own death as a consequence. In a similar way, Ananias keeps back what he represents to the apostles as devoted to the Lord and lies to the leaders of the community. In both cases, what was the bait dangling on the end of the hook?

“*Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...*” (*Acts 5:3*). Although Ananias devises the plan and suffers the consequence for acting it out, Satan obviously played a role in this drama as well. This is his first recorded appearance after the death and resurrection of Christ when he suffered a massive defeat. He is portrayed here as being actively opposed to God by attempting to destroy the well-being of this new fellowship, and he does so through classic tactics of enticing individuals to sin and defy God. What other Old and New Testament accounts can you list that show the same plan of attack?

Luke has presented a very clear contrast for his readers. You *will* be filled...**but by whom?** If I am:

- Filled by Satan, I will...
- Filled with the Spirit, I will...

One of the obvious questions is, **how** does this “filling” occur? Note the response of Peter in *Acts 5:4* – “*Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart?*” (NASB). Now couple Peter’s words with James’ clear warning in *James 1:14-15*. How does the calamity of sin occur? Retrace the tragic steps taken by Ananias as they have been generally outlined by James in the space below.



It’s appropriate that the first sin Luke documents among the followers of Christ is **hypocrisy**. *Acts 5:1-11* stands as a warning for all people who live in the formidable sight of God. The Creator’s attitude toward hypocrisy is evident. A person today may not suffer immediately as this couple did, but God **will** repay all that is due. In your own words, what is hypocrisy? Is it still a fault of believers? If so, in what ways?

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 4:32-5:11*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

- Week 9 -

“We Must Obey God Rather Than Men”



Despite the setback brought on the believers by Ananias and Sapphira, God continued to work powerfully through the apostles to bring healing and deliverance to many in Jerusalem. Multitudes of both men and women continued to respond to the gospel “*while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will*” (Hebrews 2:4). Acts 5 documents a second confrontation between the apostles of Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Luke tells us of God’s dramatic intervention so that the work of His witnesses might continue and of fearless courage in the face of growing persecution.

Day One: Acts 5:12-16

Day Two: Acts 5:17-21a

Day Three: Acts 5:21b-26

Day Four: Acts 5:27-32

Day Five: Acts 5:33-40

Day Six: Acts 5:41-42

In your own words, what is a “**miracle**”?

“*Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles*” (Acts 5:12). Take a moment to think about the miracles of Jesus recorded in the Gospels and those wonders documented already in Acts by Luke. What was accomplished by the working of these wonders? Can we go so far as to discern the divine purpose behind the working of such miracles?

Remembering what we studied last week, particularly Acts 5:11, note Luke’s statement in Acts 5:13: “*None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.*” Why do you think someone would readily acknowledge that amazing wonders were being worked by the apostles, and yet be hesitant to join them?



“And filled with jealousy” – while we can certainly see how the Jewish leaders may have been envious of the people’s enthusiasm for the apostles, the word *zelos* used by Luke in *Acts 5:17* can imply more than this. Behind it stands an Old Testament and Jewish tradition of **zeal** for the Law, the Temple, and the honor of God. Phineas the priest, grandson of Aaron, became legendary in Israel because of the way he burned with zeal for the honor of his God. When the men of Israel were indulging in sexual immorality with Moabite women and began worshiping their idols, Phineas drove a spear through an Israelite man and his Moabite companion. God commended Phineas because *“he was **jealous** for his God”* (*Numbers 25:13*). Jehovah even describes Himself as a *“jealous God”* (*Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24*). After Jesus had “cleansed” the Temple, His disciples remembered the statement of *Psalms 69:9* and applied it to Jesus: *“Zeal for your house will consume me.”* The word itself does not necessarily imply a sinful attitude, but can simply describe a fervent and even militant determination to preserve or defend.

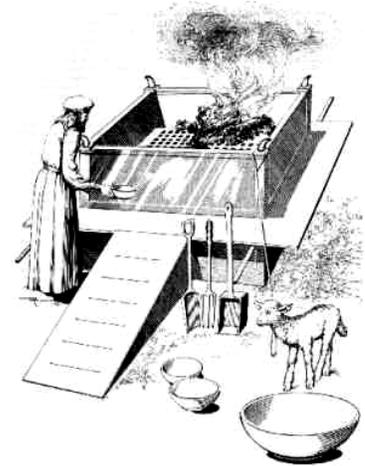
After you take the time to read the note in the box to the left, here is the question – **is it possible to have a “zeal for God,” and still be in the wrong?** Can you find any Scriptures that would support your answer?

What sort of things ought 21st century Christians be *“filled with jealousy”* for in a righteous sense?

When does righteous zeal become sinful jealousy? And when I find myself in that selfish trap, what must I do to correct the problem?

Luke tells us that *“an angel of the Lord”* opened the prison doors and told the apostles what to do next (*Acts 5:19-20*). What are angels and how does God use them to accomplish His purposes? Can you find any Scripture references to confirm your description?

The angel's commission was clear: "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life" (Acts 5:20). While we have briefly noted Luke's description of the disciples' activity in the Temple complex (see pg. 34 for a diagram), we have yet to explore the significance behind the Temple itself. In your own words, what did the Temple mean to the Jews?

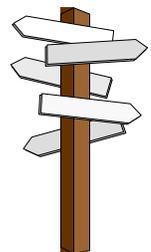


The Temple was sometimes described by Jews as "the house of our life." Note the angel's very particular instructions – telling the apostles to proclaim "all the words of this Life" not throughout the cities and villages of Judea, but specifically "in the temple." In light of how the Jews looked at this building in Jerusalem, what should we make of the commission?



Pay special attention to Peter's opening statement before the Council: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Do modern disciples still need that zealous determination? If so, can you think of some areas where it would specifically apply?

"Jesus, whom you killed by hanging on a tree" (Acts 5:30). Peter's remarks echo *Deuteronomy 21:22-23*. Paul explored the rich meaning of Jesus' sacrifice in *Galatians 3:13-14*. In what way did Christ become "a curse for us" and what was accomplished by it?



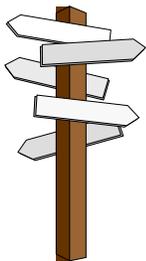


“A Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel” – one of the three major sects of Judaism, the Pharisees emphasized a rigorous commitment to obeying the Law. Not only was every written word binding, but also the interpretation and explanation of the Law provided by the Scribes. Josephus notes, “the Pharisees have imposed on the people many laws from the tradition of the fathers not written in the Law of Moses.” A strong rivalry existed between the Pharisees and Sadducees because the latter saw only the written Law as binding, not the many oral traditions of the Pharisees. Although the Sadducees had significant influence because of their wealth and control of the priesthood, the great majority of the people sided with the Pharisees, seeing them as the upholders of the Law.

Gamaliel was a famous leader of the Pharisees and recognized as the greatest teacher of his day. He was the grandson of Hillel, for whom an entire school of thought was named within Pharisaism. It is said in ancient Jewish literature that, “when Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died.” Gamaliel left a significant legacy through his descendants. His son Yeshua served as high priest in A.D. 63-65. Another son, Simeon, became a famous rabbi who is repeatedly cited in Jewish literature. His grandson, Gamaliel II, also became a famous rabbi allegedly training over a thousand disciples. Among Christians, Gamaliel is best known for his role as the spiritual father and teacher to the young Saul of Tarsus (*Acts 22:3*).

Take the time to carefully read Gamaliel’s address to the Council (*Acts 5:35-39*). How would you summarize his message?

“When they had called in the apostles, they beat them...” (*Acts 5:40*). Rather than let the apostles go again with a stern warning, the council orders a severe beating. The word used here literally means to “flay, skin,” but it has come to be used in a figurative sense for a flogging. The law governing flogging was given in *Deuteronomy 25:1-3* and limited the number of lashes to forty. The following excerpt from an ancient piece of Jewish tradition explains how it was to be done:



How do they scourge him? They bind his two hands to a pillar on either side, and the minister of the synagogue lays hold on his garments so that he bares his chest. A stone is set down behind him on which the minister of the synagogue stands with a strap of calf-hide in his hand, doubled and re-doubled, and two other straps that rise and fall are fastened thereunto. He must give him one-third of the stripes in front and two-thirds behind; and he may not strike him when he is standing or when he is sitting, but only when he is bending low, for it is written, “the judge shall cause him to lie down” (*Deut. 25:2*). And he that smites, smites with his one hand with all his might. If he dies under his hand, the scourger is not culpable.

And yet, notice the apostles' reaction in *Acts 5:41*: "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name." How can we possibly explain such a response?

Perhaps Peter's words written much later in *1 Peter 4:15-19* would be appropriate to note. What is his message for disciples of all ages?

In your own words, how would you rephrase *Acts 5:42*? Is there any reason that can't happen today? Most importantly, are you doing *your* part?

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 5:12-42*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

- Week 10 -

“Pick Out From Among You Seven Men”



If you've been keeping up with our reading schedule so far, you get a major break this week – just seven verses! Even though our text for this week doesn't make up a large section of Luke's work, these few verses are extremely important. As is common with nearly any group of people that works together for any length of time, Luke tells us of a problem that eventually arose – a problem that could have grown to threaten the unity of the church during a time of great growth. This week we'll focus in on how the apostles handled this conflict and do our best to make some practical applications for our own time and culture. Regardless of the setting, when brotherly attitudes prevail, problems *can* be resolved and harmony *can* thrive.

Day One: *Acts 6:1*

Day Two: *Acts 6:2*

Day Three: *Acts 6:3-4*

Day Four: *Acts 6:5*

Day Five: *Acts 6:6*

Day Six: *Acts 6:7*

In *Acts 6:1* we find Luke's first use of the word “disciples” to describe the followers of Jesus. What is a **disciple** and what are we implying as we describe ourselves as disciples of Christ?

Though sinners are added as sons and daughters to the one family of God upon obedience to the gospel, physical differences and variations remain in this life. What kinds of factors can too easily lead to tension or the showing of partiality between brethren?



“Hellenists” describes Greek-speaking Jews. Jews who were raised in Palestine typically spoke Aramaic, the dominant language of the Near East for centuries even before the time of Christ. Many Jews in Palestine, especially in Jerusalem and Judea, continued to use Hebrew as well. But many Jews raised outside of Palestine would have spoken Greek, having never learned Hebrew. When they settled in Jerusalem, these “Hellenists” would have enjoyed meeting together in synagogues where the reading of Scripture, prayers and conversation were in Greek. When we remember how Samaritans and foreigners were regarded by many within Hebrew communities (*John 4:9; 8:48; Mark 7:24-30*), it's not hard to imagine Jewish prejudice toward those who had grown up with Grecian ideals and customs. They were regarded as “less than holy” at best by many. Perhaps some of these old feelings are in the background of this present dispute.



“The daily distribution” – abundant evidence exists showing that many Jews immigrated to Jerusalem to spend their final years in “the Holy City.” Often the men preceded their wives in death, and the widows were then left with no immediate family to support them and care for their daily needs. Jerusalem civic leaders had put together an organized system of relief for the destitute. Rabbinic literature testifies to the existence of both a daily and a weekly distribution of relief. The daily distribution (*tamhuy*) typically consisted of bread, beans, and fruit. The weekly distribution (*quppah*) consisted of food and clothing.

Building on what we studied in *Acts 4:32-37*, it’s evident that the apostles had instituted a somewhat similar system of relief for needy saints. The funds raised by the sale of property and goods (and laid at the apostles’ feet) were understood to be designated for the benefit of brethren in need. It’s clear from the Epistles that widows continued to be objects of special attention in the early church and that first century Christians regarded it as a matter of indispensable obligation to provide for their needs (*1 Timothy 5:3-16; James 1:27*).

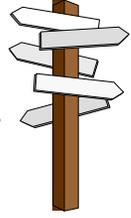
Considering typical human nature, what would’ve been the easy thing to do if you were one of the Hellenists whose widows were being neglected?

And what if you were one of the Hebrews? With so many thousands to care for, it certainly could’ve been very easy to accidentally overlook some whose physical needs were great. What if you were working as hard and sincerely as you could, yet still there were those who complained?

Significantly, the apostles didn’t undertake a blame-finding investigation. Instead, they immediately sought a solution to the problem. Can we learn anything from that course of action?

It’s hard to imagine the workload of the apostles in these early days of the church. They were responsible for teaching and ministering to thousands of people. On top of all that, problems often must have surfaced that required their attention, time and wisdom. With such a busy schedule, it certainly would’ve been very easy to let their devotion “*to prayer and the to the ministry of the word*” slip. What can you and I as modern disciples learn from their important realization?

In *Acts 6:2*, the verb translated “serve” is *diakonein* from which we derive *diakonoi* (“deacons”). The word is widely used with the simple and non-technical sense of “to serve” (as in *Mark 10:45*). However, a principle of appointed service is founded in *Acts 6* and the word is obviously used to describe a more formal role in the later writings of the apostle Paul (see *Philippians 1:1*; *1 Timothy 3:8-13*). Building on these passages, what function should deacons serve in the health and growth of a modern local church?



Looking carefully at *Acts 6:3-6*, there seems to be a clear process that was followed to resolve the practical issue:

- The apostles suggested the course of action and stated the qualifications.
- The people selected the men.
- The apostles appointed those whom the people had chosen.

In our own day and age, looking as a local church to have elders and deacons as God intended, is there anything we should take away from this example of selection and appointment?

In your own words, summarize the qualifications given by the apostles:

- “Men of good repute” –
- “Full of the Spirit” –
- “Full of wisdom” –

Take a moment to think about the apostles’ statement in *Acts 6:4* – “we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” If the Lord’s handpicked apostles felt a pressing need for more prayer, what should that tell us about the place of prayer in every disciple’s life?

“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem” (Acts 6:7). This is the third instance where, after telling us about some difficulty faced and overcome, Luke tells us the heartening news that the difficulty was but a stepping stone to greater growth (look back at *Acts 2:41; 4:4, 32; 5:14*). What should we take away from this powerful example?



“They prayed and laid their hands on them” – at times, the laying on of hands was for the purpose of bestowing supernatural spiritual gifts.

A miraculous measure of the Spirit was given to brethren through the laying on of apostolic hands (*Acts 8:14-19; 19:6*). However, the laying on of hands was also a customary practice when someone was about to undertake an important work, signifying endorsement and support (*Numbers 27:18-23*). It was for this reason that the Christians in Antioch laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas when they sent them out to preach (*Acts 13:3*). It may be, therefore, that the apostles laid their hands on these men to signify their endorsement and support of the men as they embarked upon their new responsibilities.

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 6:1-7*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

- Week 11 -

“Stephen, Full Of Grace And Power”



Our study this week brings us to the remarkable story of one of the seven men we noted last week and to a turning point in the history of Christianity. While the Jewish authorities had previously imprisoned and beaten the apostles, Luke has yet to document anyone actually being put to death for “the faith” (*Acts 6:7*). However, when Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin and boldly proclaims Jesus as Messiah, the rage of the Council reaches a boiling point. It is in connection with Stephen’s death that Luke introduces Saul, who later becomes the great apostle Paul. The stoning of Stephen initiates a vicious persecution, led by Saul, that results in Christians scattering from Jerusalem and thus carrying the gospel to other places.

Day One: *Acts 6:8-15*

Day Two: *Acts 7:1-8*

Day Three: *Acts 7:9-16*

Day Four: *Acts 7:17-29*

Day Five: *Acts 7:30-53*

Day Six: *Acts 7:54-60*

What do you make of Luke’s summary in *Acts 6:10*?

Looking over *Acts 6:11-14*, can you summarize the basic charges brought by the Jews against Stephen? What did they hope to gain with these charges?

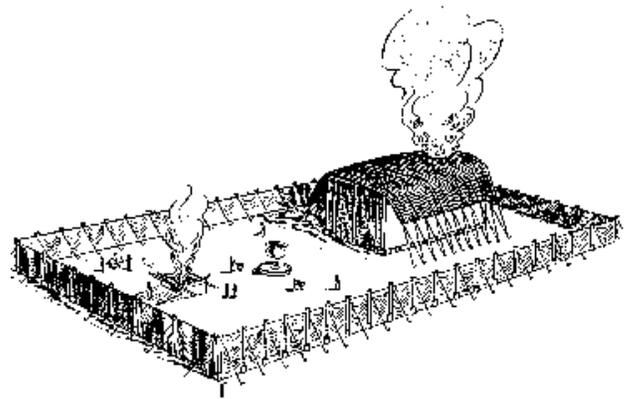
As you read those charges, do they sound familiar? Who else had been falsely charged in much the same way?



“The synagogue of the Freedmen” – since we don’t read anything about synagogues in the Old Testament, it’s generally believed that they grew out of the Babylonian Captivity. Jews, wishing a place to worship (Jerusalem having been destroyed and they themselves over a thousand miles from the city), established synagogues, or places of assembly. Saturday in the synagogue was devoted to worship and, during the week, children were sent there to learn to read and write. The chief textbook was the Old Testament.

The term “Freedmen” is a translation of the Greek word *Libertinoi*, itself a transliteration of the Latin *Libertini*. This is an expression used to designate emancipated slaves. This particular synagogue probably consisted of Jews from Rome who were freed from slavery and migrated back to Jerusalem. They banded together and formed their own synagogue where they could worship and praise God in Greek.

Stephen's use of the phrase "*God of glory*" (*Acts 7:2*) would have had great significance to his Jewish audience. For the people of Israel, the "glory" of God was the visible manifestation of His presence among them. It was exhibited by the cloud that settled on Mount Sinai (*Exodus 24:15-18*). After the Israelites constructed the Tabernacle, the cloud covered it and "*the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle*" (*Exodus 40:34-35*). A special manifestation of God's presence appeared on the ark of the covenant. When the ark was captured, it was exclaimed, "*The glory has departed from Israel!*" (*1 Samuel 4:21-22*). Ultimately, God mediated His presence and glory through the Temple in Jerusalem: "*And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD*" (*1 Kings 8:10-11*). For many first-century Jews, the Temple was the singular place on earth where God was present in His glory. How, then, would you summarize Stephen's perspective on the Temple? What did he expect his audience to grasp concerning the present-day "glory" of God? Perhaps *John 1:14-18* would be helpful.



In *Acts 7:51-53*, Stephen concludes by using a number of scathing figures from the Old Testament to describe the resistance of the Jewish authorities. Take the time to read the Old Testament counterparts and offer a basic description of what Stephen intended.

- "*Stiff-necked people*" (*Exo. 32:9; 33:3,5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6,13*) –
- "*Uncircumcised in heart and ears*" (*Lev. 26:40-42; Deut. 10:12-16; Jer. 4:4; 6:10*) –
- "*The Righteous One*" (*Isaiah 53:11*) –



Is it possible for you and I to “*resist the Holy Spirit*” today? If so, when am I guilty of such a thing?

Luke records that Stephen “gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). The picture of Jesus at the right hand of God is a common thread throughout the New Testament (Matt. 26:64; Mark 16:19; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3). What is unusual here is that Jesus is portrayed as standing, not sitting. There have been a variety of explanations offered: Jesus stands to welcome Stephen home; Jesus rises to make intercession for Stephen; Jesus stands to cheer Stephen on to victory; Jesus gets up to come to Stephen’s aid; Jesus stands as a witness in the judgment against Stephen’s murderers and as an advocate in Stephen’s defense; Jesus is standing to perform His duties as high priest in the heavenly Temple. We can only speculate as to the precise reason that Jesus is standing, but common to all these is the fact that Jesus is actively watching, involved, and responding to the needs of His people from His exalted position at the Father’s side. Let’s remember that figure this week.

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 6:8-7:60*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Those Who Were Scattered Went About Preaching The Word”



The words “*on that day*” (*Acts 8:1*) begin the second major division of the book of *Acts*. Stephen’s execution was the first of a number of waves of persecution that swept over the church. Men like Saul of Tarsus began looking for others to “discipline” until they either recanted of this new heresy or were imprisoned. Believers began to suffer, goods and property were confiscated, they were “*publicly exposed to reproach and affliction*” (*Hebrews 10:32-34*). Some were even put to death. However, remember Jesus’ commission: “*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria...*” (*Acts 1:8*). While on the surface this may have appeared to be a huge setback for the disciples of Christ, God would use this great evil as a means of continuing to spread the good news.

Day One: *Acts 8:1-3*

Day Two: *Acts 8:4-8*

Day Three: *Acts 8:9-13*

Day Four: *Acts 8:14-17*

Day Five: *Acts 8:18-25*

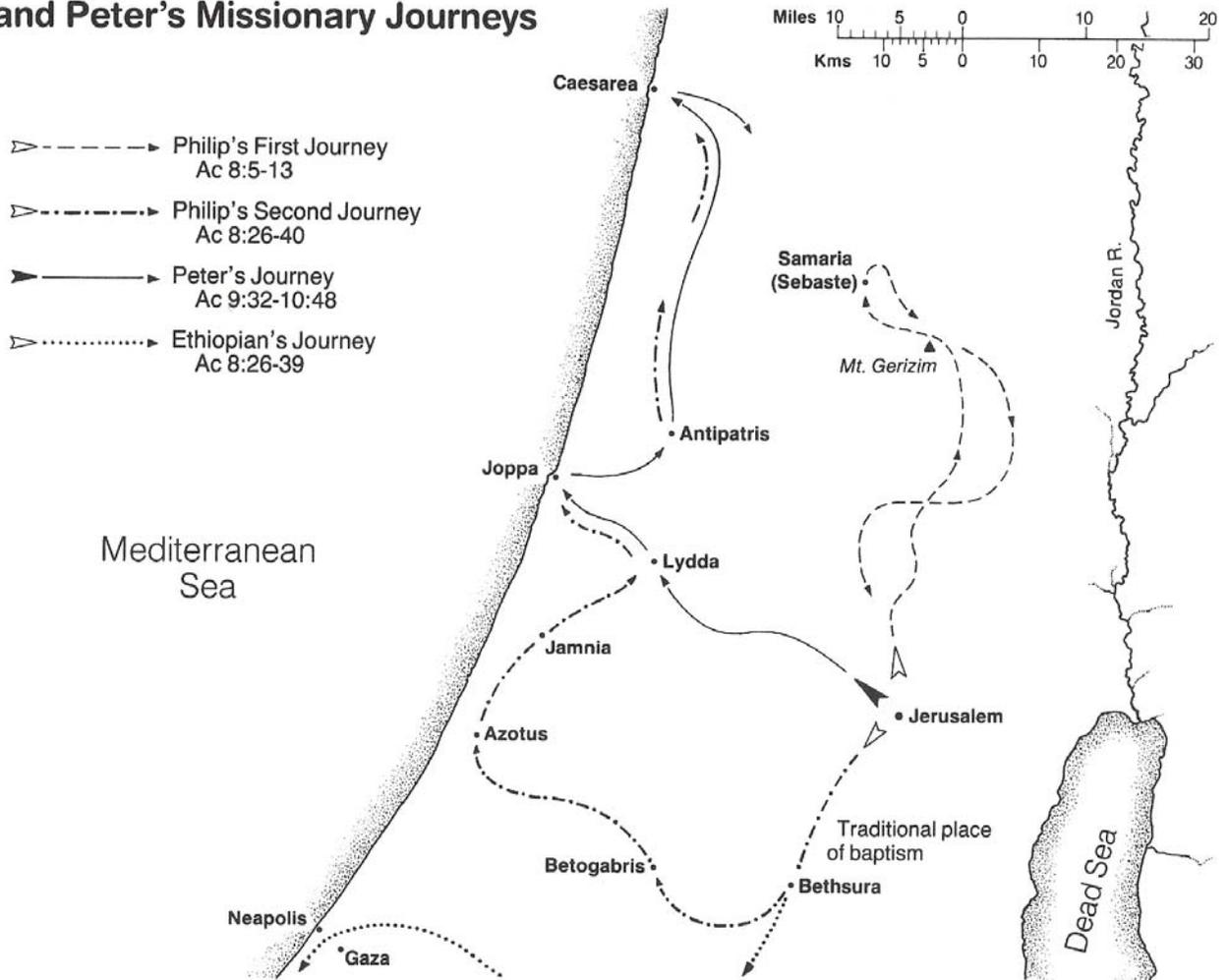
Day Six: *Acts 8:26-40*

One of the principal leaders in this flare-up of persecution is Saul of Tarsus. Later on, this man admits in his letters “*how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it*” (*Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:6*). Luke uses “*ravaging*” in *Acts 8:3*, a vivid word typically used to describe the devastation caused by wild beasts (lions, wild boars, wolves, etc). *Acts 26:9-11* describes, in Saul’s own words, just how far he was willing to go. But why would he do such a thing?



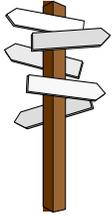
Acts 8:1 contains the second occurrence of the word “**church**” in Luke’s account (see *5:11*). The Greek equivalent is *ekklesia*, a compound of *ek*, “out of,” and *kaleo*, “call.” It is frequently used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) for the “*assembly*” or “*congregation*” of Israel (*Deut. 18:16; 23:1-8; Psa. 26:12*, etc). It has a long history of usage in Greek for simply designating an assembly of people (as in *Acts 7:38; 19:32,41*). Jesus and the New Testament writers did with this word as they did with many other words they found already in use. They took them, filled them with a new meaning, and used them to express spiritual truths which would be understandable to their hearers. In your own words, what is the “*church*” of Christ?

Philip's and Peter's Missionary Journeys



“Now those who were scattered went about **preaching** the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ” (Acts 8:4-5). The Greek term Luke uses can be translated in a simple and straight-forward way: “**evangelizing**” – literally, “announcing good news.” In your own words, what does it mean to “**announce the good news of the word**” to someone?

What about to “**proclaim the Christ**” to someone?



The **Samaritans** viewed themselves as Israelites, true remnants of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who maintained a monotheistic faith and upheld the Law as holy scripture. They kept the rite of circumcision, regularly observed the Sabbath and the Jewish festivals, and honored Moses as the greatest of the prophets.

Jews, however, viewed Samaritans as “half breeds”—descendants of Mesopotamian (Gentile) colonists who settled in the area and intermarried with the Jews remaining there after the Jewish exile by Assyria (*2 Kings 17:24-41*). Not only did Jews prohibit intermarriage with Samaritans, but they did not even allow a Samaritan to convert to Judaism. John summarizes the situation well when he says, “*Jews have no dealings with Samaritans*” (*John 4:9*).

In what way, then, is what Luke has documented in *Acts 8:4-25* so revolutionary? Is there a modern-day lesson there for us?



Since Pentecost, those who were saved seem to have remained in Jerusalem where they enjoyed fellowship with one another as they served Christ together. For the most part, this practice did not facilitate the spreading of the gospel beyond the city. Now, however, as a result of the persecution in Jerusalem, they were scattered to other places and carried the gospel with them. Can you and I learn anything from that principle when it comes to spreading the “good news” in our own time and culture?

Note *Acts 8:12*: “*But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*” Can we glean anything from this account as to **who** was expected to be baptized?

Carefully read *Acts 8:14-19* and then revisit *Acts 2:38*. What were people commanded to do in *Acts 2* to “*receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*”? After comparing *Acts 8*, would you say this context is speaking of the same “*gift*”? If not, what is it describing and what can we learn?

As you carefully read the story of Simon the magician (8:9-24), is there anything that would prove Simon was once in a saved condition?

If so, what does this text teach us about Christians and sin? Is it possible for a Christian to sin and, as a result, to be in spiritual danger? Can you find other Scriptures to support your answer?

What should the erring disciple of Christ do in order to reestablish a pure heart before God?

Before His ascension, Jesus said that the disciples would be witness to *“the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). The simple conversion story of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39) marks an enormous stride forward toward the fulfillment of this goal. To Greeks and Romans, Ethiopia was at *“the ends of the earth.”* Take the time to carefully read the account and make a list of the elements necessary for the eunuch’s salvation.

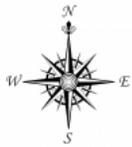


“He had come to Jerusalem to worship” – this would have been an incredible journey to undertake. If the eunuch had covered an average of 25 miles per day, the trip to Jerusalem would have taken anywhere from 48-60 days and round trip, 96-120 days. The journey would have been considerably longer if he stopped for any length of time in the cities along the way.

What is the value of Philip’s asking *“Do you understand what you are reading?”* (Acts 8:30)

Can we infer anything from this account about the nature of baptism as the Bible describes it?

One of the obvious topics we are paying special attention to in the early part of *Acts* is the question of what people did to become Christians? What do we learn from *Acts 8* that can help us answer that question?



Acts 8 is a wonderful illustration of what can happen when disciples of Christ speak up from the “*abundance*” of a fully-devoted heart (*Matthew 12:34*). Take a moment for some honest inventory. What is keeping you from “evangelizing” just as these saints did? Spend some time in faith-filled prayer to God this week. Seek His help. Ask for open doors of opportunity. And be prepared when the opportunity to serve as a witness of God’s work in your life arises.

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 8:1-40*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture has reminded me to **take caution** in...

T - rust: my **trust** in the Almighty has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

“Saul, Why Are You Persecuting Me?”



As we come to the conclusion of Part 1 of our study of the *Acts of the Apostles*, we reach one of the great climaxes of the book. After introducing Saul in connection with the death of Stephen and the outbreak of persecution against Christians, Luke now returns to him and describes his dramatic conversion and call to serve. Saul will grow to become the great apostle Paul, arguably the most important figure in the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth (*Acts 1:8*).

Day One: *Acts 9:1-9*

Day Two: *Acts 9:10-19*

Day Three: *Acts 9:20-22*

Day Four: *Acts 22:1-21*

Day Five: *Acts 26:1-11*

Day Six: *Acts 26:12-23*

Who was Saul?

- ▶ A Jew of the tribe of Benjamin (*Phil. 3:5*).
- ▶ A Pharisee, the son of Pharisees (*Acts 23:6*).
- ▶ Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, a center of Greek learning (*Acts 22:3*).
- ▶ Enjoyed the privilege of Roman citizenship from his birth (*Acts 22:28*).
- ▶ A tent-maker by trade (*Acts 18:3*).
- ▶ Reflects high training in Greek. His letters, written in a polished Greek style, contain examples and illustrations that reflect a strong Greek background. He even quotes Greek poets and prophets (*Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12*).
- ▶ Brought up in Jerusalem (*Acts 22:3; 26:4*) and provided a rich Jewish education at the feet of one of the greatest rabbis in history (see pg. 46 for notes on Gamaliel).
- ▶ Advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries (*Gal. 1:14*).
- ▶ Possessed a burning zeal for God and His law (*Acts 22:3*).
- ▶ Thought that he must do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth (*Acts 26:9*).
- ▶ Persecuted Christians in many foreign cities (*Acts 26:11*) with the authority of the high priest himself (*Acts 9:1-2*).
- ▶ Threw both male and female disciples of Christ into prison (*Acts 22:4*).
- ▶ When saints were executed, he cast his vote against them (*Acts 26:10*).

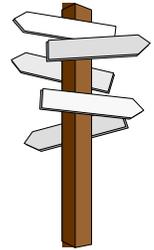


The book of *Acts* contains three separate accounts of Saul's conversion: (1) here in *Acts 9* is Luke's historical record of the event; (2) later, in *Acts 22:1-21*, we have Paul's account as he related it to an angry Jewish mob in Jerusalem; (3) finally, *Acts 26:1-23* contains the account that Paul gave as he addressed King Agrippa. The emphasis Luke places on this conversion indicates its importance to the larger story.

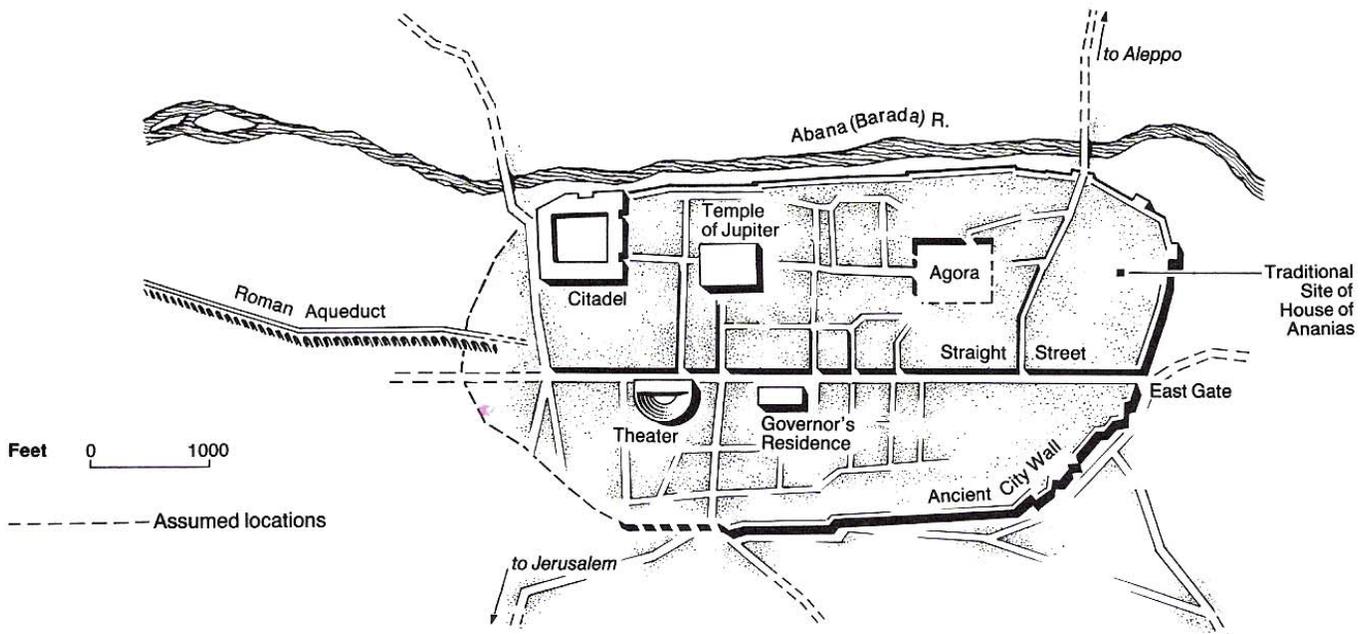
Note Luke's description of Christianity in *Acts 9:2* as "the Way." We will continue to run across this phrase throughout *Acts* (19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). What do you think Luke intends by its use? What are the implications of the phrase, especially considering the context?

"Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting'" (*Acts 9:3-5*). Try and place yourself in "Saul's sandals" at this point. He must have immediately had some shattering realizations. What do you think some of them would have been?

Take the time to read Jesus' words in *Matthew 13:10-17*. What should we make of his quotation and application of Isaiah's prophecy?



Roman Damascus



Even though Saul was physically blind for three days, there were certain things that he had come to “see” very clearly. In your own words, how had this blind man come to “see” that:

- ▶ Being “religious” was not enough? (*Galatians 1:13-14*) –

- ▶ Being sincere doesn’t necessarily make one right? (*Acts 26:9-11*) –

- ▶ Conscience doesn’t always lead in the right direction? (*Acts 23:1; 24:16*) –

- ▶ He had been ignorant of God’s will? (*1 Timothy 1:12-14*) –

- ▶ The “chief of sinners” could be saved? (*1 Timothy 1:15*) –

- ▶ He had to change the way He was serving God? (*Philippians 3:2-11*) –

- ▶ The Lord had need of him? (*Acts 26:15-18*) –

- ▶ What sinners must do in order to be saved? (*Acts 9:6-19; 22:14-16*) –





Revisit Jesus' words to Saul as they are recounted in *Acts 26:16-18*. In your own words, when you became a Christian, in what way...

- ▶ Were your eyes “opened”?
- ▶ Did you turn from darkness to light?
- ▶ Did you turn from the power of Satan to God?
- ▶ Did you receive a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Him?

A - C - T - S made personal

Based on my reading this week from *Acts 9:1-22*:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **adoration** and **praise** because...

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