

INTRODUCTION AND ACTS

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Introduction

I. Author

A. It is widely accepted that Acts was written by the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke. The reasons are:

First, the preface to the book of Acts appears to introduce a sequel (Acts 1:1 refers to "the first narrative"). Second, both books are dedicated to the same person, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). Third, the contents of Acts readily follow the story of Jesus presented in Luke (see the reference to "all that Jesus began to do and teach" in Acts 1:1). Fourth, Luke ends and Acts begins with Jesus' ascension. This was an ancient method of connecting one book to another. Finally, both books display similar styles and interests.¹

B. The author is not identified in Luke or Acts, but he² would have been known by Theophilus, the person to whom the books were dedicated, and by the first readers. That the author is Luke is supported by what are known as the "we passages" in Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). They imply the author was present during the events he narrates in those passages, the last of which is Paul's voyage to Rome.

1. In letters that probably were written from his first Roman imprisonment ("prison epistles") – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon – Paul names nine different companions (Mark, Jesus Justus, Epaphras, Demas, Luke, Tychicus, Timothy, Aristarchus, and Epaphroditus). Four of these are excluded from authorship of Acts because they are named in Acts and thus distinct from the author (Mark, Tychicus, Timothy, and Aristarchus).

2. Of the remaining five identified companions (Jesus Justus, Epaphras, Demas, Luke, and Epaphroditus), Demas is unlikely, as he deserted Paul because he loved this present age (2 Tim. 4:10). Epaphroditus was most likely from Philippi (Phil. 2:25, 4:18), but the author of Acts joined Paul in Asia Minor (Troas) before Philippi was evangelized (Acts 16:10). Epaphras was from Colossae (Col. 4:12), and the church probably was not planted there until Paul's time in Ephesus during his *third* missionary journey (Acts 19:9-10). The author of Acts, on the other hand, joined Paul in Troas during Paul's *second* missionary journey (Acts 16:8-10). Jesus Justus was a Jew (Col. 4:11).

3. The *internal* evidence thus leaves Jesus Justus and Luke as the most likely candidates for authorship of Acts. The *external* evidence is unanimously in favor of Luke.

C. Regarding the external evidence, Carson and Moo state:

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009), 258-259.

² The participle in Lk. 1:3 translated "having carefully investigated" (*parēkolouthēkoti*) is masculine.

External evidence takes over at this point and singles out Luke from the list of possible candidates. The tradition that Luke, a companion of Paul, was the author of the third gospel and Acts is early and unchallenged: the Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 180-200?), Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 3.1; 3.14.1-4), the anti-Marcionite prologue (end of second century), Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 5.12), Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.* 4.2), and Eusebius (H.E. 3.4; 3.24.15). Luke's authorship of the two books went virtually unchallenged until the onset of critical approaches to the New Testament at the end of the eighteenth century.³

D. The fact Luke is portrayed in the New Testament as a relatively insignificant coworker of Paul makes it very unlikely the early church would have credited him with the authorship of Luke-Acts if he did not in fact write them. If authorship was being assigned to some anonymous Christian writing and the goal was to build its gravitas in the community, whoever was doing it would choose someone with a higher profile in the church or Christian tradition. We now take special notice when Luke is mentioned in Scripture because we are aware of his authorship of Luke-Acts, but without that knowledge his name would hardly register.

E. Colossians 4:10-14 implies that Luke was a Gentile. He is described in Col. 4:14 as "the beloved doctor." He is also mentioned in Philem. 24 and 2 Tim. 4:11. Luke-Acts indicates he was well educated, and the preface to the Gospel makes clear "that he had access to a variety of sources about the life of Jesus, that he was not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, and that he had the opportunity to investigate the story about Jesus fully (v. 3)."⁴ "He knows his Old Testament in the Greek Septuagint version, has excellent knowledge of political and social conditions in the middle of the first century, and thinks a great deal of the apostle Paul."⁵

II. Date

A. Opinions on the dating of Acts vary. A fair number of scholars date the book before A.D. 70, some of whom put the date around A.D. 62, prior to the time of Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment.⁶ Others believe a date in the early 70s best fits the data.⁷ Most modern scholars, however, date Acts in the 80s or a bit later.⁸ "Virtually no one today dates Acts in the second century, although this has been proposed in the past."⁹

B. The dating of Acts is tied to other issues. Since Acts was written after the Gospel of Luke, the earlier the date of Acts then the earlier the date of Luke. And since most are convinced Luke was written after the Gospel of Mark, an earlier date for Luke means a still earlier date for

³ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 291.

⁴ Köstenberger et al., 258.

⁵ Carson and Moo, 290.

⁶ E.g., Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 408-410; Köstenberger et al., 261-264. Carson and Moo (p. 300) think the most likely date is the mid-60s.

⁷ E.g., Craig S. Keener, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1:400-401. He states (p. 400), "The date of Acts is uncertain, but my best guesses, for reasons that follow, are in the early 70s, with dates in the 80s and 60s still plausible, and a date in the 90s not impossible."

⁸ Carson and Moo, 297.

⁹ Köstenberger et al., 333.

Mark. Thomas Schreiner concludes, "Perhaps Luke completed Acts before Paul was freed from prison (Acts 28:30-31). On the other hand, it is also possible that Acts was written in the 70s or 80s. In any case, the interpretation of the book remains the same, whatever date we assign."¹⁰

III. Audience and Purpose

A. In the first instance, Acts, being the second volume of Luke's work, is written for Theophilus, as indicated in Lk. 1:3 and Acts 1:1.

1. The reference to Theophilus as "most excellent" (Lk. 1:3) may mean was a government official of some kind, as that is how Claudius Lysias and Tertullus refer to the Roman governor Felix (Acts 23:26, 24:3) and how Paul refers to Governor Festus (Acts 26:25). But it could simply be a form of polite address. Theophilus means "loved by God."

2. We know from Lk. 1:4 that Theophilus previously had received instruction regarding the Christian faith. It seems likely that he was "Luke's patron, the person who was putting up the money for the publication of Luke's literary effort."¹¹ He would have supported the work and made it available for viewing and copying.

B. Luke's broader audience, the people he intended to reach beyond Theophilus, would be Christians generally, perhaps especially Gentile Christians, and perhaps even more specifically Gentile Christians who before their conversion had been "God-fearers," those who worshiped the God of Israel without becoming a Jew. He was telling them the history of the church, the religious community of which they now were a part, and helping them to understand the Christian faith and to situate it within the various Greco-Roman religions and Judaism.¹² Carson and Moo explain, "As part of this general purpose, of course, Luke pursues many subsidiary purposes – legitimization of the church in the eyes of Romans, vindication of Paul in the eyes of Jewish Christians, evangelism, and others."¹³

Text¹⁴

I. The Gospel Spreads in Jerusalem (1:1-6:7)

A. The promise of the Holy Spirit (1:1-5)

1. Luke connects Acts with the Gospel of Luke by referring to the Gospel as his "first book" and again mentioning Theophilus. The statement that in the first book he dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach, until the day he was taken up, may suggest that Acts is a

¹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 2.

¹¹ Carson and Moo, 301; see also, Köstenberger et al., 264-265.

¹² Carson and Moo, 305-306.

¹³ Carson and Moo, 306.

¹⁴ With some trivial variation, the major divisions of the outline are from Schreiner, 3. The subheadings are from the ESV.

continuation of Jesus' action by the Spirit through his disciples. But it is possible it is simply a Semitic way of referring to what Jesus did and taught.¹⁵ Whatever the import of "began," it is clear "Jesus's agents act in his name (e.g., Acts 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 30), and Jesus continues actively to stand behind the miracles (esp. 9:34)."¹⁶

2. Luke states that over the course of forty days after his resurrection Jesus appeared to the apostles providing many proofs that he had indeed been resurrected. Recall how in Lk. 24:36-43 he showed them his hands and feet, invited them to touch him and see that he was flesh and bones, and ate of piece of broiled fish in front of them.

3. Luke also notes (1:3) that during these forty days Jesus spoke to them about the kingdom of God. We do not know how often or long he appeared to the apostles during this span, but it may explain "how Jesus's followers learned what happened to Jesus in their absence, such as during the trial, when they slept in Gethsemane, or earlier, at the temptation."¹⁷

4. In Lk. 24:49 Jesus tells them he is going to send upon them the promise of his Father and commands them to stay in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high. Luke refers to that command in Acts 1:4 and adds in 1:5 that Jesus said of that coming event, harking back to John's words in Lk. 3:16, "you will be baptized with/in the Holy Spirit not many days from now." That they were to wait in Jerusalem for this event implies that the power of the Spirit is necessary for fulfillment of their mission.

5. In OT the Spirit was "with" God's people, but he only "filled" or "indwelt" selected individuals. The Spirit was at that time not universally given to the redeemed.

a. Recall Jesus' statement in Jn. 7:38-39: *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'*³⁹ *Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.* Jesus said in Jn. 14:16-17: *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

b. The event at Pentecost was *the* baptism with/in the Spirit in that it was the initiation of universal availability of the indwelling Spirit for all disciples from that point on. Individuals are baptized with/in the Spirit at conversion (1 Cor. 12:13), which is the personal appropriation of the baptism with/in the Spirit at Pentecost, the Spirit having been made universally available.

B. The Ascension (1:6-11)

¹⁵ Keener, 1:651-652.

¹⁶ Keener, 1:652.

¹⁷ Keener, 1:669.

1. The Lord's teaching about the kingdom of God (1:3) and his mention of the Spirit's coming (1:4-5) prompts the disciples to ask Jesus (1:6), "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

a. We cannot be sure of what the apostles were thinking. It is possible their question reflects a misapprehension of the nature of the kingdom. They may have been expecting the restoration of a political kingdom in which the nation of Israel would dominate this present world rather than thinking of a more fully eschatological reality in which this present world has been transformed. But given that during the forty days after his resurrection Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Lk. 24:45) and taught them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), it is also possible they were asking about the consummated kingdom of God, the final state, the time when all of God's promises would be realized and fulfilled.

b. In that case, the kingdom is "restored" in the sense it returns to "Israel," viewed in terms of faith rather than ethnicity (Rom. 4:9-18, 9:6, 11:17-24; Gal. 3:6-9), the exaltation, blessing, and vindication of their trust that was theirs in the best days of the ancient kingdom of Israel. In other words, the golden age of the ancient worldly political kingdom under David and Solomon functions as a type that is exceeded by the antitype, the consummated kingdom of God under the ultimate son of David.

c. If this more developed understanding is behind the apostles' question, there still were things they at that point did not understand about the relationship of ethnic Jews and Gentiles in this kingdom. They would know that this kingdom encompassed Gentiles, but they apparently did not know the terms of that union, specifically whether Jew and Gentile were kingdom participants only through Gentile conversion to Judaism. We see that issue being worked out in Acts and elsewhere in the New Testament.

d. Their query was no doubt prompted by Jesus' talk of the kingdom of God and an outpouring of the Spirit. The outpouring of God's Spirit is sometimes associated in the OT with a transformation that reverses Israel's experience (e.g., Isa. 32:15-20, 44:3; Ezek. 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29). The apostles want to know whether that transformation, what they understand as the "restoration of the kingdom to Israel," was going to occur at that time.

2. Jesus does not address the substance of the expectation, how they conceived the "restoration of the kingdom to Israel," but instead tells them it is not for them "to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority."

a. This echoes his teaching in Mat. 24:36 (Mk. 13:32) about the unknowability of the timing of his return and the associated consummation of the kingdom of God. Rather than focusing on the timing of the restoration, their focus needs to be on the fact they have a mission to conduct during his absence. They are to serve as his witnesses "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (1:8), a mission for which they will be empowered by the coming Holy Spirit. The clause "the end of the earth" speaks of Gentile inclusion.

b. Peter seems to have gotten the message following Christ's ascension to heaven. He declares in Acts 3:17-21 – ¹⁷ *"And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ 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."* The restoration of all things, the healing of all the negative effects and consequences of Sin's invasion of God's very good creation, awaits the return of Christ, the timing of which is unknown.

3. As they were watching, Jesus was taken up into heaven, rising upward into the clouds. This does not mean heaven, the abode of God, is in outer space. It is better conceived of as a parallel dimension that Jesus entered after rising upward and in which he remains in his glorified body awaiting his return. The upward movement is in keeping with the representation of heaven in three-dimensional space as above and away from earth.

4. The angels (men in white robes) announce (1:11), "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Jesus is no longer physically present on the earth, but one day he is coming back in the same way he left, meaning he will descend from the sky on that day. We see that same idea expressed in Mat. 24:30 (Mk. 13:26), 1 Thess. 4:16-17, and 2 Thess. 1:7.

C. Matthias chosen to replace Judas (1:12-26)

1. After the Lord's Ascension, the apostles returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem and went to the upper room, presumably the upper room that had hosted the Lord's Supper (Lk. 22:11-12) and was a site of a resurrection appearance (Lk. 24:33-36). Keener remarks, "One might suppose that the entire group was 'staying' in one upper room, but Luke means only that they 'habitually met there.' Even if some were staying there, certainly the women of Acts 1:14 were not staying there along with the men of 1:13, and it would be impossible for the 120 of 1:15 to all sleep there."¹⁸

2. While awaiting the promise, the apostles with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and the Lord's brothers. As for the identity of "the women," Keener states:

They undoubtedly are those who appeared at the end of Luke's Gospel: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary mother of James (Luke 24:10); also the women who followed from Galilee (23:55), who probably would be Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna (8:2-3); and *other* women (24:10; perhaps not specifically named by Luke or preserved in his oral sources because they were lower status or simply forgotten).¹⁹

¹⁸ Keener, 1:738.

¹⁹ Keener, 1:748.

3. Peter stands in the midst of the believers ("brothers" here probably being gender inclusive), a company of around 120 people, and probably addresses the men (*andres adelphoi*, "Men brothers"), perhaps specifically the other apostles.²⁰ He says that what the Spirit said in Scripture through David about Judas, the betrayer (as reported in Lk. 22:39-54), had to be fulfilled.

a. What was necessary to be fulfilled was the removal and replacement of Judas, the treacherous enemy of the Messiah, the ultimate Son of David, as the antitype of the treacherous enemies that King David prayed to be removed and replaced. As indicated in v. 20, David prayed for such in Ps. 69:25 and 109:8. The removal had already occurred, thus he says it *was* necessary (imperfect) to be fulfilled, but the replacement was yet to come.

b. Verse 17 provides an additional explanation of the need for Judas's replacement as indicated by David's words. He was one of the apostles, one of the designated Twelve, so his removal created a void in that set. Note that it was his disloyalty, his faithlessness, not his death, that created a vacancy that required replacement. Other cases make clear there was no need to replace *faithful* apostles when they died.

4. Verses 18-19 probably are a parenthetical comment by Luke about Judas rather than part of Peter's speech (see, e.g., ESV, NET, NIV). The gruesome description – falling headlong and bursting open with his guts spilling out – may say something about the depth of God's displeasure with Judas's defection. This description, of course, raises the question of how it fits with the testimony in Mat. 27:3-10. The three seeming inconsistencies in the accounts are not as difficult as many allege.

a. Matthew says the chief priests bought the field, whereas Acts says Judas acquired it. But if the priests bought the field with Judas's segregated money, the blood money that he returned to them, it is not unreasonable to speak of Judas having acquired the field. His money was the source of the acquisition.

b. Matthew says Judas hanged himself, whereas Acts says he fell headlong and burst open. Perhaps after hanging himself his decomposing body bloated in the hot sun and then fell to the ground for some reason. Perhaps he hanged himself from a branch at the edge of a ravine that after a time broke under his weight causing him to fall to a messy end. As Carson states, "We are not so much beset by contradictory accounts as by paucity of information, making it difficult to decide which of several alternatives we should choose in working out the complementarity of the two accounts."²¹

c. Matthew ascribes the name "Field of Blood" to the fact it was purchased with blood money, whereas Acts is often taken as suggesting it was so named because Judas's blood was shed there. But the referent of the "this" or "it" that became known (1:19) is not clear;

²⁰ NET note states: "In light of the compound phrase ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί (*andres adelphoi*, "Men brothers") Peter's words are best understood as directly addressed to the males present, possibly referring specifically to the twelve (really ten at this point - eleven minus the speaker, Peter) mentioned by name in v. 13."

²¹ D. A. Carson, "Matthew" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 9:629.

it could refer to the acquisition of the field with the blood money (1:18). Or possibly he deliberately hanged himself on the property purchased by the priests, and both circumstances became public knowledge and factored into the field being called the Field of Blood by the people of Jerusalem.²²

5. Peter specifies that Judas's replacement be chosen from among the men who were present throughout the duration of Christ's earthly ministry, from the time of John's ministry until Christ's ascension. He must be someone in a position to share Christ's teaching and to join with the others in bearing witness to Jesus' resurrection. This is essential for the office of the Twelve, who were apostles in a sense distinct from the Lord's brother James (Gal. 1:19) and Paul (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:1), the latter being apostles by virtue of the special commission they received from the risen Lord (a commission presumably was given in the case of James). Both of these groups of apostles were distinct from an apostle in the generic sense of a messenger (e.g., Jn. 13:16).

6. The number twelve is an obvious parallel to the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. John Polhill writes:

Luke 22:28-30 speaks of the apostles' unique role of sitting in the kingdom and judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Their number corresponds to the tribes of Israel, for in a real sense they represent the restored Israel, the people of God. The continuity with Israel necessitates the restoration of the full number of twelve. Because the church is built on the foundation of these Twelve as representatives of the true Israel, the people of God of the messianic times, their number had to be completed before the coming of the Spirit and the "birth of the church."²³

7. Either the apostles or the larger group put forward two men who met the qualifications: Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. They then ask the Lord, after acknowledging that he knows the hearts of all, to reveal which of the two he had chosen to take Judas's place.

a. The fact they thereafter cast lots for the candidates suggests they saw that as a means through which the Lord would make his choice known, which is consistent with OT precedent (Lev. 16:8; Num. 26:55; Josh. 18:6-10; 1 Chron. 24:31, 25:8; Neh. 11:1). As expressed in Prov. 16:33, God gives guidance for decisions to those who seek his will through the casting of lots. The fact the practice is nowhere employed after the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost raises the question of whether it is still acceptable. There is disagreement about that.²⁴

b. The lot fell to Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles, restoring their number to twelve. Matthias is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible. "Both

²² Carson (2010), 629.

²³ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 93.

²⁴ Compare, e.g., Polhill, 95 and Schreiner, 11.

Hippolytus [2nd-3rd century] and Eusebius [early 4th century] also remark how Matthias was among the Seventy, the group commissioned by Jesus for ministry in Luke 10:1-20."²⁵

D. The coming of the Holy Spirit (2:1-13)

1. The day of Pentecost, the "Feast of Weeks," was fifty days after Passover. Since Jesus ascended after appearing to the disciples over a period of forty days, the disciples had been waiting in Jerusalem for ten days.

a. Eckhard Schnabel says of Pentecost:

It was essentially a harvest festival, the occasion when the Jews thanked God for the gifts of the grain harvest. Since Israel had arrived at Mount Sinai in the third month after leaving Egypt (Exod 19:1), i.e., in the third month after Passover, the Festival of Pentecost was eventually connected with the celebration of the giving of the covenant and thus the gift of the law given at Sinai.²⁶

b. Richard Longenecker states, "By the time of the first Christian century, however, [Pentecost] was considered the anniversary of the giving of the Mosaic law on Mount Sinai (as deduced from the chronological note at Ex 19:1) and as a time for the annual renewal of the Mosaic covenant (cf. *Jub.* 6:17; *b. Pesah.* 68b)."²⁷ After noting it is likely but not certain that Pentecost had been connected to the Mosaic covenant and giving of the law by the first century, Schnabel states: "If this connection is a valid background for Acts 2, Peter (and Luke) suggests that the Holy Spirit of God, poured out by the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord Jesus Christ, is in some way the Spirit of the new covenant, or, more precisely, the Spirit of the life in the renewed covenant and thus in restored Israel."²⁸

2. Luke does not specify who is included in the "they" who were assembled together. Peter and the eleven are mentioned in 2:14, but 1:14-15 make clear that more than the apostles were involved in the community gatherings. Nor does Luke identify their location. It is possible, perhaps likely, they were gathered in the upper room mentioned in 1:13.

3. The pouring out of the Spirit, the coming of his universal availability to the people of God, is marked by miraculous phenomena. Not wind but a *sound* of great wind fills the house. The word "spirit," *pneuma*, also has the meaning "wind." And then what looks like tongues of fire appear and rest on all those present. Fire sometimes symbolizes God's presence in Scripture (e.g., Ex. 19:18; Isa. 66:15).

4. All of these Jewish disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak other languages as the Spirit enabled them. In other words, the Spirit marked the momentous occasion of his being made universally available to believers by manifesting his

²⁵ W. Brian Shelton, *Quest for the Historical Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker 2018), 233.

²⁶ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 113.

²⁷ Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 10:733.

²⁸ Schnabel, 113.

indwelling presence by empowering them to speak in a language other than their own, a language they had not learned. He provided an objective verification of his presence within them.

5. Being Pentecost, Jerusalem at that time was filled with Jewish pilgrims from a multitude of nations, but there also were many Jews who had earlier moved to Jerusalem from different places (from the Diaspora). It is not clear which sound caused the multitude to gather; it could be either the sound like a rushing wind (2:2) or the sound of the disciples speaking in a multitude of different languages (2:4) which the groups that passed by would hear and then congregate. As made clear by the reaction, the disciples were not speaking in Aramaic, Hebrew, or Greek, languages that would be expected, but rather were speaking in many of the local or regional languages within the Roman Empire.

6. This blows the crowd away because they know or can tell from the accent that the people speaking are Galileans. Given that Galilee was an academically underdeveloped region, there was no way that this group of speakers would have been educated in so many different languages. This was not a gathering of scholars and philosophers! This indicates that something extraordinary is going on.

7. The list in vv. 9-11 mixes peoples (Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Romans, Cretans, and Arabians) with territories (Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and Libya). The inclusion of "Judea" seems odd given that there would be no surprise with Galileans speaking their home language. It may be used in a broader sense of "land of the Jews," which would encompass Syria, a nation absent from the list. The people and areas listed probably "highlight the key communities where Jews of the Diaspora congregated."²⁹

8. This diverse group of Jews is amazed because they hear the disciples telling in our own tongues the magnificent things of God. Polhill comments, "Their testimony was the language of praise. They may even have burst forth in song, for such can be a natural expression when one is filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18-19)."³⁰ Understanding this as God-directed praise fits with Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 14:2 that the man who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God. It is a miracle in which the Spirit enables a disciple to praise God in a language the disciple does not know.

9. Others in the crowd mocked the disciples, denying anything extraordinary was being exhibited. They apparently jumped to the conclusion that the languages they did not understand were gibberish and attributed the effort to the disciples being drunk, a charge Peter explains is wrong.

E. Peter's sermon (2:14-41)

1. Peter, standing with the eleven, indicating he was speaking on behalf of the apostolic group, addresses the crowd. He denies that those speaking in tongues were drunk, as it was only nine in the morning, a time when no one would be expected to be drunk.

²⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 103.

³⁰ Polhill, 104.

2. He explains that what is happening is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that the prophet Joel promised would occur "in the last days," which is Peter's inspired clarification of Joel's expression "after this." The "last days" is the prelude, the runway, to the final state. It is the era between Christ's first coming and his return, between the inauguration of the kingdom of God and its consummation in the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 Jn. 2:18; Jude 18).

3. With this outpouring, it is an era in which the Spirit is given to all of God's people rather than being given only to a few for special enablement. He is given without regard to gender (sons and daughters) or age (young and old). Indeed, even slaves who are his, believers without social status, will receive the gift. As a result, some in these groups, at least for as long as it suits the Spirit to do so (1 Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4), will be given the gift of prophecy. And, of course, we see prophets at work in the early church.

4. And God declared in Joel that he would work wonders in the heavens and signs on the earth below before the great and magnificent day of the Lord comes, the day when God through Christ judges and remakes the world. Peter is saying that the present phenomena, the sound of a great wind, what looks like tongues of fire, and the miraculous speaking in unlearned languages are among those prophesied wonders and signs that will precede that ultimate day.

5. These last days will include things beyond the present phenomena of Pentecost, such as blood and fire and smoke, items that signify the killing and burning of warfare. As blood and fire are sometimes joined in images of judgment (Isa. 9:5; Ezek. 21:32; Rev. 8:7), I suspect Joel is referring to acts of judgment that God will inflict on cities and nations in the "last days," referring either to the era or, more specifically, to its very end immediately before Christ's return.

6. This era will culminate in the great and magnificent "day of the Lord," the return of Christ in judgment, which as in Mat. 24:29, is depicted in the language of heavenly upheaval. This kind of language is used in the OT of God's judgment within history on cities and nations (e.g., Isa. 13:10, 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10; Amos 8:9), but it became an image for the ultimate divine intervention, that which occurs at the end of the age and most radically alters this reality (age) by bringing it to a close and ushering in the final, eternal state, the consummated kingdom of God.

7. The key is that on this great and magnificent day of the Lord, the day the Lord returns in judgment, "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." In its original context, it speaks of those who identify with Yahweh, who trust in him, but it is revealed by the Spirit in the new age to involve trusting in the Messiah, putting one's faith in the divine Son Jesus. Paul quotes this same statement from Joel in Rom. 10:13. As G. R. Beasley-Murray notes, "It is universally acknowledged that 'Jesus is Lord' is the primitive confession of faith in Christ that was made at baptism."³¹ Indeed, Ananias said to Paul in Acts 22:16, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, *calling on his name*." In just a few verses, Peter will urge the crowd to do the same.

³¹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Baptism" in Gerald F. Hawthorne, *et al.*, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 61.

8. Peter tells these Israelites that Jesus was a man accredited to them by God through the mighty works, wonders, and signs that he did through him in their midst, and he adds that they know it is true. There was no denying the miracles Jesus performed. Despite that, they crucified him by the hands of lawless men, meaning through the agency of Roman soldiers. And yet, this was according to the plan and foreknowledge of God. Polhill states:

In the paradox of divine sovereignty and human freedom, Jesus died as the result of deliberate human decision made in the exercise of their God-given freedom of choice. The Jewish crowd at Pentecost could not avoid their responsibility in Jesus' death. Nonetheless, in the mystery of the divine will, God was working in these events of willful human rebellion to bring about his eternal purposes, bringing out of the tragedy of the cross the triumph the resurrection.³²

9. God freed him from death, raised him to immortal resurrection life because it was not possible for death to hold him contrary to the will of God. He has power over life and death. In keeping with what I have explained at other times, Schnabel remarks, "The difference between Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection hope of the Jewish people is marked by the fact that the Jews expected a general resurrection of the dead at the end of this age, while Jesus' resurrection was a singular event in which nobody else participated."³³

10. That it was God's will to raise him was revealed beforehand in Scripture through David's words in Ps. 16:8-11.

a. In Ps. 16:8-11 David speaks as the "Holy One" whose soul will not be abandoned to the realm of the dead (*sheol* in Hebrew; *hades* in Greek) and who will not be allowed to see decay. One could understand this as David referring to himself, and many continue to do so, but it assumes a different cast after the Lord's resurrection. Indeed, the Spirit reveals through Peter that it actually is David speaking prophetically in the first person on behalf of the Messiah, his promised descendant. In other words, the psalm is not to be interpreted as David saying about some current distress (or saying only), "You will not let me die," but as him saying prophetically as the Messiah, "You will not let me remain dead once I have died," a prophecy that fits only Jesus.

b. Peter declares in 2:29-31 that David, being a prophet, foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. He proclaims in v. 32, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses."

c. Peter uses the fact Jesus fits what David prophesied as proof that Jesus is the Messiah. As J. Dupont states:

It is often asserted that Peter desires to prove that Jesus has really risen from the dead, but that is obviously inaccurate, for Peter presupposes the resurrection as a datum of faith. What Peter wishes to establish is rather the fact that Jesus, having really risen from the dead, is truly the Messiah of which the psalm speaks. . . . The

³² Polhill, 112.

³³ Schnabel, 143.

resurrection owes its value as a sign precisely to the oracle of the psalm which announced that the Christ would rise.³⁴

d. Paul does the same thing in the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia in Acts 13. He declared in 13:34-37: ³⁴ ***And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David."*** ³⁵ *Therefore he says also in another psalm, "You will not let your Holy One see corruption."* ³⁶ *For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption,* ³⁷ *but he whom God raised up did not see corruption.*

11. Having mentioned Christ's enthronement in v. 30, Peter refers expressly in v. 33 to his having been exalted to God's right hand and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. In other words, he was given the exalted role of dispensing the Spirit, making him available universally, which he did, as Peter's audience could verify. They were seeing and hearing the manifestation of that outpouring.

12. Psalm 110:1 confirms Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand because David, who did not himself ascend into the heavens – he is still in his tomb (v. 29) – says by inspiration that God said to *David's* Lord to sit at his right hand. Jesus, the great Son of David, the Messiah who has been exalted to God's right hand, is in fact the Lord. As such, he is the one on whom people must call to be saved (2:21). Peter follows naturally (v. 36) with the call for all Israel to know that God has made the crucified Jesus both Lord and Christ. Longenecker remarks, "God's resurrection and exaltation of Jesus accredits him as humanity's Lord and Israel's Messiah."³⁵

13. The people are convicted of their sin, their complicity in the rejection and execution of their God-given king, and they ask what they should do. Peter tells them they are to repent, meaning reject all prior wrongdoing and change their attitude toward Jesus to one of trust and allegiance in keeping with their newfound conviction of his identity, and submit to baptism in Jesus' name to have their sins forgiven. And they too will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

14. It is helpful to keep in mind that the "gift of the Holy Spirit" is the Spirit himself. It is different from what the Hebrew writer calls the "gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 2:4) and Paul calls "spiritual gifts" (1 Cor. 12:1, 14:1). Those are abilities that the Spirit gives to believers as he wills (1 Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4).

a. And we know that the Spirit gives different gifts, different abilities, to different people (1 Cor. 12:1-11). So in telling his audience that they too will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter is not saying the Spirit will grant them the same gift, the gift of tongues, that he had given to Peter and his companions.

b. The Spirit and the gifts he gives are distinct, and he is sovereign and has his own reasons for giving or not giving certain gifts. And indeed, there is no indication that

³⁴ Quoted in I. Howard Marshall, "Acts" in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 539.

³⁵ Longenecker, 746.

those who were baptized at Peter's urging spoke in tongues. That does not mean they did not receive the gift of the Spirit; it means only that the Spirit they received chose, for his reasons, not to so empower them.

15. Peter declares that the promise of the Spirit, who is received in conjunction with the forgiveness bestowed at baptism, is not only for those present but also for their descendants and for all who are far off. It is for everyone whom the Lord God calls to himself (through the gospel – 2 Thess. 2:14). As Paul says in Rom. 8:9, "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

16. As for Jn. 20:22 ("And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"), I think the most likely explanation is that Jesus' action was a symbolic foreshadowing the bestowal of the Spirit that was to take place on the Day of Pentecost. It is a kind of acted out promise. Here is how Andreas Köstenberger explains it:

The present reference represents a symbolic promise of the soon-to-be-given gift of the Spirit, not the actual giving of it fifty days later at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2; see Carson 1991:649-55; cf. Witherington 1995: 340-341). Otherwise, it is hard to see how John would not be found to stand in actual conflict with Luke's Pentecost narrative in Acts 2, not to mention his own disclaimers earlier in the narrative that the Spirit would be given only subsequent to Jesus' glorification, which entailed his return to the Father [see 7:39; 14:12, 16-18, 25-26; 16:12-15; cf. 20:17]. The disciples' behavior subsequent to the present incident would also be rather puzzling had they already received the Spirit.³⁶

17. Peter said more about Jesus that Luke does not recount. He continued urging the people, commanding them to do what was necessary to be saved by God,³⁷ to escape the fate that awaits their contemporaries at the judgment on the great and magnificent "day of the Lord" that he mentioned in 2:20.

a. In 2:21 he indicated that to be saved they needed to call on the name of the Lord, which I pointed out refers to the confession of faith in Christ that was made at baptism (e.g., Acts 22:16; also Acts 8:37 [not original but indicative of early practice]). The crowd understands what Peter means in telling them to "get themselves saved." Verse 41 explains, "So those who received his word were *baptized*, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." This, of course, is the same Peter who will write in 1 Pet. 3:21 that baptism now saves you, not because of a power invested in the ritual apart from faith but as the God-ordained expression of penitent faith. Salvation is by grace, through faith, in or at the time of baptism.

³⁶ Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 574-575.

³⁷ The aorist passive imperative (*sōthēte*) can be used in a reflexive sense ("Save *yourselves*"). When so understood in this verse (e.g., KJV, ASV, RSV, NRSV, NET, ESV, NIV), it must be recognized that the appeal is for them to "save themselves" by accepting or receiving God's salvation. They are to "get themselves saved." See, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:156.

b. Those that were baptized were added to them; they were now members of the community of the redeemed. And we see in 2:47 that those being added to them were those who were being saved. So the baptized were added, and those added were those saved. The link between baptism and salvation is difficult to miss.

18. Note that Peter is addressing the crowd that had gathered around the disciples, those he identifies as "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem" (2:14). They are distinct from those who were speaking in tongues, who are identified as "Galileans" (2:7).

a. It is this crowd that was cut to the heart by Peter's message and that said to Peter and the other apostles, "What shall we do?" (2:37). And it was this crowd that Peter instructed to repent and be baptized. Those who accepted his message were baptized (2:41) and in so doing were added by God to the already existing community of the redeemed (2:41, 47).

b. In other words, it seems the initial disciples were not among those who were baptized in water on Pentecost. Rather, the initial group of disciples that had been waiting for the gift pursuant to Jesus' instruction were the preexisting community to which those baptized were added. The fact nothing is said of them being baptized fits that understanding. If that is correct, how is it to be understood?

c. As prior disciples, they presumably had submitted to the pre-Spirit baptism administered *in Christ's name* (Jn. 3:22; 4:1-2; 7:39),³⁸ so unlike the Gentiles at Cornelius's house in Acts 10, the coming of the Spirit on them at Pentecost was not understood to require their immersion. They were more like the Samaritans in Acts 8 on whom the gift of the Spirit was delayed after their baptism, albeit for a different divine purpose.

F. The fellowship of the believers (2:42-47)

1. Luke summarizes the activity of this new Christian community in Jerusalem by identifying four things to which they devoted themselves: the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. With I. Howard Marshall and others, I think these actions probably are drawn from "elements which characterized a Christian gathering in the early church."³⁹ Note the presence of the article before each element, suggesting the actions were the common manner of the gatherings.⁴⁰

³⁸ John Moschus, in his early 7th century work *Spiritual Meadow* (5.176), attributes to Clement of Alexandria (late second to early third century) the statement "Christ is said to have baptized only Peter, and Peter Andrew, and Andrew James and John, and they the others." Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 319-320. Augustine (late fourth to early fifth century) refers to those who believed the apostles were baptized by Christ and found that view more credible than the claim they had been baptized by John. Harry A. Echle, "The Baptism of the Apostles: A Fragment of Clement of Alexandria's Lost Work Ὑποτιπώσεις in the Pratum Spirituale of John Moschus," *Traditio* 3 (1945), 365-366. Echle states (p. 368), "Thus Clement's version of the baptism of the apostles found an echo down through the centuries in the East. Whether these later writers were influenced by Clement's Ὑποτιπώσεις or whether they and Clement obtained their information from the same unknown source cannot be determined."

³⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 83.

⁴⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 225.

a. If that is correct, their devoting themselves to "the fellowship" may refer to contributions made for charitable purposes. The word (*koinōnia*) has that sense in Rom. 15:26 and 2 Cor. 9:13, and funds obviously were being provided for community needs, such as the distribution to the widows. It also could refer to the "(table) fellowship" of the love feast or simply to their coming together to share the experience of worship, in which case the other items represent specific elements of that experience.

b. The phrase "the breaking of bread" would refer to their sharing in the Lord's Supper. Although Luke can use the term "to break bread" in reference to an ordinary meal (Acts 27:33-35), he quite clearly uses it in Acts 20:7 to refer to their assembling to share the Lord's Supper. That seems to be its meaning in 2:42. Longenecker comments, "Yet it is difficult to believe that Luke meant only an ordinary meal in 2:42, placing the expression, as he does, between two such religiously loaded terms as 'the fellowship' and 'prayer.'"⁴¹

2. A fear or awe came upon all the people, probably meaning "that the non-Christian population felt a certain apprehension over against a group in whose midst supernatural events were taking place (cf. 5:5, 11; 19:17)."⁴² Many miracles were being done by God through the apostles. All the believers were together, in regular contact, and they had everything in common, meaning they voluntarily sold their possessions when need arose and distributed the proceeds accordingly. This was the kind of love, unity, and generosity that characterized the community.

3. Every day they continued by mutual desire gathering in the temple courts (specifically in Solomon's Colonnade at the eastern edge of the outer court – Acts 3:11, 5:12), sharing meals in their homes, eating together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. The fact the first Christians often were present in the temple courts (Acts 2:46-47, 3:1-3, 5:19-25, 5:42) need not mean they were still devoted to the temple cult.

a. Referring to the presence of Christians in the temple in the early chapters of Acts, Craig Blomberg states:

Not one word of the text ever refers to the sacrifices, and what is mentioned adequately accounts for the references to temple and time. (1) The temple courts were the only place of adequate size in Jerusalem for so large a public gathering (note the contrast between 'temple courts' and 'homes' in 2:46). (2) It was an optimal site for witness and proclamation, as the unfolding events of chapter 3 demonstrate (see esp. v. 11). (3) 3 p.m. was also one of the fixed times of prayer, which is mentioned in the text (3:1), and which all would have participated in (vs. only a few who offered sacrifices on any given day). Pesch and Schneider are

⁴¹ Longenecker, 757; see also, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 271.

⁴² Marshall (1980), 84.

correct: 'According to Luke, "the temple for Christians is not a place of sacrifice, but, as for Jesus, a place of teaching and prayer" (cf. Luke 19:46f; Acts 2:46)'.⁴³

b. If at that time they *were* participating in the temple cult, engaging in its worship rituals, as many believe, it would mean they had not yet grasped the implications of the Lord's teaching and sacrifice not that the temple cult remained viable in the new covenant. Hebrews and other NT texts make abundantly clear that it does not. As Paul indicated in 2 Tim. 2:7, some insights from God are given in conjunction with pondering and theological reflection. Perhaps that was the case regarding the infant church's understanding of its relationship to the temple.

4. Every day the Lord added to their number new converts, those who were being saved. God is doing the saving; the converts are merely allowing themselves to be saved by responding to his call.

G. The lame beggar healed (3:1-11)

1. Peter and John were going to the temple at "the hour of prayer." This was 3:00 in the afternoon, the time when priests would offer the evening sacrifice (Ex. 29:39-41; Num. 28:4)⁴⁴ and enter the holy place to offer incense (2 Chron. 2:4, 13:11). "It is clear that many people in the temple (Luke 1:10) and elsewhere (Dan 9:21; Jdt 9:1) prayed at these times."⁴⁵ The gathering made this a good opportunity to witness for Christ.

2. There was a man over forty years old (Acts 4:22) who was lame from birth, and every day his friends or family members would lay him at one of the gates into the temple (the Beautiful Gate) so he could beg for charity from those entering. As he was being carried, he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple and asked for a donation. He apparently diverted his attention elsewhere, perhaps calling out to other passersby, but Peter summoned his attention, so he naturally expected to receive something from them.

3. Peter tells him he has no silver and gold, no coins to give him, but gives him what he does have to give, namely the miraculous healing of his inability to walk. This is given "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," meaning the healing is bestowed by the authority of Christ. It is only because of who Jesus is and Peter's relationship with him that he has the healing to give. And the feet and ankles of this man who had never walked in his more than forty years were instantly made strong, and the man leaped to his feet and began to walk! He entered the temple with them, and as you can imagine, he was leaping and praising God.

4. The people recognized him as the lame man who regularly begged at the Beautiful Gate. They were filled with wonder and amazement over what had happened to him.

⁴³ Craig Blomberg, "The Christian and the Law of Moses" in I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, eds., *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 402.

⁴⁴ "At some point during the Hellenistic period, the time of the near-dusk offering shifted toward the middle of the afternoon (as in Acts 3:1), perhaps to avoid the risk of running late." Craig S. Keener, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 2:1044-1045.

⁴⁵ Keener, 2:1045.

As we would say, their minds were blown. And as the healed cripple was clinging to Peter and John in gratitude, the people in their amazement rushed to them in Solomon's Portico. Peter took the opportunity to preach.

H. Peter speaks in Solomon's Portico (3:12-26)

1. Peter makes clear that the miracle was not by his or John's own power or piety. They were merely conduits or agents for the power of Jesus, the one in whose execution the audience was actively or passively culpable. But God glorified his servant Jesus, the Author of life, by raising him from the dead, a fact to which Peter and John are witnesses.

2. The great miracle they have witnessed was accomplished by Jesus' name, by his person and authority. It was also accomplished by faith in his name, a faith that came through Jesus' works and words, in that their faith in him was a basis for his using them as instruments of his powerful working.

3. Peter says they know that the crowd and their rulers acted in ignorance in having Jesus executed. In other words, they had, however culpably, failed to accept the truth about Jesus. Despite the ample evidence at their disposal, they continued to believe wrongly, from a variety of motivations, that Jesus was a false teacher, an enemy of God's work (see, Lk. 23:34 [textual issue]; Acts 13:27; 1 Tim. 1:13). And though they are to blame for that rejection, as he has made clear, it fulfilled what God foretold through the prophets, namely that Christ would suffer.

4. Given that Jesus is the prophesied suffering Messiah, they need to repent, to turn away from disobedience and wrongdoing and turn to the things and ways of God. They must cease resisting God's work and embrace the truth that Jesus is the Christ. He gives three purposes or results of that repentance: that their sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that God may send Jesus the Christ.

a. We understand the forgiveness of sins as a purpose or result of turning to Christ in faith, but the "times of refreshing" is more obscure. David Peterson, following Barrett, comments:

[T]he argument of vv. 19-21 is cumulative, implying that these seasons of refreshment occur in an intervening period, before Christ's return and the consummation of God's plan in a renewed creation (cf. v. 21 note). Even now, those who turn to him for forgiveness may enjoy in advance some of the blessings associated with the coming era. Perhaps these times of refreshment are more specifically 'moments of relief during the time men spend in waiting for that blessed day'. A comparison with Peter's words in 2:38 suggests that the Holy Spirit may be the one who brings this refreshment. Peter may be describing the subjective effect of the gift of the Spirit for believers, whose presence anticipates

and guarantees the full inheritance God promises his children (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14).⁴⁶

b. Acts 1:11 speaks clearly of Jesus' return from heaven, and here Peter relates that promise to the demand for their repentance. Jesus, the Messiah, was appointed for Israel in the sense he is a Jewish king, a descendant of David. The new-covenant community, the church, is the new Israel that is built from the Jewish stock of true Israel, ethnic Jews who had the faith of Abraham in their belief of God's revelation of Jesus. All the original disciples were Jewish believers. As Paul explains in Romans 11, Gentiles who shared this faith were grafted into this community of true Israel, but the church is Jewish at its root. It seems that the timing of Christ's return depends in part on the "full number" of Jews, whatever that might be in the mind of God, embracing Jesus as the Messiah.

5. Jesus, who in his ascension was received into heaven, will remain there "until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (NIV). In other words, when Jesus returns creation will be restored in the sense it will be purged of all the effects of sin (see Rom. 8:18-25; Rev. 21:1-4) in accordance with God's promise in the Old Testament to provide a blessed eternal existence in a new heaven and new earth. The curse will be lifted (Rom. 8:21; Rev. 22:3) so that the new, redeemed creation will be a suitable place for God and redeemed mankind to dwell together eternally.⁴⁷ This understanding of Peter's words enjoys strong scholarly support.

a. For example, Ernst Haenchen says the text refers to "a restoration of the *original order of creation*."⁴⁸ Paul-Gerd Müller states, "In accord with the Jewish principle that *end time = primeval time*, the Messiah is expected to bring about the eschatological return of things to their *original state*, the *universal renewal of the world* which reestablishes the *original integrity of creation*. The Christ of the Parousia will bring about the promised *restoration of the cosmic universe*."⁴⁹ Fitzmyer says, "[M]ore probably it refers generically to *an awaited universal cosmic reconciliation*, often mentioned vaguely in Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic writings, e.g., as a new creation of heaven and earth. . . . In this Lucan context it would be associated with the coming of the Messiah and would seem to connote *a messianic restoral of everything to pristine integrity and harmony*."⁵⁰ Peterson states, "But 'restoration' is quite suitable [as a translation] (NRSV, ESV, TNIV, KJV, NKJV, 'restitution'), reflecting the conviction that *the end will be as the beginning*: 'God, through Christ, will restore his *fallen world* to the purity and integrity of his *initial creation*'" [quoting Barrett].⁵¹ Carl Holladay comments: "Here the end of history is envisioned as 'the time when all things will be *restored to their original state*' (3:21a).

⁴⁶ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 180-181.

⁴⁷ This does not mean the eschaton will be identical to the pre-Fall creation. It will have the pre-Fall aspects of this creation, and in that sense will be a restoration, but it will also have greater things.

⁴⁸ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, trans. by Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn, rev. by R. McL. Wilson et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 208.

⁴⁹ Paul-Gerd Müller, "ἀποκαθιστημι, ἀποκαθιστάνω" in Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, editors, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:130.

⁵⁰ Fitzmyer, 289.

⁵¹ Peterson, 182.

This expectation of a *return to the paradisaal era of creation* is presented as an ancient prophetic vision deeply embedded in Scripture (v. 21b).⁵² Bock likewise states:

The anticipated end was seen as *establishing again the original creation's pristine character*. This restoration is what Jesus brings with his return, an idea given later development in Rev. 19-22 but whose roots Peter declares here are already evident in that "of which God spoke through the holy prophets of old." . . . In the NT this idea is discussed in Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:18-23; and Heb. 2:5-8. The point is that God has already indicated what the end will be like. So, to learn about the future, Peter urges them to read what God has already said through the prophets about the new era the eschaton would bring.⁵³

b. In Isa. 25:8 God spoke of swallowing up death forever, in Isa. 65:17 he declared his intent to create the new heavens and new earth, and in Isa. 66:22 he promised that he would create the new heavens and new earth that would remain before him forever.⁵⁴ In Ezekiel 47:1-12 the prophet is given a vision of a life-giving river flowing from the temple.

c. In Mat. 19:28 Jesus refers to the "new world" (also translated the "renewal of all things" or the "regeneration"), which is widely recognized as a reference to the new heavens and new earth. In 2 Pet. 3:13 Peter speaks of a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell. In Rom. 8:21 Paul indicates that creation itself will be freed from its slavery to decay and will enter into the end-time glory to be enjoyed by God's children. We and it both are getting the "ultimate makeover."

d. The tie to the original creation, the "restoration" aspect of the consummation, is unmistakable in Rev. 22:1-2, where the river of the water of life that flows from the throne of God is bordered on either side by the tree of life. This is a reference to the tree of life from the Garden of Eden which symbolized God's continuing provision of life to mankind. Access to this tree was cut off when Adam and Eve sinned (Gen. 3:22), meaning humanity would now be mortal, would now suffer death, because God would no longer sustain our lives forever. He withdrew what would have been a permanent provision. So the fall of mankind into death, into mortality, is reversed in the end through the gift of resurrection life. Death is defeated, swallowed up in victory. And as the fall into death was indicated by exclusion from the tree of life, so the restoration of immortality is indicated by regaining access to the tree of life.

⁵² Carl R. Holladay, *Acts*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 120.

⁵³ Bock, 177. See also, George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 369; James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 47; Fitzmyer, 289.

⁵⁴ The reference in Isa. 65:20 to death at 100 and to failing to reach 100 in the context of the new heavens and new earth probably should be taken, in light of Isa. 25:8, as a counterfactual hypothetical that serves to emphasize the length of life. Eternal life is portrayed as a state where if one *were to die* at 100 (which one will not) he would be considered only a child and if one *were to fail* to reach 100 (which one will not) he would be considered cursed. See J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 530 and Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 721-722. Given John's reference to Isa. 65:17 in Rev. 21:1-8 (esp. vv. 1, 5), that is apparently how he understood it.

6. Peter cites Moses' words in Deut. 18:15 that God will raise up for them a prophet like him from among their brothers and that they must listen to him. Any who refuse to do so will no longer be among the people of God.

a. There is a sense in which Moses' announcement was fulfilled in God providing a line of prophets after Moses to speak to the people to accommodate their fear of having God speak to them directly. And yet, there is a sense in which this promise of a prophet "like [him]" was not fulfilled in the raising up of these other prophets. There was a distinctiveness to Moses, something about his prophetic role that transcended that of other prophets (Num. 12:6-8; Deut. 34:10-12), so even granting there was an ancient fulfillment of Moses' words in a succession of prophets, that fulfillment did not exhaust the promise. That is why many Jews in the first century expected the coming of this great prophet, this one who would be "like Moses" in the fullest sense.

b. Accepting Jesus for who he is now defines the faith of Abraham and thus defines who is part of true Israel, who is included within the people of God. He says all the prophets from Samuel and those after him also proclaimed "these days." Though some were more specific, others, like Samuel, referred obliquely or typologically to the Messiah through the promises made to David or images of a glorious future state ushered in by the great Servant.

7. As Jews, they are the natural heirs, the "sons," of the prophets and of the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants, so they should be first in line as beneficiaries of these things. Thus, it is fitting that God, having "raised up" his servant Jesus, playing off the ambiguity of "raised up," sent him first to the Jews to bless them by drawing them to him in repentance. The door is open, and Peter is calling on God's behalf.

I. Peter and John before the Council (4:1-22)

1. Peter and John are set upon by the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees. The captain of the temple was from the priestly aristocracy, and thus a Sadducee himself (as were many of the priests), and oversaw the temple police. The Sadducees were a Jewish sect that denied the resurrection and any kind of life after death and were accommodationists regarding the Roman occupation of Israel. They were averse to making political waves.

2. They are upset that Peter and John were teaching the people in the temple precincts, a role they viewed as theirs, and they were upset that they were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. In other words, Peter and John were directly contradicting the Sadducees' theology in declaring their personal knowledge that Jesus was raised from the dead. As authorities are inclined to do with people saying things they do not like, they arrested them. But the word they had been preaching was already getting traction; the number of men who believed now came to about five thousand.

3. The next day, all those of the high-priestly family brought Peter and John before them and wanted to know by what power or by what name they performed the miracle the day before. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, says that if they are being called on the carpet for a

good deed done to a crippled man, if the authorities are interested in how that was accomplished, then they and all the people of Israel need to hear loud and clear that it was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, by his person and authority – the one they crucified but whom God raised from the dead – that the man had been healed.

4. He then alludes to Ps. 118:22, explaining that Jesus was the stone they had rejected who had become the cornerstone. In other words, he was dismissed and treated contemptuously but turned out "to occupy a more exalted position than anyone would have dreamed."⁵⁵ In fact, says Peter, he is the exclusive avenue of salvation, the only name under heaven given to mankind as the way to be saved!

5. When they saw the boldness of Peter and John (remember they were filled with the Spirit) and realized they were laymen with no special training in Scripture and rabbinic tradition, and yet could so readily bring Scripture to bear in their testimony about Jesus, they were astonished. And they noted that they were disciples of Jesus; they had been with him. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. After they sent Peter and John out of the meeting, they conferred together and confirmed that the miracle was known by the people to have occurred and simply could not be denied. That had them on their back foot, so they went with Plan B.

6. To contain the damage, they command them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. They are forbidden from telling people who Jesus is and what God has done in and through him. Peter and John respond famously, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." That is a "No." Do with us what you must, but we have no choice but to heed God and share this marvelous news.

7. The authorities did not like that answer and ratcheted up the threats, but they were unwilling to punish them at that time because the people would not put up with it. They all were praising God for the tremendous miracle that had been done.

J. The believers pray for boldness (4:23-31)

1. Peter and John go and inform their friends that the chief priests and elders are demanding a halt to any speaking about Jesus. This news moves them to pray for boldness to continue speaking in the face of that threat, boldness to continue to serve God rather than men. They raised their voices together to God. Perhaps "early Christian congregations repeated prayers a phrase at a time after a 'precentor.'"⁵⁶

2. After acknowledging God as the Creator of all things, they refer to Ps. 2:1-2, which speaks of the nations' rebellion against God and his anointed king of Israel. The Psalm makes clear that they rebel in vain because God, the heavenly king, has placed his king on the throne in Jerusalem, and he will provide him dominion over all the nations. In the first century, this psalm was widely understood to include a reference to the Messiah, the ultimate Davidic

⁵⁵ John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 3: Psalms 90-150* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 362.

⁵⁶ Marshall (1980), 103 (fn. 1).

king, the ultimate Anointed One (the meaning of Messiah). It was so interpreted by the rabbis and the Qumran community.⁵⁷

3. They state in their prayer the fulfillment of the hostility element of this Psalm in the way Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the unbelieving Jews abused God's holy servant, his Anointed One, Jesus. But they acknowledge that this assault on Jesus happened only because God had determined from eternity to allow it to happen in fulfillment of his plan. Though they intended it for evil, he intended it for the greatest good. Fitzmyer states, "What the just-named adversaries of Jesus have accomplished is something that was foreseen in God's providence; indeed, it has fitted into the implementation of the divine salvific plan."⁵⁸ Polhill says, "In the paradox of human freedom and divine sovereignty, despite all the raging of humanity, God's purposes prevail."⁵⁹

4. They ask God to pay special attention to the threats made by the authorities against those speaking about Jesus and to empower them to continue to speak his word, the message of Jesus, with all boldness. Note that they are not asking to have the opposition removed, perhaps because they perceive God to be working through it as he had worked through the opposition to Jesus, but rather are asking for the courage to continue to speak in the face of that opposition.

5. And they ask that God continue (or anticipate he will continue) to perform healings and signs and wonders through the name of his holy servant Jesus. They want the courage to be faithful in the opportunities God creates by performing healings and other miracles through Jesus' name. Schnabel comments:

The healing of the lame man begging at the Beautiful Gate (3:1-10) had given Peter and John the opportunity to explain the significance of Jesus, the Messiah, in Solomon's Portico to a large crowd of Jewish listeners (3:11-26) and, after a night in prison, to the Jewish leaders assembled in the Sanhedrin (4:1-22). They pray for further healings to happen, which will lead to further opportunities to proclaim the good news of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior.⁶⁰

6. When they finished praying, God reassured them that he heard the prayer by vibrating the meeting place. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, meaning the Spirit they had received expressed himself in their lives in a magnified or heightened way, the result of which (as in 4:8) was that they continued to speak the word of God with boldness as they had requested.

a. As Paul will later make clear in Eph. 5:18, being filled with or by the Spirit is something one can be *commanded* to do. So just as the Spirit can at times choose to manifest himself in distinctively empowering ways in the lives of believers, so believers can

⁵⁷ Keener, 2:2070.

⁵⁸ Fitzmyer, 310.

⁵⁹ Polhill, 149.

⁶⁰ Schnabel, 259.

choose to yield variably to the Spirit's transforming work in their lives. There is dynamic interaction in the phenomenon of being filled with or by the Spirit.

b. Whether one understands the preposition as "with" or "by," I think Peter O'Brien captures the meaning of the believer's role in Spirit filling:

Believers are the recipients of the exhortation at 5:18, for, although we do not fill ourselves, we are to be receptive to the Spirit's transforming work, making us into the likeness (i.e., fulness) of God and Christ. We are to be subject to the Spirit's control (cf. 1:17; 3:16), which is tantamount to letting Christ's word rule in our lives (Col. 3:16), so that we may walk wisely (Eph. 5:15) and understand more fully the Lord's will (v. 17). The goal is to attain to what in principle we already have in Christ – fulness and spiritual maturity.⁶¹

K. They had everything in common (4:32-37)

1. The Christian community in Jerusalem had a great sense of family and unity. Everyone recognized a responsibility to use what they owned to help meet the needs of others in the community. They "had everything in common" in that perceptual sense, not in a legal sense, as individuals clearly continued to own property (e.g., 4:37, 5:4). As need arose, those who owned lands or houses would sell them voluntarily and give the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. Schnabel comments:

Luke does not say that these believers sold everything they had. His words can be taken to mean that "the owners sold some of the property they possessed and brought the prices of what they sold to the apostles." Nor does Luke say that all owners of lands and houses sold everything; according to 12:12-13 a believer named Mary still owned a house about ten years later. If all this is correct, v. 34b implies that there were wealthy Jews who owned several houses and who had come to faith in Jesus.⁶²

2. A notable example of such a person was Joseph, whom the apostles called Barnabas, which means son of encouragement or exhortation. He sold a field that belonged to him and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution.

a. Barnabas was a Levite originally from Cyprus. John Mark was his cousin (Col. 4:10), and the home of Mark's mother, Mary, was in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). Though the tribe of Levi received no allotment of land in Israel (Num. 18:20-24; Deut. 10:9, 18:1; Josh. 14:3-4, 21:1-42), individual Levites owned land there at least after the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian assaults (e.g., Jer. 32:6-15; Neh. 13:10). Perhaps it was understood that the original divine scheme of allotment was not intended to apply after expulsion of the Jews and seizure of their land by foreigners. It is also possible that the land Barnabas sold was in Cyprus rather than Judea and thus unrelated to the allotment program in Israel.

⁶¹ Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 393-394.

⁶² Schnabel, 272.

b. Barnabas would later vouch for Paul to the apostles (Acts 9:27). When Gentiles in Antioch converted to Christ, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas there (Acts 11:22). He is described in Acts 11:24 as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." He later would bring Paul from Tarsus to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26), go with Paul to deliver famine relief to Jerusalem from Antioch (Acts 11:29-30), accompany Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:2-3), go with Paul to Jerusalem for the conference about the Judaizers (Acts 15:2), and teach and preach the word of the Lord with Paul in Antioch (Acts 15:35). He is mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 2:1, 9, 13; and Col. 4:10.

3. That Barnabas laid proceeds of the sale of his field "at the apostles' feet" means that they were the community leaders in charge of the distribution to the needy. As we will soon see, they entrusted to others the administration of the daily distribution to the widows. When a problem arose over that distribution, a special group of servants was chosen to assume the task of administration thus keeping the apostles from getting pulled into a less optimal use of their time.

L. Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)

1. In contrast to the noble generosity of Barnabas, Ananias, in agreement with his wife, Sapphira, apparently pledged to donate to the church the proceeds from the sale of a piece of property he owned ("sold" is singular). After selling it, Ananias, with Sapphira's knowledge, laid at the apostles' feet only a portion of the proceeds passing it off as the full amount he had received. They "attempted to gain credit for a greater personal sacrifice than they actually made."⁶³ The verb rendered "kept back" (*nosphizō*) is a rare word that (in the middle voice) means "to misappropriate funds for oneself, to embezzle."⁶⁴ They had committed that money to God but then skimmed some of it for themselves. It is the same word in Josh. 7:1 (LXX) for Achan's keeping for himself some of the devoted things at Jericho.

2. Peter confronts Ananias about his duplicity, which he knows presumably by prophetic insight, as when Elisha perceived Gehazi's duplicity in accepting money from Naaman (2 Ki. 5:26). He asks why he allowed Satan to enter his heart, to have such influence over his life that he lied to the Holy Spirit by misrepresenting the amount he received for the land. Polhill remarks, "Satan 'filled' Ananias's heart just as he had Judas's (cf. Luke 22:3). Like Judas, Ananias was motivated by money (cf. Luke 22:5)."⁶⁵ Though Satan was at work, Ananias's culpability is clear from v. 4 (he contrived the deed in his heart).

3. The false representation to the apostles and the church was lying to the Holy Spirit because the "Spirit so completely and radically dwells in the church as to be the one who experiences what is done to it."⁶⁶ And, as v. 4 makes clear, lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. The Spirit is God, one of the divine persons of the Trinity.

⁶³ Marshall (1980), 110.

⁶⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:585.

⁶⁵ Polhill, 157.

⁶⁶ Barrett, 266.

4. Peter points out to Ananias that when the property was unsold it all belonged to Ananias, so if he wanted it he did not have to sell it in the first place. And even after he sold it, the proceeds were at his disposal, so he could have chosen to give whatever portion he desired to give. The sin was in misrepresenting his action as more sacrificial and generous than it was to enhance his perception in the church.

5. When Ananias heard Peter's rebuke, he dropped dead. This was understood to be God's judgment, which is why great fear came upon all who heard of it. The fact the same fate befalls Sapphira confirms it is divine judgment. God demonstrates unequivocally at the beginning of the church the horror of greed, pride, and deceit operating within the Spirit-filled community. Having made that point dramatically for the infant church and for all posterity, future failures of that kind were not occasions for similar demonstrations.

6. Ananias is quickly placed in a burial tomb, and about three hours later the scene is essentially repeated with Sapphira. Peter asks her whether they sold the property for the amount they represented, and she lies about it. He then asks how she and Ananias could have agreed to *test* the Spirit of the Lord, to sin so egregiously as if to see what they could get away with. He announces that those who buried her husband would now bury her, and she immediately dropped dead. The young men carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

7. Luke reports that great fear came upon the whole church, the first occurrence of the word in Acts, and upon all who heard these things. God is holy, righteous, and powerful and is not to be trifled with, not to be disrespected or treated like a joke.

M. Many signs and wonders done (5:12-16)

1. The apostles were regularly doing many signs and wonders among the people of Jerusalem, no doubt including healings. The community of believers continued to gather together regularly in Solomon's Portico on the temple grounds, but none of "the rest," most likely meaning the rest of the Jews, i.e., unbelieving Jews, dared to come near to the Christian gatherings. Perhaps this was from fear of Jewish reprisal or of God's means of working among the group, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Nevertheless, the Jewish populace viewed them favorably, no doubt being impressed by what was occurring among them.

2. In that conflicted environment of avoidance and respect, multitudes of men and women converted to Christ. With so many people having come to faith, rather than attempt to access Peter and the other apostles when carrying a sick person, some resorted to placing the sick on cots and mats along the street in the hope Peter's shadow would fall on them as he passed by and that they would be healed as a result.

3. Healings obviously were known to be occurring. Indeed, that news drew people from the surrounding towns. They brought the sick and demon possessed, and they were all healed.

N. The apostles arrested and freed (5:17-42)

1. The notoriety and favor the apostles were gaining made the high priest and his fellow Sadducees either jealous or filled with misguided religious zeal, which resulted in their arresting the apostles and putting them in prison. But that night, an angel led them out of the prison and told them, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." So the apostles went to the temple at daybreak and began teaching.

2. The high priest and the Sadducees call a meeting of the Council (Sanhedrin) to determine what to do with the apostles they had arrested the day before, obviously unaware of what had happened to them. When they send to bring the prisoners before the group, they learn that the apostles were not in the prison, though the door was locked and the guards were standing at their posts. The captain of the temple and chief priests were deeply perplexed and wondered what this was about.

3. They then are told that the apostles were teaching in the temple. The captain of the temple and his officers escorted the apostles to the Council but refrained from using force because they feared the people would stone them. When they arrived, the high priest interrogated them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." The apostles had violated the prior command not to speak further in Jesus' name and continued declaring the truth of Jesus' identity. In so doing, they were bringing Jesus' blood upon the leaders, making them *guilty* for instigating his execution, by making clear that Jesus was God's Chosen One, not a criminal who deserved the death they had orchestrated.

4. Peter and the apostles pull no punches in their response. They declare they must obey God rather than men, rather than the Council, and they proclaim that God raised Jesus after the Jewish leaders had had him crucified. He exalted Jesus to his right hand as Leader (or Ruler or Prince) and Savior that Israel might recognize the truth and thus repent, turn to the One they had killed, and thereby be saved.

5. The apostles declare that they are witnesses to Jesus' resurrection and ascension and therefore are trustworthy sources regarding the events. They add that the Holy Spirit is also a witness. Marshall comments, "[T]he thought appears to be that the gift of the Spirit to the church is a further testimony to the reality of the exaltation of Jesus, since the Spirit is regarded as the gift of the exalted Messiah."⁶⁷

6. The apostles note that the Spirit is given by God to those who obey God, meaning disciples of Christ, those who embrace Jesus as God intends. The not-so-subtle point is that the leaders interrogating them do not have the Spirit of God, but God's gracious offer is extended to them in the gospel.

7. The apostles' words anger their inquisitors. They not only are "doubling down" on Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, which antagonizes the Sadducees who deny the resurrection, but in doing so they confirm that the execution in which all the leaders participated was wrongful because Jesus is God's Anointed. They thus bring Jesus' blood upon the leaders. To

⁶⁷ Marshall (1980), 120.

top it off, they imply the leaders are without God's Spirit, whereas those they are persecuting have God's Spirit. In other words, they are opposing God.

8. This enraged some or most of the members of the Council so that they wanted to kill the apostles. But Gamaliel, a Pharisee who was a teacher of the law and a highly regarded member of the Council, the one at whose feet Paul was educated (Acts 22:3), intervened. He sent the apostles out and advised the Council to leave the apostles alone. He pointed out that the followers of other purported messianic or prophetic movements abandoned the cause when their leader had been killed. The fact that had not happened with the death of Jesus was a red flag. He says, "So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"

9. The Council took Gamaliel's advice to the extent they refrained from killing the apostles, but before releasing them, they beat them and again charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus. The faith and heart of the apostles is summed up on vv. 41-42: *Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.* ⁴² *And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.*

O. The seven chosen to serve (6:1-7)

1. Amid the rapid increase in the number of disciples (first use of "disciples" in Acts) in Jerusalem, Luke reports that the Hellenistic Jewish Christians (literally "the Hellenists") complained against the Hebraic Jewish Christians (literally "the Hebrews").

a. The former were Jewish converts to Christ from among the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem. These were Jews whose primary language was Greek, but who also probably had varying degrees of competence in Aramaic. They had moved to Jerusalem from the diaspora, from outside Israel, and attended their own synagogues (Acts 6:9, 9:29). They were in some ways "Greekified" Jews, but they could be quite zealous about their Jewish faith and religion. They were a minority of the Jews living in the city.

b. The Hebraic Jewish Christians were converts to Christ from among the Jews whose primary language was Aramaic and Hebrew. They also would have known some Greek, as that was the *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean world,⁶⁸ but they had been less influenced by Greek culture than the Hellenistic group.

2. The complaint was that the widows among the Hellenistic Jewish Christians were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. They were not being as well cared for as the widows among the Hebraic Jewish Christians.

a. There may have been a disproportionate number of poor widows among the Hellenistic Jewish Christians because Jewish couples from the diaspora may have moved to

⁶⁸ Marshall (1980), 125.

Jerusalem in their old age to be buried there. When the husband died, the widow was left with no local family members to care for her, and the Hellenistic synagogue may have turned away from them because of their conversion to Christ.⁶⁹

b. We are not told how or why the disparate treatment of the widows came about, but it is certainly possible that social or cultural tensions played a role. The point is that the needs of some Christian widows were not being met, which was a breakdown that had to be rectified. Schnabel remarks, "Note that supporting widows (and orphans) is an Old Testament commandment [cf. Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19-21; 26:12-13; 27:19] repeatedly reinforced by the prophets [cf. Isa. 1:17, 23; 10:2; Jer. 5:28; 7:6; 22:3; Ezek. 22:7; Mal. 3:5; Ps 94:6; Jas. 1:17]. The neglect of widows is disobedience of God's will [cf. Lk. 7:12-14; 20:46-47; 1 Tim. 5:9-13]."⁷⁰

3. The apostles ultimately were in charge of the distribution of the community's assets (Acts 4:34-35), which means those who were conducting the daily distribution were doing so with the approval of, if not appointment by, the apostles. When their competence was overwhelmed by the rapid growth of the church, the situation threatened to require a more hands-on role for the apostles, which would pull them away from the best use of their time, devoting themselves to prayer and to teaching and preaching about Jesus.

4. To avoid that, the apostles call all the disciples together and instruct them to choose seven men of good reputation who were full of the Spirit and wisdom to whom the apostles will delegate responsibility for the daily distribution. Presumably to remove any concern that the Hellenistic widows would be discriminated against in the daily distribution, perhaps suggesting that was an underlying suspicion about their having been neglected, the disciples chose seven men from the Hellenistic group. This is suggested by the fact they all have Greek names which, except for Philip, were unlikely to be used by Palestinian Jews.⁷¹

5. They chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus. They were set before the apostles who formally "appointed them to their task by praying for them and placing their hands upon them."⁷²

a. All seven men are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (v. 3). Here Stephen is said to be a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Note that this is prior to his appointment by the apostles. This "sets the stage for the description of his wider ministry in 6:8-8:1."⁷³ Philip is later called "the evangelist, who was one of the Seven" (21:8) and is described as living in Caesarea and having four unmarried daughters who prophesied (21:9). He figures prominently in Acts 8.

⁶⁹ Longenecker, 805.

⁷⁰ Schnabel, 331.

⁷¹ Marshall (1980), 127.

⁷² Marshall (1980), 127.

⁷³ Bock, 261.

b. We know little about the other five. They are not mentioned again by name in the NT. Luke notes that Nicolaus was a proselyte from Antioch, meaning was a Gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch before his conversion to Christ.

6. The seven men appointed in Acts 6:1-7 to handle the daily distribution are not called deacons, and their qualifications are more general (good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom) than those given later in 1 Tim. 3:8-12, but by the late second century they were understood to be the first deacons.⁷⁴ That conclusion was no doubt based in part on the presence in the text of two cognates of *diakonos* (deacon): *diakonia* (serving) in v. 1 and *diakoneō* (serve) in v. 2. Benjamin Merkle concludes, "The seven men chosen in Acts 6, while not specifically called deacons, provide the closest parallel to the Christian office."⁷⁵

7. As a result of this solution, which brought peace and freed the apostles to focus on prayer and the ministry of the word, the teaching and preaching of the gospel continued to increase with great effect. The number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many priests converted. Many of these may have come from the ordinary priests living in the countryside who worked in a trade except for the two weeks in the year when they served in the temple.⁷⁶

II. The Gospel Spreads in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee (6:8-9:31)

A. Stephen is seized (6:8-15)

1. Stephen is here said to be full of grace and power, and he is performing great wonders and signs among the people. His ministry obviously goes beyond administration of the daily distribution to the widows, and his works provide him evangelistic opportunities. He is "making waves," most significantly among the Hellenistic Jews, the group from which he came.

2. Members of one or more Greek-speaking synagogues in which Stephen probably had spoken about Christ confronted him, but they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking, meaning they could not get the better of him in debate. That did not sit well with them, so they induced men to claim that Stephen had spoken blasphemous words against Moses and God. They used that charge to work up the people, the elders, and the scribes to the point that they dragged Stephen before the Council.

⁷⁴ See, e.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, ch. 12:10 ("Stephen, who was chosen the first deacon by the apostles"), Book IV, ch. 15:1 ("Luke also has recorded that Stephen, who was the first elected into the diaconate by the apostles"); Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against All Heresies* ("He was one of the seven deacons who were appointed in the Acts of the Apostles") [The work is thought to be related to the lost treatise of the early third-century theologian Hippolytus of Rome titled the *Syntagma* – see Reinhard Plummer, *Early Christian Authors on Samaritans and Samaritanism* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 32]; Cyprian, *Epistles of Cyprian*, Epistle LXIV:3 ("while apostles appointed for themselves deacons after the ascent of the Lord into heaven"). This understanding is reflected in Eusebius's early fourth-century work, *The History of the Church*, Bk. 2:1 ("By prayer and laying on of the apostles' hands they were appointed to the diaconate").

⁷⁵ Benjamin Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 240.

⁷⁶ Schnabel, 336; Bock, 265.

3. There they brought false witnesses who charged that Stephen was always bad-mouthing the temple and the law by saying Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs that Moses had delivered. As Keener notes, "'Customs' (Acts 6:14) here must be roughly equivalent to 'law' (6:13), since they were passed down by Moses (cf. 2 Macc 12:38)."⁷⁷ Longenecker comments:

The testimony of witnesses who repeated what they had heard a defendant say was part of Jewish court procedure in a trial for blasphemy (cf. *m. Sanh.* 7:59). But this testimony against Stephen, Luke tells us, was false. "We have heard him say," they claimed, "that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us" (v. 14). Like the similar charge against Jesus (Mt 26:61; Mk 14:58; cf. Jn 2:19-22), its falseness lay not so much in its wholesale fabrication but in its subtle and deadly misrepresentation of what was intended. Undoubtedly Stephen spoke about a recasting of Jewish life in terms of the supremacy of Jesus the Messiah. And it cannot be doubted that Stephen expressed in his manner and message something of the subsidiary significance of the Jerusalem temple and the Mosaic law, as did Jesus before him (cf. e.g., Mk 2:23-28; 3:1-6; 7:14-15; 10:5-9). But this is not the same as advocating the destruction of the temple or the changing of the law (though on these matters we must allow Stephen to speak for himself in Ac 7).⁷⁸

4. As the Council members gazed at Stephen after the charges were leveled, they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. This probably means there was a supernatural radiance to it indicative of a special closeness to God. Whatever they made of this phenomenon, the Council forged ahead with the inquisition.

B. Stephen's speech (7:1-53)

1. Stephen's response to the charge that he is an enemy of the Jerusalem temple and the law/traditions of Moses is more relevant than it may seem at first blush. In summarizing what the law teaches about Israel's history from Abraham to the building of the temple, he not only reveals his high regard for the law, having devoted the time to learn it so well, but his overview shows that as God's work has unfolded through the ages, he has worked with his people in different ways (no dwelling, tabernacle, temple) and different places (Mesopotamia [Ur], Haran, Egypt, Midian, the wilderness, and Canaan).

a. So it is not unreasonable to think the temple he established in Jerusalem was part of this unfolding work, a prescribed but temporary form of relating, rather than an essential and indispensable endpoint. Seeing it as a waystation in salvation history is consistent with the flow of history revealed in the very law they venerate.

b. He drives this home at the end of his speech by citing Scripture to the effect that God does not really dwell in manmade temples; he is far too great for such a limitation (vv. 48-50). Referring to Isa. 66:1-2, he says, "Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made

⁷⁷ Keener, 2:1318.

⁷⁸ Longenecker, 813-814.

by hands, as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?'"

c. Contrary to how he had been characterized, it is not about "destroying" the temple in the sense of attacking what God intends should continue. It is about fulfillment pursuant to the intention of God; it is about the planned obsolescence of the old covenant and its associated cult. It is his opponents who are resisting God.

2. Along that line, Stephen also notes in his speech the persistent resistance by the people of Israel to God's messengers and agents. The patriarchs opposed Joseph, and the people fought Moses at nearly every turn. They rejected him in Egypt initially, and even after he led them out of Egypt following his time in Midian, they refused to obey him and turned to idol worship. He reminds them that it was Moses, the hero of Israelite history, who said, "God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers." The fact is that he has done that in the Lord Jesus Christ, and true to how the ancients resisted Moses, Stephen's opponents are resisting the one about whom Moses spoke.

3. I suspect Stephen realizes his fate is sealed, that this is not an honest hearing by men open to the truth. At the very end of his speech, he goes fully on the offensive based on his rehearsal of Israelite history. He says in reference to the message of Jesus for which he is being persecuted (vv. 51-53), "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." As you might imagine, that was not well received.

C. The stoning of Stephen (7:54-60)

1. Stephen's words enraged the Council. Luke says "they ground their teeth at him," referring to the visceral, tight-jawed grimace of someone who is infuriated. But Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit, was given a vision, was allowed to peer into the heavenly realm where he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at his right hand. That Jesus was standing rather than sitting, as usually described, may have been to indicate his readiness to receive Stephen.

2. When Stephen announced his vision, that he saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, confirming Jesus' exalted status as presented in the gospel, that was all the enraged Council could take. At that, they started screaming, covered their ears to protect from hearing any more of what they considered blasphemy, and rushed him. They dragged him outside the city and stoned him. Stephen is the first Christian martyr, killed for trying to share the truth with a people who hated it.

3. Verse 58b notes that the witnesses, who would be participating in the actual stoning, laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. They wanted to be unencumbered by their clothing so they could perform their gruesome task with appropriate

vigor. This is the first mention of Saul. Being from Tarsus in Cilicia, Saul was no doubt familiar with the circle of Stephen's opponents. "He did not actually take part in the stoning, although he approved what was done."⁷⁹

4. While he was being stoned to death, Stephen called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He then fell to his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them," after which he died. You see, the strong things he said to his inquisitors were said not because he had ill will toward them but because he loved them. He was seeking to wake them up that they might turn and be saved. That is clear from his prayer for them, those killing him. This, of course, echoes the Lord's words in Lk. 23:34 (note there is a textual issue with that verse).

5. In the first century, Israel was occupied and under the control of the Romans who prohibited them from administering the death penalty (Jn. 18:31),⁸⁰ except in cases where the sanctity of the temple had been violated (Acts 21:28). Whether this execution was a "mob action" instigated by the Council or an official act of the Council beyond its legal authority, the Roman authorities apparently were willing to ignore it, perhaps because they could defend their inaction should they be called to account by claiming it was the best course for maintaining order in the province.

D. Saul ravages the church (8:1-3)

1. Luke spells out that Saul approved of Stephen's execution. He then explains that on that day there arose a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem and all were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

a. The persecution probably was focused on the Hellenistic Jewish Christians, those in Stephen's category, as the Jewish leaders could claim they differed from the Hebraic Jewish Christians and thus demonize them without having to risk taking on the entire group of disciples. But the persecution against them may have been sufficiently concerning to cause a large portion of even the Hebraic Jewish Christians ("all" in a hyperbolic sense) to lay low in the countryside and towns around Jerusalem, perhaps staying with other believers or relatives.

b. The apostles remained in the city, but we do not know under what trials or circumstances. Judging from what Luke writes subsequently, the Hebraic Jewish Christians returned, whereas the Hellenistic Jewish Christians seemingly stayed away. Longenecker states, "From this time onward . . . the church at Jerusalem seems to have been largely, if not entirely, devoid of Hellenistic Jewish Christians."⁸¹

c. The fact this persecution dispersed the disciples throughout Judea and Samaria reflects the Lord's words in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit

⁷⁹ Marshall (1980), 150.

⁸⁰ Craig Keener states in *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 2:1109, "Most scholars thus currently recognize that the Sanhedrin lacked the legal authority to execute prisoners in this period (Josephus *Ant.* 20.200)."

⁸¹ Longenecker, 834.

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." God is at work even in the darkness of persecution.

2. Despite the danger of doing so, some devout men, presumably some fellow Jewish Christians, gave Stephen a proper burial and mourned loudly over him. If the rabbinic prohibition of public lamentation for a person executed by stoning that is expressed in a later Jewish writing (*m. Sanh.* 6:5-6) was in effect at this time, "the 'great lamentation' . . . may have been a public protest by the people who buried Stephen and who disagreed with what the Jewish authorities had done."⁸²

3. Saul was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia and a Roman citizen. He was a Pharisee and a scholar of Judaism, having been a leading student of the renowned Rabbi Gamaliel. At this time, he began harming the church severely by going to the various homes in which believers were meeting and dragging off both men and women to put in prison for interrogation and ultimately sentencing probably ranging from the forty lashes minus one to death.⁸³ Saul was convinced the Christians were heretics and deceivers who had to be punished and silenced.

4. Saul is, of course, better known as Paul; Saul being his Jewish name and Paul being the Greek equivalent that he would have commonly used in the Greco-Roman world of his day. Luke refers to him only as Saul prior to his conversion in Acts 9 and then *usually* refers to him as Paul, but there are exceptions in Acts 9 through 13. Acts 13:9 states, "But Saul, who was also called Paul." Though many think God changed Saul's name to Paul at his conversion that does not appear to be the case.

E. Philip proclaims Christ in Samaria (8:4-8)

1. Those scattered from Jerusalem throughout Judea and Samaria went about preaching the word. Philip, one of the Seven, went to "the city" or "a city" (textual issue) of Samaria and preached to them the Christ. In either case, it was not a city named Samaria as no such city existed at that time. If it is "*the city*," it may refer to the city of Sebaste, which had been rebuilt by Herod the Great in honor of Augustus.⁸⁴ Polhill doubts it was Sebaste because its population was predominantly Gentile pagan rather than those of Samaritan descent and religious persuasion.⁸⁵ If it is "*a city*," the identity is more ambiguous.

2. Jews viewed Samaritans as somewhat in between Jews and Gentiles. Polhill writes:

They were descended from the northern tribes of Israel, the old kingdom of "Israel" that had fallen to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Those who were not taken captive to Assyria but remained in the land intermarried extensively with the native Canaanite population and the peoples whom the Assyrians resettled in the conquered territory. These Samaritan descendants of the old northern tribes

⁸² Schnabel, 394.

⁸³ Schnabel, 395.

⁸⁴ NET note.

⁸⁵ Polhill, 214.

considered themselves still to be the people of God. They had their own form of the Pentateuch for their holy Scriptures, circumcised their sons, and built a temple on Mt. Gerizim to rival the one in Jerusalem (cf. John 4:20). The Hasmonean king John Hyrcanus (135-104 B.C.) destroyed their temple and made them subservient to the Jews. Later liberated by the Romans from Jewish domination, they continued to worship God in their own independent manner and to look for the *taheb*, a prophetlike messiah who would restore the true worship on Gerazim, a messianic expectation based on Deut 18:15 (cf. John 4:25). The Jewish prejudice against the Samaritans is well-known. To the Jews the Samaritans were half-breeds and heretics. Philip's venture into a Samaritan mission was a radical step toward Stephen's vision of a gospel free of nationalistic prejudices.⁸⁶

3. The crowds were spellbound, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. He was doing conspicuous exorcisms and healing those who were paralyzed or lame. As you can imagine, there was much joy in that city, but nothing is said yet about their believing the gospel.

F. Simon the magician believes (8:9-25)

1. Luke tells us there was a man named Simon who for a long time had practiced magic in the city and amazed the people with it. He claimed to be someone great, and everyone paid attention to him and was convinced he had divine powers. But when Philip came, the people paid attention to him (v. 6), and when they believed Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

2. The specifics of Simon's acts that amazed people are not given, but in "the ancient world, magic – what today we would call witchcraft, sorcery, or the occult – was based on the view that human beings, gods, demons, and the visible world are all connected by sympathies and antipathies in ways that can be influenced by rituals involving incantations and manipulation of objects."⁸⁷ Engaging in magical practices was prohibited in the Mosaic law (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:10-12).

3. Simon himself believed and was baptized. He continued with Philip and was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.

4. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard the remarkable news that Samaria had received the word of God, that people there had believed the gospel and been baptized, they sent Peter and John to them, probably to confirm and assess what was happening. We read in vv. 15-16 that after they arrived, they prayed that the Samaritan converts might receive the Holy Spirit because he had not yet fallen on any of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The apostles then laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

a. Despite the fact the Samaritans believed Philip's message about Christ and were baptized, God temporarily withheld the gift of the Spirit from them. I believe he did so

⁸⁶ Polhill, 214-215.

⁸⁷ Schnabel, 407.

to teach them an important lesson. Contrary to what you may have heard, what was withheld from the Samaritans was the same gift of the Spirit normally received at baptism.

(1) This is indicated by the fact the text speaks repeatedly of them receiving or being given "the Holy Spirit," not simply a gift given *by* the Holy Spirit. There is a difference between the Spirit, who is a divine person, and the gifts the Spirit gives, between the Spirit himself and how he manifests his presence. Receipt of the Spirit is throughout the New Testament an accompaniment and indication of salvation. His presence in a person is regeneration and spiritual life.

(2) That what was withheld from the Samaritans was the gift of the Spirit normally received at baptism is clear from 8:16. Luke says the Spirit had "not yet" come upon the Samaritans (contrary to what one would normally expect regarding baptized believers) and that they had "only" been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (contrary to what normally happens in baptism).

b. The Spirit was withheld (meaning the normal timing of baptism and receipt of the Spirit was altered) until Hebraic Jewish apostles from the Jerusalem church came to Samaria. That was done, I am convinced, as an object lesson for the Samaritans, to teach them that the Jews were the true Messianic community, the ones through whom the Messiah came and to whom he was first preached. Philip, being a Hellenistic Jew, a "Greekified" Jew, would not send a clear message in that regard. Despite the longstanding claim by the Samaritans that they and not the Jews were the true people of God (see, e.g., Jn. 4:22), they were shown through this episode to be no different than the Gentiles in terms of salvation history. The believing Jews were God's olive tree and the Samaritans, like the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11-24), were wild shoots that were grafted into that tree.

c. This lesson was intended to prevent the Samaritans from starting a competing Samaritan church, as they had done with Judaism. Once the point about Jewish priority in salvation history had been made, Samaritan conversions followed the normal pattern (i.e., the Spirit was received upon baptism).

5. Now when Simon *saw* that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

a. The implication of Simon "seeing" that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands is that, as in Acts 2, the Spirit immediately manifested his presence in the new Christians by enabling and prompting them to speak in tongues or do some other miraculous feat. In those cases, and two others (Acts 10 and 19) we will discuss in due course, the Spirit chose to mark his indwelling presence, the common experience of Christians, by miraculous manifestations.

(1) The question that arises is: If the believers in Acts 2 and 8 (and 10, and 19) received the gift of the Spirit or baptism in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) that all Christians normally receive at conversion, why in those cases did the Spirit immediately signify by miraculous

manifestation his having come to dwell in those new Christians? Why in those cases but not in the countless others?

(2) We are not told directly, but I think the answer is suggested by the texts. It is not that these people received some work of the Spirit that was unrelated to salvation, something separate and distinct from the indwelling Spirit common to all Christians, but that the Spirit on those particular occasions marked his indwelling presence with miraculous manifestations in order to send a message. And the message he was sending is tied to the fact each of these conversions marked the first extension of the gospel to a new, definable group. "These four groups (including the Samaritans) represent people who are distinct from a salvation-historical perspective."⁸⁸

(3) Notice that Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19 each involved multiple conversions of members of a group – Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and disciples of John – rather than conversions of single individuals. As *group* conversions, they readily serve as representatives of the group to which they belong. The giving of the Spirit to these *group representatives* signified or confirmed the availability of the gospel's blessings to all members of the respective groups (that significance is alluded to in Acts 11:18, 15:8), and for that reason the Spirit's indwelling presence was specially and objectively indicated by miraculous manifestations. That signaled unmistakably that each of those groups were indeed to be part of the harvest.

(4) The availability of the gospel's blessings to these groups having been confirmed objectively, there is no hint that subsequent conversions within the groups were accompanied by such manifestations (see, e.g., Acts 2:41, 4:4, 5:14, 8:25 [conversions implied], 8:38-39, 9:17-18, 11:20-21, 13:12, 13:48, 14:1, 14:21, 16:15, 16:32-33, 17:12, 17:34, 18:8, 22:16). That is why Peter referred all the way back to the events of Pentecost when explaining his experience at Cornelius's house (Acts 11:15-17). It was obviously quite rare for speaking in tongues to accompany the initial giving of the Spirit, the receipt of the Spirit on conversion.

(5) This does not mean that later converts within a group were permanently deprived of such spiritual gifts. On the contrary, Paul and some of the Corinthians clearly exercised the gift of tongues. It simply means that those later converts did not receive such gifts (or were not moved to exercise them) at the time they initially received the Spirit. So in their case, the gift and its exercise did not function as a marker of the Spirit's arrival. It did not serve as a sign that the blessings of the gospel were available for that group; that had already occurred.

b. Simon's offer of money to purchase from Peter and John the ability to give the Holy Spirit to anyone on whom he lays his hands is sinful because it is an attempt, however misguided, to gain control over God, to ensure by purchase that God will bestow the Spirit on whomever Simon, no doubt for a fee, chooses to give it. He is expecting the apostles to contractually bind God to enter into his service, as though they ever had such a right or ability. It is a manifestation of Simon's magical view of the spiritual realm, that spiritual powers can be manipulated and controlled to serve those in the know.

⁸⁸ Schnabel, 412.

6. Peter rebukes him sharply for even thinking he could buy the gift of God with money. He indicates the gravity of the sin by saying "May your silver perish with you," which suggests he is worthy of divine destruction, perhaps like Ananias and Sapphira. What Simon sees as a power belonging to Peter and John, Peter says is a gift given by God and thus something that is not available for purchase. God's gifts can only be received with gratitude not peddled like a worldly commodity.

7. Peter then tells him (vv. 21-23), "You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

a. Having recognized and accepted the God of the gospel, the holy and righteous God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Simon soon lapsed into his pagan perception, seeing God as a heavenly power he potentially could manipulate for personal gain. With his heart in that state, he had fallen away and no longer had a share in the blessings of Christ.

b. That is why Peter tells him to repent and to pray for forgiveness. That is the way back for Christians who have been ensnared in sin. The qualification that he pray to the Lord that, "if possible," he may be forgiven highlights that forgiveness always remains a matter of God's grace. It is never to be presumed upon as an entitlement.

c. The statement that Simon is "in the gall of bitterness" is probably a way of suggesting that he is in a condition that will produce a super bitter experience (gall itself being a bitter substance). Being in the bond of iniquity puts one in bitter gall, in a terrible state, hence the urgency of repentance.

8. In response, Simon asked Peter and John to pray for him to the Lord, that what Peter said may not happen to him. He wants to avoid the dire fate Peter has indicated will be his unless he repents, and to that end, he solicits their prayers. Marshall comments, "There is no hint in the text that his request was anything but sincere, however much or little he may have understood all that was said. . . . [T]he story indicates there is a possibility of forgiveness even for serious sin committed by a baptized person."⁸⁹

9. After giving parting exhortations to the believers, Peter and John headed back to Jerusalem. On the way, they preached the gospel to many Samaritan villages. They fully endorse and are extending the Samaritan mission.

G. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40)

1. Philip is told by an angel to go south to the desert or wilderness road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza, and he rises and sets out. We are not told where Philip was when he received that divine directive. Philip meets an Ethiopian eunuch, an official in charge of all the treasury of "the Kandake" (NIV, NJB; or "Candace"), which is the title of the queen of the

⁸⁹ Marshall (1980), 159-160.

Ethiopians (like Pharaoh). He was returning to his country after having gone to Jerusalem to worship, so he would have taken the desert road to Gaza and then traveled south from there.

a. "Ethiopia" here is not the modern country of Ethiopia. "[It] is to the south of Egypt (Ezek. 29:10) and is known as Cush in the earlier books of the OT (Gen. 2:13). It is in what today is known as the Sudan, and it was in the Nubian kingdom, whose capital was Meroë."⁹⁰ As an Ethiopian, he is probably black.

b. The fact the "eunuch" had gone to Jerusalem to worship and possessed a copy of Isaiah, which may have been difficult for a non-Jew to get,⁹¹ suggests he was a proselyte, a Gentile convert to Judaism (like Nicolaus in 6:5). Some balk at this claim because Deut. 23:1 indicates that no emasculated male could be included within the Jewish religious community, but the term "eunuch" had come to be used for high military and political officials without any implication of emasculation.⁹² Thus, Longenecker concludes, "We are probably justified in taking 'eunuch' here to be a governmental title in an Oriental kingdom."⁹³

c. That Luke does not intend the reader to understand this eunuch as a non-Jew, as a Gentile who had not converted to Judaism, is further suggested by the emphasis he places on the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10 and following) as a new extension of the gospel to Gentiles. Schnabel comments:

The narrative so far in Acts has reported the conversions of Palestinian Jews in Jerusalem (2:41; 5:14) and in Judea (5:16), of diaspora Jews in Jerusalem (6:1), and of Samaritans (8:12). A culturally consistent story line makes it plausible to assume that the Ethiopian official converted in 8:35-39 is a proselyte, followed by the conversion of Cornelius, a Gentile God-fearer living in Caesarea (10:1-48). That episode, then, is followed by the conversion of a number of Greeks in Antioch (11:20-21). In terms of Luke's concerns, the broad and detailed narrative of the conversion of Cornelius through Peter's preaching in 10:1 – 11:18, with the three fold telling of the divine revelation that instructed Peter not to treat Gentiles as impure, does not make much sense unless Luke wants his readers to understand that the conversion of Cornelius represents a fundamentally new step in the movement of the gospel of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem via Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth (1:8).⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Bock, 341.

⁹¹ Longenecker, 845; William L. Larkin, Jr., *Acts*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 133 (fn.). But perhaps that would be more a matter of wealth than of being a Jew.

⁹² Johannes Schneider, "εὐνοῦχος" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 2:766. The following clauses ("a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure") need not mean "eunuch" is intended literally. They simply may provide additional information about the kind of official (eunuch) he was. Indeed, William Larkin, Jr. comments in *Acts*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 133 (footnote), "Luke's clarifying description seems to point to eunuch as high official, not castrated, and therefore allowably a proselyte."

⁹³ Longenecker, 845; see also, Fitzmyer, 412; Larkin, 132-133 (footnote).

⁹⁴ Schnabel, 422.

2. The official was sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah, and the Spirit told Philip to go over and join the chariot. "The chariot would have been in fact an ox-drawn wagon and would not have moved at much more than walking pace."⁹⁵ People in ancient times generally read aloud rather than silently,⁹⁶ and as Philip approached the chariot, he heard the voice of someone reading Isaiah. He asked the official, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Marshall comments:

[T]he eunuch confessed his need for an interpreter and invited Philip to undertake the task. He will have presumed, perhaps from his clothing or accent, that he was a Jew and therefore probably able to help him. But the general principle which he announces is significant. The Old Testament cannot be fully understood without interpretation. It needs a key to unlock the doors of its mysterious sayings. Jesus had provided such a key for his disciples (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-47). Now Philip was being called upon to help the eunuch in the same way.⁹⁷

3. It "just so happens" that the official is reading Isa. 53:7-8, which is a great place to launch into teaching about Jesus: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." The specific question the official asks is whether the prophet is speaking of himself or someone else, and Philip proceeds to explain to him that the prophet is speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, he tells him the gospel, the good news about Jesus.

4. Having heard the gospel, when the chariot comes to some water the official says, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" So obviously Philip's presentation of the good news about Jesus included the fact one is to respond to that news by submitting to baptism. This is understood by the reader from Luke's record of the events of Pentecost in Acts 2 and Samaria in Acts 8. The official wants to know if there is anything, subjectively or objectively, that makes him ineligible to respond in the prescribed way.

5. That there is nothing making him ineligible is evident in the fact Philip baptizes him. He is eligible from the subjective side because he has believed the gospel and repented; he is eligible from the objective side because the gospel is for all people, whosoever will.

6. Verse 37 is not present in the earliest and most reliable early manuscripts, which is why it is omitted, bracketed, or relegated to a footnote in most modern translations. It is significant, however, because it reflects an early baptismal confession. It seems an early scribe made express what was understood and assumed in the original text, adding, "Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart you may.' And he replied, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'"

⁹⁵ Marshall (1980), 162.

⁹⁶ Marshall (1980), 163 (fn. 1).

⁹⁷ Marshall (1980), 163.

7. The fact the verb *baptizō* carries the idea of immersion⁹⁸ and that they both went down into the water suggests the baptism was by immersion. Wayne Grudem remarks: "Apparently neither of them thought that sprinkling or pouring a handful of water from the container of drinking water that would have been carried in the chariot was enough to constitute baptism. Rather, they waited until there was a body of water near the road."⁹⁹ Polhill writes, "Since the verb employed is *baptizō*, which always carried the idea of total submersion, there is no reason to assume that the eunuch was baptized in any other way than the consistent New Testament pattern of immersion."¹⁰⁰

8. With the completion of the official's conversion in his baptism, Philip is whisked away by the Spirit. The official, now forgiven and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, went on his way rejoicing. Philip showed up in Azotus, near the Mediterranean coast, then he preached his way through the various towns until coming to Caesarea. We see in Acts 21:8 that Philip, there called "the evangelist," is living in Caesarea.

H. The conversion of Saul (9:1-19a)

1. Luke reported in Acts 8:3 that Saul, after the stoning of Stephen, began harming the church severely by going to the various homes in which believers were meeting and dragging off both men and women to put in prison (for interrogation and ultimately sentencing). He notes here that Saul was still breathing out threats and murder against the Lord's disciples. He was hostile to believers, whom he saw as heretics, issuing threats against them and advocating for their execution, whenever and however that could be accomplished.

2. Saul's zeal against Christians drove him to seek to expand the persecution beyond Jerusalem and Judea. He secured from the high priest letters to the synagogues in Damascus giving him authority to bring to Jerusalem as prisoners any he found, men or women, who belonged to the Way, the Christian faith. Damascus, about 135 miles north-northeast of Jerusalem, was within the Roman province of Syria, and at the time had a considerable Jewish population. The Christian community there would have been founded by the Hellenistic Jewish Christians who had fled Jerusalem during the persecution. This was probably around A.D. 33.

3. As Saul approached Damascus, a light from heaven shone around him, and as Ananias states in v. 17, the Lord Jesus appeared to him on the road. Falling to the ground, Saul hears Jesus saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" and when he asks who he is he is told, "I am the Lord Jesus whom you are persecuting." Jesus tells him to rise and enter the city where he will be told what he is to do. Luke notes that Saul's traveling companions heard the voice (or sound) but, in contrast to Saul, did not see Jesus. Saul rises from the ground but is now

⁹⁸ The *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1:144, defines *baptizō* as "dip, immerse, submerge, baptize." The author, G. R. Beasley-Murray, points out that *baptizō* is the word used in the LXX for Naaman's sevenfold dipping or immersion in the Jordan River in 2 Ki. 5:14. He states (p. 144), "Despite assertions to the contrary, it seems that *baptizō*, both in Jewish and Christian contexts, normally meant 'immerse', and that even when it became a technical term for baptism, the thought of immersion remains."

⁹⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 1197.

¹⁰⁰ Polhill, 226.

blind. He is led by the hand into Damascus where for three days he remained blind and neither ate nor drank.

a. Jesus' identification with his disciples is evident in his statement that Saul is persecuting *him*. To persecute Christians is to persecute the Lord. The church is the present embodiment of Christ on earth. That perspective may help us when we are tempted to mistreat a brother or sister in Christ.

b. Luke reports Paul's account of this episode in Acts 22:6-11 and 26:12-18. Different details are provided in the accounts, but they are all consistent. For example, 26:14 notes that not only Paul but his companions also fell to the ground, that the voice spoke to him *in Hebrew*, and that the Lord's statement included, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Acts 22:8 says that Jesus identified himself as "Jesus *the Nazarene*," and 26:16-18 include a description of the Lord's purposes for Paul. There is no requirement that the account of an event always must be given in the identical way with the same level of detail.

c. The biggest question of conflict is between 9:7 where the companions are said to hear the voice and 22:9 where the companions arguably are said *not* to hear the voice, but as many English translations indicate (NAS, NASU, NET, NIV, ESV), not "hearing" in 22:9 can have the sense of not understanding. Another possibility is that the companions in 9:7 heard a "sound" (a meaning of *phōnē*) but, according to 22:9, did not hear a "voice" in the sense of an intelligible, communicative sound.

4. There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord told him in a vision to go and look for Saul of Tarsus at Judas's house on the street called Straight because Saul was praying and had seen in a vision Ananias laying his hands on him so that he might regain his sight. Ananias was concerned about this instruction because he knew how Saul had persecuted the saints in Jerusalem and that he had come to Damascus with authority to arrest Christians there. The Lord reassures him, saying, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." The fact the Lord will show Saul how much he must suffer for the sake of his name ensures that Saul will have no further appetite for causing others to do so.

5. Ananias locates Saul at the house and lays his hands on him, saying, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately he regained his sight, and though many insist that he also at that time received the Holy Spirit, the text says nothing about that. Instead, it says "then he rose and was baptized." From what Luke has written previously about the connection between baptism and receiving the Spirit, the reader is to understand that Saul received the Spirit in conjunction with his baptism. Holladay remarks:

Since "receiving sight" and being "filled with the Holy Spirit" are coordinate benefits (v. 17), the respective means of achieving each are given in v. 18. His sight is restored when whatever covered Saul's eyes falls away; he is filled with

the Holy Spirit by being baptized. So understood, Saul's reception of the Holy Spirit is not exceptional but conforms to what occurred at Pentecost (2:18).¹⁰¹

6. After he was baptized, presumably by Ananias, Paul ends his fast and eats some food, which naturally strengthened him. The food may have been provided by his host, Judas, or possibly by Ananias if Paul had gone to stay with his new brother in Christ.

I. Saul proclaims Jesus in synagogues (9:19b-22)

1. Saul spent some days with the disciples in Damascus and immediately proclaimed in the synagogues that Jesus is the "Son of God." Marshall states that this title "expressed the position of Jesus as the Messiah (2 Sa. 7:14) who had been exalted by God to sit at his right hand (Ps. 2:7)."¹⁰² Schnabel adds that the title "here is not simply synonymous with the title 'Messiah' (ὁ χριστός; v. 22) but expresses 'Jesus' unique standing and intimate favor with God, and God's direct involvement in Jesus' redemptive work'" (quoting Hurtado).¹⁰³ Those who heard him were amazed by his turnaround, knowing that he had persecuted Christians in Jerusalem and had come to Damascus to arrest them.

2. Saul would have known fundamental aspects of the Christian faith – such as the claim Jesus is the Son of God – from his opposition to it, and the Lord's appearance to him had convinced him that the Christians were correct. This is not inconsistent with his declaration in Gal. 1:11-12 that he did not receive the gospel he preached from a man but through a revelation of Jesus Christ. The gospel of which he speaks in Gal. 1:11-12 is more complete or developed than the profound truth Jesus is the Son of God; it includes its relationship to Gentiles.

3. It appears from Gal. 1:15-17 that Paul quickly left Damascus for Arabia,¹⁰⁴ where he remained for an unspecified time and then returned to Damascus. Luke does not mention the sojourn in Arabia but emphasizes Paul's growth in strength and how he confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ (v. 22). According to Gal. 1:18, it was not until three years after his conversion – the phrase could mean anywhere from two to three years¹⁰⁵ – that he returned to Jerusalem. This fits with Acts 9:23-26a, where Luke says that "when many days had passed," the Jews in Damascus plotted to kill Paul which led to his escape and return to Jerusalem.

¹⁰¹ Holladay, 199. See also Dennis Gaertner, *Acts*, CPNIVC (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1993), 158 ("Apparently it was in his baptism that Saul received the Spirit."); David J. Williams, *Acts*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 172 ("Paul's filling with the Spirit is better linked with his baptism"); Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 177 ("That he also received the Holy Spirit is implied in v. 17, and should probably be connected with Baptism rather than with the laying on of hands."); R. C. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961 [1934]), 366 ("And he is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, this supreme gift is to be bestowed upon him by means of the baptism that followed immediately.").

¹⁰² Marshall (1980), 174.

¹⁰³ Schnabel, 453.

¹⁰⁴ "Arabia" refers to Nabataea, the area next to Damascus (in Syria) that was ruled by King Aretas IV. At the time to which Paul refers, Aretas also may have controlled Damascus itself, but even if he did not, he exercised strong political influence in the city. See Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 513, 521.

¹⁰⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 108.

J. Saul escapes from Damascus (9:23-25)

1. After many days of being unable to counter Paul's arguments that Jesus was the Christ, the Jewish leaders in Damascus plotted to kill him. Paul learned of their plan, and though they were watching for him at the city gates 24/7, he escaped their plot by being lowered in a basket at night through an opening in the city wall.

2. Paul refers to this incident in 2 Cor. 11:32-33. He writes, "At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me,³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands." So apparently the Jewish leaders were able to enlist the aid of the governing powers in trying to kill Paul.

K. Saul in Jerusalem (9:26-31)

1. When Paul returned to Jerusalem as a Christian after his absence of two to three years, the disciples were afraid of him. Knowing the intensity of his hostility to the faith when he left for Damascus, they thought he was only pretending to be a disciple, perhaps to gather intel to be used to attack the church. But Barnabas, the cousin of John Mark (Col. 4:10), who in Acts 4 sold a field and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution, brought him to the apostles and vouched for him. He told them that Paul had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and that in Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. He was accepted by the apostles and preached boldly in Jerusalem in the name of the Lord.

2. Paul in Gal. 1:18-19 specifies that he saw only two apostles on that visit, Peter and James. (By "saw" he may mean had significant engagement with rather than merely laying eyes on them.) Since Luke wanted to highlight that this visit marked Paul's acceptance by the church in Jerusalem, he speaks generally of "the apostles," presumably taking Peter and James as their representatives. Paul, on the other hand, was rebutting any suggestion by the Judaizers that he had received his gospel from some lesser or deviant apostle. He stresses that the only options from that visit were Peter and James, both of whom were respected by the Judaizers.

3. Paul disputed with the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem, the same crowd that had instigated the execution of Stephen that triggered the persecution of the church there. So it is no surprise that they were seeking to kill him. When the Christians learned of their intention, they brought Paul to Caesarea and put him on a ship to Tarsus, his hometown in Cilicia. Paul says in Gal. 1:18 that he stayed with Peter fifteen days. Here we are given more detail of his departure.

4. When Paul later addresses the mob in Jerusalem that wanted to kill him (Acts 22:17-21), we learn the additional detail that his leaving Jerusalem was in accordance with a vision he received while praying in the temple. He was told by the Lord to leave quickly because they would not accept his testimony about him. The Lord told him (22:21), "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles."

5. As Paul says in Gal. 1:21, after his brief visit in Jerusalem, he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. Marshall remarks:

The fact the two regions are named in that order in Gal. 1:21 (cf. Acts 15:23) need not mean that Paul worked in Syria before going to Cilicia; in fact, his work in Antioch, the capital of Syria, followed his time in Tarsus. At this time, Syria and Cilicia formed one province, and it was natural to name the more important partner first, without implying that Paul necessarily visited the two areas in the same order.¹⁰⁶

6. On the brink of the report of the church's expansion to the Gentiles, Luke provides a general summary of the state of play. Following Paul's departure to Tarsus, the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was being built up. Though no specific mention has been made of evangelism in Galilee, the church had spread there as well, as one would imagine. Living their lives with reverence for Christ and in the comfort or encouragement provided by the Holy Spirit, the church multiplied.

7. Probable partial chronology of Paul's life:

conversion (Acts 9:1-7)	33/34
Damascus & Arabia (Acts 9:8-25)	33/34 - 36/37
1st Jerusalem visit (Acts 9:26-29)	36/37
Tarsus (Cilicia) (Acts 9:30)	36/37 - 43/45
Peter's Gentile ministry (Acts 10 - 11)	40/41
Antioch (Syria) (Acts 11:25-26)	43/45
2d Jerusalem visit (famine) (Acts 11:30)	46/47
1st missionary journey (Acts 13-14)	47/48
Peter visits Antioch (Gal. 2:11-16)	48/49
Galatians	48/49
Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)	49
2d missionary journey (Acts 15:36 - 18:22)	49-51

III. The Gospel Spreads to the Gentiles (9:32-12:25)

A. The healing of Aeneas (9:32-35)

1. Peter was traveling among the churches outside Jerusalem, certainly teaching them truths of the faith and probably evangelizing in the areas. When visiting the Christians in Lydda, a city about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem on the road to Joppa, he discovered a man named Aeneas, probably a Christian, who had been bedridden for eight years as a result of being paralyzed.

2. Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. The command "make your bed" probably refers to the consequences of the healing, that he will henceforth be able to spread his sleeping mat on the floor without needing others to do it for him.

¹⁰⁶ Marshall (1980), 176 (fn. 3).

3. All the inhabitants of Lydda and the towns in the Plain of Sharon north of Lydda saw Aeneas walking, the latter when they would visit Lydda or when Aeneas traveled to those towns. Recognizing the great miracle, large numbers of them turned to the Lord ("all" being hyperbolic).

B. Dorcas restored to life (9:36-43)

1. Joppa was about 11 miles from Lydda on the Mediterranean coast. It was the main port city of Judea. Among the Christians in that town was a woman whose Aramaic name was Tabitha, which meant gazelle. The word for gazelle in Greek was Dorcas, so that was her Greek name. She was an exemplary Christian, someone full of good works and acts of charity, which suggests she was generous and wealthy.

2. In the time of Peter's travels, she became ill and died. Her friends ("they") prepared her body for burial, but instead of burying her promptly, they laid her body in an upper room. As bodies in upper rooms were connected to resuscitations in some OT accounts (1 Ki. 17:19 [Elijah and the widow's son]; 2 Ki. 4:10, 21 [Elisha and the Shunammite woman's son]), this may reflect a hope that God somehow would do the same for their dear sister.

3. Hearing that Peter was in nearby Lydda, the disciples in Joppa sent two men to urge Peter to come to Joppa, which he did. When he arrived, they took him to the upper room where Dorcas had been laid. The house was now filled with mourners, and the widows, who perhaps had been blessed by Dorcas's generosity, stood beside Peter weeping and showing him various garments that Dorcas had made for them, garments they may have been wearing.

4. Peter sends everyone out and kneels and prays. He then turns toward the body and says "Tabitha, arise," and she opened her eyes and sat up! Polhill comments: "As with Jairus's daughter, the widow's son at Nain, Lazarus, and Dorcas, it was not a matter of resurrection but of resuscitation, of temporary restoration of life. But all the miracles of raising from the dead are in a real sense 'signs,' pointers to the one who has power even over death and is himself the resurrection and the life for all who believe and trust in him."¹⁰⁷

5. Peter gave her his hand to help her up, and then called the saints and widows and presented her alive. The phrase "saints and widows" may mean "the saints, including the widows," but as Marshall notes, "it is not necessary to assume that Tabitha helped only Christian widows."¹⁰⁸ This great miracle became known throughout the city and led to many conversions. Luke notes that Peter stayed in Joppa for many days with a tanner named Simon. This is where he is staying when in the next section he is called to Caesarea, about 30 miles up the coast (about 65 miles northwest of Jerusalem).

C. Peter and Cornelius (10:1-8)

¹⁰⁷ Polhill, 248.

¹⁰⁸ Marshall (1980), 180.

1. Caesarea Maritima was built by Herod the Great and was the center of government for the Roman administration of Judea. A Roman centurion by the name of Cornelius was stationed there. He was a devout Jewish sympathizer who engaged in pious works like giving alms and praying, but he was not a proselyte, a full convert who had undergone circumcision. He was a God-fearing Gentile.

2. About the ninth hour (3 p.m., an hour of prayer at the temple), presumably while he was praying, Cornelius saw an angel in a vision. He was terrified, but the angel quickly assured him that God was pleased with him. He had taken favorable note of his prayers and deeds of charity (10:31), the implication being that God will grant his prayer, as he does in the unfolding narrative.

3. The angel instructed Cornelius to send for Peter in Joppa and told him precisely where he was staying, at the home of Simon the tanner, which is located by the sea. The angel indicated that Peter would present a message from the Lord by which Cornelius and his household would be saved (11:14), a message Cornelius was eager to hear (Acts 10:22, 33). When the angel left, Cornelius dispatched two servants and a soldier to invite Peter to come and told them what had happened so they could explain the request to him.

D. Peter's vision (10:9-33)

1. Around noon, as the men sent by Cornelius approached Joppa, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry, and as the food was being prepared, he fell into a trance and was given a vision of a great sheet descending from heaven by its four corners that contained all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds that were unclean under Jewish law. A voice told him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat," but Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." The voice replied, "What God has made clean, do not call common." This exchange, in substance if not identical words, occurred three times, and then the sheet was immediately taken up to heaven. In emphasizing to Peter the obsolescence of the Jewish food laws, God was freeing Peter "from any scruples about going to a Gentile home and eating whatever might be set before him."¹⁰⁹

2. As Peter was trying to make sense of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius arrived at the house. The Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." Peter went down to meet them and asked why they had come. They told him a holy angel had directed Cornelius to send for him to come to his house and hear what he had to say. The men spent the night, and the next day Peter and six Jewish Christians from Joppa headed out with Cornelius's men for Caesarea (10:23b, 45; 11:12). The trip took the whole of one day and part of the next.

3. Cornelius was expecting them and had gathered his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius fell down at his feet in an act of reverence, but Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." Peter went into the group and told them that, contrary to how they knew Jews were not allowed to associate with or visit Gentiles, God had showed him

¹⁰⁹ Marshall (1980), 186.

that he should not call any person common or unclean, meaning he should not exclude them from social interaction because they were not Jews. That is why he came when invited. He then asked Cornelius why he sent for him.

4. Cornelius explained the angelic visit that prompted the invitation and thanked Peter for coming. He then said, "Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord." They were primed to hear the word.

E. Gentiles hear the good news (10:34-43)

1. Peter begins by saying that he understands that God does not play favorites in that he accepts people of all nations on the same basis. Anyone in any nation who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God. His point is not that one can be saved apart from appropriating the atoning death of Jesus Christ but that no person is barred from accepting the gospel because of his nationality or race. In light of Christ's appearance and work, accepting the gospel is part of what it means to fear God and do what is right. Peterson remarks, "This does not mean that Cornelius was already saved before he met Peter, but that non-Jews are 'acceptable' or welcome to come to Christ on the same basis as Jews."¹¹⁰

2. These Gentiles were assumed to be generally familiar with Christ's life and ministry (10:37), but they had not heard the saving message that Cornelius had been instructed to invite Peter to deliver (10:22, 33; 11:14). At the very least, this means they had not had Christ's nature and status or the theological significance of his work proclaimed to them. Peter proceeds to tell Cornelius and the others gathered at the house that Jesus is the Spirit-anointed, miracle-working, devil-opposing Lord of all who was crucified, resurrected, and appointed as the judge of the living and the dead. He then declares (10:43) that it had been prophesied of Jesus that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins in his name.

F. The Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles (10:44-48)

1. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those hearing the message. This is a reference to Cornelius and the other Gentiles, those who were hearing the message for the first time, as identified in Acts 10:24, 33.¹¹¹

a. This is indicated by the fact the Jewish Christians present were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, who alone were reported to be speaking in tongues and extolling God (Acts 10:45-46). When Peter recounted the event to the church in Jerusalem, he specified twice that the Holy Spirit fell on *them*, meaning on the gathered Gentiles in distinction from Peter and his companions (Acts 11:15, 17). The Spirit fell on the Gentiles as he had previously fallen on the Jewish believers at Pentecost (Acts 11:15).

¹¹⁰ Peterson, 335.

¹¹¹ "The Spirit falls on all 'the hearers', i.e. Cornelius, his relatives and his friends – not Peter and the Joppa Christians, who are rather the witnesses to attest this event (*pace* Wendt, 185)." Haenchen, 353. "Only Cornelius and company receive the gift of the Spirit, permitting Peter and company to serve as objective witnesses to the phenomena." Pervo, 281. See also, Krodel, 200; Polhill, 263; Bock, 400; Longenecker, 883.

b. Peter made the same distinction when speaking of the event at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:8). Indeed, the focus of the entire Cornelius narrative is on *Gentile* acceptability to receive the gospel. It is about how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name (Acts 15:14).

2. While Peter was preaching, his words about Jesus and his announcement that forgiveness was available through faith in him produced faith in the gathered Gentiles. That they had come to faith is implied by the fact Peter says later that the gift of the Spirit given to these Gentiles was the same gift the Jews had received *when they believed* in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 11:17). As Peter said later at the Jerusalem Council, God chose him to be the one through whom the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel *and believe* (Acts 15:7).

3. At the Jerusalem Council, Peter also said about the Cornelius event: "And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, *having cleansed* [καθαρίσας, aorist participle]¹¹² their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8-9). In other words, the Spirit was given to those Gentiles after God cleansed their hearts on the basis of their faith response to Peter's message. Marshall states:

Since elsewhere the gift of the Spirit comes to people who repent and believe (*cf.* 11:17f.), the implication is twofold: first, that the Gentiles present responded to the message with faith; and, secondly, that God accepted them and sealed their faith with the gift of the Spirit. Once Gentiles had been given the opportunity to hear the message, they responded, and God received them.¹¹³

4. Their hearts having been cleansed by faith refers to the forgiveness of their sin. In keeping with Peter's declaration of 10:43, they had believed in Jesus and received forgiveness. Richard Gaffin remarks, "The tie [of v. 43] with v. 44 should not be missed: as Peter speaks the Holy Spirit comes on all who 'hear' (= believe) his message. The faith that receives forgiveness receives the Holy Spirit – among other things, the Spirit as the inseparable, attesting seal of that forgiveness."¹¹⁴ Barrett observes, "[T]he cleansing of the heart probably means for [Luke] the forgiveness of sins (*cf.* 13.38f.) and inward renewal with a view to future obedience."¹¹⁵ Donald Guthrie states, "It was the Spirit who had confirmed for Cornelius and his household the forgiveness of sins through Christ's name (Acts 10:43)."¹¹⁶ And J. Bradley Chance states, "Readers must supply the implications of what it means that Gentiles have received the Spirit. Again, remembrance of the first Pentecost story helps, for there Peter declared that the coming of

¹¹² The aorist participle is normally antecedent to the action of the main verb. Wallace, 555, 614; David Alan Black, *It's Still Greek to Me* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 124-125. This is reflected in the ESV and is implicit in the causal sense given to the participle in the NEB, REB, NIV, and NJB.

¹¹³ Marshall (1980), 193-194. Dunn likewise states, "Here the primacy of the Spirit as a mark of God's acceptance is plain beyond dispute. The implication is clearly that Cornelius had believed (10.43; so explicitly in 11.17 and 15.7, 9)." James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 399. See also, Longenecker, 883; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 230.

¹¹⁴ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Justification in Luke-Acts" in D. A. Carson, ed., *Right With God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 121.

¹¹⁵ C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 2:717.

¹¹⁶ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 544.

the Spirit accompanied 'the forgiveness of sin' (2:38). God has cleansed these Gentiles and forgiven them."¹¹⁷

5. The notion of forgiveness as a faith-based cleansing of the heart is echoed in Heb. 10:22. There the heart of the Christian is said to have been "sprinkled from an evil conscience," meaning cleansed from guilt by the sprinkling of Christ's blood, a clear reference to the removal of sin.¹¹⁸ Thus, the Gentiles' acceptability to receive the gospel had, through their faith in that message, become their acceptance by God (Acts 11:18). To apply Paul's words to the situation, it was because they were sons, had been forgiven by grace through faith, that God gave them the Spirit (Gal. 4:6).

6. Some reject this understanding of the Cornelius event because they believe the norm of baptism preceding salvation that Peter enunciated in Acts 2:38-39 is absolute. In other words, they believe Peter was declaring by inspiration that God would never, for any purpose or under any circumstance, grant salvation prior to baptism. But that is reading more into Peter's words than is there. To say God will grant forgiveness and the Spirit to everyone who in penitent faith is baptized is not the same as saying he will never grant those blessings prior to baptism. Peter was giving the rule, the norm; he was not addressing whether God would ever alter the order of salvation to make a point to his people.

7. Now, if one disagrees with that and believes that God revealed through Peter that he would never for any reason grant salvation prior to baptism, then one must claim that the gift of the Spirit received by these Gentiles prior to their baptism was different from the gift of the Spirit that accompanies and indicates salvation, the latter often being labeled the gift of the *indwelling* Spirit. But this alleged distinction faces a number of difficulties that cause me to reject it, reinforcing my understanding that God was not saying through Peter that he would never for any reason grant salvation prior to baptism.

a. First, as I have indicated, the gift of the Spirit was given to the Gentiles after their hearts had been cleansed by faith, meaning after their sins had been forgiven. That is precisely when one would expect the gift of the Spirit that accompanies salvation, the gift that is common to Christians, to be given, as that gift is linked with forgiveness (Acts 2:38).¹¹⁹

b. Moreover, the phrase "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (ἡ δωρεὰ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος) occurs in the New Testament only in Acts 10:45 and Acts 2:38 (cf. Acts 11:17). Both times it is used by Peter, and in 2:38 it clearly refers to a gift bestowed in conjunction with salvation. As David Warren remarks, "It is significant that the very same writer (Luke) in the very same book (Acts) has the very same speaker (Peter) use the very same phrase ('the gift of the Holy Spirit') on two separate occasions. It would seem that Luke intends his readers to make a connection here."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ J. Bradley Chance, *Acts*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2007), 175.

¹¹⁸ See, e.g., William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 286.

¹¹⁹ This point is unaffected if καθαρίσας in Acts 15:9 is understood in a simultaneous sense, as the association with cleansing remains.

¹²⁰ David H. Warren, "Can Anyone Withhold the Water?" in David H. Warren *et al.*, eds., *Early Christian Voices* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 133.

c. Notice also that Peter three times identifies the Gentile experience at Cornelius's house with that of the Jewish disciples on whom the Spirit fell at Pentecost (Acts 10:47; 11:15-17; 15:7-9). There is no suggestion that those Spirit-baptized Jewish disciples were subsequently baptized in water,¹²¹ so one is to understand from the Pentecost narrative that what they received included the gift of the Spirit common to Christians, it being essential to Christian identity, life, and fellowship. The same is to be understood of the analogous coming of the Spirit at Cornelius's house, the "Gentile Pentecost."

d. And finally, Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 12 that speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the one Spirit who is shared by all Christians, not something given to the unsaved. The fact the Gentiles at Cornelius' house spoke in tongues thus indicates they had received the one Spirit who is shared by all Christians.

8. Given these facts and the strong coupling of salvation and reception of the Spirit throughout the New Testament,¹²² one would need unambiguous evidence that the gift of the Spirit received by the Gentiles at Cornelius's house (10:47) was divorced from salvation. I am aware of no such evidence.

9. This is not to deny, of course, that the receipt of the Spirit at Pentecost and Cornelius's house (or at Samaria in Acts 8 and Ephesus in Acts 19) included atypical dimensions. It is to say that the physical manifestations that accompanied the gift of the Spirit on those occasions were *in addition to* rather than instead of the normal association of the Spirit with salvation.

a. Each of those occasions involved the Spirit's initial coming on multiple individuals who functioned as representatives of specifically identified groups (Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and disciples of John). The Spirit unmistakably marked his coming on those representatives to leave no doubt that God had indeed made the life of the new age available to the members of those groups.

b. So the fact the Spirit flagged his presence in those initial converts should not be construed to mean he was present in some way unrelated to their salvation. On the contrary, the physical manifestations were to ensure that his presence could not be doubted precisely because that presence was a mark of their new life in Christ. That was the divine message.

10. The granting of salvation prior to baptism in the case of the Gentiles at Cornelius's house is consistent with a strong baptismal theology if one recognizes that God has nowhere bound himself never to alter the timing of salvation in relation to baptism. The norm is

¹²¹ As disciples they presumably had submitted to the pre-Spirit baptism administered in Christ's name (Jn. 3:22; 4:1-2; 7:39), so unlike the Gentiles at Cornelius's house, the coming of the Spirit on them at Pentecost was not understood to require their immersion. They were more like the Samaritans on whom the gift of the Spirit was delayed after their baptism, albeit for a different divine purpose.

¹²² E.g., Jn. 7:39; Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9-10, 15; 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11, 17; 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 3:2, 14; 4:29; 5:25; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 2 Thess. 2:13; Tit. 3:4-6; Heb. 6:4; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13.

clearly set forth in Peter's programmatic statement in Acts 2:38-39 and confirmed throughout Scripture¹²³ and church history,¹²⁴ but it is an overreading to conclude that God left himself no room to vary the order of things in fulfillment of his purposes in salvation history. Acts 10 is a case of his doing just that.

11. Understanding, as Peter now did, that non-Jews are welcome to come to Christ on the same basis as Jews (Acts 10:34-35) leaves open whether that same basis includes a commitment to Judaism. To break through Jewish resistance to administering baptism to the uncircumcised, God saved those believing Gentiles in a conspicuous fashion (having them speak in tongues) with no requirement that they be circumcised (convert to Judaism), thereby indicating to the Jewish Christians that *they* were not to require the Gentiles to convert to Judaism to be saved. And since baptism is the rite in which God has promised to grant salvation (by grace through faith), the message was that the Jewish Christians were not to require Gentiles to convert to Judaism before baptizing them. In other words, God saved those uncircumcised Gentiles *prior to their baptism* to teach that uncircumcised Gentiles were acceptable candidates for the baptism in which salvation normally is given.¹²⁵

12. Peter understood the point. He says in 10:47 (see also 11:17) that no one can oppose those Gentiles being baptized because in showing they were acceptable for salvation without circumcision God showed they were acceptable for baptism without circumcision. With that point having been made, in all subsequent cases, Gentile salvation would occur in conjunction with their baptism pursuant to the norm announced by Peter at Pentecost.

13. The fact the baptism in their specific case would not be the time of their salvation, that gift having already been given, is beside the point. God was communicating by his action that the baptism of believing Gentiles was not to be conditioned on their being circumcised. That point was able to be made by saving them prior to baptism precisely because of the understood normal coupling of baptism and salvation.

¹²³ "[I]n the Acts and Epistles baptism is the supreme moment of the impartation of the Spirit and of the work of the Spirit in the believer." G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 275. "As we have observed, it was the careful plan of the Book of Acts to teach the divine will for the most intimate connection of baptism with the gift of the Spirit." Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 256. As I noted, even in the exceptional case of the Samaritans in Acts 8:4-17, Luke confirms (v. 16) that the gift of the Spirit normally accompanies baptism by stating that the Spirit had "not yet" come upon the Samaritans (contrary to the normal expectation) and that they had "only" been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (contrary to the normal happening). Paul's question in Acts 19:3 assumes the same connection.

¹²⁴ Everett Ferguson states in the conclusion of his monumental study *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 854: "Although in developing the doctrine of baptism different authors had their particular favorite descriptions, there is a remarkable agreement on the benefits received in baptism. And these are present already in the New Testament texts. Two fundamental blessings are often repeated: the person baptized received forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)."

¹²⁵ "God had to give so clear an indication of his will otherwise even Peter might have hesitated to take such a step in the case of Gentiles without first requiring them to be circumcised." Dunn (1996), 146. "With subtlety Luke argues in his narrative that the Jewish church had rationalized the divine plan for the inclusion of Gentiles: Yes, God would accept the Gentiles into his church, but first they must become Jews. Before Gentiles can be baptized in water, they must undergo a circumcision of the flesh. But here in the story of Cornelius, God showed the Jewish Christians that their assumption was clearly wrong." Warren, 137.

G. Peter reports to the church (11:1-18)

1. It became known to the apostles and throughout the church in Judea that the Gentiles also had accepted the gospel, so when Peter went to Jerusalem "those of the circumcision," meaning Jewish Christians, criticized him for having eaten with Gentiles because in doing so he presumably would have violated the food laws of the Mosaic covenant. With circumcision, these food laws had become very important markers of Jewish identity, and at this point in the young church's life, the relationship of those laws to disciples of Christ had not yet been worked out.

2. Peter then told them how it all came about, how God had given him a vision of unclean animals, told him to rise, kill, and eat; and three times met his protest against doing so with the words, "What God has made clean, do not call common." The Spirit told him to go with the Gentiles sent to him from Caesarea "making no distinction," so he and the six brothers did so. Peter explained that Cornelius told him an angel had said to him, "Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household." So whatever it meant for their theology, it undeniably was God's will for Peter to be at Cornelius's house.

3. He then told them how the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit as he was preaching to them. As is clear from the account in chapter 10, the phrase "as I began to speak" (11:15a) is not literal but means something like "I had hardly started speaking when . . ." ¹²⁶ Their receiving the Spirit reminded him of the Lord's statement (Acts 1:5), "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So this first reception of the Spirit by the Gentiles was analogous to the Jews' first reception of the Spirit at Pentecost. God gave to them the same gift he gave to the Jews when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Given that God saved these Gentiles, as demonstrated by their overt reception of the Spirit, it clearly is his will to save Gentiles as Gentiles, not to require conversion to Judaism as an interim step to salvation. And since baptism is the rite in which salvation normally is granted (by grace, through faith), God's will that Gentiles be saved as Gentiles was rightly understood by Peter to mean that baptism must not be withheld from believing Gentiles pending conversion to Judaism. To do so would be to stand in God's way.

5. That put an end to the complaint. They glorified God saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." In the preaching of the gospel, God provided them the opportunity of repenting of their sins and thus of obtaining eternal life. ¹²⁷ This recognition, however, was difficult to hold fast, perhaps in part because of fear of hostility from non-Christian Jews if they were seen as lax in matters of Jewish piety.

¹²⁶ Dunn asks rhetorically whether the phrase "as I began to speak" in 11:15 is "any more than a vigorous way of speaking intended to highlight the suddenness and unexpectedness of the Spirit's coming . . . and to be taken no more literally than our 'I had hardly started speaking when . . .'" James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 80. See also, Fitzmyer, 472; Bruce, 235; Marshall (1980), 197.

¹²⁷ Marshall (1980), 198.

H. The church in Antioch (11:19-30)

1. Jewish Christians who had been scattered from Jerusalem by the persecution that arose after the killing of Stephen traveled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch and preached the gospel to their fellow Jews. But some who had been scattered, Jews who had come to Jerusalem from Cyprus and Cyrene before converting to Christ, preached the gospel to Greeks (Ἕλληνας) or to Greek-speaking non-Jews (Ἑλληνιστής) in Antioch.¹²⁸ This "shows that Peter's experience of reaching out to the Gentiles was not unique."¹²⁹ Marshall remarks, "We do not know whether the conversion of Cornelius had taken place earlier and was known of in Antioch, so that it could have acted as a precedent."¹³⁰

2. The hand of the Lord, his power, was with the missionaries, perhaps including the working of miracles, and a great number of people converted to Christ. Antioch was a cosmopolitan and commercial hub and the capital city of the Roman province of Syria, about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. It became a significant Christian center, and the church there features prominently in Acts. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, behind Rome and Alexandria, having a population possibly as high at 600,000, perhaps 25,000 of whom were Jews.¹³¹

3. When news of the church's great growth in Antioch reached the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas there to evaluate and report on the situation. Recall that Barnabas was a Hellenistic Jewish Christian, a native of Cyprus, who had sold property and donated the proceeds to the church and had vouched for Paul to the apostles Peter and James. When he saw the grace of God, meaning when he saw what Luke knows was God's work in spreading the gospel in Antioch, he rejoiced rather than raising any objections, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord.

4. Luke notes that Barnabas had that proper and noble reaction *because* he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. Barrett comments, "To Luke it was so evident that Gentiles must be included in the Christian mission that he was convinced that any good and honest Christian must approve of the step taken in Antioch; those who, in Antioch and Jerusalem, took the view recorded in 15.1, 5 had a small chance of a favorable comment from him."¹³²

5. A great many more people were added to the Lord, and then Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul and brought him to Antioch. Luke notes that for a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians." The populace probably applied that name to designate them as followers of Christ

¹²⁸ Longenecker (p. 893) says the textual evidence is inconclusive (see also, Bock, 419-420), but the standard Greek texts read "Hellenists." Though "Hellenists" in Acts 6:1 and 9:29 refers to Greek-speaking Jews, here it clearly refers to Gentiles, non-Jews, who spoke Greek.

¹²⁹ NET note.

¹³⁰ Marshall (1980), 201.

¹³¹ Bock, 413.

¹³² C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:553.

(like "Herodians" were follower of Herod). Luke mentions this presumably "because 'Christian' had become a familiar term in certain areas at the time when he wrote."¹³³

6. "In these days," which may refer to the time when Paul and Barnabas labored together in Antioch or more generally to earlier years of the church there,¹³⁴ prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem, one of whom was Agabus. He prophesied there would be a famine over all the world, which Luke remarks took place in the days of Claudius. Agabus will appear again in Acts 21:10-11 with a prediction concerning Paul's arrest.

a. In the early church, the Holy Spirit gave the gift of prophecy to some men and women (e.g., Philip's daughters, Acts 21:9) by which they were enabled to speak the inspired word of God to others. Marshall remarks, "[Prophets] might be attached to a local church or engaged in an itinerant ministry. . . . Their functions were various and included both exhortation and foretelling of the future. . . . Their activity was connected with the new sense of inspiration associated with the gift of the Spirit to the church."¹³⁵ As I understand 1 Cor. 14:33b-36, women prophets were to refrain from exercising their gift in the assembly. For details on that understanding and how it relates to 1 Corinthians 11, see [An Assessment of Hicks's Women Serving God](#).

b. Regarding the predicted scope of the famine, Schnabel states: "The phrase 'throughout the world' (ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν οἰκουμένην) is often used in ancient literature and can refer to the entire inhabited world, to the Roman Empire, a much larger area than a specific region, and to a particular region."¹³⁶ The NIV, HCSB, and CSB render the phrase "the Roman world." This sense is confirmed by the fact Luke declares that it took place in the days of Claudius, who was emperor from A.D. 41-54. Schnabel states, "There were indeed food crises in Egypt, Syria, Judea, and Greece during A.D. 45-47, a year (at the latest) after Agabus visited Antioch. The fact that Egypt was affected was particularly dire, since Egypt was one of the most important grain-growing regions of the empire."¹³⁷

7. In response to Agabus's prophecy, the disciples in Antioch, each according to his ability, contributed to a relief effort for their brothers and sisters in Christ living in Judea. We are not told how long they took accumulating what they wanted to send. Money would help the poor to stock up on grain and other food in preparation for the famine and to afford food priced out of their reach during the shortage.

8. They had Barnabas and Paul take the collection to the elders of the church in Jerusalem, who would be responsible for organizing the distribution to the needy. This is almost certainly the visit Paul refers to in Gal. 2:1-10. The fact Luke does not mention Titus need not mean Titus was not in the group. Luke may have mentioned only Barnabas and Paul because they were charged with the responsibility of delivering the gift.

¹³³ Marshall (1980), 203.

¹³⁴ Schnabel, 525.

¹³⁵ Marshall (1980), 203.

¹³⁶ Schnabel, 525.

¹³⁷ Schnabel, 525.

I. James killed and Peter imprisoned (12:1-5)

1. The events of chapter 12 precede the famine visit on which Paul and Barnabas embarked at the end of chapter 11. The marker in 12:1 "about that time" refers generally to the events occurring in Antioch that he has reported from 11:19, events in the early to mid-40s. Luke is filling in significant events that occurred in Jerusalem and Judea during that time. He may have mentioned the famine visit at the end of chapter 11, even though it was after Herod's death, because it resulted from Agabus's prophecy about the famine, which preceded the events of chapter 12.¹³⁸ In any event, we see in chapter 12 that things took a dark turn in Jerusalem.

2. Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who in A.D. 41 had his rule expanded to include Judea and Samaria,¹³⁹ had James the son of Zebedee and brother of John executed. You will recall that Jesus said to James and John in Mk. 10:39 that they would indeed drink the cup he drinks and be baptized with the baptism with which he is baptized. No effort was made by the church to replace this dead apostle, unlike the case of Judas, the difference presumably being that the vacancy in the Twelve created by Judas was tied to his rejection of faith rather than simply to his death.

3. When Herod, desiring to gain the loyalty of his Jewish subjects, saw that executing James pleased the leaders, he proceeded to arrest Peter. Luke notes this was during the feast of unleavened bread, the weeklong festival which followed immediately after Passover, the two festivals being regarded as virtually one. That is why Peter was not dealt with immediately after his arrest. This would have been in the spring of A.D. 42, 43, or 44,¹⁴⁰ whereas the famine visit by Paul and Barnabas was probably in A.D. 46.¹⁴¹

4. Peter was placed under heavy security. He was guarded by four squads of four soldiers each, which squads would each serve in three-hour shifts during the twelve hours of night to ensure maximum alertness. Polhill speculates, "Why the heavy guard? Perhaps the Sanhedrin had informed Agrippa of their own experience in jailing the apostles on a previous occasion (5:19)."¹⁴²

5. While Peter was in prison, the church expressed its great concern for him by praying fervently to God for him, but we are not told what they were asking on Peter's behalf. Acts 12:14-15 makes clear they had no expectation of God freeing Peter that night, so they apparently were not praying for the kind of miraculous escape God brought about.¹⁴³ (That seems preferable to assuming they were praying fervently for a miraculous escape without any expectation or hope that God would grant the request.)

a. Perhaps they prayed for Peter to be freed unharmed by Herod ruling in his favor at the hearing on the following day, thus reversing the Roman condemnation of the

¹³⁸ Keener, 2:1981.

¹³⁹ Marshall (1980), 207; Polhill, 277.

¹⁴⁰ F. F. Bruce, "Chronological Questions in the Acts of the Apostles," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 68 (1986), 276-277; Polhill, 277.

¹⁴¹ Bruce (1987), 244; Polhill, 286.

¹⁴² Polhill, 279.

¹⁴³ Schnabel, 536-537; Bock, 426.

faith implicit in Herod's execution of James. In other words, they may have been praying for him to be released unharmed by being judicially vindicated rather than by escape, in which case they would have no expectation of his release during the night before the hearing.

b. Perhaps they assumed from the fact God allowed James to be executed and Peter to be imprisoned pending a hearing that it was God's will for Peter to follow in the steps of martyrdom. In that case, their prayer may have been along the lines of Acts 4:29: "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness." (They may not have been aware of or recalled Lord's statement to Peter recorded decades later in Jn. 21:18, indicating that Peter would live to old age.)

c. Or maybe they were praying that Peter be given the joy of faithfully and courageously enduring some lesser punishment for Christ's name, not that he be spared all punishment by release through judicial vindication. Recall that the apostles in Acts 5:41 rejoiced after being beaten because they were counted worthy to suffer such humiliation for Christ's name. This would not occur until the next day, at the earliest, so it is consistent with their amazement at Peter's release.

d. Whatever they prayed for specifically, presumably they would have included the sentiment, "Nevertheless, not our will, but yours, be done." This seems to be a case in which God's plans for Peter differed from their specific requests to such an extent that what he did amazed them. Their prayers were a catalyst for Peter's rescue, but he answered them according to his own purposes, in a way that differed from and exceeded what they were asking.

J. Peter is rescued (12:6-19)

1. The very night before Herod was to bring Peter out for a trial that, barring divine intervention, was sure to result in his execution, Peter was in jail chained to two guards, one on each side. The other guards from the four-man squad were standing watch at the prison doors. The fact Peter was able to sleep in that circumstance says something about his peace knowing he was in the hands of God.

2. An angel of the Lord appears, accompanied by supernatural light, awakens Peter, and tells him to get up quickly. The chains on his wrists fall off miraculously so he can comply with the command to get dressed. He does so and then, pursuant to the angel's command, follows the angel out of the cell, thinking the whole time that it is a vision rather than something that was physically happening.

3. The fact they walked right past the guards at the prison doors suggests the guards in the cell who had been chained to him had likewise been prevented from noticing his departure. The iron prison gate leading to the street swung open on its own, and Peter and the angel exited onto the street. Then the angel left him, and it dawned on Peter that the Lord had sent the angel to rescue him from his impending execution. With that realization, he no doubt recognized that he was in danger and needed to make himself scarce. But first he needed to inform the brothers and sisters what had happened.

4. To do that, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark. This is the John Mark who soon will accompany and abandon Paul and Barnabas on Paul's first missionary journey. Peter expected to find fellow Christians there, and he was not disappointed, as many were gathered there praying.

5. Peter knocked on the gate to the outer courtyard of the house, and a servant girl named Rhoda went to answer his knocking. She recognized Peter's voice without question (presumably the gate was solid which prevented her from seeing him) and was so excited she immediately ran to tell the others without opening the gate for him! You can imagine how often the early disciples told this story and laughed about it.

6. When Rhoda tells the gathering Peter is at the gate, they say she is out of her mind. We know nothing about Rhoda; she may have been prone to mistaken assessments. But for whatever reason, the implication of her claim that God had rescued Peter miraculously from Roman custody that night was considered too unlikely to be given any credence when coming from her. She insisted she was correct, and while they argued about it, Peter kept beating on the gate.

7. Some tried to make sense of Rhoda's claim by suggesting she had mistaken "his [Peter's] angel" for Peter himself. Marshall comments:

This curious reference [to Peter's angel] must be to some kind of 'heavenly' counterpart to a person, having the same physical appearance. The Jews believed that people had guardian angels . . . and there is some evidence (admittedly much later than the New Testament and not altogether easy to interpret) that guardian angels were thought to bear the image of the persons whom they protected. The supposition of the people in the house was in this case false, since it really was Peter himself; Luke says nothing to indicate that the supposition rested on a sound doctrine of angels, and it is most likely that it is nothing more than a Jewish superstition which he cites but does not necessarily corroborate.¹⁴⁴

8. When they finally open the gate, they see Peter and are amazed. He tells them how the Lord brought him out of prison and then instructs them to pass on the news to James and "the brothers," perhaps referring to the other Christian leaders. This is James the Lord's brother who becomes a leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13, 21:8). "Paul regarded him, along with Peter and John, as one of the three 'pillars' of the church (Gal. 2:9). He had been a witness of a resurrection appearance of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7) and hence Paul recognized him as an apostle (Gal. 1:19)."¹⁴⁵ These leaders presumably were in hiding in view of what had happened to James and Peter.

9. Peter then set off into the night, presumably to a safe place. Marshall states: "As for Peter, the text may imply merely that he went into hiding until it was safe for him to return to Jerusalem (i.e., after the death of Herod); he is again present in the church there in

¹⁴⁴ Marshall (1980), 210.

¹⁴⁵ Marshall (1980), 210-211,

Galatians 2:1-10 and chapter 15, but otherwise he plays no further part in Acts. At some point he went to Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14), and this visit may have taken place at this time."¹⁴⁶

10. When day came, there was major turmoil among the soldiers triggered by the disappearance of Peter. You can imagine the kind of bewilderment, accusations, fear, and casting of blame going on within the ranks. When Herod was unable to find Peter, he questioned the guards and ordered that they be put to death. Polhill states, "This was in accordance with Roman law, which specified that a guard who allowed the escape of a prisoner was to bear the same penalty as the escapee would have suffered."¹⁴⁷ So clearly Herod was planning to execute Peter. Herod then went from Jerusalem ("Judea" used in a narrow sense of Jerusalem and its immediate environs) to Caesarea, the capital of the province.

K. The death of Herod (12:20-25)

1. Things do not turn out well for Herod. Luke reports that Herod was angry with Tyre and Sidon, self-governing cities on the Phoenician coast. We do not know why he was angry with them, but since they depended on Herod's territory for food, they were very interested in smoothing things over. The political leaders of Tyre and Sidon sent delegations to Herod when he was in Caesarea (implied in v. 19b and confirmed by Josephus), after they had secured the support of one of Herod's trusted officials, a man named Blastus. They asked for peace, and an agreement apparently was reached, as Herod planned to give a speech to commemorate the new arrangement.¹⁴⁸

2. On the appointed day, which Josephus specifies was the day of a festival in honor of Emperor Claudius, Herod, wearing his royal robes and seated on his throne, gave a speech. Luke says the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man," and Josephus confirms that the people declared him to be a god, more than a mere mortal (*Ant.* 19.345).

3. Luke states that immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down and adds that he was eaten by worms and died. Josephus confirms the immediate onset of a severe and violent pain in Herod's stomach, which required him to be carried off, and says he endured five days of excruciating pain before dying (*Ant.* 19.346-350). His death was in either March or August of A.D. 44, depending on whether the festival was part of the quinquennial games held in March or a celebration of Claudius's birthday in August.¹⁴⁹ The famine visit Paul and Barnabas made to Jerusalem probably was a couple years later. Marshall states:

The cause of Herod's death is not certain [meaning the immediate medical condition]. Eaten by worms can be taken quite literally (cf. 2 Macc. 9:9), although it appears to have been a stock phrase in describing the death of tyrants. Appendicitis leading to peritonitis would fit the symptoms described by Josephus, and with the lack of medical hygiene in the ancient world roundworms could have

¹⁴⁶ Marshall (1980), 211.

¹⁴⁷ Polhill, 283.

¹⁴⁸ Bock, 431.

¹⁴⁹ Bruce (1986), 277; Bock, 431.

added to the king's sufferings. Neil (p. 152) suggests a cyst produced by a tapeworm.¹⁵⁰

4. Luke says Herod died because he did not give glory to God. Josephus likewise implies that it was because "Upon [being praised as a god] the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery" (*Ant.* 19:346). In identifying an angel as the agent of God's judgment on Herod, Luke need not mean the angel was visible. He simply worked whatever needed to be worked to execute the judgment of God.

5. Despite the intent of the enemies of God, as represented by the now deceased persecutor Herod, Luke remarks, "But the word of God increased and multiplied." In other words, the number of people being obedient to the gospel continued to grow. The good news had been unleashed on the world, like a fire that Satan cannot stamp out.

6. Verse 25 returns to the timeline from 11:29-30 that was interrupted by the report of earlier events in Jerusalem and Judea, culminating in Herod's death. The return of Paul and Barnabas to Antioch with John Mark sets the stage for the missionary journey in chapter 13.

IV. The Gospel Spreads to What Is Now Turkey (13:1-16:5)

A. Barnabas and Saul are sent off (13:1-3)

1. Luke notes that there were prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch and then names a diverse group of five people without identifying which of the roles they occupied. Some, like Paul, would have functioned as both a prophet and a teacher. Schnabel states:

Christian prophets (see on 11:27) would have conveyed, as did the prophets in Israel's history, God's revelation, expressed in terms of exhortation, instruction, critique, encouragement, and at times disclosure about future events. Teachers are mentioned only here in Acts, but the central importance of teaching God's word – revealed in Israel's Scriptures, in Jesus' ministry, and in the apostles' preaching – is evident in Luke's frequent references to teaching activity and to the body of teaching that is passed on.¹⁵¹

2. The "they" in v. 2 who were worshiping the Lord and fasting probably refers to the church mentioned in v. 1a and not just the five prophets and teachers identified in v. 1b. Marshall explains, "Since the list of names in v. 1 is primarily meant to show who was available for missionary service, and since changes of subject are not uncommon in Greek, it is preferable to assume that Luke is thinking of an activity involving the members of the church generally."¹⁵² So as the congregation is worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit, probably speaking through one

¹⁵⁰ Marshall (1980), 212-213.

¹⁵¹ Schnabel, 553-554.

¹⁵² Marshall (1980), 215. Polhill (p. 290) says, "In v. 2 'they' likely refers to the entire Antiochene congregation gathered for worship"; Schnabel (p. 555) understands the context as "one of the regular worship times;" Bock (p. 439) says it "is likely congregational worship;" Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 184, says "they" in v. 2 "more probably refers to the larger Antioch congregation."

of the prophets, commands them, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

3. After concluding their fast and praying, no doubt for God's blessing on Barnabas and Saul in the work of God, the church commissioned them to the task by laying hands on them, "an act of blessing in which the church associated itself with them and commended them to the grace of God (14:26)."¹⁵³

B. Barnabas and Saul on Cyprus (13:4-12)

1. Paul and Barnabas, sent by the Spirit and assisted by John Mark, sailed from Seleucia, the nearest seaport to Antioch, to the large island of Cyprus about 60 miles away. They arrived at the city of Salamis on the east coast, where they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues. Recall that Barnabas originally was from Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and some of those scattered in the persecution after Stephen was killed preached to Jews on the island (Acts 11:19). We are not told how the message presented by Paul and Barnabas was received in Salamis.

2. From Salamis they moved westward to Paphos, the seat of the Roman government about 100 miles away on the opposite end of the island. There they encountered a Jew who made his living by practicing magic and who claimed to be a prophet. Like many Jews, he had more than one name: Bar-Jesus, meaning son of Joshua, and Elymas, meaning magician. He was affiliated with the Roman governor of the island, an intelligent man named Sergius Paulus.¹⁵⁴

3. Sergius Paulus learned that Paul and Barnabas were in the area and summoned them to hear what they were teaching. Elymas may have perceived Sergius's interest in their message as a threat to his standing, but for whatever reason, he staunchly opposed the gospel and sought to keep Sergius Paulus from accepting it.

4. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, stared at Elymas and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?" He was making the way to the Lord, acceptance of the gospel, more difficult, making the path crooked, in trying to deceive Sergius with false claims and specious arguments.

5. Paul then announces that Elymas will, by the hand of the Lord, be blind for a period of time. And immediately he lost his sight. Because he was astonished at the teaching about Jesus, and thus was open to its truth, when Sergius Paulus saw the Christ-associated display of power over Elymas, he believed, which is Luke's shorthand for he converted to Christ. As Peterson notes (p. 382, fn. 41), "it is unreasonable to expect Luke to give every detail of a conversion experience, such as the coming of the Spirit or baptism, in every context."

¹⁵³ Marshall (1980), 216.

¹⁵⁴ For inscriptional evidence of Sergius Paulus, see, [Sergius Paulus: An Archaeological Biography](#) (accessed on 5/5/21).

C. Paul and Barnabas at Antioch in Pisidia (13:13-52)

1. Paul and his companions sailed from Paphos in Cyprus, probably landed in Attalia in the province of Pamphylia, and then made their way about 10 miles northeast to Perga. It is here that John Mark left them to return to Jerusalem, an action that later becomes a point of contention between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:37-40). They journeyed from Perga to Antioch in Pisidia, about 90 miles north of Perga, and went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. After the reading from the Scriptures, the rulers of the synagogue invited them to speak, and Paul took the opportunity to do so. He stood, motioned with his hand, which was a sign for silence and attention, and asked both the Jews and the God-fearers, the Gentile devotees of Judaism, to listen.

2. Paul briefly surveys Israel's history. He mentions God's election of Israel, his increasing their population while they were in Egypt, his delivering them from Egypt, his tolerance of them during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, and his giving them the land of Canaan as an inheritance, all of which took about 450 years. Afterward, he gave them judges up until the time of the prophet Samuel, and when they asked for a king, he gave them Saul who reigned for forty years. When he removed Saul, he raised up David to be their king, a man after God's own heart, and of David's offspring God brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised he would.

3. Paul says that before Jesus appeared on the scene, John the Baptist made clear that he, John, was not the promised Savior, but he pointed to the one coming after him, the sandals of whose feet he was unworthy to untie. This message of God's promised Savior was given to the Jewish people through their Scriptures, but the Jews in Jerusalem, because they did not recognize him as the prophesied one, fulfilled the Scriptures by condemning him. Though they found no guilt in him, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And after they had him crucified in keeping with what was written about him, they laid him in a tomb.

4. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to his disciples who now bear witness to that fact. Paul says that he and his companions bring them the good news that what God promised to the fathers he has fulfilled in their generation by raising Jesus from the dead, which resurrection was spoken of in Psalm 2:7, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you."

(a) Psalm 2 speaks of the nations' rebellion against God and his anointed king of Israel. They rebel in vain because God, the heavenly king, has placed his king on the throne in Jerusalem, and he will provide him dominion over all the nations. Tremper Longman points out that "this psalm almost certainly was used during the monarchical period as a song that accompanied the installation ceremony of the son of David who assumed the throne after the death of his father."¹⁵⁵

(b) In the first century, this psalm was widely understood to include a reference to the Messiah, the ultimate Davidic king, the ultimate Anointed One (the meaning of

¹⁵⁵ Tremper Longman III, *Psalms*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 61.

Messiah). It was so interpreted by the rabbis and the Qumran community.¹⁵⁶ It thus was understood to have an eschatological element, the Messiah being a figure of the end time.

(c) Verses 6-7 make clear that God's becoming the father of the king (his metaphorical "begetting" of him) refers to the king's enthronement, his formal, public identification as Israel's king. He becomes God's son at that time in the sense he at that time assumes in a public way the new God-appointed role of ruler.

(d) Though Jesus was the unique Son of God from his divine conception (e.g., Lk. 1:35 [Gabriel's words to Mary], 3:22 [announcement at Jesus' baptism]), in his resurrection and associated ascension he, as the God-man Jesus, assumed in a public way the new God-appointed role of Israel's ultimate king, the supremely powerful Lord of lords. God at that time exalted him to a new stage or phase of his messianic career. As God became the Father of the merely human kings of Israel upon their enthronement, he in an analogous sense became Jesus' Father upon his "enthronement," upon his public exaltation to ultimate kingship. That *does not mean* he was not Jesus' Father before that time in a different sense; it means only that he became his Father at that time *in a Ps. 2:7 sense*.

(1) This resurrection-related exaltation to a new stage or phase of Jesus' messianic career is evident in Phil. 2:5-11. There we are told the Son chose to forego the prerogatives of his divinity in obedience to the will of the Father, only to have bestowed on him as a result of his faithfulness unto death the supremely powerful position of Lord of lords.

(2) In Rom. 1:3-4 Paul also refers to a transition in Jesus' messianic role that was effected by his resurrection. The eternal Son of God, Jesus the Christ, was *appointed* (same word translated "appointed" in Acts 10:42 and 17:31) "Son of God in power" on the basis of the resurrection. In other words, before the resurrection he was the Son of God in the weakness and lowliness of his human existence; after, he was the Son of God in the power of his indestructible life and his supreme ruling authority.

(3) In Acts 2:32-36, Peter points to Jesus' resurrection and related ascension as certification of God having made him both Lord and Christ. Resurrection and ascension were aspects of his enthronement.

(e) This is why Paul here ties Ps. 2:7 to Jesus' resurrection. The writer of Hebrews in Heb. 1:3b-5 similarly links Jesus' resurrection, by implication from his ascension, to Ps. 2:7. He writes: *after providing purification of the sins sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, ⁴having become as much greater than the angels as the name he has inherited [is] superior to theirs. ⁵For to which of the angels did he ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? And again, "I will be to him as a father, and he will be to me as a Son"?*

5. That God raised Jesus from the dead also is in keeping with Isa. 55:3b: "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David." But it requires some unpacking to appreciate the connection.

¹⁵⁶ Keener, 2:2070.

(a) In Isa. 55:1-3a, God invites the people to receive his gifts and live. He says in v. 3b that he will make an eternal covenant with them in accordance with the certain blessings promised to David (lit. "the sure mercies of David"). It suggests that God will make a future covenant with his people that will in some way derive from the unalterable commitment he made to David as specified in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89.

(b) Referring to Isa. 55:3b, Paul says in Acts 13:34, *And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, 'I will give you [plural] the holy and sure blessings of David.'* The holy and sure blessings of David include the promises of 2 Sam. 7:12-13: *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.*¹⁵⁷ *He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

(c) Paul's *hearers* ("you" is plural) receive the holy and sure blessings of David in the sense they receive benefit from God's fulfillment of his commitment to David. That benefit is given to them in Jesus' resurrection because it is by his resurrection that God established forever the throne of the kingdom of David's descendant. In other words, the eternal rulership of that descendant is revealed not to be dynastic but personal. Having been raised from the dead, he is no longer subject to death (Rom. 6:9), and because he is this ultimate Davidic king who rules forever, he is able to bestow unique blessings as indicated in 13:38-39. Marshall comments: "So [Acts 13:34] is not saying that God will give to Jesus the promise of resurrection that was made to David – that would require that the 'you' be singular, not plural; rather, the faithfulness of God to David will continue to be shown to a later generation by God's raising up of Jesus to be the author of forgiveness and justification (13:38)."¹⁵⁷

6. Given God's intention to raise Jesus from the dead as revealed in Ps. 2:7 (and Isa. 55:3), God says in another psalm (16:10), "You will not let your Holy One see corruption."

(a) In Ps. 16:8-11 David speaks as the "Holy One" whose soul will not be abandoned to the realm of the dead (*sheol* in Hebrew; *hades* in Greek) and who will not be allowed to see decay. One could understand this as David referring to himself, and many continue to do so, but it assumes a different cast after the Lord's resurrection. Indeed, the Spirit reveals here and elsewhere in the New Testament that it actually is David speaking prophetically in the first person on behalf of the Messiah, his promised descendant. In other words, the psalm is not to be interpreted as David saying about some current distress (or saying only), "You will not let me die," but as him saying prophetically as the Messiah, "You will not let me remain dead once I have died," a prophecy that fits only Jesus.

(b) Peter cited Ps. 16:10 on the Day of Pentecost in his speech in Acts 2:25-32, making clear that David "foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption." He uses the fact Jesus was resurrected as proof that he is the Messiah whom David prophesied in the psalm would be

¹⁵⁷ I. Howard Marshall, "Acts" in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 586.

resurrected. Paul does the same thing here. As the resurrected one, the Messiah, he is the one through whom the forgiveness of sins is available and is being offered to them.

(c) And he is the one by whom everyone who believes is freed from everything from which they could not be freed by the law of Moses. Since the law of Moses, broadly conceived, includes the sacrificial system under which forgiveness of sins was available, albeit ultimately on the basis of Christ's future sacrifice, what they could not be freed from by the law under the old covenant was something other than their sin; there were provisions in the law for obtaining forgiveness. I think what they could not be freed from by the law under the old covenant was not their sin but their sense of guilt. This is taught most clearly in Hebrews 9 and 10.

(1) In Heb. 9:1-10 the writer explains that under the old-covenant cult access to the Holy of Holies was restricted to the high priest, and even he could only enter once a year and could do so only with sacrificial blood which he offered for his and the people's sins. This Spirit-given arrangement symbolized the truth that access to the real sanctuary, true intimacy with God, was not available while the old-covenant arrangement was still applicable (expressed as "while the front room still had standing," meaning still had cultic status).

(2) The reason is that the offerings under that covenant – the regulations of flesh imposed until the time of [the] new order – were unable to resolve fully one's sense of guilt because there was an intuitive awareness of their inherent inadequacy for atonement. George Guthrie comments:

The outer room of the tabernacle, therefore, illustrates the whole era managed by the older covenant. It was a time in which the general populace could not draw near to God because provision had yet to be made for their consciences to be cleansed.

. . . The problem under the old covenant consisted of the sacrificial system's inability to resolve one's awareness of personal guilt. Thus, the outer room of the tabernacle illustrated the inner, spiritual condition of the people. Ultimately the conscience, not a material, earthly space, keeps a person from intimacy with God. Consequently, more than external regulations that dealt with practices regarding food, drink, and certain washings would be required to make entrance to the presence of God possible. These rituals simply were provisional, given until the new covenant system could be established.¹⁵⁸

(3) As indicated in Heb. 9:13-14, the blood of bulls and goats was accepted by God as purification for people, albeit purification at an external level, something that restored a formal degree of fellowship, but it left a barrier to intimacy in the form of a lingering sense of guilt. Given that is the case, then certainly, the writer declares, the blood of Christ will *utterly* purify, will purify even our consciences from sin that we might serve God in a greater state of intimacy.

¹⁵⁸ George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 300.

(4) As made clear in Heb. 10:1-4, it is impossible for the blood of animals to be the actual basis of divine forgiveness. Their death does not have atoning efficacy; rather, the offering of them is merely the occasion on which forgiveness was granted under the old covenant on the basis of Christ's future sacrifice. Because they are shadows that lack atoning efficacy, animal sacrifices are inadequate to deal finally and fully with one's conscience, one's sense of guilt, and thus their repeated offering serves as a reminder of sins rather than as an ultimate cleansing.

(5) We see in Heb. 10:22 that to draw near to God one must have had one's heart purified from guilt by the sprinkling of Christ's blood, by the personal appropriation of his all-sufficient, fully efficacious sacrifice. He purifies even our consciences from sin so as to remove that last barrier to intimacy with God.

7. Paul ends with a warning not to reject God's offer in Christ, thereby "fulfilling the prophecy of Habakkuk 1:5 which speaks of the danger of failing to recognize what is happening as being truly an action of God."¹⁵⁹ In its original context the prophecy referred to the failure to recognize God's work in preparing to judge Judah through the Babylonians. Paul here applies it to the danger of failing to recognize God's work of salvation in Jesus.

8. As Paul and Barnabas were leaving, the people urged them to teach on the subject again on the next Sabbath. A bit later, after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, apparently not wanting to wait a whole week before hearing more. Paul and Barnabas urged them to *continue* in the grace of God, which they could only do by accepting the truth of God's work in Christ. Marshall comments, "This phraseology (*cf.* 11:23) suggests that these people already trusted in the grace of God, as they had come to know of it through the Old Testament, and were now being urged to continue in that basic attitude by believing in Jesus as the one through whom God's promises were being brought to fulfillment."¹⁶⁰

9. A huge crowd from the predominantly Gentile city, described hyperbolically as "almost the whole city," gathered the next Sabbath to hear the gospel, the word of the Lord. But when the "Jews," here referring to the Jewish religious leaders and those under their influence, saw the great interest there was in the gospel, they were jealous or envious, presumably because they had received no comparable interest in the community. They then began disputing with and personally attacking Paul.

10. Paul and Barnabas are not intimidated but declare boldly that their opponents' fate is on their own heads. As Jews, it was necessary that the gospel be presented to them first because it is the message of the fulfillment in Jesus of the promises God made to the Jewish patriarchs. Jews are the people of the promises and thus have priority in hearing the message (Rom. 1:16 – the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"). But since they, as represented by their leaders, reject the gospel and thereby reject the eternal life that is offered in it, Paul and Barnabas are "turning to the Gentiles," meaning focusing their attention on the non-Jews in Pisidian Antioch. Schnabel comments:

¹⁵⁹ Marshall (1980), 229.

¹⁶⁰ Marshall (1980), 229.

Paul has not given up on the Jewish people, of course. He continues to proclaim the good news of Jesus as Israel's Messiah to Jewish audiences. His missionary work among Gentiles is not motivated by the rejection of the gospel by fellow Jews but by his divine call and commission (v. 47); he has preached before Gentile audiences before. Rather, Paul and Barnabas state that if it becomes impossible to preach before the Jewish congregation in a city, they will by necessity have to turn to the Gentiles and look for other venues in which to preach and teach.¹⁶¹

11. They let them know this is in keeping with the universality of the gospel implicit in the Lord's words in Isa. 49:6. The Servant of Isa. 49:6 "was to act as a light to the nations and to be a means of salvation throughout the world,"¹⁶² a role that passed from Jesus to his disciples as the new Israel.

12. When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of God, praising and extolling it as something great. And as many as were "destined for eternal life" (NRS, NAB, NJB)¹⁶³ believed the saving message.

a. This does not mean their believing was determined by God so that they had no freedom or ability to reject the gospel. Indeed, v. 46 shows the opposite in that Paul and Barnabas there make clear that the Jewish leaders were responsible for their fate, had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life by rejecting the message that was presented to them.

b. It means only that the eternal destiny of all these Gentiles was known by God; some of their names were in the Book of Life and some were not.¹⁶⁴ And since eternal life is the blessing of those who believe the gospel, Luke points out that it was, unsurprisingly, those destined for eternal life who believed. I suspect he does so to highlight the tie between believing the gospel and the blessing of eternal life and the fact Gentiles are among those who will receive eternal life.

13. As the gospel took hold among these Gentiles, it spread throughout the region. The more converts there were, the more people there were sharing the message. This spreading of Christianity fanned the hostility of the Jews toward Paul and Barnabas. They riled up some influential Gentile women who were God-fearers, devotees of Judaism, and some of the leading men of the city, people with political juice. They presumably used this influence in instigating persecution against the missionaries and ultimately in having them driven out of the district.

¹⁶¹ Schnabel, 588.

¹⁶² Marshall (1980), 230.

¹⁶³ See also, Franco Montanari, ed., (and Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder, eds. English edition), *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 2086 ("as many as were destined for eternal life").

¹⁶⁴ "[I]t was joyful news to the Gentiles who heard it, and many of them believed the gospel – all, in fact, who had been enrolled for eternal life in the records of heaven (for this appears to be the sense of the words here used)." Bruce (1987), 283-284. "The phrase 'appointed' applied to 'enrollment' in papyri, relevant in view of the perspective in Luke 10:20 [your names are written in heaven']. One may think of the Book of Life in early Jewish literature." Keener, 2:2101.

14. As the Lord had instructed the apostles in Lk. 9:5, Paul and Barnabas shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. Marshall comments:

It was customary for Jews to shake off the dust of a pagan town from their feet when they returned to their own land, as a symbol of cleansing themselves from the impurity of sinners who did not worship God. For Jews to do this to their fellow Jews was tantamount to regarding the latter as pagan Gentiles. The Christians were demonstrating in a particularly vigorous manner that Jews who rejected the gospel and drove out the missionaries were no longer truly part of Israel but were no better than unbelievers (cf. Lk. 9:5; 10:11; Acts 18:6; 22:22f.).¹⁶⁵

15. In the midst of such turmoil and persecution, the disciples, those in Antioch who had put their trust in the Lord, were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. He was at work in their lives such that they transcended their immediate troubles and rejoiced in the big picture, in the truth that they were children of God and heirs of eternal life. "Paul and Barnabas soon returned to strengthen these believers in their faith and to establish them as the new people of God in that city (14:21-23)."¹⁶⁶

D. Paul and Barnabas at Iconium (14:1-7)

1. At Iconium, a city about 90 miles east of Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas presented the gospel in the Jewish synagogue. As a result, many Jews and Greeks came to faith in Christ. This would include the Jews and God-fearers who heard them in the synagogue and all they may have subsequently influenced. But the unbelieving Jews were trashing the Christians to the Gentiles in the city.

2. Because of the receptivity of the people to the gospel, they remained in Iconium a long time despite the Jewish opposition. They spoke boldly for the Lord who bore witness to the message they presented by empowering them to perform signs and wonders.

3. The people of the city were divided between the Jews and "the apostles," referring to Paul and Barnabas (also v. 14). It is not clear how Luke is here using "apostles." Polhill writes:

In Acts, Luke used the term [apostle] in a restricted sense, which denotes only the Twelve who were eyewitnesses to Jesus' entire ministry. Acts 14:4, 14 are the exceptions to the rule. Perhaps Luke indicated here that Paul and Barnabas were delegates of the Antioch church, commissioned by them for their mission. Perhaps it indicates Luke's awareness of the wider application of the word and that he here slipped into the more customary and less specialized usage.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Marshall (1980), 231.

¹⁶⁶ Peterson, 400.

¹⁶⁷ Polhill, 311.

4. When Paul and Barnabas learn that the Gentiles and Jews and their rulers intend to mistreat and stone them,¹⁶⁸ "[t]hey decide that the collaboration of their Jewish and Gentile enemies with city officials has created a situation so dangerous that they must leave the city in a hurry."¹⁶⁹ They fled to Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding country and continued to preach the gospel.

E. Paul and Barnabas at Lystra (14:8-18)

1. Lystra was about 18 miles south-southwest of Iconium. Whether there was a synagogue in the city, no mention is made of it. The focus here is on the response of "pure heathens" to the gospel, Gentiles who had shown no prior interest in the God of Israel.

2. There was a man there who had never walked, being cripple from birth. As Paul preached about Jesus, the crippled man came to believe that Jesus was great enough that he could, even through his ambassadors, make him walk if he chose to do so. Paul was given insight into the man's faith and was moved to respond with a command for healing. He boomed out, "Stand upright on your feet." And the man sprang up and began walking! This was a dramatic moment that parallels Peter's healing of the lame beggar in Acts 3.

3. The miracle was so profound that the crowds exclaimed in their native language (Lycaonian), which Paul and Barnabas would not have understood, that the gods had come down to them in the likeness of men. They were identified with two traditional Greek gods. Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul they called Hermes, because Paul was the main speaker, which was consistent with Hermes role as the messenger or spokesman of the gods.

4. When Paul and Barnabas learned the priest of Zeus and the crowds were preparing to offer sacrifices to them, they tore their garments and rushed into the crowd. Marshall remarks, "the tearing of the clothes is an expression of revulsion at a blasphemous attempt to regard men as divine, and the swift rush by the apostles into the crowd was their attempt to avoid being revered as gods and so committing sin against the true God."¹⁷⁰

5. They make it clear that sacrificing to them is inappropriate because they are mere mortals not gods. They tell them they are bringing good news, namely that they should turn from "these worthless things," their idolatrous system of worship, to the Living God, the one true God who made all things. He is the source of all life, and life is found only in him. He is inviting them to come to know him, which additional teaching would explain is done through the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. They explain that in past generations, God allowed the nations, the Gentiles, to go their own way, meaning he did not engage directly with them to instruct them in his ways, as he did with Israel and is now doing with the Gentiles through the gospel. That does not mean that

¹⁶⁸ Many translations indicate that an *attempt* to mistreat and stone them had been made, but ὡς δὲ ἐγένετο ὁρμηὶ is better understood to mean "And when an inclination arose." The NIV captures that sense: There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.

¹⁶⁹ Schnabel, 605.

¹⁷⁰ Marshall (1980), 237.

in the former time they were not accountable to God or culpable for their conduct. On the contrary, they were accountable and culpable despite the lack of special revelation because, as Paul and Barnabas note, God's existence and nature were evident in his good provision of rains and crops, which satisfy and bring gladness. Terrance Tiessen states:

It is highly implausible that Paul is suggesting that God accepted all the various forms of worship and conduct that the nations chose in their ignorance of God through lack of revelation. His point is twofold: First, God had given them some revelation in the form of his providential care for them. As indicated in Rom 1:21, this left them culpable if they did not respond by honoring God as God and giving him thanks. And second, in Paul's generation, they were receiving a clearer revelation of God's truth and of his will, so their obligation was increasing accordingly.¹⁷¹

7. Despite Paul and Barnabas's actions and words rejecting any attempt to sacrifice to them, they were barely able to prevent the people from doing so. That tells you something about how mind-blowing the miracle was. The problem was they were attributing it to Paul rather than recognizing it was the work of Paul's Lord.

F. Paul stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19-23)

1. At some point, antagonistic Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra and succeeded in turning the people against the missionaries. We are not told what claims or arguments they used to do so. They then stoned Paul and dragged his body out of the city. He was in such bad shape that they assumed he was dead. Paul almost certainly refers to this event in 2 Cor. 11:25 and more generally in 2 Tim. 3:11 (also possibly Gal. 6:17).

2. But when the disciples, presumably converts from Lystra, gathered around him, he rose up and went back into the city. This is a very terse report, but I agree with Bruce that it "has a flavor of miracle about it."¹⁷² Schnabel offers the following as a possibility: "As the believers of Lystra stand in a circle around Paul, who is lying on the ground, bleeding and perhaps unconscious, they undoubtedly pray for him. God answers their prayers in terms of granting Paul a miraculous recovery."¹⁷³

3. The next day Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe, about 60 miles southeast of Lystra. Luke says only that they preached the gospel to that city and made a considerable number of disciples there. It would have been a far easier route back to Syrian Antioch for them to travel

¹⁷¹ Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 128-129. In Acts 17:29 Paul explains that since humans are God's offspring, we *ought not* conceive of him as idolaters do, thinking he is like an image made of gold or silver or stone that was formed by the art and imagination of man. The point of 17:30 is that God, having disregarded the Gentiles' time of culpable ignorance (in which they suppressed what they ought to have known as God's offspring to engage in idolatry – v. 29; Rom. 1:18-25) in the sense he did not allow that time to disqualify them as objects of his mercy, extends to them an offer of mercy in Christ. He commands all people everywhere, Gentiles as well as Jew, to repent, to turn from their present way to his way that they may be saved on the appointed day of judgment by Jesus Christ.

¹⁷² Bruce (1987), 296.

¹⁷³ Schnabel, 612.

southeast from Derbe the roughly 150 miles to Tarsus, Paul's hometown, and then return to Antioch from there. But instead, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch, strengthening the disciples in those cities and encouraging them to continue in the faith, warning them not to fall back into Judaism or paganism. Following up with and nurturing those new Christians was so important that they faced the danger of returning to those cities and the inconvenience and hardship of prolonged travel to do it.

4. They told those babies in Christ that the road to the consummated kingdom of God, the future eternal state, passes through suffering and persecution. That fate is not reserved for missionaries; it is the lot of all disciples because this world is opposed to Christ. And yet we have many today who are trying to attract people to Christ with the lie that he guarantees his disciples wealth and easy living.

5. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders "for them" in every church, for the benefit and blessing of the disciples. These are men who shoulder the burden of leadership of God's people. They are responsible for using their authority under Christ for the spiritual welfare of the congregation, and they will answer for how they discharge that responsibility (Heb. 13:17). Those who are under the oversight of elders are to obey the word of the Lord that is presented by them, respect them for their work, support them, and cooperate with them that they may serve with joy and not groaning (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7, 17).

6. With prayer and fasting, Paul and Barnabas committed "the young churches and their newly-appointed elders to the Lord."¹⁷⁴ This presumably was a prayer for their strength, courage, wisdom, growth, unity, peace, protection, and faithfulness. They were asking God to bless and multiply his little pockets of fire in the pagan darkness.

G. Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch in Syria (14:24-28)

1. On the way back to Syrian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas preached in Perga in Pamphylia, the city they had visited in Acts 13:13 (where John Mark left them). They then went to the adjacent seaport of Attalia and from there sailed to Syria and traveled to Antioch, the church that had sent them out.

2. They naturally reported their journey to the assembled church. They declared "all that God had done with them." This no doubt included events and information Luke does not provide. They recognized that in all of it God was the primary actor; they were merely his instruments.

3. In the report of what God had done with them, they specified how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. They were not saying, of course, that their work was the first conversion of Gentiles. That had happened earlier, including in Antioch. Rather, they were saying that in their missionary journey, God had used them to call Gentiles to faith in unprecedented numbers. If any caution light remained in anyone's mind regarding the Gentile mission, God was making clear the light was green.

¹⁷⁴ Bruce (1987), 297.

4. They remained a considerable time with the disciples in Antioch. It is during this time that stage is set for the Jerusalem Conference of the following chapter.

H. The Jerusalem Council (15:1-21)

1. Some men from Judea came to Antioch and were teaching the Christians there that one must be circumcised and commit to obeying the Mosaic law (15:1, 5) in order to be saved. In other words, they agreed ethnic Gentiles could be saved but only by first converting to Judaism. This seems to be the visit referred to in Gal. 2:12, where Paul says that before certain men came from James, Peter ate with the Gentiles; but when they came, he drew back and separated himself because he feared those of [the] circumcision [group].

a. They came "from James" only in the sense that (a) the Jerusalem congregation was identified with James (perhaps because he was the leader who spent the most time there) or (b) the more conservative or law-conscious element of the Jerusalem congregation was identified with James (perhaps because of his strong personal choice to observe of the law). In other words, they were not actually sent by James; they simply came from a group that was identified in some way with James.

b. Acts 15:24 makes clear that, though the men referred to in 15:1, 5, those insisting on submission to the Mosaic law, went out from the Jerusalem congregation, they did not have any authorization or commission to spread their views among the Gentiles. They were going rogue in making their claims, allowing their association with the Judean church to give an impression of authority.

c. Peter's fear of those of the circumcision group is difficult to understand given his prior experiences and actions, but he may have given into that fear with the rationalization that he was doing so for the sake of the non-Judaizer Jewish Christians in Judea. In other words, he may have justified succumbing to the pressure by thinking the Judaizers could cause trouble for the other Jewish Christians in Judea by enlisting *non-Christian Jews* to help bring them in line with their Judaizing view. We just do not know what fueled Peter's lapse on that occasion.

d. Peter's hypocrisy adversely influenced some of the other Jews, including Barnabas (Gal. 2:13). If this is indeed the incident reported in Acts 15:1, which seems likely, Paul presumably convinced Barnabas of his error in following Peter's example, and then, as noted in Acts 15:2, he and Paul argued sharply with the Judaizers, perhaps after Peter's departure. If Barnabas recovered quickly from his theological "slip," Luke may have seen no need to mention it when reporting in Acts 15:3 that Barnabas was sent with Paul to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about the question.

e. The Apostles certainly were Spirit-filled men, but they were not sinless, just as we have God's Spirit but are not sinless. There is no contradiction between the Apostles being capable of sin and their being incapable of error when used by the Spirit to write Scripture.

For example, Moses sinned at Meribah (Num. 20), and yet Jesus made clear that the Scripture written by the Spirit through Moses was inerrant.

f. Paul does not say in Galatians how Peter responded to his rebuke. Perhaps he was not yet sure when he wrote the letter, it being before the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 where Peter left no doubt about his change of heart, forcefully siding with Paul. As Bruce states, "Such information as we can glean about Peter after this does not suggest that he persisted for long in this charade of 'separate tables'."¹⁷⁵ Years later, Peter referred to Paul affectionately in 2 Pet. 3:15 as "our dear brother."

2. The disagreement and debate in Antioch over what the Judaizers from Judea were claiming prompted the church to appoint Paul, Barnabas, and some others to go to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about the question. And as they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, they described the conversion of the Gentiles and brought great joy to the saints. Polhill comments:

They used the opportunity to visit congregations along the way. It could almost be described as a "campaign trip," since most of these congregations would likely be sympathetic with their viewpoint that Gentiles should not be burdened with circumcision and the Torah. This would be especially true of the Christians in Phoenicia whose congregations were likely established by the same Hellenists who reached out to the Gentiles in Antioch (11:19-20). The congregations along their route rejoiced at the news of Paul and Barnabas's success among the Gentiles. Evidently they did not share the misgivings of the Judaizing Christians.¹⁷⁶

3. When they arrive in Jerusalem, they are welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they relate how God had used them in converting the Gentiles. But some Jewish Christians "from the sect of the Pharisees," meaning they were Pharisees when they converted (like Paul), asserted that Gentile converts had to submit to the law of Moses. Polhill says of their claim:

Gentiles who become Christians must undergo Jewish proselyte procedure. They must be circumcised. They must live by the entire Jewish law. It was not the moral aspects of the law that presented the problem but its ritual provisions. The moral law, such as embodied in the Ten Commandments, was never in question. Paul, for instance, constantly reminded his churches of God's moral standards in his letters. The ritual aspects of the law presented a problem. These were the provisions that marked Jews off from other people – circumcision, the food laws, scrupulous ritual purity. They were what made Jews Jews and seemed strange and arbitrary to most Gentiles. To have required these of Gentiles would in essence have made them into Jews and cut them off from the rest of the Gentiles. It would

¹⁷⁵ F. F. Bruce, *Paul Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 178.

¹⁷⁶ Polhill, 324.

have severely restricted, perhaps even killed, any effective Gentile mission. The stakes were high in the Jerusalem Conference.¹⁷⁷

4. The apostles, elders, and the Antioch delegation (v. 12) met to consider the matter. After much debate, Peter took the floor and reminded them of how God had sent him to the Gentiles (at Cornelius's house) that they should hear the gospel and believe. God cleansed their hearts by faith, as he had done with the Jews, and bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he had given to the Jewish believers. Since these Gentiles were reconciled to God through their faith in Christ without submission to the law, why would they put God to the test by requiring Gentiles to submit to the law? As Marshall notes, that would be to test God "in the sense of questioning his judgment to see whether he really meant it and whether men might get away with doing something different."¹⁷⁸

5. In binding the Mosaic law on Gentiles, the Judaizers were placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that the Jews themselves had been unable to bear in the sense they had been unable to keep all its demands so as not to require grace. On the contrary, the law itself included ritual offerings through which God made available atonement for sins (underwritten by Christ's coming sacrifice).¹⁷⁹ But as Christians, they all now believe that the grace they need for salvation is not in the offerings of the law but "through the grace of the Lord Jesus," i.e., in his atoning sacrifice, the same sacrifice through which the Gentiles will be saved (v. 11). So why hang on the Gentiles a law that is irrelevant to their salvation?

6. Peter's words silenced the opposition, so the group was ready to hear from Paul and Barnabas about the great work God had done through them among the Gentiles. Longenecker remarks, "Peter had evidently completely recovered from his temporary lapse in Syrian Antioch. Now he saw matters more clearly and was prepared to agree with Paul (1) that there is 'no distinction' between Jews and Gentiles, and (2) that the Mosaic law is an unnecessary 'yoke' for Gentile believers in Jesus."¹⁸⁰

7. After Paul and Barnabas recounted their experience, James the Lord's brother, a leading figure in the Jerusalem church, sealed the point. He said that Peter's account of how God had included the Gentiles among his people was consistent with the words of the prophets. Specifically, he appealed to Amos 9:11-12 (in LXX, the Scripture most familiar to the Gentiles).

(a) God said through Amos in 9:11-12 that after the time of Israel's scattering, i.e., after the exile, he would raise up the "fallen tent" of David. It is a metaphor for the kingdom of David, one that looks back to the security Israel once enjoyed under David's rule. It is a promise that peace and security will again be established by the revival of the Davidic kingdom, by a descendant of David returning to the throne.

(b) He indicates that this restored Davidic kingdom will include other nations; other nations will bear God's name under the rule of his king (9:12). James's point is that

¹⁷⁷ Polhill, 324.

¹⁷⁸ Marshall (1980), 250.

¹⁷⁹ E.g., Lev. 1:4; 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:6, 10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 7:7.

¹⁸⁰ Longenecker, 945.

Jesus is the Davidic king promised by Amos and the restored Davidic kingdom to which Amos referred included Gentiles. So Peter's experience and testimony should not be resisted as theologically suspect; it is in keeping with the revelation of God.

8. Given God's acceptance of Gentiles among his people, James's judgment was that they should not trouble Gentile converts by requiring them to submit to the Mosaic law. Rather, they should write to them requiring only that they keep away from the pollutions of the idols and from the sexual immorality, the strangled thing, and the blood (v. 20). The meaning and relationship of these regulations have been debated throughout history. Schreiner states, "Certainly what James meant by these prohibitions is not easy to discern, and scholars have struggled to understand them and to see how they apply today. We have to admit that ascertaining what James said is difficult, and any solution must be tentative."¹⁸¹ My understanding on the matter has been most influenced by Ben Witherington.

a. The "pollutions of the idols" refers to the spiritual desecration that accompanies participation in idol worship. Holladay says the pollutions of the idols "expresses the Jewish belief that worship offered to images of other deities not only compromises monotheistic faith but also defiles the worshiper."¹⁸² The Gentile converts are to steer clear of worshiping idols, which in practice meant they were to keep their distance from the ritual meals in the pagan temples that were a regular part of idol worship in antiquity, meals they would have attended all their lives.

b. He reinforces the prohibition of attending pagan temple feasts by including conduct the Jews knew (or assumed) took place at those feasts and which they considered appalling: the sexual immorality, the strangled [thing], and the blood. If one gives force to the definite articles – *the* sexual immorality, *the* strangled [thing], and *the* blood – it suggests a specific occurrence of the conduct, such as took place in the feasts. Peterson states, "Witherington rightly proposes that the four elements mentioned by James and included in the decree in v. 29 must be viewed together and applied to a particular social context. The most natural way to read the text would be to see it as a prohibition of attending temple feasts and all that they entailed in the Greco-Roman world."¹⁸³ Bock states, "It is quite likely that the prohibition relates especially to attending pagan temples and what goes on with them."¹⁸⁴

c. It is like someone saying, "Stay away from the corruption of the strippers and from the drunkenness, the infidelity, and the fighting." We would understand that these are not four isolated prohibitions but a set of prohibitions that are related to the first, the command to stay away from the corruption of the strippers. Attending strip clubs is not only an immoral act of lusting but immerses one in an environment of ancillary vices. We would realize that these strip-club-related prohibitions were designed to magnify the warning and not intended to be an exhaustive or comprehensive list of one's moral obligations. The same goes for the prohibitions related to idol worship. It truly would be perverse to claim Gentile Christians are not required to be honest, loving, kind, forgiving, etc. because those virtues were not included in the

¹⁸¹ Schreiner, 31.

¹⁸² Holladay, 302.

¹⁸³ Peterson, 433 (fn. 55).

¹⁸⁴ Bock, 506.

Jerusalem decree. It is clear throughout the NT that all Christians are called to live like Christ in all areas of their lives.

d. There is no question that Jews associated idol worship with sexual immorality. Schnabel observes, "In the Old Testament and in Jewish tradition, sexual immorality was often linked with idolatry" (citing Jer. 3:6-8; Ezek. 16:15-46, 23:7-35; Hos. 5:4, 6:10).¹⁸⁵ *Wisdom of Solomon* 14:12, a work that probably dates from the latter part of the first century B.C., states, "For the invention of idols was the beginning of fornication, and the discovery of them the corruption of life." *2 Maccabees* 6:4, a work that probably dates from the latter part of the second century B.C., says of the defiling of the Jerusalem temple by the forces of Antiochus, "For the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the nations, who dallied with prostitutes and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit."

e. Regarding the cryptic phrases "the strangled [thing]" and "the blood," Witherington writes:

Also relevant to our discussion is the evidence that the choking of the sacrifice, strangling it, and drinking or tasting of blood transpired in pagan temples. In regard to the former, we have evidence from the magical papyri of the attempt to choke the sacrifice and in essence transfer its life breath or spiritual vitality into the idol, and in regard to the latter R. M. Oglivie points to the practice, mentioned occasionally in the literature, of the priest tasting the blood of the sacrifice. The singular reference to blood at the end of the decree would be superfluous after the reference to abstaining from things strangled or choked if the meaning was to avoid meat with the blood still in it. It is more likely that each item in the decree should be taken separately and all be seen as referring to four different activities that were known or believed to transpire in pagan temples.¹⁸⁶

f. If despite the redundancy, one assumes, as many do, that "the strangled [thing]" and "the blood" both refer to eating sacrificial meat from an animal whose blood had not been drained, it still is something a Jew would consider appalling. Consuming blood is expressly prohibited in the Old Testament because of blood's relationship to life (e.g., Gen. 9:4; Lev. 7:26-27, 17:10-14, 19:26; Deut. 12:16, 23-24, 15:23; 1 Sam. 14:33-34; Ezek. 33:25). Whether the prohibition of eating blood is a transcultural moral norm that continues in the new covenant is debated,¹⁸⁷ but that is not relevant to the Jewish revulsion.

¹⁸⁵ Schnabel, 643.

¹⁸⁶ Witherington, 464. Citing Witherington, Bock (p. 506) says, "What may have been particularly offensive was the Gentile priest tasting the blood of the sacrifice."

¹⁸⁷ Schreiner states (p. 32), "Another possibility, which I incline toward slightly, is that the prohibition of eating blood stems from the command given to Noah (Gen. 9:4) and represents a moral norm, so that the prohibition to eat blood has the same binding character as the prohibition against idol food and sexual immorality." In any event, draining the blood is part of standard practice today when slaughtering livestock. "After stunning, animals are usually suspended by a hind limb and moved down a conveyor line for the slaughter procedures. They are typically bled (a process called sticking or exsanguination) by the insertion of a knife into the thoracic cavity and severance of the carotid artery and jugular vein. *This method allows for maximal blood removal from the body.*" *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "[Livestock Slaughter Procedures](#)."

9. The rationale given in v. 21 is that Jews steeped in the law have long been present in cities throughout the empire. The point is that if Gentiles continue attending pagan temple feasts after they become Christians, it will kill evangelism among the Jews because they will not receive religious instruction from anyone engaging in idolatry and (presumably) in the repulsive practices they associate with it. It would be a massive stumbling block to sharing the gospel with them. Witherington states, "The witness of Gentile Christians was important to James. They must not give Jews in the Diaspora the opportunity to complain that Gentile Christians were still practicing idolatry and immorality by going to pagan feasts even after beginning to follow Christ."¹⁸⁸

10. This interpretation raises the question of why Paul did not appeal to the ruling when addressing the issue of food offered to idols in 1 Cor. 8:1 – 11:1. Why not just say that attending pagan temple feasts had already been prohibited by the apostles and elders at the Jerusalem Council and be done with it? That is not as puzzling as it may seem.

a. Briefly, it seems the Corinthians were resisting Paul's prohibition of attending idol feasts in pagan temples by arguing that they all know that idols are not real gods, a point with which Paul will agree, and thus their eating in the temple was not an act of worship but a purely social matter. In addition, food is a matter of indifference to God, another point on which Paul will agree, so putting this with the first argument, it does not matter *what* they eat or *where* they eat. So how can Paul forbid their participating in the temple feasts? Some of them also doubt that Paul has the proper apostolic authority to forbid them on this matter.¹⁸⁹

b. Paul opens his attack on their objection to his prohibition of attending temple feasts by challenging its faulty ethical premise. The assumption behind their argument was that Christian behavior is predicated solely on knowledge, that knowing that something is not forbidden automatically authorizes one to do it. Paul's first line of response is that *even if* their arguments about the propriety of eating in the temples were correct, which they were not (as he will make clear in 10:14-22), the principle of brotherly love would still require that they forego the practice.

(1) It would not help that point to tell them they could not attend the idol feasts because the Jerusalem Council had so ruled. He is teaching them the deeper rationale for avoiding the feasts, the rationale of love.

(2) He could have launched into an explanation that the Jerusalem decree was rooted in love for Jewish non-Christians, a desire not to put a stumbling block in the way of evangelizing them and analogized that to the claim he was making about brotherly love between believers. But he may have felt that was not necessary and a possible distraction.

c. After explaining that, regardless of their arguments justifying eating the idol feasts, the principle of brotherly love would require that they forego the practice, Paul makes clear in 10:14-22 that eating the cultic meals in pagan temples is in fact a sharing in the worship

¹⁸⁸ Witherington, 463.

¹⁸⁹ See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 398-399.

of the idol, which is in reality a demon, and is therefore prohibited. Perhaps Paul chose here not to bolster his case by appeal to the Jerusalem decree because his apostolic authority had been called into question. Relying on the ruling of others to make the point would play into that claim.

I. The Council's letter to Gentile believers (15:22-35)

1. The apostles, the elders, and the whole church agreed to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas a letter carried by two chosen delegates, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, who were leaders among the brothers in Jerusalem. We are told in v. 32 that they also were prophets. They would convey the letter and expound on its contents based on their presence at the meeting. We know nothing else of this Judas, but Silas (also known by his Latin name Silvanus) became an important figure in the church.

2. The letter is formally addressed to the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. The issue of Gentiles and the Mosaic law had become acute in Antioch, and Antioch was "the hub for this double province of Syria and eastern Cilicia."¹⁹⁰ The conclusion expressed in the letter would be relevant to Gentile converts elsewhere, and we see in Acts 16:4 that other communities were informed about it.

3. They assure the church in Antioch that the men from Jerusalem who had troubled them by claiming Gentile converts were obligated to submit to the Mosaic law were not speaking on their behalf. In contrast, Judas and Silas have their full authorization and will confirm and expound upon the contents of the letter. They are accompanying Barnabas and Paul, who are described as "beloved" and as "men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

4. They state that the conclusion expressed in the letter "seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." The language "it seemed good" is the language of a formal decree; it does not imply that they were expressing a mere opinion.¹⁹¹ And the language indicates that the decision they reached was in accordance with the will of God as expressed through the Holy Spirit. Luke does not specify how the Spirit made known God's will in the matter. Perhaps it was by a revelatory word through one of the Christian prophets¹⁹² or by knowledge planted directly in the hearts of the apostles. Or perhaps it was by the report of the Spirit's work among the Gentiles that was given by Peter and Paul and Barnabas and the Spirit's testimony through the prophet Amos that James quoted, which they realized made clear that the Mosaic law was not to be bound on Gentiles.¹⁹³

5. In the context of some Jews insisting that Gentile converts conform completely to Judaism, the apostles and elders declare that the only obligation they will put on the Gentile converts *that relates to the law-shaped perspective of the Jews* is that they steer clear of idol

¹⁹⁰ Bock, 511.

¹⁹¹ Witherington, 469.

¹⁹² Schnabel, 650.

¹⁹³ Peterson, 439. In that scenario, the prohibitions would be drawn from other revelations of the Spirit, such as the evil of idolatry and its related vices, the importance of the gospel, and the priority of love.

feasts in the pagan temples¹⁹⁴ and the associated vices.¹⁹⁵ This does not mean the prohibition of idol worship is merely an accommodation to Jewish sensibilities, that it is wrong only because of its devastating effect on Jewish evangelism. Paul makes clear that is not the case; idol worship is inherently sinful. But it is a sin that, more than others, will cause the Jews to ignore and rightly condemn Christians. As I interpret Acts 15:21, James was focused on the potential harm of the sin in driving Jews from the gospel, but that rationale is not specified in the letter.

6. The church in Antioch rejoiced when they read the letter because of its encouraging message. "The Gentile believers rejoiced that they did not have to be circumcised and they did not have to become Jewish proselytes. The Jewish believers in the congregation probably rejoiced that the apostles and elders were able to come to a unanimous decision"¹⁹⁶ and that the evangelistic roadblock of idol worship had been dealt with. The obligation to steer clear of idol feasts was not without cost in the pagan world (note the resistance in Corinth), but was a relatively mild and understandable burden.

7. Judas and Silas, who as I noted were prophets, encouraged and strengthened the saints in Antioch with a long or lengthy message or speech (NAS, NASU, HCSB, NJB, CSB, NET). After staying there for some time, they were sent off in peace to return to Jerusalem. They "were sent off with the ancient blessing of *shalom*, that the peace of God would abide with them."¹⁹⁷ Verse 34 ("But it seemed good to Silas to stay there") is excluded by almost all English versions because it almost certainly was not part of the original text.

8. Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others. Marshall comments, "Paul and Barnabas taught the church and evangelized together for the last time of which we have any record. There was, however, a group of other Christians engaged in the same work, so that the way was open for the two former missionaries to resume their travels and to know that the church would be left in good hands."¹⁹⁸

J. Paul and Barnabas separate (15:36-41)

1. Paul proposed that he and Barnabas return to the areas they previously evangelized. His letter to the churches in Galatia, probably written from Antioch prior to the Jerusalem Council, reveals the Judaizers had been active among the churches of that region.

2. Barnabas again wanted to take John Mark, his cousin (Col. 4:10), but Paul did not think it wise to do so because he had left them on their prior journey. Barnabas no doubt wanted to develop John Mark by giving him another chance, whereas Paul was convinced the potential cost to the mission would be too great. They disagreed sharply over the matter of judgment and decided in the end to divide the task.

¹⁹⁴ The "pollutions of the idols" in v. 20 refers to the spiritual desecration that accompanies participation in idol worship. The word in v. 29 (*eidōlothutos*) refers to sacrifices offered to idols in their temples (see, Witherington, 460-463).

¹⁹⁵ They are not addressing the kinds of concessions love demands in situations like Rom. 14:1-15:13.

¹⁹⁶ Schnabel, 651.

¹⁹⁷ Polhill, 336.

¹⁹⁸ Marshall (1980), 256.

3. Barnabas took John Mark to Cyprus, where he, Paul, and John Mark had begun their prior journey. Recall that Barnabas was a native of Cyprus (Acts 4:36). Paul, on the other hand, chose Silas as a companion, who had returned to Antioch, either on his own or at Paul's request. They were commended by the saints in Antioch to the grace of the Lord, sent with the church's approval and blessing. This is around A.D. 49/50.

4. In making their way to the churches Paul had planted with Barnabas, he and Silas traveled northward through Syria and Cilicia. They strengthened the churches that had been planted in those regions, either during Paul's years in Tarsus and/or as the gospel had spread out from the church in Antioch.

5. We do not know how John Mark would have fared if there had been no disagreement and he had again accompanied Paul and Barnabas, or if he would have affected the mission negatively. It seems clear, however, that Barnabas's investment in John Mark bore fruit. "Paul later acknowledged the worth of Mark and regarded him as a colleague (Col. 4:10; and especially 2 Tim. 4:11; cf. 1 Pet. 5:12)."¹⁹⁹

6. Luke follows Paul's path from this point. Barnabas is not mentioned again in Acts.

K. Timothy joins Paul and Silas (16:1-5)

1. Paul and Silas went to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived. His mother, Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5), was a Jewish Christian, but his father was a Greek unbeliever, who probably was now dead.²⁰⁰ Timothy had a good reputation among the saints at Lystra and Iconium, and Paul wanted him to accompany them. It was probably at this time that Timothy received a spiritual gift (a gracious endowment) for ministry, the giving of which was accompanied by the laying on of hands (by the elders and Paul) and by prophetic recognition of the gift (1 Tim. 1:18, 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5).

2. Timothy had not been circumcised as a child as required by Jewish law, and this was known by the Jews in the area because they knew his father, as an unbelieving Greek, would not allow it. Paul had Timothy circumcised simply as a matter of evangelistic expediency. Because his mother was Jewish, the Jews apparently considered Timothy a Jew in terms of his ethnicity,²⁰¹ and Paul did not want to hinder the gospel's progress among the Jews by having an uncircumcised Jewish-Christian as his associate. He thought that would be a needless impediment to gaining a hearing with them.

¹⁹⁹ Marshall (1980), 258.

²⁰⁰ The imperfect tense in 16:3b ("his father *was* a Greek") suggests to Marshall, Barrett, and Bruce that he was dead. Marshall (1980), 259; Barrett, 2:761-762; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 352.

²⁰¹ The earliest rabbinic evidence in the Mishnah counted as Jewish the sons of a Jewish mother and a Gentile man. Though some doubt whether that principle was in effect in the mid-first century, the evidence of the Mishnah seems to confirm the practice assumed in Acts. See Keener, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 3:2317-2318.

a. Paul knew that in the new covenant circumcision was insignificant in God's eyes (Gal. 5:6, 6:15) and that the Jerusalem Council had agreed that circumcision was not an obligation, but he also knew the Jews might be put off by it. He was willing to become all things to all people so as to win some (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

b. On the other hand, Paul adamantly refused to have Titus, a Gentile, circumcised (Gal. 2:3-5) because the Judaizers were insisting that this was necessary for salvation (e.g., Acts 15:5). Giving in to that demand would not be a matter of expediency but a matter of compromising the truth of the gospel.

3. As they went through the cities, they delivered the decision of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem that Gentile converts were required to avoid idol feasts but were not required to be circumcised and to submit to the Mosaic law. Voluntarily submitting to circumcision as an evangelistic strategy or for some other non-salvific purpose, whether as a Jew or a Gentile, was a different matter.

4. As a result of their visits, the churches were strengthened in the faith. God works through human agents in strengthening our faith. And as often happens, with stronger faith comes an increase in conversions. Faith that is real and alive is not contained.

V. The Gospel Spreads to Europe (16:6-19:20)

A. The Macedonian call (16:6-10)

1. For an undisclosed reason, the Holy Spirit forbid the missionaries from speaking the word in the Roman province of Asia. Presumably they had intended to do so before the Spirit intervened. Perhaps the Spirit made the prohibition known through a prophetic utterance. With that door closed, they went northwestward through the region of Phrygia and Galatia.

2. When they came to Mysia, they intended to head north into Bithynia, but once again the Holy Spirit, here called the Spirit of Jesus, did not allow them to do so. So passing *through* Mysia,²⁰² they went to the Roman colony of Troas on the coast. It is about 585 miles from Syrian Antioch (roughly the distance from Phoenix to Lubbock, TX). The Spirit seems to have been funneling them there.

3. The missionaries could have sailed in several directions from Troas, but Paul was given a vision during the night of a man of Macedonia urging him to come to Macedonia to help them. The missionaries understood that God was calling them through the vision to preach the gospel to the people in Macedonia, so they immediately sought to go there. The gospel was

²⁰² See NAB, REB, NJB, and NET. NET note states: "Although the normal meaning for *παρέρχομαι* (*parerchomai*) is 'pass by, go by,' it would be difficult to get to Troas from where Paul and his companions were without going through rather than around Mysia. BDAG 776 s.v. *παρέρχομαι* 6 list some nonbiblical examples of the meaning 'go through, pass through,' and give that meaning for the usage here."

spreading to Europe. Notice Luke says "we" immediately sought to go into Macedonia, indicating that at this time he was part of the team.

B. The conversion of Lydia (16:11-15)

1. They sailed from Troas to the island of Samothrace and then to the Macedonian port city of Neapolis. From there they journeyed the 10 miles inland to Philippi, a Roman colony and a leading city of the district. They stayed there "some days."

2. On the Sabbath day, they went to a place by the river that they had been led to believe was a place where some Jewish women customarily met for prayer. Apparently there was no synagogue in the city, which requires the presence of at least 10 Jewish men. They sat and spoke with the women who had gathered there.

3. One of the women was Lydia, a Gentile who was a worshiper of God, probably meaning a devotee of Judaism who had not fully converted (a God-fearer). She was from Thyatira and a seller of goods made from the purple dye for which her home region (also called Lydia) was famous.

4. The Lord opened Lydia's heart to pay attention to Paul's message, to hear it fairly and honestly, free from obscuring prejudice. He enabled her acceptance of it by allowing her to perceive it in a different light. Everyone who responds has had their heart opened in this way by the Lord. This does not mean they were *made* to respond; it means they were *enabled* to respond. The means of opening the heart are not revealed. God may act directly on the person and/or indirectly through circumstances and experiences, through the presented word, or through a combination of these. René López writes:

When Paul and Silas were in Philippi, they spoke to women who had gathered at the river outside the city gate to pray. One of the women was Lydia, and "the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul" (16:14). The Greek δῆνοιχεν ("opened") refers to "opening of the eyes to make understanding possible and enable perception" [citing Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd rev. ed., Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 234]. Many of the New Testament occurrences of καρδία ("heart") refer to the mind, as it does here; God opened Lydia's "eyes of the heart," as if removing a mental veil (2 Cor. 4:3–4), so that she would understand and respond. God enabled her to understand Paul's message so that she could believe and be saved. But opening her heart (or understanding) is not the same as giving her faith. Acts 16 does not say God gave her faith. Instead He enabled her to understand so that she could exercise faith.²⁰³

4. After Lydia and her household were baptized, baptism being the prescribed response for those who come to faith, she prevailed on the missionaries to stay at her home. As

²⁰³ René A. López, "Is Faith A Gift From God Or A Human Exercise?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:655 (July 2007), 264.

the head of her household, she likely was a widow or had never married.²⁰⁴ She obviously was a woman of means to have a house of sufficient size to accommodate the missionaries. Polhill states:

Not only did Lydia share her goods, but she shared her faith as well. As the leader of her household, she led them to join her in commitment and baptism (16:15). This is the first time the baptism of a "household" is *narrated* in Acts. Another will follow shortly (v. 33). There is no evidence whatever that this included infants, and it cannot be used in support of infant baptism. Previous references to Cornelius's household indicate that those who were baptized both heard and believed the message (10:44; 11:4, 17). Throughout Acts baptism is based on personal faith and commitment, and there is no reason to see otherwise in the household baptisms.²⁰⁵

C. Paul and Silas in prison (16:16-24)

1. On the way to the place of prayer, they were met by a slave girl who had an evil spirit by which she predicted the future. As a result, she earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. People paid for her prognostications.

a. That the spirit was demonic is indicated in several ways. Luke does not describe her as a prophetess or refer to her activity as prophesying. Rather, he says literally that she has a "python spirit," a word associated historically with the pagan oracle of Delphi. He describes her activity as "fortunetelling," which points to something prohibited in Scripture (e.g., Deut. 18:10; 1 Sam. 28:8; 2 Ki. 17:17; Jer. 27 [LXX 34]:9; Ezek. 12.24), and he highlights the profit motive which he elsewhere links with magic, with pagan or false religion (Acts 8:4-24, 19:11-41).²⁰⁶ The fact Paul casts the spirit out confirms it is not of God.

b. Demonic spirits do not have innate knowledge of the future. That belongs only to God, as is implied in Isa. 42:8-9, 46:9-10, and, I believe, in Satan's participation in the crucifixion of Christ. But having lived for thousands of years and having quick and invisible access to many things, they have a superhuman knowledge of the present and past that can give them extreme insight into the future.

2. The slave girl followed Paul crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." It is possible this was a truthful declaration that they were servants of Yahweh who were proclaiming the way of eternal salvation in Christ that became a hindrance by being made so incessantly, but it may have been ambiguous to obscure the true nature of the missionaries' work. Ben Witherington explains:

The Jewish influence on this city is not seen to be great, and the pagan use of $\upsilon\psi\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ θεος [Most High God] of various pagan deities is documented (see SIG no. 1181). [Footnote states: In fact, as Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p 361 says,

²⁰⁴ Bock, 535.

²⁰⁵ Polhill, 350.

²⁰⁶ Peterson, 463.

"Among Gentiles σωτηρια [salvation] was the object of many vows and prayers to Θεος υψιστος and other divinities." "In Philippi the term 'Highest God' must have been misleading. In view of the pagan usage of Hypsistos, the term would not have suggested the referent was the Jewish God, unless that person was a Jew or Judaizer. There were many 'highest gods' and a pagan hearer would understand the referent of the term to be that deity he or she considered to be supreme. Hearers would not think of Yahweh. Thus the primary effect of the term on pagans must have been to mislead them" [citing Trebilco, "Paul and Silas," p. 60]. Furthermore, the text does not clearly say that the Pythoness [the slave girl with the python spirit] was suggesting that Paul and Silas were proclaiming *the* way of salvation. [There is no definite article so the context must determine whether to translate "a way" or "the way."] Her utterance should be seen in its proper polytheistic and pluralistic context. V. 18 indicates that this behavior continued for many days, and no doubt Paul found it annoying, but the verb διαπονηθεις surely means being deeply troubled. In other words, Paul is not merely annoyed. The story is not about a true proclamation come from a dubious source, which is how most commentators have understood this verse.

Paul is disturbed because the message being proclaimed was at the very least misleading. He was troubled about the content of her proclamation. The very word "salvation" without further explanation would often connote health or healing or rescue to a pagan, just as the phrase "Most High God" would not suggest monotheism to a pagan, but rather would suggest the deity one saw as being at the top of the pantheon of all gods. Thus v. 18 indicates that Paul turned and spoke to the spirit (τῷ πνεύματι), which was actually speaking through the girl, and ordered it to come out of the girl in the name of Jesus.²⁰⁷

3. With the exorcism, the owners of the slave girl realized that their goldmine was destroyed, so they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the magistrates. After pointing out they were Jews, they accused them of disturbing the city by advocating customs that violate Roman law. The crowd joins in the attack, and the magistrates rip off their clothes and have them beaten severely with rods. They then threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely, so he put them in the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks. The darkness, lack of ventilation, filth, crowding, foul odors, cold or heat, and hard floor made an inner cell terrible, even without being in stocks.

D. The Philippian jailer converted (16:25-40)

1. In the pain and discomfort of having been beaten severely, thrown in an inner cell, and put in stocks, Paul and Silas were, around midnight, praying and singing hymns to God. Marshall remarks, "Here we have a concrete depiction of the Christian ideal of 'joy amid suffering' (Rom. 5:3; Jas. 1:2; 1 Pet. 5:6)."²⁰⁸ This was no doubt one of the "sleepless nights" Paul includes among his sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:27.

²⁰⁷ Witherington, 494-495.

²⁰⁸ Marshall (1980), 271.

2. Luke notes the prisoners were listening to them praying and singing and that suddenly there was a great earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison. In conjunction with that earthquake, all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. The prisoners may have surmised from the timing of the earthquake that it was God's response to Paul and Silas, which would cause them to take seriously any instructions given by those men. Perhaps Paul told them in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake to stay put. They may have been inclined to do so not only because of Paul's spiritual credibility but also because becoming a permanent fugitive was as bad or worse than the consequences of the trials they were facing.²⁰⁹

3. The jailer woke and saw the prison doors were open, but we are not told where he was sleeping or how he was awakened. He may have been at his house, which was near the jail, and been awakened by subordinates who were (or were supposed to be) watching the cells during the night. In any event, he was able to see that the prison doors were open, and perhaps hearing no commotion of prisoners he assumed they had escaped. Rather than face the dishonor of execution for dereliction of duty for the negligence that could be pinned on him or his subordinates,²¹⁰ especially the horrific execution that could be administered if he were a public slave,²¹¹ he intended to commit suicide in the Roman manner of falling on his sword so that it pierces his heart or throat.

4. Paul yells to the jailer, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." Paul would have known despite the darkness that none of the prisoners had escaped because they probably were all in the same inner cell. Prisoners sometimes were put in the inner cell at night for security reasons.²¹² He could see the jailer from the darkness of the inner cell because there were torches outside that would illuminate him (16:29).²¹³

5. The jailer called for the torches to be brought and rushed into the interior of the jail. He falls down before Paul and Silas, trembling in fear, because he was aware they had been proclaiming in Philippi "the way of salvation" (v. 17, however that was understood). "The supernatural confirmation of the messengers and thus of their message led the jailer to give them the reverence due to divine agents (verse 29) and to seek the salvation which they claimed to offer."²¹⁴

6. The jailer brings Paul and Silas out of the jail and asks them what he must do to be saved. He is now convinced that he needs to take seriously whatever message of salvation these men are preaching. They have been certified in his mind as representatives of the divine.

7. They tell him that if he believes in the Lord Jesus, he will be saved, and the same goes for his household. And they then proceed to speak the word of the Lord to him and to all in his house that they might know what believing in the Lord Jesus entails, the content and nature of that belief which is necessary for salvation. In other words, they preach to them the

²⁰⁹ Schnabel, 690 (fn. 53).

²¹⁰ Keener, 3:2497-2498.

²¹¹ Schnabel, 690 (fn. 51).

²¹² Keener, 3:2488.

²¹³ Keener, 3:2507.

²¹⁴ Marshall (1980), 272-273.

gospel, the message of Jesus' identity, atoning death, and resurrection. The jailer's acceptance of that message is indicated by the fact he at that very hour did what he could to care for Paul and Silas by washing the wounds from their beating. And he and all his family, those to whom the gospel had been preached and believed, were "at once" baptized. Baptism clearly was part of the "word of the Lord" that they spoke to them; it is the way in which God commands penitent faith to be expressed, the God-ordained way of calling out to him. One can think of it as a symbolic prayer, the substance of which is "God have mercy on me in the work of your Son."

8. After they were all baptized, the missionaries and the jailer and his family ate a meal together, a symbol of their fellowship. And the jailer and his entire household rejoiced that he, the jailer, had believed in God. They all rejoiced in that fact because, as the head of the household, his belief was the doorway to the belief of the entire household.

9. Paul and Silas would have been returned to the prison, and the other prisoners again would have been secured there. When day came, the magistrates sent the police to instruct the jailer to release the missionaries. They may have concluded "that the public beating, the night of imprisonment, and perhaps expulsion from the city would serve as sufficient deterrent to these preachers' further activity in Philippi."²¹⁵

10. But Paul then informed the police that he and Silas were Roman citizens whose rights had been violated by the magistrates. Paul notes in 1 Thess. 2:2 that they were treated shamefully in Philippi. Rather than be sent away quietly as though no wrong had been done, Paul insists that the perpetrators themselves come to escort them out.

a. This is not merely a matter of justice and personal pride. As Keener notes, "Public beating and imprisonment incurred shame, a shame that would attach to the mission if not corrected."²¹⁶ He states:

Why do Paul and Silas need to raise the point of citizenship at all, once they are being released? An important reason is that in the eyes of Philippi's inhabitants (and perhaps the new Christians among them), their condemnation appears to reflect poorly on their mission and the church they have started; securing at least some degree of vindication will encourage the church and, it is hoped, discourage later aggression against it.²¹⁷

b. One wonders why Paul did not play the citizenship card before their unlawful beating and imprisonment. It would have spared them that suffering, but raising it at that time probably would have entangled him in a protracted legal proceeding that needed to wait on the availability of the province's governor and in which hostile authorities may have insisted on the production of distant witnesses.²¹⁸ By waiting until after they had been unlawfully treated, Paul and Silas had the upper hand in that their mistreatment as Roman citizens put the

²¹⁵ Keener, 3:2516.

²¹⁶ Keener, 3:2526.

²¹⁷ Keener, 3:2526.

²¹⁸ Keener, 3:2480-2482.

magistrates in danger.²¹⁹ The magistrates gladly apologized and escorted Paul and Silas out, thus providing vindication of their mission, to avoid drawing official attention to their conduct. Note that the magistrates now request that they leave the city rather than demand that they do so.

11. They left the prison and went to Lydia's house, where they had stayed. After encouraging the new converts, they left the city. The fact his first "we passage" ends with the departure of Paul and Silas and resumes when he apparently reunites with Paul in Philippi in Acts 20:5-6 suggests that Luke stayed on in Philippi.

E. Paul and Silas in Thessalonica (17:1-9)

1. Following the great Roman highway, the Via Egnatia, they went through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, roughly 100 miles from Philippi. There was a synagogue in the city, and on three Sabbath days, Paul reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and rise from the dead. We sometimes talk like mystics, as though applying logic to Scripture to prove a point is sub-Christian or even anti-Christian, but the inspired apostle Paul disagreed. He routinely used reason to try to persuade Jews and Greeks (18:4).

2. He declared to these Jews in Thessalonica that Jesus is the Christ. Some Jews were persuaded and *joined* Paul and Silas, as did many Greek God-fearers, i.e., Gentile devotees of Judaism, and some upper-class women (or the wives of leading men of the city). The probable implication is "that they formed a separate group and met apart from the synagogue, evidently at the house of Jason (17:5)."²²⁰

3. The Jews were jealous that Paul and Silas were effective in pulling away many of their potential Gentile converts to Judaism and even in pulling away some of the Jews. So they induced some bad characters from the marketplace to create an uproar against them that they could use to bolster their charge to the authorities that Paul and Silas were involved in wrongdoing. Some things in politics never change. You create the uproar behind the scenes and then claim it is a grassroots reaction to your enemy.

4. They attacked Jason's house, intending to grab Paul and Silas, but they were not there. They settled for dragging Jason and some of the brothers before the authorities, accusing Jason of harboring and sympathizing with these social disrupters, whom they describe hyperbolically as having turned the world upside down (apparently aware of the disturbance in Philippi and elsewhere) and charge with breaching the decrees of Caesar in saying there is another king named Jesus. That sounded like disloyalty to Caesar if not treason, which understandably disturbed the people and the authorities.

5. Whether they were unimpressed with the case after some preliminary investigation or for some other reason, the authorities do not insist on hunting down Paul and Silas or on punishing Jason and the others. Instead, they are content to have Jason and the brothers post a bond that presumably was conditioned on their ensuring certain behavior, perhaps

²¹⁹ Keener, 3:2527-2529.

²²⁰ Marshall (1980), 278.

including that Paul and Silas would leave the city and not return during the term of office of the present authorities.²²¹ With that, they allowed Jason and the brothers to leave.

F. Paul and Silas in Berea (17:10-15)

1. Realizing the danger of further mob violence, the brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas at night to Berea, about 45 miles southwest of Thessalonica. It is unclear precisely how long they spent in Thessalonica. The fact Paul worked at his trade while there (1 Thess. 2:7-9) and received aid from the Philippians (Phil. 4:16), perhaps more than once, suggests he probably was there longer than a few weeks, but it was almost certainly not longer than a couple of months.

2. In Berea, Paul and Silas begin their evangelism in the Jewish synagogue. The Jews there were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they were interested in and open to the message rather than closeminded and hostile. But they were not gullible. They examined the Scriptures daily to see if the biblical case being presented was solid. Marshall remarks, "Here was no mere emotional response to the gospel, but one based on intellectual conviction."²²²

3. As a result of their openness and honest examination of the Scriptures, many of the Jews in Berea came to faith. In addition, a good number of Greek women of high standing and Greek men converted. It is not clear whether these were Jewish sympathizers whom they would have encountered in the synagogue or "pagan Greeks" they may have encountered in other venues like the marketplace. These converts probably included Sopater, the son of Pyrrhus, who is identified in Acts 20:4 as being from Berea.

4. When Jews in Thessalonica learned Paul was preaching in Berea, they went there with the same strategy of opposition that had been effective for them in Thessalonica. They turned the crowds against the missionaries, presumably by again claiming they were breaching the decrees of Caesar in saying there is another king named Jesus. Realizing Paul's importance and the danger to him from mob violence, the brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast where he and some Berean companions sailed to Athens. Silas and Timothy remained in Berea, presumably to instruct the new converts in their faith. Paul sent word to them by those who had accompanied him to come to him as soon as possible.

G. Paul in Athens (17:16-21)

1. While Paul was waiting in Athens, he was provoked or distressed by the manmade images of gods that were everywhere in the city. He preached Jesus and the resurrection to Jews and God-fearers in the synagogue, and daily he preached that message in the marketplace to whoever happened to be there.

2. Some of the philosophers who conversed with him spoke disparagingly of him as a "babbler." It probably refers to someone who picks up bits and pieces of information from

²²¹ Longenecker, 976.

²²² Marshall (1980), 280.

various sources and then tries to pass them off as his own deep insight, a kind of poseur intellectual. Others said he was a proclaimer of strange gods because he was preaching what for them was a new religion involving one called Jesus and the resurrection that had begun with him.²²³

3. The philosophers brought Paul to the Areopagus wanting him to expound on his teaching. "[The Areopagus] does not refer so much to the place, however, as to the advisory council of Athens known as the *Areopagus*, which dealt with ethical, cultural, and religious matters, including the supervision of education and controlling the many visiting lecturers."²²⁴ Luke notes that the Athenians and foreigners who lived there were obsessed with "the next thing," perhaps implying they chase philosophical fads rather than truth.

H. Paul addresses the Areopagus (17:22-34)

1. Paul begins his address before the Areopagus by sharing his perception from the many idols in the city that they are a very religious community. So much so that they even have an altar on which worship is directed to "an unknown god." Paul uses the public acknowledgement that there is a God or gods they do not know to tell them about the almighty creator God.

2. He tells them that the God who made the world and everything in it, who is Lord of all, does not live in manmade temples and has no needs that are met by human efforts. On the contrary, he is the one who *gives to mankind* life and breath and everything else. This God made from one man all the inhabitants of all the nations on the earth; they all descended from Adam. And in creation, he provided for humanity by setting the seasons of the year (cf. 14:17; "the ordered seasons" NAB) and preparing the areas of the world that are inhabitable by humans (thereby establishing the areas available for nations).

3. He did so in the desire that dispersed humanity would in their fallenness find their way to him. And the fact is that he is not far from each one of us, meaning the evidence of his reality, presence, and goodness surrounds us. Creation itself bears witness to him if we will but see it. Indeed, his nearness is reflected in the fact it is by him²²⁵ that we live and move and have our being.²²⁶ We are dependent on him and close to him.

4. Paul then quotes the Greek poet Aratus's statement (3rd century B.C.), "For we are indeed his offspring." (This was very similar to the statement of the Greek poet Cleanthes,

²²³ Bock, 562.

²²⁴ NET note.

²²⁵ "While Stoics in the audience may have seen a point of agreement, Paul likely understood the prepositional phrase in an instrumental sense ('by him'), in which case the triadic formulation is not an argument for humankind's ontological connectedness with deity but a biblical reference to God's act of creation through which human beings came into existence, who are thus both dependent on him and close to him – expressed in Hellenistic philosophical terminology." Schnabel, 737.

²²⁶ "This sentence is often regarded as a quotation from a hymn to Zeus composed by Epimenides of Crete (ca. 600 BC) or from Posidonius. These suggestions are not convincing; the triadic formulation that emphasizes the complete dependence of human beings on God for their existence and lives 'is not a veiled poetic quotation, but a combination that must be ascribed to Paul or Luke'" [quoting Bertil Gärtner]. Schnabel, 736.

which may explain why he says some of your poets, plural, have said.) Aratus would have meant the words in a pantheistic sense, that all things of nature are a manifestation of the divine, whereas Paul intends it as a reference to Adam, who was created specially in the image and likeness of God and from whom all human beings descended.²²⁷

5. Paul explains that since humans are God's offspring, we *ought not* conceive of him as idolaters do, thinking he is like an image made of gold or silver or stone that was formed by the art and imagination of man. The point of 17:30 is that God, having disregarded the Gentiles' time of culpable ignorance (in which they suppressed what they ought to have known as God's offspring to engage in idolatry – v. 29; Rom. 1:18-25) in the sense he did not allow that time to disqualify them as objects of his mercy, extends to them an offer of mercy in Christ. He commands all people everywhere, Gentiles as well as Jew, to repent, to turn from their present way to his way that they may be saved on the appointed day of judgment by Jesus Christ.

6. Paul says God has given assurance to all that Christ is his criterion of judgment by raising him from the dead. The reference to resurrection caused some of his hearers to mock the claim. Marshall comments, "Although Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, the idea of a bodily resurrection was alien to their thinking, since the body was increasingly regarded as earthly and evil in comparison with the soul which was the seat of the divine in man. Not only was the cross 'folly to Gentiles', but so also was the resurrection."²²⁸ Others were at least more polite and indicated they were willing to hear him on another occasion.

7. Luke notes that there were conversions in Athens, including Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, and a woman named Damaris. The fact Paul in 1 Cor. 16:15 describes the Corinthian household of Stephanus as the firstfruits of Achaia does not mean there were no conversions in Athens prior to the visit to Corinth. Keener states:

More important, from the standpoint of Roman administration, is that Athens was one of a handful of 'free cities' excluded from the province of Achaia until the time of Constantine I. Athenian converts would not then need to be counted technically among Paul's first converts in the province of Achaia, certainly not in a letter to Corinthians. We therefore lack grounds to doubt Luke's report of converts there.²²⁹

I. Paul in Corinth (18:1-17)

1. It seems from other texts that Silas and Timothy (or maybe just Timothy) joined Paul in Athens and then Timothy was dispatched to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage the saints in the midst of their persecution (1 Thess. 3:1-3). Silas presumably was sent somewhere else in Macedonia (or remained in Berea), and then Paul left Athens for Corinth (Acts 18:1), the capital of Achaia, where Silas and Timothy later joined him (Acts 18:5). The three of them are said to have preached Christ among the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:9).

²²⁷ Schnabel, 737.

²²⁸ Marshall (1980), 291.

²²⁹ Keener, 3:2678.

2. Paul's condition when he arrived in Corinth is reflected in 1 Cor. 2:3 where he says, "I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling." He was "in a dejected mood, burdened by the problems in Macedonia and his dismissal at Athens."²³⁰ He met a Jewish-Christian couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who had recently come to Corinth after Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome.²³¹

a. Like Paul, they were tentmakers or leatherworkers by trade. Paul stayed with them and supported himself by working with them. Marshall states, "Since rabbis were expected to perform their religious and legal functions without demanding a fee, it was necessary for them to have some other source of income. Paul's occupation was as a tentmaker."²³²

b. The Roman historian Suetonius (A.D. 69-140) reports that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of "Chrestus." Most scholars agree that "Chrestus" is a misspelling of the Greek "Christos" and that the reference is probably to disputes within the Jewish community over the claims of Jesus to be "Christos," the Messiah. This expulsion was in A.D. 49.²³³

c. Aquila and Priscilla later accompanied Paul to Ephesus, where they remained as he continued back to Antioch. It is here that they explained to Apollos the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:24-26). When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus around A.D. 54, he sent greetings to the Corinthians from Priscilla and Aquila and the church in their house (1 Cor. 16:19). When Paul wrote Romans around A.D. 57, the couple was back in Rome (Rom. 16:3), the expulsion edict having ceased to be in force following Claudius's death in A.D. 54. In the mid-60s, they were back in Ephesus, that being Timothy's probable location when Paul wrote 2 Timothy (2 Tim. 4:19).

3. Every Sabbath Paul tried to persuade the Jews and Greeks in the synagogue about the truth of the gospel. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, one or both brought financial assistance to Paul from the Philippians and possibly elsewhere (Phil. 4:15; 2 Cor. 11:8-9), which allowed him to devote himself more fully to preaching to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.²³⁴ The Jews opposed and defamed Paul with such intensity that his continuing to teach in the synagogue was no longer possible or feasible. Marshall comments:

Paul responded by leaving the synagogue, but not before he had done his best to convince the Jews of the seriousness of their plight in rejecting the gospel. As on an earlier occasion (13:51), he *shook* the dust off his *garments* (Neh. 5:13) as a sign of the breaking off of fellowship with them. This kind of action was performed by Jews against Gentiles, and its present significance was to indicate that in the sight of the missionaries those who rejected the gospel were no better than the Gentiles, cut off from the true people of God. If the Jews found

²³⁰ Longenecker, 992.

²³¹ Luke does not identify them here as Christians, but if they had not already converted Luke surely would have commented on their later conversion.

²³² Marshall (1980), 293.

²³³ See, e.g., Polhill, 382-383.

²³⁴ Marshall (1980), 294.

themselves ultimately rejected by God, the blame for this would rest entirely on themselves; Paul had preached faithfully to them, and bore no responsibility for what they did with the message. From this point onwards he was justified in bothering no more with them and turning instead to the Gentiles, both proselytes and others (13:46; 28:28).²³⁵

4. Paul sets up his teaching ministry next door to the synagogue in the home of Titius Justus. He is described as "a worshiper of God," which "is practically a technical term for the category called *God-fearers*, Gentiles who worshiped the God of Israel and in many cases kept the Mosaic law, but did not take the final step of circumcision necessary to become a proselyte to Judaism."²³⁶ Since he "made his house available as a new center of preaching and teaching," he presumably "had heard Paul preach and teach in the synagogue . . . [and] come to faith in Jesus."²³⁷ "The suggestion that his full Roman name was Gaius Titius Justus and that he was Paul's host in Corinth when he wrote his letter to the Romans (Rom 16:23; cf. 1 Cor 1:14) is possible, but must remain hypothetical."²³⁸

5. Paul's ministry in Corinth was very successful. Many who heard him believed and were baptized, including Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and his entire household. (Crispus's baptism is mentioned expressly in 1 Cor. 1:14.) Crispus's conversion was no doubt disturbing to the Jews and "must have made a great impression and led to other conversions."²³⁹

6. From past experience, Paul could anticipate that with greater evangelistic success comes greater opposition, so the Lord reassures him in a nighttime vision. He tells him, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." He commands Paul to continue preaching because he knows in advance how successful the gospel is going to be in the city; there are many in the city are going to convert. To steel him for that task, he promises that he will protect him from harm that he may continue the mission.

7. Paul taught the word of God in Corinth for about 18 months. The Lord's promise to protect him is demonstrated in the attempt of the Jews to bring legal charges against him before Gallio, who was proconsul of Achaia from July A.D. 51 to June A.D. 52.²⁴⁰ Specifically, they charged Paul with persuading people to worship God contrary to "the law," almost certainly meaning Roman law. It seems they were claiming that the religion for which Paul was advocating was something new and not part of the legally protected religion of Judaism and thus was an illegal religion. Gallio, however, perceived the complaint as a squabble within the Jewish religion and thus not something properly subject to a Roman court. He therefore dismissed the case out of hand, with no need even to hear from Paul, and expelled the Jews from his presence. Schnabel comments:

²³⁵ Marshall (1980), 294.

²³⁶ NET note.

²³⁷ Schnabel, 759.

²³⁸ Schnabel, 759.

²³⁹ Longenecker, 992.

²⁴⁰ Schnabel, 761.

This was an immensely important verdict, not only because it protected the Christians in the province of Achaia from legal cases against their beliefs and against the existence of their new congregations, but also because this was the first time that a Roman official issued a legal verdict concerning the followers of Jesus. This verdict declared that they should be regarded as a Jewish group, with the corollary that they would have the right to the same legal privileges that the Jews had been granted by the emperors.²⁴¹

8. When the Jews present realized "that their legal case [had] been disallowed and that Paul and his group [had] been given, by implication, official legal sanction,"²⁴² they turned on Sosthenes, the current synagogue ruler who was no doubt instrumental in bringing the case against Paul. They beat him in front of the tribunal, but Gallio did not care. Alternatively, it is possible Sosthenes was beaten by Gentiles who took the occasion of Gallio's snub of the Jews to vent their anti-Semitism or by a combination of Gentiles and Jews.²⁴³

9. It is interesting that a Sosthenes is identified in 1 Cor. 1:1 as a co-author of that letter to the Corinthian church. Marshall notes, "[T]he possibility that Crispus's successor as ruler of the synagogue was also converted to Christianity cannot be ruled out."²⁴⁴ Perhaps Gallio's ruling, his treatment by fellow Jews, and Paul's continuing preaching helped open his eyes.

J. Paul returns to Antioch (18:18-23)

1. Paul remained in Corinth an unspecified number of days after the Gallio decision, which may suggest a short stay in addition to the 18 months noted in 18:11.²⁴⁵ He then, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila, went to nearby Cenchreae to board a ship to return to Antioch in Syria. Luke notes that at Cenchreae Paul cut his hair because he was making a vow.

a. Though opinions vary, it seems Paul at Cenchreae cut (*keirō*) his hair (not shaved [*xuraō*] as in Acts 21:24) in advance of making a Nazirite vow in gratitude for God's blessings and protection in Corinth. Knowing he would not cut his hair again until he shaved it in Jerusalem in completion of the Nazirite vow pursuant to Numbers 6 and knowing the uncertainties of travel in the ancient world, especially for him given the hostility his gospel engendered, he cut it before the vow to limit its ultimate length.²⁴⁶ As Johnson states, "In this case the translation of the imperfect as 'he was making a vow' would probably be better."²⁴⁷

b. Paul's personal decision to make a Nazirite vow to God does not mean he believed the Mosaic law continued in force or was binding on Christians. It reflected his understanding that Jews of that day, those caught in the covenant transition wrought by Christ,

²⁴¹ Schnabel, 764.

²⁴² Schnabel, 765.

²⁴³ Schnabel, 765.

²⁴⁴ Marshall (1980), 299.

²⁴⁵ Barrett, 2:876; Peterson, 519.

²⁴⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 330; see also, Dunn (1996), 246; Keener, 3:2785; Schnabel, 767 (can be understood as "Paul's final haircut before the vow took effect").

²⁴⁷ Johnson, 330.

were not forbidden from expressing their piety in certain traditional Jewish ways. He was willing to live voluntarily as a Jew, at least in terms of things not inherently contrary to the gospel, such as offering animal sacrifices for sin, but that is different from claiming those things were a divine obligation. Of course, many such traditional expressions of Jewish piety became impossible with the prophesied destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, which served as a divine exclamation point that the Mosaic covenant had been rendered obsolete.

2. The ship sailed from Cenchreae to Ephesus. Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue there, and though they asked him to stay for a longer time, he declined, telling them, "I will return to you if God wills." He then sailed from Ephesus for Caesarea, leaving Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus.

3. Luke reports that after Paul landed at Caesarea, "he went up and greeted the church," which "is usually understood as a reference to going up to Jerusalem and seeing the church there; this would fit in with the suggestion that Paul's vow could be terminated only by the offering of a sacrifice in Jerusalem."²⁴⁸ Longenecker remarks, "Jerusalem is certainly implied by the expressions 'went up' (*anabas*, GK 326) and 'went down' (*katebē*, GK 2849), as well as by the absolute use of the term 'the church' (*hē ekklēsia*, GK 1711)."²⁴⁹ After visiting Jerusalem, where he presumably completed his vow at the temple, he went down to Antioch.

4. After spending an unspecified length of time in Antioch, he departed on what is known as his third missionary journey. Schnabel comments:

After leaving Antioch, Paul traveled north, visiting the churches in Syria and Cilicia (15:41), reaching the Anatolian highland via the Cilician Gates. The expression "from place to place" and the reference to "disciples" indicate that Paul visited churches that he had established in those areas. Read in this context, the phrase translated as "the region [χώρα] of Galatia and Phrygia" suggests that Paul traveled through the regions of Lycaonia and Phrygia that were incorporated into the province of Galatia, as well as through the region of Phrygia that belonged to the province of Asia. Thus, when he strengthened "all the disciples" in this region, he evidently visited the churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch.²⁵⁰

K. Apollos speaks boldly in Ephesus (18:24-28)

1. Apollos was a learned or eloquent Jew from Alexandria in Egypt who came to Ephesus between Paul's visits to the city. He had a good knowledge of the Scriptures, and somewhere at some point, perhaps very recently, he received accurate instruction about Jesus, which teaching he conveyed to others enthusiastically (Acts 18:24-25). But Luke points out that there was a deficiency in his teaching in that he was unaware of the baptism instituted by Christ. He had only heard about John's baptism.

²⁴⁸ Marshall (1980), 301-302.

²⁴⁹ Longenecker, 999.

²⁵⁰ Schnabel, 782-783.

2. Though Apollos had heard of John's baptism, there is no indication he had received that baptism or thought it had ongoing applicability. He may have thought John's baptism, being one of repentance with a view to the coming Christ (Acts 19:4), had been fulfilled with Christ's coming and was no longer operative. Brian Dennert states, "There is no reason to see the expression ['knew only the baptism of John'] as indicating that Apollos was a disciple of John."²⁵¹ Rick Strelan similarly states:

A number of scholars think Apollos belonged to John's community and was . . . "one of his ardent disciples" (McCasland 1958: 229). But this is not self-evident from the text. Nor does Apollos' knowledge only of John's baptism necessarily mean that he himself had been baptized with such a baptism. Luke is talking about Apollos' *knowledge*, not his experience or practice. The verb *ἐπίστασθαι* is used regularly in *Acts* (10:28; 15:7; 19:15, 25; 20:18; 22:19; 24:10; 26:26) in the sense of factual, practical knowledge. Apollos knows as fact the baptism of John, but he knows it as something outside of his *own* experience – he was not baptized with John's baptism.²⁵²

3. The point of the text is that the instruction Apollos had received "in the way of the Lord" did not include teaching about the Spirit-related baptism instituted by Christ. He only knew about John's baptism. When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos and realized immediately this deficiency in his knowledge, they privately explained to him "the way of God more fully," meaning they filled him in on Christian baptism, the subject about which he was expressly ignorant.

4. The implication is that Apollos was thereafter baptized. Though some take Luke's silence on the matter as implying the opposite, that Apollos was *not* baptized, but in the context of Acts, where baptism in Jesus' name is tied to forgiveness and receipt of the Spirit and is the expected and understood response of all those with penitent faith, even the Gentiles who in Acts 10 were saved for God's special purpose prior to baptism, Apollos *not* being baptized would require comment and explanation more than his being baptized. In other words, Luke's silence on the matter is more consistent with Apollos being baptized than with him not being baptized.

5. In that regard, it is worth noting that before his instruction from Priscilla and Aquila, he spoke in the synagogue; after that instruction, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. Coleman Baker states:

[Apollos'] only shortcoming, according to Luke, is that he "knew only the baptism of John" (18:25). The implication of Apollos' description, therefore, is that he believes that Jesus is the resurrected Messiah but he has not undergone the boundary crossing rituals of baptism in Jesus' name and being filled with the Spirit. Once when Apollos was speaking in the synagogue, Priscilla and Aquila heard him and "took him aside and explained the Way [of God] more accurately to him" (18:26). This reference

²⁵¹ Brian Dennert, *John the Baptist and the Jewish Setting of Matthew* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 63 (fn. 134).

²⁵² Rick Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 221.

implies that they had explained the boundary crossing rituals to Apollos and that he underwent the rituals to join the Christian group.²⁵³

6. Having had the deficiency in his knowledge about baptism filled in by Priscilla and Aquila, and presumably having submitted to that baptism, when he wanted to go to Achaia the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. He was a great help there in that he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. In fact, as we see from 1 Corinthians, he became, through no fault of his own, one of the teachers behind whom some members of the Corinthian congregation were lining up, which posed a danger of factionalism.

L. Paul in Ephesus (19:1-10)

1. After Apollos had gone to Corinth from Ephesus, Paul arrived in Ephesus via the inland route and found some "disciples" (v. 7 specifies there were about 12 men). As Marshall points out, "These men can hardly have been Christians since they had not received the gift of the Spirit; it is safe to say that the New Testament does not recognize the possibility of being a Christian apart from possession of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5; Acts 11:17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 3:2; 1 Thes. 1:5f; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 6:4; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13)."²⁵⁴ Luke may here use "disciples" to mean followers of John the Baptist,²⁵⁵ but I think it more likely he describes them as "disciples" because he is telling the story from Paul's standpoint. "Paul met some men who *appeared to him* to be disciples, but because he had some doubts about their Christian status he proceeded to examine their claims more carefully."²⁵⁶

2. Whatever tipped him off, Paul asks them if they received the Holy Spirit in conjunction with their conversion to Christ. They say, in effect, "We not only did not receive the Spirit but have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit," meaning they had not even heard of the promise of indwelling. The NET note states: "Apparently these disciples were unaware of the provision of the Spirit that is represented in baptism. The language sounds like they did not know about a Holy Spirit, but this seems to be only linguistic shorthand for not knowing about the Spirit's presence (Luke 3:15–18)." They were carrying on in the name of John the Baptist long after the Lord Jesus had appeared and accomplished his work, and even if their theology was rooted in John's ministry of decades earlier, it quite possibly had evolved in novel directions, so their misunderstandings cannot rightly be attributed to John.

3. Given the connection between Christian baptism and the Spirit, the fact they know nothing of that connection prompts Paul to ask, "Into what then were you baptized?" They tell him that they had received John's baptism, and Paul explains that John's baptism was a baptism administered to the penitent in preparation for the coming of Jesus. Jesus was the object of faith to whom John pointed, and with his coming the purpose of John's baptism was fulfilled. The implication is that baptism thereafter must be in Jesus' name, meaning administered based

²⁵³ Coleman A. Baker, *Identity, Memory, and Narrative in Early Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 169.

²⁵⁴ Marshall (1980), 305.

²⁵⁵ Witherington, 570; Polhill, 398-399.

²⁵⁶ Marshall (1980), 306.

on penitent faith in him, which is why v. 5 states, "On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

4. There is no indication that the twelve "disciples" in Acts 19 had been taught by Apollos. It seems from 18:26 that Apollos's inadequate knowledge was corrected at the start of his time in Ephesus, and it is difficult to believe the church in Ephesus would allow John's baptism to be administered during Apollos's tenure there. Those in Acts 19 represent an ignorance similar to that of Apollos, but whereas he knew only about John's baptism, they assumed its continuing validity and had submitted to it. Apollos was unaware of Christian baptism, having only heard about John's; they were "disciples of John," people who practiced an obsolete baptism in place of Christian baptism. Paul Trebilco states, "We have no reason to think that Apollos had any strong connection with John the Baptist, and so no reason to suggest that Apollos and the 12 were connected historically."²⁵⁷

5. Immediately after reporting these men were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, Luke states that when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. Here I think the laying on of Paul's hands is meant to be understood as part of the baptism rite not as a distinct and separate act.

a. When Paul learned from their confession of ignorance that the men had not received the Holy Spirit, he questioned their baptism not whether anyone had laid hands on them. He understood that submission to Christian baptism was key to receiving the Spirit.

b. In Heb. 6:1-2 the writer lists three pairs of teachings that he includes among the basic things, six items that "span the journey of faith from initial repentance to final judgment."²⁵⁸ In the middle pairing, he speaks of "instruction about immersions and [the] laying on of hands," thus associating baptism and the laying on of hands.

c. Dunn says, "baptism and the laying on of hands [in Acts 19:5ff.] are the *one* ceremony."²⁵⁹ Frederick Dale Bruner states, "The laying on of hands was no doubt an integral part of the baptismal service, with prayer, and should not be separated from baptism as an independent rite granting the Spirit."²⁶⁰ Krodel states, "The imposition of hands in connection with Baptism reflects the liturgical practice of Luke's church. Baptism mediates the gift of the Holy Spirit . . ."²⁶¹ Fitzmyer states, "The episode emphasizes Christian baptism as a baptism in the Spirit, which has superseded the preliminary baptism conferred by John in Judea."²⁶² Schnabel states, "When Paul baptizes these disciples of John, he lays his hands on them (which may have been his practice) and they receive the Holy Spirit."²⁶³ Turner states, "No separation of receiving the Spirit from their Christian baptism is necessarily to be deduced from the statement

²⁵⁷ Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 123.

Trebilco thinks Apollos was baptized into John's baptism, but despite that he says, "Nothing suggests he was John's disciple."

²⁵⁸ Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 311.

²⁵⁹ Dunn (1970), 87.

²⁶⁰ Bruner, 211.

²⁶¹ Krodel, 358.

²⁶² Fitzmyer, 642.

²⁶³ Schnabel, 789.

that the Spirit was conferred in the laying on of hands (v. 5), for the latter may well have been part of Paul's baptismal procedure. . . . Luke certainly does not encourage the view that laying on of hands is a necessary condition of receiving the Spirit."²⁶⁴

d. Indeed, the relevant text could be rendered: "On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and Paul having laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them." Dunn writes, "The laying on of hands is almost parenthetical; the sequence of events is 'baptism (resulting in) . . . Spirit.'"²⁶⁵ I suspect Luke highlighted the laying-on-of-hands aspect of the baptisms in Acts 19 to parallel Paul's role with that of Peter and John in Acts 8. As Keener notes, Luke has a "pattern of paralleling Peter and Paul where he is able to do so."²⁶⁶

e. Unlike Jewish proselyte baptism (which probably was practiced at this time) in which the person immersed *himself*, Christian baptism is done to someone by someone else. The person being baptized is laid hold of by a saint, buried in the water, and then raised; it is a rite of human contact. (Beyond that, we hug the baptized person and then pray for him while holding his hand or shoulder.) So though we may not pay much attention today to the human-contact aspect of baptism, I think we nevertheless practice it; it is inherent in the way we understand baptism to be conducted.

6. The reception of the Spirit by the Samaritans in Acts 8 and John's disciples in Acts 19 is not labeled the "gift of the Spirit" or their being "baptized in the Spirit," but the text states expressly that they received or had come upon them the *Holy Spirit himself* not simply *an ability* given by the Spirit. There is a difference between the Spirit, who is a divine person, and the gifts the Spirit gives, between the Spirit himself and how he manifests his presence, and receipt of the Spirit is throughout the New Testament an accompaniment and indication of salvation. His presence in a person is regeneration and spiritual life.

a. As in Acts 2 and 10, the Spirit in Act 8 and 19 immediately manifested his presence in the new Christians by enabling and prompting them to speak in tongues or do some other miraculous feat. Tongues and prophesying are identified in the case of John's disciples, and some unspecified miraculous manifestation seems implied in the case of the Samaritans.

b. And as with Acts 2 and 10, I think the believers in Acts 8 and 19 received the same gift of the Spirit or baptism in the Spirit that every Christian receives. In other words, it is not that they received some working of the Spirit unrelated to salvation but that in their cases the Spirit chose to mark his indwelling presence, the common experience of Christians, by miraculous manifestations. Indeed, Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 12 that tongues-speaking is a gift given to *Christians*, a manifestation of the one Spirit all Christians share, so why assume in these cases it is divorced from the indwelling of the Spirit that accompanies salvation?

²⁶⁴ Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 391 (fn. 134).

²⁶⁵ Dunn (1970), 87.

²⁶⁶ Keener, 2:2130.

7. If you are following me, the question on your mind is: If the believers in Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19 received the gift of the Spirit or baptism in the Spirit that all Christians normally receive at conversion, why in those four cases did the Spirit immediately signify by miraculous manifestation his having come to dwell in those new Christians? Why in those four cases but not in the countless others?

a. To repeat what I said in discussing chapter 8, we are not told directly, but I think the answer is suggested by the texts. It is not that these people received some work of the Spirit that was unrelated to salvation, something separate and distinct from the indwelling Spirit common to all Christians, but that the Spirit on those particular occasions marked his indwelling presence with miraculous manifestations in order to send a message. And the message he was sending is tied to the fact each of these conversions marked the first extension of the gospel to a new, definable group.

b. Notice that Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19 each involved multiple conversions of members of a group – Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and disciples of John – rather than conversions of single individuals. As *group* conversions, they readily serve as representatives of the group to which they belong. The giving of the Spirit to these *group representatives* signified or confirmed the availability of the gospel's blessings to all members of the respective groups (that significance is alluded to in Acts 11:18, 15:8), and for that reason the Spirit's indwelling presence was specially and objectively indicated by miraculous manifestations. That signaled unmistakably that each of those groups were indeed to be part of the harvest.

c. The availability of the gospel's blessings to these groups having been confirmed objectively, there is no hint that subsequent conversions within the groups were accompanied by such manifestations (see, e.g., Acts 2:41, 4:4, 5:14, 8:25 [conversions implied], 8:38-39, 9:17-18, 11:20-21, 13:12, 13:48, 14:1, 14:21, 16:15, 16:32-33, 17:12, 17:34, 18:8, 22:16). That is why Peter referred all the way back to the events of Pentecost when explaining his experience at Cornelius's house (Acts 11:15-17). It was obviously quite rare for speaking in tongues to accompany the initial giving of the Spirit, the receipt of the Spirit on conversion.

d. This does not mean that later converts within a group were permanently deprived of such spiritual gifts. On the contrary, Paul and some of the Corinthians clearly exercised the gift of tongues. It simply means that those later converts did not receive such gifts (or were not moved to exercise them) at the time they initially received the Spirit. So in their case, the gift and its exercise did not function as a marker of the Spirit's arrival. It did not serve as a sign that the blessings of the gospel were available for that group; that had already occurred.

8. Paul entered the synagogue, where he had taught on his prior brief visit (18:19-21), and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. You may recall that during the forty days after his resurrection Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), and Philip preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12).

a. Persuading them that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 9:22, 17:3, 18:5) is persuading them about the kingdom of God because the Christ, the Messiah, is the one through

whom God establishes his kingdom, that state of creation in which his sovereignty is fully and completely expressed such that everything is in harmony and conformity with his ultimate will and purpose. It is the divine utopia of the new heavens and new earth, the state in which all things have been set right, and the redeemed exist eternally in a perfect reality of love, joy, and fellowship with God and one another.

b. As I have explained many times, contrary to Jewish expectations in the first century, Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God comes in two stages. Michael Bird puts it this way:

The coming of Jesus has inaugurated a new era of redemptive history and God's new age has been launched upon the world, something like a covert operation seizing key nodes along the rear echelons of an opposing force. Those people who confess faith in the Messiah and experience the transforming power of the Spirit of God are living billboards in our global metropolis advertising God's activity in the world and pointing to things soon to come. At the same time, the old age continues, death and evil are realities that need to be confronted and endured, but their power has been broken in principle and even in practice. What is more, the day is coming when God will finally do away with them and the old age will be no more. On that day God will be 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28).²⁶⁷

D. A. Carson states:

[S]ometimes Jesus speaks of the kingdom as already having dawned. It is already here, operating secretly, as it were. It is like yeast that is put into dough; it is already quietly working and having its effect. Yet elsewhere Jesus speaks of the kingdom as what comes at the end when there is a final consummation and tremendous transformation. So the kingdom is already; seen another way, it has not yet come.²⁶⁸

9. When some in the synagogue *stubbornly* resisted the truth of the gospel and began speaking evil of Christianity, called "the Way," before the congregation, Paul ceased teaching there. He took the disciples with him and began teaching daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years. So many people were taught during that time that the message radiated from Ephesus to such an extent that Luke says hyperbolically that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. This ministry had a tremendous effect in disseminating the gospel.

M. The sons of Sceva (19:11-20)

1. Paul's preaching was accompanied by extraordinary miracles God was doing through him, confirming the truth of his message. Paul himself referred in some of his letters to the signs, wonders, and mighty works that accompanied his ministry (2 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 15:18-19). For his reasons, God, in the case of Paul in Ephesus, healed the sick and demon possessed to whom handkerchiefs or aprons Paul had touched were brought. This remote healing in association with

²⁶⁷ Michael Bird, *Introducing Paul* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 116.

²⁶⁸ D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 82.

Paul-connected objects was a further way of accrediting him in a city that was a hotbed of magic, a city that emphasized the manipulation and control of spiritual forces through rituals, spells, incantations, and the use of names. "Paul is shown to be more than equal to anything Ephesus can offer."²⁶⁹

2. The seven sons of a Jewish chief priest²⁷⁰ named Sceva were itinerant exorcists, men who traveled about making a living by claiming an ability to cast out harmful spirits. Having become aware of Jesus' power over demons, they tried to appropriate it for their own ministry. They said over a demon-possessed man, "I adjure [or command] you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." But the evil spirit called their bluff. It responded, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" In other words, you do not speak with the authority of Jesus; you are only saying his name.

3. The spirit-possessed man then wailed on all seven of the exorcists and sent them running from the house naked and bleeding. This episode became known throughout Ephesus. As a result, the residents were seized by a reverent fear of Jesus through the demon's implied recognition of his power, and they magnified his name as one who was above manipulation through the magic arts.

4. Given how the exorcists' attempt to use the name of Jesus as a magic incantation for their own ends proved harmful and nearly deadly for them, some Christians in Ephesus were convicted of the incompatibility of the Christian faith and engagement in the magic arts. Bock states:

[S]o they confess and divulge their practices, turning from their past ways. In this context, the term *πράξεις* (*praxeis*) means "magic spells" or "magical acts"; normally it simply means "deeds" (MM 533; PGM 4.1227; Maurer, TDNT 6:644; Barrett 1998:912). Their divulging of spells is important, as one of the keys to magic is the secrecy and mystery behind the spells. Once made public, the spell is perceived to be impotent. The fact that this becomes evident to those who already believe shows their growing maturity in the faith. They did not appreciate this when they initially responded to Jesus, but now they see it.²⁷¹

5. Beyond confessing their sin and divulging (and thus neutralizing) magic spells, a number of penitent Christians collected the books of magic spells and formulae they had retained and burned them publicly. The value of these works was 50,000 pieces of silver, probably referring to Greek drachmas. This is no small sum.

Another way to express the value would be in sheep: One drachma could buy one sheep. So this many drachmas could purchase a huge flock of sheep. A drachma also equals a denarius, or a day's wage for the average worker. So this amount would be

²⁶⁹ Bock, 602.

²⁷⁰ Peterson states (p. 538), "There is no *Sceva* in the list of Jewish high priests available to us. However, the word *chief priest* (*archiereus*) is regularly used in the plural in Luke's Gospel (e.g., 9:22; 19:47; 20:1, 19) and in Acts 4:23 (cf. some manuscripts of 4:1), apparently denoting 'members of the Jewish priestly aristocracy, or of the court that determined issues relating to the priests and the Temple'."

²⁷¹ Bock, 604.

equal to 50,000 work days or in excess of 8,300 weeks of labor (the weeks are calculated at six working days because of the Jewish cultural context).²⁷²

6. Luke gives a summary of Paul's Ephesian ministry in v. 20. "The word bore fruit as more and more people responded in faith to the preaching of Paul and to the witness of the Ephesian Christians through such examples as their personal sacrifice in the public burning of their magical books."²⁷³ It was during his time in Ephesus that Paul wrote the unpreserved letter to the Corinthian church that is referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9, wrote 1 Corinthians, made an emergency visit to the church in Corinth, and wrote the unpreserved "severe letter" to the Corinthians referred to in 2 Cor. 2:3-4, 7:8-12.

VI. The Gospel Spreads from Jerusalem to Rome (19:21-28:31)

A. A riot at Ephesus (19:21-41)

1. Under the guidance of the Spirit, Paul resolved to leave Ephesus and to revisit Macedonia and Achaia before returning to Jerusalem. He no doubt intended to encourage the young churches there, but we know from his letters that he also was gathering funds from these Gentile churches to help the saints in Judea. Paul was determined to visit Rome after going to Jerusalem. He sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him to Macedonia and remained in Ephesus for an unspecified time.

2. During that time, a major disturbance arose in the city over the Christian religion. It was instigated by a silversmith named Demetrius who made and sold silver replicas of the massive temple of Artemis located in Ephesus and who drew in business for others. He gathered the tradesmen together and told them that Paul's message that manmade idols were nothing was jeopardizing their livelihoods and risked diminishing the status of the great temple of Artemis and even Artemis herself. This enraged them and caused them to cry out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

3. This created chaos in the city, and the growing crowd of protestors rushed to the theater, a public space that could accommodate around 25,000 people, taking with them Gaius and Aristarchus, two Macedonians who were companions of Paul. They wanted to persuade the city officials to take action against the missionaries.²⁷⁴ Paul wanted to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. They were supported in that by some provincial authorities, called "Asiarchs," who were friends of Paul.

4. It was a confused and disorderly assembly. People were shouting various things, and most of the people did not know why they were there. They had simply been swept up in the emotion.

²⁷² NET note.

²⁷³ Polhill, 406.

²⁷⁴ Marshall (1980), 318.

5. The Jews put forward a representative named Alexander to speak for them at the assembly, no doubt intending for him to distance the Jews from the Christians, and some in the crowd, presumably a Jewish contingent, shouted instructions at him. Alexander motioned to speak, intending to make a defense for the Jews, but when the people recognized he was a Jew, an adherent of a monotheistic religion that rejected idols, they shut him down by shouting for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

6. The town clerk, who was the chief magistrate in Ephesus,²⁷⁵ quieted the crowd and reassured them there was no need to fear that the reputation or fame of their goddess or their city, as the keeper of her temple and the sacred stone that fell from the sky (a meteorite), was going to be diminished. Those things were too well established – indeed, "cannot be denied" – for that to be a legitimate motivation for what they were doing. They had dragged men to the assembly with no charges of sacrilegious actions against the temple or blasphemous words against Artemis. If Demetrius or the other craftsmen had been wronged *personally* by the missionaries, the courts were available for such disputes. If there was indeed a bona fide public offense, "the proper procedure was to wait for a *regular* meeting of the *assembly*, which would not have been more than a week or so distant."²⁷⁶

7. The clerk's concern is reflected in v. 40. Marshall comments:

The clerk's final words betray his fear that the holding of an extraordinary meeting of the assembly which had turned into a near-riot might have serious repercussions. Sherwin-White (pp. 83-85) cites interesting evidence from this period which shows that the Romans were anxious to get rid of these democratic assemblies; the town clerk of Prusa addressed his assembly in remarkably similar terms, warning his hearers about the drastic consequences of reports of unruly gatherings reaching the proconsul. The clerk's appeal was successful, and the assembly *dismissed*. So far as we can tell, no further steps were taken, publicly or privately, by the silversmiths against Paul and his colleagues.²⁷⁷

B. Paul in Macedonia and Greece (20:1-6)

1. After that uproar ceased, Paul gathered the disciples and encouraged them. He then departed for Macedonia. We know from 2 Cor. 2:12-13 that he headed there by way of Troas where he hoped not only to preach the gospel but to meet Titus returning with news of the Corinthian reaction to his "severe letter." When Titus did not show, Paul continued to Macedonia, which is where the cities of Philippi and Thessalonica are located, apparently in keeping with a contingency plan he had with Titus.

2. Luke reports that in Macedonia Paul gave much encouragement to the saints in the region. We know from 2 Cor. 8:1-4, 9:2 that he also organized the collection he was taking up from the Gentile churches for the poor Jewish Christians in Judea. The Macedonian churches

²⁷⁵ Marshall (1980), 319-320.

²⁷⁶ Marshall (1980), 321.

²⁷⁷ Marshall (1980), 321.

were themselves facing "the most severe trial" and "extreme poverty" (2 Cor. 8:2), and yet they insisted on participating in the contribution and gave with extreme generosity (2 Cor. 8:1-5).

3. When Paul got to Macedonia, Titus had not shown up, so he still had no idea how his severe letter had been received in Corinth (2 Cor. 7:5-6). Titus soon arrived, and Paul's distress turned to joy because the church at large had responded positively to his strong words (2 Cor. 7:6-13). The majority had repented of their rebellion against his apostleship. Paul probably started writing 2 Corinthians soon after receiving Titus's encouraging report. This is probably sometime in A.D. 56.

4. Paul worked his way down to Greece (Acts 20:2), where he stayed three months (Acts 20:3), no doubt in Corinth. It was here that he wrote Romans, probably in A.D. 57. He was intending to sail to Syria, but as he was about to do so, he learned that some Jews had made a plot against him, perhaps intending to kill him in the port city of Cenchreae or on the ship. Paul therefore changed his plans and went north back through Macedonia.

5. Paul was accompanied by Sopater of Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica; Gaius of Derbe; Timothy of Lystra; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia, probably Ephesus. These men may have been appointed by the various churches to represent them regarding the collection being taken to Jerusalem.²⁷⁸

a. Luke says those men (possibly referring only to the last mentioned, Tychicus and Trophimus) "went on ahead and were waiting for *us* at Troas," but he and Paul (and possibly the five others mentioned) sailed from Philippi (from the port city of Neapolis) after the days of Unleavened Bread. Peterson notes, "This 'we' style first appeared in 16:10, when Paul and his team originally went to Troas. Luke apparently joined them there and went at least as far as Philippi with the (the first person plural ceased at 16:17). There is something to be said for the view that Luke remained in Philippi until this return visit by Paul."²⁷⁹

b. Paul and the others remained in Philippi until after the Passover and the immediately following week of Unleavened Bread. If Luke is suggesting Paul was celebrating these festivals rather than citing them merely as a time reference, it may have been a "Christianized version" of Passover.²⁸⁰ Marshall says, "It is probable that he was celebrating the Christian Passover, i.e., Easter, with the church at Philippi (1 Cor. 5:7f.) rather than that this is merely a Jewish time-note (cf. 20:16 and contrast 27:9)."²⁸¹

6. The journey to Troas took five days. This may have been because of bad weather or because they stopped in Samothrace. They remained in Troas seven days, just long enough to gather with the saints there on the first day of the week.

C. Eutychus raised from the dead (20:7-16)

²⁷⁸ Marshall (1980), 323.

²⁷⁹ Peterson, 556.

²⁸⁰ Witherington, 604.

²⁸¹ Marshall (1980), 325.

1. On the first day of the week, which is Sunday, the day John calls "the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10),²⁸² the disciples were gathered together to break bread.

a. As David Aune notes, "Here the phrase 'to gather together' is a technical term referring to the assembly of Christians for worship."²⁸³ Bruce and Longenecker concluded in their respective commentaries that Acts 20:7 provides "unambiguous evidence" for Christians assembling for worship on the first day of the week.²⁸⁴ Numerous other scholars recognize that this verse refers to a Christian worship assembly.²⁸⁵

b. The phrase "to break bread" in Acts 20:7 is widely understood as a reference to the Lord's Supper (see Lk. 22:19; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16). Hans-Josef Klauck writes, "That Luke at least has in mind the Lord's Supper, as he knows it from his church, could hardly be denied."²⁸⁶ Longenecker says, "They met, Luke tells us, 'to break bread' (*klasai arton*), which, especially after Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 and 11:17-34, must surely mean 'to celebrate the Lord's Supper.'"²⁸⁷ Rordorf states, "Surely, by the breaking of bread in Acts 20:7a nothing else than the 'Lord's Supper' is meant."²⁸⁸

c. Although Luke can use the term "to break bread" in reference to an ordinary meal (Acts 27:33-35), the fact he expressly connects it in Acts 20:7 to the Sunday gathering and describes it as the reason for the assembly strongly implies a liturgical meaning. Thus, Jon Laansma concludes: "This likelihood [that 'to break bread' refers to the Lord's Supper] is increased by the combination of 'to break bread' with 'gathering' (cf. 1 Cor. 11:20, 24; *Did.* 14.1;

²⁸² "We conclude that in the *Didache*, Ignatius, and the *Gospel of Peter* Κυριακή is a technical term in fairly widespread use at least in Syria and Asia Minor, designating the first day of the week as the Christian day of regular corporate worship. It therefore becomes extremely likely that κυριακή ἡμέρα in Revelation 1:10 also means Sunday." Richard Bauckham, "The Lord's Day" in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 231.

²⁸³ David Aune, "Worship, Early Christian" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 6:979.

²⁸⁴ Bruce (1987), 407-408; Longenecker, 1024.

²⁸⁵ Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance (London: SCM Press, 1953), 10-11; Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 199-200; Roger Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *The Christian Sunday: A Biblical and Historical Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 36-39, 41; Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament Volume 2*, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 12; M. Max B. Turner, "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts" in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 137; Bauckham, 232-233; Paul Jewett, "Lord's Day" in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3:158; Krodel, 378; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 169; Johnson, 356; Polhill, 418; Fitzmyer, 669; Richard I. Pervo, *Acts*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 510; Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 899-900.

²⁸⁶ Hans-Josef Klauck, "Lord's Supper" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 4:366.

²⁸⁷ Longenecker, 1024.

²⁸⁸ Rordorf, 221. See also, Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 364; Johannes Behm, "Klao" in Gerhard Kittel, ed., and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. and ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 3:730; Beckwith and Stott (1978) 89; Marshall (1980), 325; Goppelt (1982) 12; Turner (1982), 130-131, 137; Bruce (1990), 425; Fitzmyer (1998) 669; Pervo, 510.

Ign. *Eph.* 20.2). We have to do, then, with a formal gathering of the church on the first day of the week, the stated purpose of which is to celebrate the Lord's Supper rather than to say farewell to Paul."²⁸⁹ Pervo comments, "On Sunday the community gathers to celebrate the Eucharist."²⁹⁰ Turner writes:

We may be relatively sure that by the time the Book of Revelation was written, "the first day of the week" was widely referred to in the area as "the Lord's Day" . . . and that this day involved congregational worship. In order to explain the "Lord's Day" phenomenon, for which (at this stage) there were no Jewish or pagan Sunday parallels, we are forced to hypothesize earlier *Christian* "first day" observance of some kind . . . It is not therefore surprising that so many scholars have seen in Acts 20:7 precisely the sort of "first day" consciousness that they expected to find. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that they are right. It may be subjective, and not liable to proof, but the connection between "the first day of the week," "to gather together," and "to break bread" is remarkably similar to later statements that clearly refer to Sunday worship. *Συνάγειν* ("to gather together") coupled with *κλᾶν ἄρτον* ("to break bread") appears to be a standard formula (cf. 1 Cor. 11:20; *Did.* 141:1; Ign. *Eph.* 20:2). The coincidence is too inviting to be dismissed.²⁹¹

2. They assembled in the evening, as indicated by the many lamps that were employed in the upper room and the fact Paul spoke until midnight. We know it is the first day of the week because Luke specifies that fact, but there is a question about how Luke reckoned the beginning of a new day. Did it begin at sunset, at midnight, or at sunrise? There was precedent for each in the Greco-Roman world of the first century.²⁹² If he reckoned a new day to begin at sunset as in Judaism, then the worship assembly would have begun on what would be Saturday night by our reckoning, but it is far more likely that Luke and the saints in Troas, like most everyone at the time, reckoned a new day to begin at sunrise. This would put the meeting on what would be Sunday night by our reckoning.

a. Leon Morris writes, "Westcott thought that John used the 'Roman' method of computing time, whereby the day began at midnight as with us. . . . This is attractive, but there appears to be no evidence that the so-called Roman method of computing time was used other than in legal matters like leases. At Rome, as elsewhere, the day was reckoned to begin at sunrise."²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Jon C. Laansma, "Lord's Day" in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 681.

²⁹⁰ Pervo, 510.

²⁹¹ Turner (1982), 132.

²⁹² See, e.g., Schnabel, 835.

²⁹³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 708. See also, Marshall (1980) 325-326; Conzelmann, 169; Bruce (1990) 425-426; Aune, 979; Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 238; Geoffrey Wainwright, "Lord's Supper, Love Feast" in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 688; Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 7; Schnabel, 835. Marshall, Aune, and Wainwright say the Romans reckoned the day to begin at dawn, but since it seems clear that at least the official Roman day began at midnight (e.g., Schnabel), they are presumably referring to the common practice. Bruce, Conzelmann, Ferguson, and Schnabel indicate that Greeks reckoned the day to begin at dawn, but Finegan, quoting Pliny, says the Greeks reckoned the day to begin at sunset.

b. That Luke considered sunrise the beginning of a new "day" is indicated by the fact he specifies that Paul intended to leave "the next day" (Acts 20:7) and then reports that Paul left "at daybreak" (Acts 20:11).²⁹⁴ Luke's use of this method of reckoning also is apparent in Acts 23:23, 31-32. The detachment of soldiers, horsemen, and "spearmen" (the meaning is uncertain) left Jerusalem around 9:00 p.m. and during the night traveled the roughly 35 miles to Antipatris. They would not have reached Antipatris until long after midnight. So when Luke says they returned to the barracks "on the next day," it seems clear that he considered the "next day" to have begun at sunrise.

3. Paul was intending to leave the next day, being in a hurry to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (v. 16), and he spoke to them until midnight. A boy²⁹⁵ named Eutychus was sitting in the window, and as Paul talked on, he fell asleep and then fell from the window to his death, the room being on the third story. But when Paul went down, he took him in his arms, told them not to be alarmed, and announced that his life was in him, meaning it had returned to him. Marshall notes, "There can be little doubt that Luke intended to portray Paul as being able to raise the dead (like Peter, 9:36-43)."²⁹⁶ Those who took the boy away, presumably his parents, were greatly comforted by the miracle (v. 12).

4. The indication in Acts 20:11 that Paul "broke bread and ate" after "midnight" need not mean the church observed the Lord's Supper after 12:00 midnight.

a. Some are convinced the compound phrase "broke bread and ate" signifies an ordinary meal rather than the Lord's Supper, which they already would have eaten. Longenecker states, "Eutychus was restored to life. Then everyone returned to the third-story room, where they had a midnight snack – here certainly the compound "broke bread and ate" (*klasas ton arton kai geusamenos*) signifying an ordinary meal, not the Lord's Supper – and Paul continued to talk till dawn."²⁹⁷ W. E. Vine likewise wrote, "As to whether Acts 20:11 refers to the Lord's Supper or to an ordinary meal, the addition of the words 'and eaten' is perhaps a sufficient indication that the latter is referred to here, whereas ver. 7, where the single phrase 'to break bread' is used, refers to the Lord's Supper."²⁹⁸

b. Moreover, the N.T. follows the Roman practice of dividing the night into four watches: evening, midnight, cockcrow, and morning. Finegan states, "The nighttime was divided into watches. . . . The rabbis debated whether there were three watches or four. In the New Testament, as in Roman and Egyptian practice, we find four watches of the night: evening, midnight, cockcrow, and morning (Matt 14:25; Mark 13:35)."²⁹⁹ The term "midnight"

²⁹⁴ Bruce (1990), 425-426.

²⁹⁵ He is called a *παιδός* in v. 12, a word Marshall ([1980], 326) says traditionally referred to one 8-14 years of age. BDAG (p. 750) defines it as "a young pers. Normally below the age of puberty, w. focus on age rather than social status, *boy, youth*."

²⁹⁶ Marshall (1980), 326.

²⁹⁷ Longenecker, 1024.

²⁹⁸ W. E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, John R. Kohlenberger III, ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 346.

²⁹⁹ Finegan, 9. See also, Carson (2010), 9:393; Morna Hooker, *The Gospel of Saint Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 324.

therefore covers the period from roughly 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight. So Paul could easily talk until "midnight" (e.g., 9:30 p.m.), bring Eutychus back to life, and still "break bread and eat" before 12:00.

5. But even if Acts 20:11 meant that the church in Troas shared in the Lord's Supper after 12:00 midnight, I have explained that the first day of the week would extend to the following dawn according to how Luke probably reckoned when a day began. Thus, Ferguson states, "Apart from Acts 2:46, which is ambiguous, there is no evidence in the early Christian literature for a daily Lord's supper, or indeed for its observance on any day other than Sunday."³⁰⁰ It was only later that the Supper came to be observed at other special occasions (e.g., on the anniversary of the deaths of martyrs).

6. At daybreak Paul headed for nearby Assos by land, whereas Luke and whoever was with him sailed to Assos from Troas, where they took Paul on board. Because he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost, Paul had chosen a ship that sailed past Ephesus to avoid getting tied up there. The ship stopped in Miletus, about 30 miles south of Ephesus.

D. Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders (20:17-38)

1. From Miletus Paul sent for the Ephesian elders. He tells them they know how he lived the entire time he was with them in Ephesus, which was just an extension of how he had lived from the time he set foot in Asia. Specifically, he served the Lord with all humility, recognizing his slave status and the fact his calling and strength were by the mercy and grace of God. And his service was accompanied by tears of sorrow, anguish, and concern and by the trials to which he was subjected by plots of the Jews. He clearly is not motivated by worldly gain.

2. In addition to that general knowledge about his lifestyle and circumstances in Asia, they knew he did not shrink from declaring to them anything that was profitable for them, even if it was unpopular. He was committed to telling the truth people needed to hear not tailoring his message to what they wanted to hear. Perhaps Paul was aware that some in Ephesus had charged him with doing the opposite, with tailoring his gospel to fit the desires of Gentile hearers by leaving out any obligation to obey the Mosaic law.

3. He taught them in every possible forum, in public and from house to house, telling both Jews and Greeks that they needed to repent, turn toward God, by putting their faith in, giving their allegiance to, his Anointed One, the Lord Jesus Christ. Bock states:

Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin (repentance for Paul: Acts 17:30; 26:18, 20; faith: 11:17; 14:23; 16:31; 20:21; 24:24; Gal. 2:16; 3:26; Phil. 1:29; Fitzmyer 1998:677; OT roots: Jer. 34:15; 26:3-5; Hos. 6:1-3; Larkin 1995:294). . . . Repentance to God represents a change of direction in how one relates to God. It entails faith in Jesus, so that the turning results in one placing trust in what God did through Jesus as one embraces his person and work. This is

³⁰⁰ Everett Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 1096.

a message for both Jews and Greeks, considering that both need to hear the same thing.³⁰¹

4. Paul tells them that the Spirit is leading him to Jerusalem. Precisely what will happen to him there has not been revealed, but the Spirit has made clear to him that in every city imprisonment and afflictions await him. This may have been impressed on him "through Christian prophets he met along the way."³⁰² But whatever happens, he considers himself expendable in carrying out the ministry he received from the Lord Jesus, which was to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. That is what matters.

5. Paul informs the elders, men in whose midst he had proclaimed the kingdom while in Ephesus, that none of them will see him again. That need not mean he knew he would never again go to Ephesus but only that if he did return he would, for whatever reason (their death, relocation, temporary unavailability), not cross paths with them. This was their last goodbye on this side of eternity. If Paul never made it back to Ephesus, and we have no record that he did, it was only because more pressing things occupied him until that window of opportunity suggested in 1 Tim. 3:14 closed (probably by his final arrest).

6. The fact this is goodbye prompts Paul to remind them of his life before them as an encouragement for them to emulate it. He announces without fear of contradiction that he is innocent of the blood of *all* because he did not shrink from declaring to "you," the Ephesians, the whole will/purpose/plan/counsel of God. The idea is that he did not hold back in his preaching and teaching anything they needed to get right with God. Just like the watchman who sounds the alarm when he sees the land coming under attack is not responsible for the blood of those who do not heed his warning (Ezek. 33:1-5), so Paul has no blood on his hands because he has sounded the alarm. He has without compromise given the message by which all can be saved if they will heed it.

7. He commands them to pay careful attention to themselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers. "They are to pay attention to their own spiritual condition (*cf.* 1 Tim. 4:16) as well as to that of the church; it is only as the leaders themselves remain faithful to God that they can expect the church to do so likewise."³⁰³

8. He says they were appointed from within the congregation ("the flock *in* which") to the role of overseer by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of taking care of (lit. "to shepherd") the congregation, this local expression of the church of God. Whether their appointment had been by Paul, as the elders in Acts 14:23, or by the Spirit-filled community of believers, it was the Holy Spirit working through them. Holladay remarks, "Their selection may involve human wisdom and discernment, but here the Holy Spirit is the true authorizing agent, probably in the same way earlier consequential church decisions are seen as involving well-intentioned, prayerful people collaborating with the Holy Spirit (13:2-3; 15:28)."³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Bock, 627.

³⁰² Longenecker, 1029.

³⁰³ Marshall (1980), 333.

³⁰⁴ Holladay, 399.

9. Paul adds that the church was acquired by God, was brought into existence as his people, "with the blood of his own." As the reference is clearly to the blood of Jesus, "his own" is best understood as "his own [Son]," as in RSV, NRSV, NJB, NET and in the footnote in the NIV and ESV. God purchased the church with the blood of Christ. Bock comments:

The verse does not explicitly mention the title "Son" but rather speaks to God's giving his own to gain the church. The image implies sonship. . . . Thus the acquiring of the church had as its basis a substitution of God's own for those God would bring to eternal life. Such a sacred form of down payment for the church makes the responsibility of the elders sacred. It is clear that the death of Jesus, God's own Son, is described here. Behind the action is the loving commitment of God to take the initiative and suffer sacrifice in order to restore a broken relationship with humanity.³⁰⁵

10. Paul warns them that in his absence from Ephesus, heretics will invade the church and attack the flock like fierce wolves. "The thought is of heretical teachers coming in from outside and leading people astray, especially after Paul was no longer there to counteract them."³⁰⁶ He adds that even some insiders, members of the Ephesian church (elders as well?), will begin twisting the truth to lure disciples into following them.

11. His charge in the face of this coming great danger is for them to be alert. They must be vigilant regarding false teaching that is introduced into the community so they can reject and refute it before it can spread and magnify the damage. Paul reminds them that for three years he constantly admonished each of them with tears. He warned them to remain faithful to God by continuing in the truth he has revealed in Christ and through the apostles.

12. Paul commends the elders to God's care and protection and to the word of his grace, the gospel message that has God's saving grace at its center. That message is able to build them up and to give them a share in the inheritance of the sanctified, a place in the eternal glory of the consummated kingdom of God.

13. Finally, Paul reminds them that he coveted no one's wealth. On the contrary, rather than claiming a right of support from those to whom he and his team were ministering, as he might have done as an apostle (1 Cor. 9:3-15; 1 Thess. 2:6), he did manual labor to earn what was necessary to meet the team's physical needs. In all that he did, he demonstrated that Christians must work hard to be able to help "the weak," here meaning "people who 'experience some personal incapacity or limitation' causing a lack of material necessities."³⁰⁷ One is reminded of Paul's instruction in Eph. 4:28: "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."

14. This commitment to the needy is in keeping with the Lord's words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This saying is not reported in the Gospels but clearly was

³⁰⁵ Bock, 630-631.

³⁰⁶ Marshall (1980), 334.

³⁰⁷ Schnabel, 852.

remembered in the church. It is a proverbial warning against greed, which Paul is applying to the specific danger of greed among church leaders. Polhill writes: "'Receiving' can be a gracious act, and to refuse the well-intentioned gift of another can be an insult or even a rejection of that person. The saying should not be seen as a judgment against gracious receiving but rather against acquisitiveness, against actively 'taking' for oneself, a common meaning for λαμβάνω. The emphasis in any event is on giving."³⁰⁸

15. Paul then knelt and prayed with them all. It was a farewell of hugs, tears, and kisses. What was most sorrowful for the elders was the statement they would not see each other again. They accompanied Paul to his ship to continue his journey to Jerusalem.

E. Paul goes to Jerusalem (21:1-16)

1. Luke reports the various stops their ship made in sailing from Miletus to Patara, where they switched to a ship sailing directly to Tyre in Phoenicia about 400 miles to the east-southeast. At Tyre, they stayed seven days with the disciples. "Evidently the direct open-sea voyage had saved Paul sufficient time for him to spend a week with the Christians at Tyre and still fulfill his desire to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (cf. 20:16)."³⁰⁹

2. The statement in v. 4 that "through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem" is best understood to mean that some of the disciples told Paul not to go to Jerusalem based on revelations of Paul's suffering that were given through the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit was not telling Paul through the disciples not to go to Jerusalem – how could he when it was the Spirit who was compelling him to go to Jerusalem (Act 20:22)? Rather, the disciples on their own were telling him not to go because they took the revelation of Paul's coming suffering to mean he should not go. That was their interpretation of or inference from the revelation not the revelation itself.

a. Ajith Fernando explains: "What the Christians in Tyre received from the Spirit was a prophecy that Paul would have trouble in Jerusalem. Out of that they may have inferred that the Spirit was prompting Paul not to go to Jerusalem. This explains why 'through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem.'"³¹⁰

b. This is illustrated in the prophecy at Caesarea at the end of the chapter. There the people urge Paul not to go to Jerusalem based on Agabus's prophecy of how he will suffer there.

3. When they left Tyre, the Christian families from the city accompanied them to the ship, where they prayed together on the beach and said goodbye. From Tyre, they sailed to Ptolemais, where they stayed with the Christians for a day. They then sailed to Caesarea and stayed in the home of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven. Recall Luke's report in Acts 8:40 that Philip "preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea." Luke

³⁰⁸ Polhill, 430 (fn. 95).

³⁰⁹ Polhill, 433.

³¹⁰ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 551. See also, Krodel, 393; Bruce (1987), 421; Marshall (1980), 338-339; Bock, 636-637; Longenecker, 1033.

notes that Philip had four unmarried (virgin), and therefore young, daughters, who prophesied. As indicated in the Joel prophecy cited in Acts 2:16-21, even the young and women will prophesy.

4. During their stay in Caesarea, which lasted more than a few days, Agabus, the prophet from Jerusalem who foretold the famine in Acts 11:28, came to the city. He bound his hands and feet with Paul's belt and announced, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" He does not tell Paul not to go; he only told him what was in store for him.

5. At that, Paul's companions (even Luke) and the others there urged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul tells them, in modern American vernacular, "you are killing me." He knows it is God's will that he go to Jerusalem despite the certainty of suffering, and yet those who love him are trying to talk him out of it. He answers them, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

6. When Paul refused to be persuaded to abandon his mission to Jerusalem, they gained a new or deeper appreciation for the fact his impetus was not his own wisdom or a personal preference. They understood as they had not previously that this was indeed the Lord's call on Paul's life. Therefore, they ceased trying to change his mind and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

7. Some allege that Agabus's prophecy was not fulfilled. They claim it was only the Romans who bound Paul, not the Jews, and that the Jews did not deliver him into the hands of the Romans but rather the Romans took him into custody contrary to the Jewish intention to kill him. But the Jews arrested Paul and dragged him out of the temple (Acts 21:30, 24:6), which implies some form of restraint, a "binding" sufficient to meet the prophetic symbolism, and they handed him over to the Romans in the sense their attack on him and accusations against him were *the cause* of his being taken into and kept in Roman custody (Acts 21:30-36; 22:22-24, 30). The active voice of the verb in Agabus's prophecy ("will deliver") can have this causal meaning, even if the Jews did not intend the action caused.³¹¹ Indeed, Paul later says to the Jews in Rome (Acts 28:17), "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, yet I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans" (NRS; see also, NJB, REB, NIV).

8. Paul and his companions and some of the disciples from Caesarea then traveled on foot³¹² the 60+ miles to Jerusalem. They stayed at the home of an early disciple named Mnason, who was a native of Cyprus. Luke may have acquired valuable information from him about early events.

³¹¹ Wallace, 411-412, citing specifically Acts 21:11.

³¹² Schnabel writes (p. 859, fn. 133): "The party consisted of at least twelve people (Paul, the seven companions mentioned in 20:4, and presumably Luke, as well as an unspecified number of Caesarean believers). It is doubtful that the believers in Caesarea owned, or were likely to hire, twelve horses for the journey to Jerusalem."

F. Paul visits James (21:17-26)

1. A group of the brothers in Jerusalem received Paul and his companions gladly. The next day, Paul's entourage, which included representatives of the churches who had come in connection with the collection (see Acts 24:17), went to see James, and all the elders were present. Apparently the other apostles were no longer in the city. Paul told them the things God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry, and they praised God for what they heard.

2. James and the elders told Paul there were many Jewish Christians who were enthusiastic for the Mosaic law, meaning they considered it important that Jews adhere to that law to the extent doing so would be compatible with the Christian faith. Certainly Christian leaders in Jerusalem would not tolerate something like offering animal sacrifices for sin, but there were many other aspects of Judaism (such as circumcision, holy days, food laws, and other ritual practices) that were deeply ingrained markers of Jewish identity. These enthusiasts for the law were suspicious of Paul because they had heard he taught the Jews living in Gentile communities to cease observing the law. Bruce writes:

It was freely rumored among the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem that Paul not only refused to impose the requirements of the Jewish law on his Gentile converts (that, in the eyes of many, was bad enough, despite the decision taken at the Council of Jerusalem); but he actually dissuaded *Jewish* believers, it was said, from continuing to practice their ancestral customs, handed down from Moses: he even encouraged them to give up circumcising their sons.³¹³

3. The truth, of course, is that Paul did no such thing. As I pointed out, it is probable that Paul in Acts 18:18 was making a Nazirite vow, so he certainly did not believe that Jews of his day were forbidden from expressing their piety in any traditional Jewish way. And he was sensitive to the consciences of those caught in the salvation-historical shift brought by the coming of Christ. Though he clearly taught that the Mosaic covenant, and with it the law that was part of that covenant, was no longer operative (e.g., Rom. 10:1-4; 2 Cor. 3:14-18; Gal. 3:15-4:7, 4:21-31), he condemned any who would use that truth to ride roughshod over the lagging consciences of Jewish Christians (Romans 14).

4. Knowing that Paul's presence would quickly become known throughout the church, James and the elders instruct Paul how to combat the false rumor that he was opposed to all Jewish observance of the law. The details of the situation and solution are obscure, but here is what is probably happening.

a. Four Jewish Christians had taken a Nazirite vow, the period of which was about to end. Completion of the vow involved a ceremony in the temple in which the participant's hair was shaved and burned as an offering, and other costly sacrifices were presented as specified in Num. 6:14-15 (a male and a female lamb, a ram, and cereal and drink offerings). Paul was asked to accompany the four men for the completion of their vow, the completion of what in the LXX (Num. 6:3) is called the time of their "being purified" (*hagnizō*) from wine and strong drink, and to bear their associated expenses.

³¹³ Bruce (1987), 430.

b. To be able to enter the temple for that purpose, Paul needed to go through a purification rite of his own, a purification from ritual defilement, analogous to that of Num. 19:12 (*hagnízō*). Bruce explains, "The two kinds of ἀγνισμός coincided in time: once Paul's ἀγνισμός was completed he would help the four Nazirites complete theirs by paying their expenses."³¹⁴ Polhill comments: "Often a Jew on returning to the Holy Land after a sojourn in Gentile territory would undergo ritual purification. The period involved was seven days (cf. Num. 19:12), which fits the present picture (v. 27). Paul thus underwent ritual purification to qualify for participation in the completion ceremony of the four Nazirites which took place within the sacred precincts of the temple."³¹⁵ As he says, "This would be a thorough demonstration of his full loyalty to the Torah, not only in his bearing the heavy expenses of the vow but also in his undergoing the necessary ritual purification."³¹⁶

5. The purpose was not to give a false impression that Paul lived under the law, lived as though the law was still binding, but to indicate, by his being willing to observe even some of its ritual elements, that he was not opposed to Jews doing so. He did not insist that Jews abandon all the Jewish identity markers in the law and not circumcise their children, as some had charged. Rather, as his fellow Jews worked through and internalized the shift of covenants brought by Christ, he insisted only that they not treat the Mosaic law, that set of commands, as something binding in the new covenant, something that could be imposed on Gentiles (or Jews for that matter). He also no doubt would object to observance of any commands that were inherently contrary to the gospel, such as the offering of animal sacrifices for sin, but that does not seem to have been an issue.

6. As for Gentile Christians, who had no historic attachment to the Mosaic law and thus no pull to live by it in the new covenant, they reassure Paul that their request of him to observe these Jewish rituals does not mean they are retreating in any way from the decision of the Jerusalem Council. They reiterate that the obligation of Gentile Christians in terms of easing their offensiveness to Jews is limited to steering clear of idol feasts in the pagan temples and the associated vices. Gentile believers will not get pulled into Mosaic rituals to satisfy Jewish desires or expectations. In Marshall's words, "The fact that Paul was being asked to behave in this way in no sense implied that similar demands would be made of the Gentiles. The fundamental freedom of the Gentiles from the law had been established at the meeting described in chapter 15 whose decision is now reaffirmed."³¹⁷

7. Though it remains obscure, I think the NASU of v. 26 makes it a bit easier to see what is going on: "Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them." The next day, Paul, having decided to synchronize his purification of ritual defilement with the Nazirites completion of their "purification" ("purifying himself along with them"), went to the temple to notify the priests that he was

³¹⁴ Bruce (1990), 447.

³¹⁵ Polhill, 449. See also, Bruce (1990), 447; Krodell, 404-405; Witherington, 649; Peterson, 586-587; Longenecker, 1038.

³¹⁶ Polhill, 449.

³¹⁷ Marshall (1980), 346.

beginning his seven-day purification process and informing them its completion was to coincide with the completion of the Nazirite vows of the four men, at which time each of them would offer the prescribed sacrifices at Paul's expense. Longenecker states:

Coming from abroad, Paul would have had to regain ceremonial purity by a seven-day ritual of purification before he could be present at the absolution ceremony of the four Jewish Christians in the Jerusalem temple. This ritual included reporting to one of the priests and being sprinkled with water of atonement on the third and seventh days. . . . What Paul did was to report to the priest at the start of his seven days of purification, inform him that he was providing the funds for the offerings for the four impoverished men who had taken Nazirite vows, and return to the temple at regular intervals during the week for the appropriate rites. He would have also informed the priest of the date when the Nazirite vows of the four would be completed (or perhaps they were already completed and the four had only to make the offerings and present the hair) and when he planned to be with them (either with all of them together or with each individually) for the absolution ceremony.³¹⁸

G. Paul arrested in the Temple (21:27-36)

1. Whatever the specifics of the ceremonies in the temple, when Paul went to the temple at the end of the seven-day period to complete his purification, Jews from Asia recognized him and stirred up the crowd and grabbed him. They called for help, yelling that Paul had been teaching everyone everywhere against the Jews, the law, and the temple, adding the false claim that he had even defiled the holy temple by bringing Gentiles into the area reserved for Jews. They jumped to that conclusion simply because they had seen Paul in the city with Trophimus the Ephesian. This attack created a major uproar, and the people ran over and seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, closing the gates behind him.

2. As the crowd was seeking to kill Paul, news of the disturbance reached the Roman commander, who ran to the scene with soldiers and centurions. When the mob saw them, they stopped beating Paul. The commander, who we learn later was named Claudius Lysias (23:26), assumed Paul had committed some serious offense. He arrested him, put him in chains, and inquired who he was and what he had done. The crowd was so agitated and boisterous, shouting different things, that he could not get to the bottom of the matter, so he had Paul brought into the barracks. The crowd was so threatening and bent on violence that at one point the soldiers literally carried Paul.

H. Paul speaks to the people (21:37-22:21)

1. When Paul asks the commander in polished Greek for permission to speak to him, the commander guesses that he is the Egyptian Jew who a few years earlier had stirred up a revolt. This rebel "attracted followers during the time of Felix and said he would bring down the walls of Jerusalem, much like Jericho. When the Romans attacked as he approached the Mount

³¹⁸ Longenecker, 1038. See also, Bruce (1990), 448; Peterson 588; Polhill, 450.

of Olives, he escaped and never appeared again, although four hundred died and two hundred were captured."³¹⁹ Paul corrects the commander, explaining that he is Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a city of high culture, which explains his facility in Greek. He then receives permission to address the people.

2. Paul motions to get their attention and then speaks to them in the "Hebrew dialect," meaning "the Aramaic spoken in Palestine in the 1st century (BDAG 270 s.v. Ἑβραϊτῆς)."³²⁰ When the crowd heard him speaking in Aramaic, they became even quieter.

3. Paul tells them that though he was born in Tarsus, he was brought up in Jerusalem and educated by the famous rabbi Gamaliel. He was as orthodox and zealous for God as any of them could want. He persecuted Christians, both men and women, capturing and handing them over for punishment, which in some cases included death. Indeed, he was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians when his life was turned completely around.

4. He recounts the Lord's appearance to him, who instructed him go into Damascus where he would be told all that he was assigned to do. Ananias, who was well respected by the Jews, came to him to deliver God's message. He regained his sight, and Ananias told him that God had appointed him to be a witness for Christ. At that point, Paul was without question a penitent believer. He knew the truth about Christ, and he was ready to be a witness for him to the world. But despite his penitent faith, Acts 22:16 makes clear that his sins were not yet forgiven. In other words, he was not yet saved. Ananias said to him, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." David Peterson comments:

[B]aptism is a means of appropriating the benefits of Christ's saving work (*wash away your sins*) and receiving the promised forgiveness of sins (cf. 2:38 note). The image of washing in 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5; and Hebrews 10:22 is also probably linked to baptism. Outward washing with water expresses the cleansing from sin that is proclaimed in the gospel and received by faith sacramentally in baptism.³²¹

5. When he returned to Jerusalem after an absence of two to three years (Acts 9:26-31), he stayed for only fifteen days (Gal. 1:18). His stay was so short because he argued with the Hellenistic Jews, the same crew that was behind Stephen's stoning, and was sent away to Tarsus by the brothers before he was killed. His leaving was in accordance with a vision he received while praying in the temple. He was told by the Lord to leave quickly because they would not accept his testimony about him. In other words, their enmity toward him was not going to be placated or assuaged. With that revelation, Paul acceded to the brothers' desire that he leave the city (Acts 9:29-30).

6. In response to his vision in the temple, Paul registered his disappointment and bewilderment, noting that all the Jews were fully aware how zealous he was in his opposition to the church. They knew how he persecuted the church and approved the stoning of Stephen, so

³¹⁹ Bock, 657.

³²⁰ NET note. It is rendered "Aramaic" in NIV, NET, and CSB (see also NRSV note).

³²¹ Peterson, 603.

how in the world could they deny his testimony about what caused his radical reversal? However difficult it may have been for him to comprehend, the fact was that his opponents were not going to be swayed, and so the Lord told him, "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles." It was not the time for Paul to die for the faith.

I. Paul and the Roman tribune (22:22-29)

1. When Paul said that the Lord had sent him to the Gentiles, his enemies lost their minds. They began screaming that he should not be allowed to live, throwing off their cloaks, and flinging dust into the air. The commander ordered Paul to be brought into the barracks intending to flog him to find out why the people were so angry at him. He probably did not understand Aramaic well enough to follow Paul's speech.

2. As they were about to flog Paul, he asks the centurion a rhetorical question designed to let him know they were about to commit the serious offense of flogging a Roman citizen who had not been convicted of a crime. The centurion promptly warned the commander, who confirmed directly Paul's claim to be a Roman citizen. Claims of Roman citizenship often were accepted at face value because the penalty for lying about it was severe, and the claim was plausible in Paul's case given that he was an educated citizen of Tarsus.³²² Lysias had mistakenly assumed Paul was not a Roman citizen because he was a Jew.

3. Lysias's response that he had purchased his citizenship for a large sum was not only an attempt to ingratiate himself with Paul in case the situation got reported to the governor but also was designed to ferret out Paul's relative social status. He finds out that he is facing a worst-case scenario because not only is Paul a Roman citizen, but his citizenship was by birth rather than purchase (almost certainly bribes in Lysias's case) and thus carries greater social status than Lysias's citizenship. It is a double whammy. Keener explains:

[T]he tribune is assessing the measure of political trouble he may have generated by openly shaming Paul without a hearing. Because courts evaluated the seriousness of an offense according to the relative status of the plaintiff, he needs to know whether Paul's official citizenship status is higher or lower than his own. If Paul acquired his citizenship more recently or suspiciously than Lysias, it would reduce Lysias's offense; if, by contrast, Paul was a citizen from birth, a civilian court would be more prejudiced against Lysias. Unfortunately for Lysias, Paul's citizenship status is higher.³²³

4. There being no mitigation of the offense from having a superior citizenship status, fear of the potential repercussions for their action was heightened. The would-be torturers withdrew from him immediately, and the commander was afraid.

J. Paul before the Council (22:30-23:11)

³²² Longenecker, 1048.

³²³ Keener, 3:3256-3257.

1. Determined to get to the bottom of the accusations against Paul by the Jews, Lysias convened the chief priests and all the Council, perhaps for an unofficial consultation, and brought Paul to the meeting. Paul essentially declares that he has done nothing wrong, that his conscience is clear, and thus that the accusations that have been made against him are false. Ananias, who served as high priest from about A.D. 47-58 and who Josephus indicates was insolent and quick-tempered,³²⁴ ordered that Paul be struck on the mouth, presumably to register his conviction that Paul was lying.

2. Paul was offended by that injustice and called out his hypocrisy, saying, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" Ordering him to be struck was contrary to the law because the law required just, fair, and impartial treatment (e.g., Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17, 16:19; Jn. 7:51). Bruce writes, "The rights of defendants were carefully safeguarded by Jewish law, and they were presumed innocent until proven guilty. Paul had not yet been properly charged, let alone tried and found guilty."³²⁵

3. Some Jews who were present rebuked Paul, asking, "Do you dare insult God's high priest?" And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

a. Most modern commentators think Paul knew Ananias was the high priest and view his claim to the contrary as sarcastic. As Krodel paraphrases the alleged meaning: "I did not think that a man like this who flaunts [sic, flouts] the Law in front of the Sanhedrin could be the high priest. Nevertheless, the law of Exod. 22:28 remains in force, to which I submit obediently."³²⁶

b. I think it more likely, however, that Paul was not aware that the one who gave the order to strike him was the high priest. There are too many unknowns to be certain one way or the other. Longenecker comments:

The high priest presided at regular meetings of the Sanhedrin and so would have been easily identifiable. But this was not a regular meeting, and the high priest may not have occupied his usual place or worn his robes of office. Furthermore, since he had visited Jerusalem only sporadically during the past twenty years, and since the office of high priest passed from one to another within certain priestly families, Paul might very well not have known who held the office of high priest in AD 58 – whether Ananias, who had reigned since AD 48, or Ishmael ben Phabi, who took the office in AD 58-59. Nor would he have known any of the current high priestly claimants by sight.³²⁷

4. Paul's indignation over and rebuke of the judge's sin and hypocrisy were justified. Peterson states, "Jesus and Paul were united in condemning those who pretended to be

³²⁴ Marshall (1980), 362-363.

³²⁵ Bruce (1987), 450.

³²⁶ Krodel, 424.

³²⁷ Longenecker, 1051. See also, Peterson, 615; Fitzmyer, 717.

righteous, but inwardly were corrupt."³²⁸ But had Paul known it was the high priest, he would have remained silent in deference to the office. Peterson comments:

At the time of his trial, Jesus clearly was more restrained than Paul in dealing with his accusers (cf. Lk. 22:63-71; Jn. 18:19-23). He submitted to injustice without complaint to accomplish the redemptive work prescribed for the Servant of the Lord (cf. Is. 53:7-8, cited in Acts 8:32-33). Nevertheless, there are occasions when Christians should speak out against hypocrisy and injustice. What Luke wishes us to see in Paul is 'the courage with which he faced official opposition, injustice and violence. When many a man would cringe, Paul answers back, and points out . . . that the Jewish judge is himself not observing the Law that he is appointed to administer.'³²⁹

5. Recognizing that the assembly included both Sadducees and Pharisees, Paul declares himself to be a second-generation Pharisee. That is his Jewish identity, the sect in which he was raised and received his theological training.

6. He then declares that he is on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead, meaning that the hostility toward him and his message of Jesus' resurrection ultimately is driven by theological opposition to the resurrection of the dead. Pharisees, who believe in an end-time resurrection, have far less distance to travel in accepting that the resurrection has already begun with Jesus than do Sadducees, who reject in principle the very notion of resurrection. By focusing on the Sadducean objection to resurrection as the root of their opposition to the gospel, he divided the opposition along sect lines. Instead of allying with the Sadducees in their opposition to Paul, the Pharisees, at least at this hearing, allied with Paul in their opposition to the Sadducees.

7. In explaining why the assembly divided over the resurrection, Luke says in v. 8, "For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, nor angel or spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all." Their rejection of belief in the resurrection of the dead is clear historically, but the clause "nor angel or spirit" is puzzling.

a. On its face, it seems Luke is saying the Sadducees deny *the existence* of angels and spirits, but there is no other evidence of such a belief, and it runs headlong into the fact the Sadducees accepted the testimony of Scripture, especially the Pentateuch, which refers clearly to such beings. John Meier explains:

Yet there is grave difficulty with understanding Luke's assertion in this natural sense: the Sadducees certainly revered the Torah as normative. And the Torah speaks in various passages either of "the angel of the Lord" (a sort of visible representation or spokesman of Yahweh) or of a group of angels obviously subservient to Yahweh (e.g., Jacob's dream of the angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder reaching up to heaven in Gen 28:12) or of individual kinds

³²⁸ Peterson, 614.

³²⁹ Peterson, 614 (quoting Barrett).

of angels with individual tasks (e.g., the cherubim who guard the way to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden in Gen 3:24).³³⁰

b. Of course, skeptics and those with a low view of inspiration claim Luke made a mistake, but one need not think Luke is saying the Sadducees deny the existence of angels and spirits. He may, for example, be saying that the Sadducees say there is "no [*revealing*] angel or spirit," meaning they do not believe that angels *any longer* intervene in human history as messengers of new revelation.³³¹ That Luke intends such a qualification is possibly suggested by the next verse where the Pharisees defend Paul by saying a spirit or angel may have spoken to him (which, in their view, Paul mistook as a resurrection appearance). In saying, "What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" they are challenging a Sadducean claim that such a thing could not happen.

c. Now, we have no other evidence that the Sadducees believed angels no longer serve as messengers of new revelation, but that is not as significant as it may seem given that we know very little about the beliefs of the Sadducees. We have no writings in which Sadducees express their own beliefs, and the NT tells us little about them. The only other sources, Josephus and the rabbinic literature, are limited and biased against the Sadducees.³³² Meier states:

As for Sadducean beliefs and practices, we are poorly informed. It is well to remember that, as with the Pharisees so with the Sadducees, we are dealing with a group that existed for over 200 years in a Palestinian society that was undergoing massive changes around the turn of the era. No doubt both the Pharisees and the Sadducees developed and mutated along with the society in which they were embedded. Yet all we have are "flat," static descriptions of their beliefs and practices, with no historical sense of their developments and mutations.³³³

8. The theological dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees became so heated that it got violent. Since the dispute related to Paul's culpability regarding his teaching (which the Pharisees and Sadducees agreed was wrong), whether it could be mitigated by appeal to the appearance of an angel or spirit, Paul's body would become the battleground. The commander was afraid he would be torn to pieces, so he forcibly removed him from their midst and brought him into the barracks.

9. That night, the Lord appeared to Paul and reassured him. Longenecker writes:

Paul had feared such a reception at Jerusalem (cf. 20:22-23; 21:13; Ro 15:31), and now his worst fears were being realized. He had planned to go to Rome and minister throughout the western part of the empire after his visit to Jerusalem (cf. Ro 15:24-29). But developments at Jerusalem were building up to a point where it

³³⁰ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 3:408.

³³¹ Offered as a possibility in Meier, 3:408; see also, Solomon Zeitlin, "The Sadducees and the Belief in Angels," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 (Mar. 1964), 70-71. For other proposals, see, e.g., Bock, 671-672.

³³² Meier, 3:389-391.

³³³ Meier, 3:399.

appeared his life could come to an end through any number of circumstances beyond his control. Undoubtedly he was despondent as he awaited the next turn of events in his cell at the Fortress of Antonio. "On the following night" . . . however, the risen and exalted Jesus appeared to Paul – as he had done at other critical moments in his ministry (e.g., 18:9-10; 22:17-21) – and encouraged him by his presence. The Lord said, "Take courage!" He assured Paul that he would yet testify in Rome as he had done in Jerusalem. Certainly, as F. F. Bruce has observed, "this assurance meant much to Paul during the delays and anxieties of the next two years, and goes far to account for the calm and dignified bearing which seemed to mark him out as master of events rather than their victim."³³⁴

K. A plot to kill Paul (23:12-22)

1. The next day, more than forty Jewish fanatics hatched a plot to kill Paul and took an oath to fast until they had accomplished that task. The plan, which they divulged to the chief priests and elders, was that the chief priest and elders, in concert with the Council, would request the commander to have Paul appear for another hearing ostensibly to have a fuller airing of his case. They would kill Paul on the way to the hearing. This confirms Paul's assessment of the high priest as a hypocrite, a whitewashed wall.

2. Paul's nephew, the son of his sister, learned of the plot and informed Paul. Paul then had a centurion escort his nephew to the commander to tell him what was afoot. The commander listened to the nephew and then, for security reasons, told him not to tell anyone that he had informed the commander about the plot. We learn that the request was going to be made the next day. As Marshall notes, "the plotters did not want to fast for too long!"³³⁵ But knowing the Lord has plans for Paul to testify in Rome, the readers are prepared for the plot to be foiled.

L. Paul sent to Felix the governor (23:23-35)

1. The commander, Lysias, orders two centurions to assemble a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to head out for Caesarea around nine that night. They are instructed to provide mounts for Paul and to bring him safely to Governor Felix, who resides in Caesarea. Claudius (or Antonius) Felix was governor of Judea from A.D. 52-59. His wife Drusilla was Jewish (Acts 24:24). Brian Rapske says of Felix (citations omitted):

Felix pacified the countryside by capturing bandit leaders and sending them on to Rome, crucifying their followers and punishing their supporters. . . . Felix also put down less militant movements by slaughter. About the year 54, he dealt with a popular movement led by a self-proclaimed prophet from Egypt. Many were killed and a good number taken prisoner, excepting the Egyptian who escaped.

³³⁴ Longenecker, 1052-1053.

³³⁵ Marshall (1980), 369.

This action renewed banditry in the countryside. Several years later, the apostle Paul was mistaken for the Egyptian (Acts 21:38).³³⁶

2. Critics claim Lysias would not have sent such a large force to escort a single prisoner, but as Witherington notes, "in view of the tenseness of the times, with various people of high social status being assassinated by the *sicarii* (cf. 21:38), it is not impossible that Claudius Lysias might commit this size of a force for a short mission such as this, if he felt Paul's safe conduct to Caesarea was very important and the situation very dangerous."³³⁷ He adds, "It is a good rule to be skeptical about modern scholars who think they know more about . . . what a Roman commander might do in handling a crisis than Luke did."³³⁸

3. Lysias sent a letter that explained to Felix what was happening. This was required when transferring a prisoner from one jurisdiction to another.³³⁹ Of course, Lysias spins the explanation in his own favor, claiming he initially rescued Paul because he had learned he was a Roman citizen. He reports, based on Paul's appearance before the Council, that the accusations against him involved questions of Jewish theology rather than any criminal offense subject to a Roman court. He explains that a plot precipitated the urgent action, which was to be followed by ordering his accusers to present their charges before Felix.

4. The soldiers marched through the night to reach Antipatris, a military station about 35 miles northwest of Jerusalem and 26 miles south of Caesarea (though there is some dispute as to its location). How long such a march would have taken is debated, but even if they did not arrive until early the next morning, it would be true that Paul had been brought there "by" or "through" the night. Sometime during the "next day," meaning after the sunrise following the night of the march, the foot soldiers and spearmen headed back to Jerusalem because, having reached open country (out of the Judean hills), the remaining journey to Caesarea was less dangerous. The horsemen continued to Caesarea with Paul at the much faster pace that riding allowed.

5. Felix inquires about Paul's home province and, despite the fact Paul was from Cilicia, announces he will deal with the case when his accusers arrive. It seems Felix legally could have punted the case to officials in charge of Cilicia, but for various political reasons chose not to avail himself of that option. He ordered Paul to be guarded in "the palace which had been built by Herod the Great and now served as the headquarters of the Roman administration."³⁴⁰

M. Paul before Felix at Caesarea (24:1-21)

1. After five days, the high priest Ananias, some of the elders, and their professional advocate, a man named Tertullus, arrived in Caesarea to present the case against Paul. After some standard complimenting, the case Tertullus presents boils down to claims that

³³⁶ Brian M. Rapske, "Roman Governors of Palestine" in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 983.

³³⁷ Witherington, 697.

³³⁸ Witherington, 697 (fn. 234).

³³⁹ Polhill, 474.

³⁴⁰ Marshall (1980), 373.

Paul stirs up riots among the Jews throughout the world, is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, and tried to profane the temple before the Jews seized him to prevent it. Tertullus tells Felix that he can confirm the truth of the charges by examining Paul himself, and the Jews whom Tertullus was representing joined with him and agreed that his accusations were true. (Verse 7 is probably not original, which is why it is omitted, bracketed, or relegated to a footnote in most modern English translations.)

2. Felix nodded to Paul to speak, and after complimenting Felix, Paul declared that his accusers did not find him disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. That is why they must resort to vague and unsubstantiated rumors about his conduct in distant lands, none of which is relevant to his arrest in the temple. They cannot prove that he incited any disturbance or attempted to profane the temple. As we might say, "They got nothin'."

3. It is true, however, that he worships the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob according to the Way, what they call "the sect of the Nazarenes." But this is in keeping with everything laid down in the Scriptures, not contrary to it. He does so having a conventional Jewish hope in God that there will be a resurrection of all the dead on Judgment Day, which hope his accusers, at least the Pharisees, also accept, and they are not subjected to persecution. In other words, the question of resurrection is at the heart of the Christian faith, and it is a theological issue within Judaism not a matter for Roman courts. Of course, Paul in making his defense is preaching to Felix and all who can hear.

4. Given that he believes in a resurrection of the just and the unjust, that all people will stand before God for judgment, he takes pains to maintain a clear conscience before God and man. Therefore, he is not someone who would lie to the court (or anyone else).

5. Finally, he explains that he had come to Jerusalem bringing alms for the poor, a recognized act of piety, and (as it turned out) to present offerings, referring most likely to the offerings of the four Nazirites that he enabled (Acts 21:26, only other occurrence of the word in Acts).³⁴¹ This is what he was doing in the temple, having completed his own purification ritual, when he was seized. He was creating no disturbance. He then begins to explain that it was some Jews from Asia who were behind the whole thing but breaks it off to declare that they need to be present in court as the real accusers.

6. In their absence, the Jews who are present should specify what wrongdoing they found when he stood before the Council in Jerusalem. There was nothing other than the issue he identified in that hearing: "It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day." That still stands, and that is a theological debate, not a Roman crime.

N. Paul kept in custody (24:22-27)

1. Being married to a Jew, having ruled in Palestine for a number of years, and holding the same office as Pontius Pilate, the man who ordered Jesus' crucifixion, it is no

³⁴¹ Marshall (1980), 379; Krodel, 440; Polhill, 484; Peterson, 637; Schnabel, 961.

surprise that Felix is well acquainted with the Way. That familiarity probably made him realize "that the charges against Paul were entirely religious in nature, even though they were presented in the guise of political sedition."³⁴² Yet, he did not want to upset the Jewish leaders by ruling against them (note 24:27). Schnabel comments:

Since the high priest had taken the trouble to travel from Jerusalem to Caesarea to accuse Paul of capital crimes, Felix would have to have good reasons for going against the powerbrokers of the province for whose order he was responsible. His immediate predecessor, Ventidius Cumanus, had been deposed and exiled precisely because he had failed to administer Judea in sympathetic cooperation with the Jewish officials.³⁴³

2. On the other hand, there was risk in ordering Paul's execution. To quote Schnabel again:

Since Paul was a leader of the followers of Jesus whose base was in Jerusalem, the tensions in Judea may spread to new segments of the population. Moreover, since Paul had been active among their adherents in many cities outside Judea, there was the prospect of potential unrest in other provinces, which, if traced back to his decision in the case against Paul, might harm his standing in the Roman imperial administration, particularly considering the fact Paul was a Roman citizen.³⁴⁴

3. So Felix punted. He adjourned the proceedings allegedly until he could gather further information by examining commander Lysias in person. We are not told whether Felix ever met with Lysias about the matter, but Paul remained in custody, albeit under relaxed terms, including a right to have friends tend to his needs.

4. Some days later, Felix, with his Jewish wife Drusilla, came to an unidentified place and sent for Paul. Perhaps Drusilla was curious to hear about the Way from someone as influential in the movement as Paul. Bock says of Drusilla:

Born in AD 38, she is not yet twenty years old, the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I [grandson of Herod the Great] and sister to Agrippa II. This is her second marriage. She left her first husband, whom she had married in a customary, arranged marriage at fourteen. She is Felix's third wife. Josephus (*Ant.* 2.7.2 §§141-144) notes that she was beautiful and was persuaded by Felix to leave her first husband (also *Ant.* 19.9.1 §354; *J. W.* 2.1.6 §220; Suetonius, *Claudius* 28; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.9).³⁴⁵

5. Paul spoke to them about faith in Christ Jesus, which included speaking about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. Fleshing this out is an entire sermon, but

³⁴² Longenecker, 1063.

³⁴³ Schnabel, 964.

³⁴⁴ Schnabel, 964.

³⁴⁵ Bock, 695.

in a nutshell, Paul says to this pagan governor and his hypocritical Jewish wife that to receive the gracious gift of life offered by God in Christ one must reject all unrighteous conduct and seek to live righteously for his glory. This includes exercising self-control, control over one's sinful desires, especially in matters of sex. On Judgment Day, the only salvation from eternal punishment will be a genuine faith in Jesus, an allegiance to him that includes submission to him as Lord.

6. This is why Felix was alarmed and shut Paul down, telling him he would send for him some other time. He was unwilling to repent and was distressed by the message of what awaits those who refuse to do so. Because Felix hoped Paul would pay him a bribe, perhaps with money from his supporters, he sent for him often and conversed with him. This presumably was after he had hardened his heart to Paul's message so that it did not touch him to the point of alarm as it did initially. No bribe was paid, and Paul continued languishing in custody.

7. When two years had elapsed (A.D. 57-59), Felix was succeeded as governor of Judea by Porcius Festus. Rather than resolve the case, Felix chose to leave Paul in prison as a favor to the Jews. It then became Festus's problem to deal with.

O. Paul appeals to Caesar (25:1-12)

1. Three days after arriving in Judea as the new governor, Festus makes the trek from Caesarea to Jerusalem to pay a courtesy visit to the Jewish leaders, whose cooperation can aid his rule. The chief priests and other Jewish leaders took the opportunity to make their case against Paul, and as we see in 25:15, they asked Festus to condemn him. Festus told them it was not the custom of the Romans to condemn anyone without an opportunity to confront their accusers and to present a defense (25:16), so they urged Festus, couching it as a favor to them, to summon Paul to Jerusalem and hold the hearing on his case there. They were planning to kill him on the way.

2. Festus does not want to begin his tenure as governor by being directed by his subjects, especially if their request was improper under Roman law because Paul was not present,³⁴⁶ so he politely declines their request. He tells them Paul is being held in Caesarea, and he is going there soon, so the appropriate Jewish authorities can accompany him and formally bring their charges there.

3. Festus returned to Caesarea after staying in Jerusalem no more than eight or ten days, and the next day convened the hearing in Paul's case. When Paul arrived, the Jews who had come from Jerusalem brought many serious charges against him, which they could not prove, presumably the same things they had alleged before Felix. Paul flatly denied their claims, requiring them to "pony up" the proof, which two years down the road would be even more difficult. He declared: "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense."

³⁴⁶ See Schnabel, 987.

4. Perhaps having learned that his initial refusal to bring Paul to Jerusalem was antagonizing the Jews, Festus seeks to placate them by seeking Paul's consent to a change of venue, which would happen at Festus's convenience. Paul adamantly rejects Festus's request for what is ostensibly a mere change of venue, i.e., Festus hearing the case in a different location, because he realizes his fate would, in effect, be put in the hands of Jewish authorities. The mob in Jerusalem would either prevail on Festus to allow Paul to be tried by the Council for his alleged religious offenses or would pressure Festus to such an extent regarding the alleged Roman crimes that it would amount to their exercising jurisdiction through Festus.

5. Paul declares, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar."

a. There was a legal question whether Paul had a right to have his case transferred to the emperor. After conferring with officials better versed in the intricacies of Roman law, Festus determined that such a right existed. He thus answered Paul, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go."

b. If Festus simply had acquitted Paul the appeal would have been unnecessary, but as Longenecker states, "politically no newly arrived governor would have dreamed of antagonizing the leaders of the people he sought to govern by acquitting one against whom they were so vehemently opposed. It was thus more a political than a legal decision that Festus had to make, and he was probably only too glad to have this way out of a very sticky situation."³⁴⁷ Schnabel notes, "The cost of appeals had to be paid by the person making the appeal, including payment for transport and room and board."³⁴⁸

P. Paul before Agrippa and Bernice (25:13-27)

1. After an unspecified number of days, Herod Agrippa II, the great grandson of Herod the Great, and his slightly younger sister, Bernice, came to Caesarea to greet the new governor. (The death of Herod Agrippa II's father, Herod Agrippa I, is recorded in Acts 12:23.) "[Agrippa II] had been granted various territories in the north-east of Palestine by the Romans, and he ruled over these with the status of a king."³⁴⁹

2. During their lengthy stay in Caesarea, Festus told Agrippa II about Paul's case. He told him how the Jewish leaders had asked to have Paul condemned in absentia and how he insisted on holding a hearing in Caesarea on the matter. Whatever had happened under Felix, the charges and evidence would have presented to him if they expected him to condemn Paul. The Jewish leaders came to Caesarea, and he held the hearing the next day.

3. The only charges the Jews even attempted to substantiate in that hearing centered on a man named Jesus who had died but whom Paul insisted was alive. This struck

³⁴⁷ Longenecker, 1069.

³⁴⁸ Schnabel, 992.

³⁴⁹ Marshall (1980), 387.

Festus as a religious dispute that did not involve a violation of Roman law, which is not what he had expected. Instead of telling Agrippa that he asked Paul whether he wanted to be tried in Jerusalem because he wanted to do a favor for the Jewish leaders, he suggests that he did so because he thought it might be easier to investigate whether this seeming religious dispute intersected with Roman law if the hearing was held in Jerusalem. At that point, Paul appealed to the emperor, and Festus has been holding him until he could send him to Caesar.

4. Agrippa is so intrigued that he wants to hear Paul himself, and Festus schedules the presentation for the next day. That day Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, military tribunes, and the prominent men of the city all gathered in the hall; and Festus ordered that Paul be brought in. Festus announced to Agrippa that the Jews were adamant that Paul should be put to death, but he was unable to find that he had committed any offense deserving death. Pursuant to Paul's appeal, he was sending him to Caesar, but he did not see how to frame a credible charge against him that would justify to the emperor his failure simply to rule in Paul's favor. He is seeking some angle on the facts that will make the matter seem more complicated from the standpoint of Roman law than it is. Agrippa was part Jewish and was respected for his knowledge of Judaism, so he is hoping he is just the man for the job.³⁵⁰

Q. Paul's defense before Agrippa (26:1-11)

1. Agrippa permits Paul to speak, and Paul says he considers himself blessed in being able to present his defense to Agrippa, given his familiarity with the customs and controversies of the Jews. He begins by declaring that the Jews all know that from his youth, in Tarsus and later in Jerusalem, he was a fervent adherent of the Jewish faith, living as a Pharisee, a sect that pledged to live strictly according to the law.

2. Despite his Jewish bona fides, he stands on trial before Jews because of his hope in the promise God made to the Jewish ancestors that he will raise people from the dead. Indeed, the Jews (other than Sadducees) serve God in the hope they will experience that promise, that they will be resurrected, and yet, they accuse him of a death-penalty offense for having that same hope but focused on the resurrection of Jesus, the firstfruits from among the dead (26:23). Given their hope in resurrection life, why think it incredible that God raises the dead, as Christians declare that he did with Jesus and will do for all who have faith in him?

3. At one time, Paul shared that reflexive hostility to this work of God, being convinced he needed to do all he could to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jerusalem, he threw saints in prison, had a hand in condemning them to death, punished them often in the synagogues, and tried to force them to blaspheme God. His rage against them was so extreme that he even persecuted them in foreign cities. He is fully aware of the mindset of his opponents; the problem is that they are tragically wrong, as he had been.

R. Paul tells of his conversion (26:12-32)

³⁵⁰ Bock, 709.

1. Paul proceeds to recount for Agrippa his conversion story. The Lord appeared to him dramatically on the road to Damascus, where he was heading to persecute Christians. The fact those traveling with him also fell to the ground when the amazingly bright light shone around them confirms this was an objective, external phenomenon and not something limited to Paul's mind. Here we learn that the Lord used a proverbial expression in speaking to him, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads," meaning it would be easier and better for him to submit to the Lord's call and purpose than to rebel against it.

2. After Jesus identifies himself and declares that Paul is persecuting *him*, he explains that he appeared to him to appoint him as a servant, a primary function of which will be to bear witness to the things he had already seen and the things he would be shown in the future. He is "to bear witness to the things associated with Jesus,"³⁵¹ which will include his work in delivering him from the Jews and the Gentiles to whom he is sending him.³⁵² Though Paul's commission was focused on Gentiles (Acts 22:21; Gal. 1:16, 2:7-8; Eph. 3:8; Rom. 11:13), it was not limited to them (Acts 9:15).

3. The purpose of Paul being sent is to open the eyes of those to whom he preaches, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that in doing so they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ. He is sent to offer salvation to mankind through the gospel of Christ.

4. Given his experience on the Damascus Road, he tells Agrippa that he was obedient to the "heavenly vision."³⁵³ He declared that he preached to the ones in Damascus first

³⁵¹ Bock, 717.

³⁵² Barrett states (2:1160), "The masculine singular λαοῦ (the People, Israel) and the neuter plural ἐθνῶν are taken up – *ad sensum* and quite naturally – in the masculine plural οὓς [whom], which refers to the multiplicity of persons concerned. It is however quite possible that οὓς refers to ἔθνη only." See also, Bock, 718; Schnabel, 1010.

³⁵³ The description of the experience as a "heavenly vision" does not mean it was a purely subjective "seeing" of a nonmaterial thing. The following question and answer are instructive in that regard. It is from [Ben Witherington's interview of N. T. Wright](#) (March 13, 2009) regarding Wright's book *Surprised By Hope*:

Question 2--- There seem to have been at least two persons who saw the risen Jesus on or after Easter who were not amongst his disciples at the time--- James his brother and Saul on Damascus Road. One of these surely took place during the initial period of appearances, the other after those 40 or so days, which is to say after the Ascension. Yet they both claimed equally to have seen the risen Lord.

In your view was either of these appearances to non-disciples visionary in character, and does it make any difference to your case that resurrection always meant something that happened to a body after death and the initial afterlife?

ANSWER

James, Paul and 'visions'. The difficulty here is that in our culture a 'vision' is thought of as a 'purely subjective' thing, so that when people say 'so-and-so had a vision' they assume there is no correlated phenomena in our own space-time-matter world. The whole NT is predicated on a different view: that heaven and earth are twin parts of God's good creation, and that they overlap and interlock in a variety of surprising ways, so that sometimes people really do see right into God's dimension and sometimes aspects of God's dimension -- in this case, the risen body of Jesus -- are visible from within our dimension.

That is of course what I think was happening when Paul saw Jesus, as I have explained in the relevant chapter of *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Such moments are genuine anticipations of the final day when heaven and earth will come together as one glorious reality, when 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea'. Our culture is built on the denial that such a thing is possible, let alone desirable, so things fall apart into either 'ordinary seeing' or 'vision', the first

and also in Jerusalem, throughout all the region of Judea,³⁵⁴ and to the Gentiles. Paul is not saying that he preached throughout all the region of Judea soon after his conversion, right after he preached in Jerusalem. Indeed, Acts 9:1-30 and Gal. 1:22 indicate the contrary. As Witherington suggests, his preaching "throughout all the region of Judea" refers to his later witnessing activity in the region (Acts 15:3, 18:22, 21:7-16), "and perhaps also the witnessing during the two-year period in A.D. 57-59 while in chains is in view."³⁵⁵ His point is that he preached everywhere because he was under divine compulsion to do so.

5. He summarizes the content of his preaching as telling the people "they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance." Bock comments:

He asked the same from both Jews and Gentiles, namely that they should repent (i.e., change their minds) and turn (i.e., change the direction of the orientation of their life). These responses can also be called faith directed toward Jesus, the idea mentioned at the end of v. 18. So all these ideas are related to each other. Faith in Jesus is where the process ends, but to get there, a person changes his or her mind about sin and God and turns to God to receive the offer of salvation through Jesus. So each of these terms ("repent," "turn," "believe") is adequate for expressing the offer of the gospel, since Paul used each of them.³⁵⁶

6. Paul makes clear that repenting and turning to God, putting one's faith in Christ, is accompanied by a changed life, by deeds that are consistent with one's repentance and the blessings of faith. To quote Bock again:

Paul was not an antinomian. He did not believe that someone who had faith could do whatever one wished without concern for God's moral standards. . . . One who turns to God follows in God's way and produces fruit. To trust God is to be responsive to God. John's Gospel calls this loving God, knowing God, or abiding in God (John 14-16). Polhill summarizes, "Works can never be the basis of salvation. They are, however, the inevitable result of a genuine experience of turning to God in Christ."³⁵⁷

being 'objective' and the latter 'subjective'. To unravel this further would need a few paragraphs on epistemology...

For example, the two "men" in dazzling apparel who stood before the women and spoke to them in Lk. 24:4-7 were an external manifestation; they were angels who were, or at least appeared to the women to be, physically present. (God sometimes dispatches faithful angels in human form. The physicality of the angels in Genesis 18-19 is indicated by their repeated description as "men" and the fact they ate food [18:8, 19:3].) All the women were frightened by what they saw and bowed their faces to the ground. According to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the women described this shared, objective experience as their having "seen a *vision (optasia)* of angels" (Lk. 24:23), using the same word as in Acts 26:19. The same goes for the angel of the Lord whom Zechariah saw and spoke with in Lk. 1:11-20 (described as a "vision" in Lk. 1:22). So clearly a "vision" can be an objective perception of an external phenomenon. For Paul, it involved him seeing the resurrected Christ.

³⁵⁴ Taking the phrase *πάσαν τε τὴν χώραν τῆς Ἰουδαίας* as an accusative of extent. See, Williams, 420-421; Witherington, 746.

³⁵⁵ Witherington, 746.

³⁵⁶ Bock, 719.

³⁵⁷ Bock, 719-720.

7. It was because of his message that salvation is in Christ and is available to Gentiles on the same basis as to Jews that the Jews seized him in the temple and tried to kill him. But as the Lord had promised (v. 17), he was delivered by God from their evil intentions so that he now stands before them, the small and the great, testifying to the truth of Christ. In doing so, he was saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

8. The notion of Christ's resurrection was so far outside Festus's worldview that he yelled out, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." Paul says, in essence, "O contraire, what I am saying is both true and rational." He then says that Agrippa, with his familiarity of Judaism, knows what he is talking about. And he presses the point further with Agrippa saying he feels sure he is tuned into what has been going on. After all, the Christian movement, rooted in the resurrection of Christ, is a matter of public knowledge.

9. Turning to Agrippa's personal convictions, Paul says to him, "Do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." Agrippa deflects his question by saying, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul's response is classic: "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am – except for these chains." Paul, as Christ's ambassador, wants everyone to come to faith in him.

10. With that, the hearing was adjourned, and the authorities agreed that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or further imprisonment to await additional proceedings. Agrippa says to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." Apparently, it would be disrespectful or somehow in bad form to terminate a case and thus remove it from Caesar's jurisdiction once that jurisdiction had been properly invoked by the prisoner. So whereas they agree there is no substance to the charges, it is now too late from a political standpoint to rule in Paul's favor. He is now in Caesar's hands.

S. Paul sails for Rome (27:1-12)

1. When the time came for Paul to be sent to Rome, Paul and some other prisoners were turned over to a centurion named Julius and put on a ship. Luke and Aristarchus, a Christian from Macedonia, accompanied Paul on the journey. The ship took a short hop up the coast to Sidon, where Julius allowed Paul to go to his friends and be cared for. They then sailed around the north side of the island of Cyprus, because of the direction of the prevailing winds in the summer and early autumn, and eventually came to Myra in Lycia.

2. At Myra, the centurion found a ship from Alexandria that was sailing for Italy and put them all on board. The pilot and owner of the ship no doubt figured they could reach Italy before the onset of wintery weather made travel impossible, but it was slow going from the start. Because of the wind, they sailed around the east side of Crete and with difficulty made it to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea on the southern side of the island.

3. The journey had already taken longer than expected, and it seems they spent additional time in Fair Havens waiting for the weather to allow them to make the short journey to Phoenix, a harbor of Crete that was better suited for withstanding the winter. Given how late in the year it now was – the Jewish Day of Atonement (the Fast) falling in early October in A.D. 59 – Paul was convinced that continuing the voyage would result in the loss of the cargo, the ship, and their lives. There was danger from "winter storms, fog, and overcast skies, which made navigation (by the sun and stars) nearly impossible."³⁵⁸ Paul, of course, was a very experienced traveler, having been shipwrecked three times in the past (2 Cor. 11:25). The centurion, however, listened to the pilot and the owner. This may not imply that the centurion had final authority over whether the ship would continue but may refer to whether he would keep his soldiers and prisoners on the vessel if it did continue.

4. Fair Havens was considered an unsuitable place for the ship, its crew, and passengers to spend the winter. It may not have provided proper shelter from the winter winds, and the lack of amenities in that place and in the town of Lasea also may have been a factor.³⁵⁹ So "the majority," referring "to the seamen responsible for the ship, or possibly to the bulk of the passengers on board," decided to risk the relatively short trip to Phoenix, a harbor further west on Crete, with the intention of spending the winter there.

T. The storm at sea (27:13-38)

1. When they got a gentle south wind, the sailors figured they had their opening, so they set out carefully, hugging the coast. But soon a ferocious storm struck, the winds of which they could not resist. The ship was driven southward, past the eastern end of a small island called Cauda and into the open sea. To keep it from being swamped or dashed against the ship, they brought on board the small lifeboat that normally was towed behind the ship, but because of the wind, waves, and water in the boat, they did so with difficulty.

2. The crew used supports to undergird the ship. We are not sure which method they used, but it would be designed to hold together the planks forming the hull of the ship to prevent or stop water coming into the vessel. And fearing the ship would be blown into the Syrtis, a zone of sandbars off the coast of north Africa that was notorious for destroying vessels, "the crew lowered the gear, and thus were driven along." Schnabel explains:

The crew lowered all superfluous sail and rigging, retaining only a minimal storm sail with which to keep the ship steady. By lowering most of the sail and rigging, the crew would have been able to lay the ship "on a starboard tack, with its right side pointed into the wind, to make as much leeway as possible northward of the natural line of drift, and so away from the Syrtis" (quoting Hemer).³⁶⁰

3. The next day, they began to jettison the cargo (not yet all of it, v. 38), and on the third day they threw the ship's "gear" overboard. Lightening a ship in dire circumstances was well known in antiquity (e.g., Jonah 1:5). Having the vessel sit higher in the water made it less

³⁵⁸ Schnabel, 1037.

³⁵⁹ Schnabel, 1039.

³⁶⁰ Schnabel, 1040.

likely to take on water and improved its maneuverability. The "gear" or "equipment" that was thrown overboard is uncertain.

4. After being driven by the storm for many days with no visible sun or stars by which to determine their location, and thus to gauge their risk of being driven to the Syrtis, the situation seemed hopeless. Marshall remarks, "Humanly speaking, there appeared to be no chance of survival, and despondency settled on the ship."³⁶¹

5. After many days of the storm, during which time the men had not eaten, "surely due to anxiety, seasickness, and the impossibility of cooking,"³⁶² Paul reminds them of his warning not to set sail from Fair Havens, the heeding of which would have avoided the damage to the ship and loss of equipment. Schnabel comments, "Paul's remarks should not be understood as those of a smart aleck who insists on having been right, but as establishing his credibility (*ethos*), which was a standard feature of speeches."³⁶³

6. Now he is telling them to take heart because there will be no loss of life, only loss of the ship. He knows this because an angel appeared to him that night and told him not to be afraid because, as the Lord told him previously (Acts 23:11), God has determined that he is to stand before Caesar, so he is not going to die in the storm. And in saving him, God will also save all those sailing with him. He tells them to take heart because he has faith in God that it will play out exactly as he was told. No one will die, but the ship will run aground on some island.

7. About midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, as they were being driven across the sea,³⁶⁴ the sailors suspected they were nearing land, perhaps from the sound of breakers and maybe even smells. They then checked the depth of the water, which dropped within a short distance from about 120 feet to 90 feet, suggesting they were rapidly approaching land. Fearing they would run aground on rocks and be dashed to pieces in heavy seas in the pitch dark, they dropped four anchors from the stern hoping to maintain the status quo until morning when they could better assess their options. They dropped the anchors from the stern to keep the stern from pivoting around and smashing into rocks.

8. Some of the sailors intended to abandon the ship and lowered the lifeboat into the water under the pretense of laying anchors from the bow, which would have required them to use the boat to position the anchors some distance from the bow.³⁶⁵ Paul realized their intention and told the centurion and the soldiers that they cannot be saved unless those attempting to abandon the ship remain on board. Their expertise would be necessary to maneuver the ship close enough to shore for the others to survive (cf. 27:39-41).³⁶⁶ It is like airline pilots trying to grab the parachutes and jump out of the plane in a thunderstorm; if they go, those left behind are

³⁶¹ Marshall (1980), 410.

³⁶² Schnabel, 1041.

³⁶³ Schnabel, 1042.

³⁶⁴ "Nowadays the *sea of Adria* means the gulf between Italy and the Balkan peninsula, but in ancient usage the term was used to include the area between Sicily and Crete as well." Marshall (1980), 411.

³⁶⁵ Polhill, 525; Marshall (1980), 412.

³⁶⁶ Witherington, 772; Polhill, 526; Keener, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 4:3637.

in dire straits. Of course, God could spare those sailing with Paul however he wanted, but apparently his plan for doing so included using the skills of these men.³⁶⁷

9. Trusting Paul's insight, the soldiers take the drastic step of cutting the ropes that tethered the lifeboat to the ship, allowing it to drift away. That certainly ensured that the sailors would remain on board, but that was their decision not Paul's. Perhaps it would have been better to guard the lifeboat instead of cutting it loose so that it would have been available for getting people to shore, but there are too many unknowns to be confident about what may have motivated soldiers' action.

10. As day was about to dawn, Paul urges them to eat that they will have the energy for the effort that lies ahead, and he encourages them with the assurance that not one of them will die. He then took bread, gave thanks to God in the presence of all, broke it, and began to eat. The people were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. Luke notes that there was a total of 276 persons on the ship. For none of them to perish is amazing, a confirmation of God's involvement.

11. When the people had eaten enough, they lightened the ship further by tossing the wheat overboard. Polhill comments, "[They] took steps for the breaching operation, jettisoning the remaining cargo to lighten the ship for running as far up on the beach as possible."³⁶⁸

U. The shipwreck (27:39-44)

1. In the daylight, they saw an unfamiliar island but noticed it had a bay with a beach, and they decided to attempt to run the ship ashore there. They detached the anchors, untied the rudders so they could maneuver the vessel, raised the foresail, and headed for the beach. Unfortunately, the ship struck a reef or sandbar (or hit a crosscurrent) and ran aground. The bow was stuck, and the stern was getting broken apart by the storm surf.

2. Rather than risk some of the prisoners swimming to the island and escaping, which would subject the responsible soldier(s) to the escapee's penalty, they plan to kill them all before they have an opportunity to escape. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, put the kibosh on that idea. He ordered those who could swim to head for the land and those who could not to head there on planks or pieces of the ship used as floatation devices. It turned out that everyone reached the island safely.

V. Paul on Malta (28:1-10)

1. Upon arrival, they learn the island is Malta. The native people treated them kindly, welcoming them with a fire to help warm them up. As Paul puts a bundle of sticks on the fire, he a viper attaches itself to his hand. When the natives saw it, they assumed Paul was a murderer whom the god Justice was putting to death even though he had dodged death at sea.

³⁶⁷ Peterson, 692.

³⁶⁸ Polhill, 528.

2. Their opinion changed, however, when Paul simply shook off the snake into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The locals kept waiting for him to swell up and die, but when nothing happened after a sufficiently long period of time, they figured he was a god.

3. Near where they had come ashore was the estate of a man named Publius. He was the Roman governor of the island. He entertained at least a group of the shipwrecked party for three days. Publius's father happened to be ill at that time with a fever and dysentery, and Paul went and, by praying and putting his hands on him, healed him. His reliance on prayer indicates that it is God who healed through Paul. That news spread quickly, and then the rest of the people on the island who were sick also came and were cured.

4. As a result of Paul's healing ministry, the people honored him and his companions greatly, but the ways in which they did so are not specified. The locals demonstrated their gratitude by putting on board their next ship whatever they needed in the way of provisions.

W. Paul arrives in Rome (28:11-16)

1. After spending three months on Malta, they set sail for Italy on an Alexandrian ship that had wintered there. They sailed to Syracuse, then Rhegium, and then came to Puteoli. Paul spent a week with the Christians there, and then traveled overland the roughly 130 miles to Rome. Presumably Paul had gained such respect and trust from Julius and his soldiers, especially after his healings and reception by the people of Malta, that they were willing to grant him this time with the saints in Puteoli.

2. As Paul was heading for Rome, the Christians in that city heard he was coming and went out to greet him as far as the Forum of Appius, about 43 miles south of Rome, and the Three Taverns, about 33 miles south of Rome. When Paul saw the love for him represented by this desire and effort to greet him, he thanked God and took courage.

3. Luke says, "And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him."

a. This indicates that Paul "was able to occupy private lodgings in Rome,"³⁶⁹ a conclusion that is confirmed in Acts 28:30, which says Paul stayed there two whole years "in his own rented quarters."³⁷⁰ Those quarters were large enough to fit "the local leaders of the Jews" (Acts 28:17) and even greater numbers (Acts 28:23), and Paul was able to encourage and receive visitors (Acts 28:17, 23, 30).³⁷¹ It may well be, as Brian Rapske has argued, that the reason for Paul's loose custody in Rome was that the trial documents revealed the case against this Roman citizen was weak and inconsistent in terms of any Roman charges.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Brian Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 177.

³⁷⁰ This rendering is better than "at his own expense." See Rapske, 179-180; NAS, NASU, NET, and similarly, KJV, ERV, ASV, NKJV, NIV, CSB.

³⁷¹ Rapske, 181.

³⁷² Rapske, 191.

b. Paul notes in Acts 28:20 that he is wearing a chain, and the term he uses (*halusis*) makes clear he is referring to a literal chain.³⁷³ Rapske states, "Security against escape in light custody conditions usually called for a chain, which in keeping with the pattern, would bind the prisoner by the wrist to his soldier or guard."³⁷⁴

c. As for the nature of Paul's "own rented quarters," he almost certainly could not have afforded a private house in Rome, even with financial assistance from others, as the prices were exorbitant.³⁷⁵ It seems most likely that "he lived in an apartment in one of the thousands of tenement buildings in Rome."³⁷⁶ Rapske comments

Unlike life in the cubbyhole environment of most rooms in boarding houses, such accommodation would have given relatively more space to a prisoner occupant. It is hard to conceive of Paul as confined at night to a tiny room with a soldier-guard, or sitting by day entertaining visitors in the prurient environment of a restaurant [as would be the only option in a boarding house]. Much more convincing is the picture of Paul shut up with his guard in an apartment at night and, during the day, able to divide his time between his rooms and the precincts of his tenement – perhaps wandering about the courtyard if such was a part of his dwelling. . . . If Paul's quarters were of too modest a size to accommodate such numbers of visitors as Acts would seem to imply, perhaps the atrium – of course again, if such existed in his building – could have been used without great disturbance to the other tenants.³⁷⁷

X. Paul in Rome (28:17-31)

1. After three days, Paul calls together the local Jewish leaders and explains that he had been unjustly handed over to the Romans by the Jews, meaning they were the cause of his arrest and continued incarceration. Though the Roman authorities repeatedly concluded he had done nothing deserving death under Roman law, they refused to dismiss the charges because the Jewish leaders objected, and the Romans did not want to alienate them. That compelled him to appeal to Caesar, but in doing so he was not throwing the Jews under the bus, accusing them of wrongdoing before the emperor. His claim on appeal is that the dispute is a religious one and not a matter of Roman law.

2. Given the potential for confusion about his situation and appeal, he asked to speak with them to explain things. The reality is that he is a prisoner because of the hope of Israel, the hope of resurrection life which has been realized in the resurrection of Christ.

3. The Jewish leaders inform him that they had not received any letters from Judea about him or a bad report about him from any travelers from there. Perhaps Paul arrived in Rome ahead of any such report, or the Jews in Jerusalem had no interest in stirring up Jewish

³⁷³ Rapske, 310.

³⁷⁴ Rapske, 181.

³⁷⁵ Rapske, 236-237.

³⁷⁶ Rapske, 238.

³⁷⁷ Rapske, 238-239.

unrest over Paul in the Roman capital, knowing the weakness of any claim that Paul violated Roman law and remembering the recent past when Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because of disputes over Jesus. They tell Paul they want hear his views because they know the Christian faith is being spoken against everywhere, and they want to hear what, if anything, can be said in defense of it.

4. On the appointed day, the Jewish leaders came to Paul's place in large numbers, and from morning to night he explained things to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. He was preaching to them that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah who ushered in the long-awaited kingdom of God that will be consummated at his return and that eternal life in that kingdom depends on one's acceptance of that good news. Some were persuaded but others were not.

5. The divided group of Jews departed after Paul's final statement. Given the rejection of the gospel by some, he said, "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to their fathers through Isaiah the prophet: "Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." ²⁷ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' This is a rebuke of their spiritual hardness, their refusal to receive the truth of Christ being given to them of a silver platter by Paul. In that regard, they are repeating the attitude and action of their fathers that Isaiah rebuked.

6. Paul declares to them that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen! I think this is a specific case of what he says in Rom. 11:13b-14: "So then, inasmuch as I am an apostle of the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry, ¹⁴ if somehow I may provoke my kindred to jealousy and save some of them." He is trying to induce the "Gentile effect."

7. Verse 29 is omitted, bracketed, or relegated to a footnote in most modern English translations. That it was not part of the original text is considered certain.³⁷⁸

8. Luke ends Acts with the declaration: "He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."

a. While Paul was imprisoned in Rome, the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to him with a gift (Phil. 4:18) and with instructions to care for his needs (Phil. 2:25). It was also during this time that Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus, encountered Paul and was converted.

b. It was during his confinement in Rome that Paul wrote Ephesians, which was probably a circular letter to churches in Asia Minor that, because of some contact with Ephesus (e.g., the initial point from which it circulated), came at an early date to be associated exclusively with that city. It is also probably the time he wrote Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, the four letters that are known collectively as the "Prison Epistles."

³⁷⁸ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 444.

c. In keeping with Paul's expectation expressed in Phil. 1:25-26 and 2:23-24, it seems he was released from prison around A.D. 62. There is a strong church tradition regarding this release. It is reflected in 1 Clement (late 1st century), the Muratorian Canon (around A.D. 180), and in Eusebius (early 4th century). Upon his release, he may have gone west to Spain, as he intended to do when he wrote Romans (Rom. 15:23-28) and as church tradition indicates that he did. If so, he probably stayed in Spain only a short time and then made a missionary journey to Crete with Titus (Tit. 1:5). Whether before or after going to Crete, Paul went to Macedonia, and it appears Timothy left Ephesus to meet him on his way there. In the mid-60s Paul was again imprisoned in Rome from where he wrote 2 Timothy shortly before his execution.