

A Missiological Study
LUKE'S BOOK OF ACTS

**“The Mission and Expansion
of
the New Testament Church”**

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2025

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Preface.

This study will be an exegetical theological missiological study of Luke's book, *Acts of the Apostles*. It is commonly listed in our Bibles as *The Acts of the Apostles* by which it was known among Christians in the early centuries of Christianity. In early Greek manuscripts it was simply titled ΠΑΡΞΕΙΣ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΩΝ, *PAXEIS APOSTOLAN*. We might accurately translate this as the *Acts of the Apostles*, or "*the praxis of the Apostles*," meaning "*what the Apostles did*".

Luke, however, in his opening paragraph explained in clear terms what the *Acts of the Apostles* was about, and what he intended Theophilus to know about it.

Acts 1:1-8

¹ *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,* ² *until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.* ³ *To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God.* ⁴ *And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me,* ⁵ *for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*

⁶ *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* ⁷ *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.* ⁸ *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."*¹

He was aware that the narrative he planned to lay out in the *Acts of the Apostles* built on his previous writing, the Gospel of Luke, which we will identify as Part 1 of his two-part narrative.

From Acts 1:1-5 we learn that Luke in his Gospel had introduced a "narrative" which we will in due course define as a "theological, historical, and missiological narrative". Luke had in his Gospel introduced Theophilus to a "narrative" that we will learn was a "theological historical" narrative with missiological import of what Jesus had done in his life and ministry.

Acts 1:1-5, Part 2 of Luke's narrative, is an explanation of why this book is defined as a "theological missiological historical" narrative, which is how *The Acts of the Apostles* was intended to be read:

¹ *In the first book (the Gospel of Luke), O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. ⁴ And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, ⁵ for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*

As we have mentioned above, Luke's *first book* refers to his gospel which we know as *The Gospel According to Luke*. We learn that this *first book* he had addressed to someone whom he refers to as "*most excellent Theophilus*". Luke 1:1-4 records this:

¹ *The Revised Standard Version, Ac 1:6-8.*

“¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, ²just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, ³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.”

Biblical scholars believe that Luke and Acts were intended to be one “theological narrative set in history” explaining the story of the beginnings of Christianity primarily for Greek Gentile people, possibly in the region of Asia and Macedonia.

Overarching each part of this two-part narrative is a steady *theological missiological* theme built around the “evangelistic commission instruction” of each book, Luke 24:45-49, and Acts 1:6-8.

Each book, Luke and Acts, is of the approximate size of an ancient scroll, thus requiring Luke to write to “volumes” *Luke-Acts 1* and *Luke-Acts 2* which we simply call Luke and Acts.

In this book, the *Book of Acts*, I will briefly address Luke’s *first book* simply as *Luke’s Gospel*. I trust that the student will read the *Gospel of Luke* through carefully before engaging this study!

I am adding a couple of personal notes regarding my *theological* journey which has been impacted by Luke’s Acts! When June, my wife, and I in 1958 were baptized into Christ in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, we were already firm believers in Jesus. However, we had not been introduced to a serious study of Scripture. Our knowledge of Jesus was due to having been raised in good Christian families. In a strange sense, therefore, in 1958 we were not “converted” to Jesus, but to a serious study of Scripture.

Consequently, our discovering the Church of Christ, of which we had not heard before our “conversion,” had to our surprise been clearly defined in the New Testament!

The first book I studied seriously after our “conversion” was a commentary on Acts, *Studying the Truths of Acts*, by a Church of Christ minister in Kentucky, Dr. J.W. McGarvey. It had been written in ca 1872.

McGarvey had graduated from Bethany College in Virginia in 1850, and had preached for several churches in Virginia and Kentucky. He was a fine scholar and for several years was the Bible chair in the College of the Bible at Kentucky University.

Having been excommunicated by the local Baptist Church in Pietermaritzburg, and trying to find my place in the new Church of Christ in Pietermaritzburg, I would take my lunch break from my employment with the South African Railways Survey Office to eat my lunch sandwich each day in the beautiful garden of a one hundred year old Church of England building. It was at that time abandoned, but had been declared a historical monument dedicated to those who had died in the Anglo Zulu and Anglo Dutch Wars of the 1879, 1890. It was a quiet, surreal, and peaceful environment conducive to new discoveries in the Acts of the Apostles!

The purpose of my mentioning this brief personal history is that here I am now in Allen, Texas in 2023, approximately one hundred and fifty years after McGarvey, and almost sixty-five years since my introduction to Scripture and the Church of Christ, having like McGarvey been a former head and dean of a Bible College, writing a commentary on Luke’s *Book of Acts* for a new generation of the Church.

I doubt I will be able to add much to McGarvey’s fine commentary other than to bring it up to date for a new generation. I am blessed with many new excellent literary resources and

archaeological discoveries in Jordon, Palestine, and Turkey/Asia, and literary discoveries like the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and *Nag Hammadi Tractates*, that were not available to McGarvey.

Perhaps my theological journey is defined by an *inclusio*, in the beginning, by McGarvey's *Book of Acts*, and in the end, by my commentary on Luke's *Book of Acts*!

Inclusios define the meaning or theology of what lies between the opening and closing of the *inclusio*. In my case, my life, career, and ministry has been defined by the theology of Acts, a critical biblical study of missions, and encouraging a *missional* approach to church growth and an *eschatological*² view of *kingdom* theology.

I like Temper Longman III's comment regarding the nature of his intended readers, and find myself thinking along the sane lines and to the same readership as his in his commentary on Job:

“Commentaries are meant for specific readers, and this volume is no exception. The primary audience I had in mind while writing this book was composed of ministers and future ministers, that is, seminary students. Yet I hope that I have written it in a way that makes the commentary accessible to interested laypersons.”

My primary intended readership of this commentary will be ministers, teachers, and serious Bible students in Africa, and elsewhere on foreign fields, who do not have available for their studies the many rich resources we have in our university libraries, or possibly on the internet. For this reason I will be citing, in some detail, important references and resources that I believe will be of interest to the readers especially in Africa. Hopefully, students, ministers, and church leaders, will be able to access this commentary at little cost digitally through either Heritage Christian College, Ghana, <https://hcuc.edu.gh>, or Amazon.com, Kindle books.

Gratitude to several people who have shaped by career.

First, I dedicate this book to my only girlfriend, my wife, and the mother of our three sons. June has stood beside me since we both were “converted” to Scripture and to the Church of Christ over sixty-five years ago.

Throughout our years of university study, mission work, ministry, and teaching on two continents, Africa and America, she has never faltered in full support of our efforts through some tough yrsrs, but also some of the most rewarding years of our lives together.

Second, I am also indebted to those ministers and church leaders who have graduated in ministry and Biblical Studies from the Heritage Christian College Department of Ministry and Theology, Ghana, the Heritage Bible Institute, Ghana, and the South African School of Preaching at Waterfall, Durban, South Africa.

Finally, I am grateful for another piece of personal theological discovery and direction, not originally intended by McGarvey, but certainly contained in the Book of Acts. I am profoundly indebted to a theological course at Abilene Christian College in 1967 under Dr. Abraham Malherbe, a fellow South African and convert from the mission field. His course made a capital impact in defining my later almost two decades of mission experience in Africa. The course description was *The Mission and Expansion of the New Testament Church*. The primary biblical text was, guess what, Luke's *Book of Acts*!

I learned from Malherbe that Acts is a primary source of missiological theory, not simply a book relating the history of the early church. Acts actually (no pun intended) outlines a missional

² Much of my biblical and theological efforts have been exploring the impact of eschatology on kingdom theology. My MA and PhD research was primarily devoted to the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, a trail blazing theologian who made a significant impact on the eschatology on New Testament theology with an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus.

theology of God's eschatological kingdom which the church was commissioned to carry out to all the world, not only to Israel,

In the course I was introduced to several major missiological theologians such as Roland Allen, former early missionary to China, James Livingston Nevius, another early former missionary to China, and Professor David Bosch, Professor of Missiology at the University of South Africa.

Roland Allen.

https://www.bu.edu/missiology/files/2013/02/Roland-Allen_2.jpg. Allen was born in Bristol, England, the youngest of five children of an Anglican priest. His father died early in his life and he was raised by his mother. Later, he obtained an education in scholarship at St. John's College, Oxford, and at the Anglo-Catholic Leeds Clergy Training School. In 1892 he was ordained a deacon, and the following year he became a priest in the Church of England. In 1895 he was sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) to its North China Mission. While preparing to head a new seminary for Chinese catechists in Peking, he was trapped with other foreigners in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. After rescue by foreign troops, Allen wrote about his experience in *The Siege of the Peking Legations* (1901).

Allen wrote several books on missiology, the foremost being, *Missionary Methods: Saint Paul's or Ours*, 1912. Allen's *Missionary Methods* was a groundbreaking book in its time. In particular it helped to theologically pioneer indigenous missions.³

John Livingston Nevius.

Another early missiologist of note that we read was John Livingston Nevius, missionary to China, 1829-1893. Nevius published widely on mission methods, publicizing the well known mission principle of an indigenous church. Nevius questioned the methods of western missionaries of his time, Nevius took up the Venn-Anderson principles of "self-propagation, self-government, and self-support" in a series of articles in the Chinese Recorder journal in 1885, which was later published as a book in 1886, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*. Nevius called for discarding old-style missions and the adoption of his new plan to foster an indigenous, independent, self-supporting local church. He criticized the missionaries' practice of paying national workers out of mission funds, believing the healthy local church should be able to support its own local workers.⁴

David Jacobus Bosch.

A comment in Wikipedia summarizes Professor Bosch's contribution to mission theology:

"David Jacobus Bosch (13 December 1929 – 15 April 1992) was an influential missiologist and theologian best known for his book *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991) — a major work on post-colonial Christian mission. He was a member of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (NGK), also known by its English abbreviation DRC. On Freedom Day, 27 April 2013, he posthumously received the Order of the Baobab from the President of South Africa "for his selfless struggle for equality ... and his dedication to community upliftment. By doing so, he lived the values of non-racialism against the mainstream of his own culture."

Bosch was born in Kuruman, Cape Province, in the Union of South Africa in 1929. He was raised in a political nationalist Afrikaner home with little regard for his nation's black citizens. In

³ Boston University School of Theology, "History of Theology," <https://www.bu.edu/missiology/>.

⁴ Notes from Wikipedia, Free Encyclopedia, "John Livingston Nevius".

1948 when the National Party (South Africa) came to power and began implementing its program of apartheid, Bosch at first welcomed it. That same year however Bosch began studying and teaching at the University of Pretoria, where he joined the Student Christian Association and was exposed to black members of the community. This contact with black Christians led to a lifelong involvement in Christian mission. He was soon questioning the apartheid system.

Sensing a call to be a missionary, Bosch changed his university education at the theological school and graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity and a Master of Arts in languages; Afrikaans, Dutch, and German. He then went to Switzerland to study for his doctorate in the field of New Testament at the University of Basel, under Oscar Cullmann. Cullmann influenced Bosch to accommodate more ecumenism in his thinking. In 1957 Bosch began a decade working as a missionary with the Dutch Reformed Church, planting churches in the Transkei province of South Africa..

In 1967 he took up a position as lecturer in church history and missiology at a Theological School training black church leaders in the Transkei, where he also built ties with the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. Here he began to develop his ministry of research and writing on mission theory.

Bosch shared his concerns that the Christian mission in South Africa that brought “good news” to black Africans was more like a colonial and nationalistic motive that would only entrench racial divisions.

He raised questions regarding the end goal of mission motivated by such racially biased overtones? Was mission intended to maintain white people’s oversight and control of black churches in South Africa—or was it to be the foundation of a true church of Christ? Was it to serve South Africa—or to serve God? Was it to hear the sentimental voice of our own blood—or to hear together the last command of Christ? Have we, by this missionary motive, created a sheep in wolf’s clothes—or is it perhaps a wolf in sheep’s clothes?

Isolated from the majority thinking of the Dutch Reformed Church who supported apartheid, Bosch left his college in 1971 to become Professor of Missiology at the University of South Africa in Pretoria, which at the time was South Africa’s only interracial university. There he edited its journal “Theologia Evangelica” and continued to write and shape theological thinking in South Africa, Europe, and the United States.⁵

You might be asking what this has to do with Luke’s *Book of Acts*?

Hearing Malherbe and reading missiologists like Allen, Nevius, Bosch, and others, instilled in me the realization that the our missiological theory should be what the Book of Acts was all about, the *Mission and Expansion of the New Testament Church, planting self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating, and self-theologizing churches.*

I graduated from Malherbe’s course with a much deeper understanding of how one does biblical theology, and a much deeper understanding of the missional nature of the Book of Acts.

⁵ This material is comprised of notes compiled from personal studies of “David Jacobus Bosch”, and Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Luke's Book of Acts.

Introduction.

This chapter will introduce the reader to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, to Luke, the fellow-worker of the Apostle Paul, to the beginning of the Church of Christ in Jerusalem, to the mission and expansion of the Church through the dispersion of Christian Jewish converts, and to the three major mission journeys of the Apostle Paul.

We will also examine the transitional dynamic of Jesus' missional instruction to his twelve Disciples or Apostles, Jesus' promise of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as a sign for the inauguration of *the mission and expansion of the Church and eschatological Kingdom of God*. Will also use this chapter as a primer to the study of Acts 1 and 2, the driving force of Luke's missional theology.

Leading Persons of the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke, the physician and fellow worker of the Apostle Paul.

I have edited the article on Luke in the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* to be a little more concise on Luke, the author of the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles*:

“Luke is commonly known as the faithful companion of the apostle Paul. This is reinforced by the “we” passages in the Acts narrative (16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16). The first “we” begins with Paul's Macedonian call and concludes with Paul and Silas' imprisonment in Philippi. The second “we” picks up later on in Philippi and follows through to Jerusalem. The third “we” runs from Caesarea to Rome. It would seem that Luke accompanied Paul at least during a portion of his second and third missionary journeys, as well as his eventful trip to Rome.

We do not know where Luke was born, or about his death. Paul excludes him from the list of his Jewish co-workers (Col 4:14). He seems to exemplify those Gentiles who welcomed the gospel and persisted in the faith. Demas, who is mentioned in connection with Luke, eventually deserted Paul, having “loved this present world” (2 Tm 4:10). The apostle adds “Luke alone is with me” (v 11).

Paul refers to Luke as “the beloved physician” (Col 4:14). He was apparently known and loved by those bonded together in the gentile mission. He appears to have used his gifts unselfishly, and cultivated friendships in the process. Paul anticipates no argument in describing him as “our friend.”

Various writers have attempted to demonstrate that Luke and Acts were in fact written by a physician ... We can at the least conclude that the narrative in Luke and Acts is quite consistent with having been written by a physician, but it is uncertain how much further the evidence can be pressed ... Some have credited Luke with being the first Christian historian. He writes, “Since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account” (Lk 1:3 NIV).

Luke blends himself into his own narrative. He points us beyond himself to Christ, and to such major figures as Peter and Paul. His literary works remain an impressive memorial to an otherwise little known, but highly cherished member of Paul's inner circle of associates.¹

From what we can learn about Luke from Scripture and his literary style, it seems safe to assume that he was an educated Greek who wrote primarily for Gentile or Greek readers. He was the only writer included in the New Testament canon who was a non-Jewish Greek Christian. He

¹ Elwell, Beitzel, “Luke (Person)”, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1361.

wrote with a “historical theological” purpose, demonstrating that the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of God was for all nations, not only for Israel.

The Apostolic Leadership of Peter.

Although Paul and his evangelistic companions, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy and others “dominate” Luke’s account of the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John feature prominently in the first five chapters of Acts in the early beginnings of Christianity among the Jews. Following this, Peter does not feature as prominently in Acts.

The first seven chapters in Acts lead up to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the apostle Paul, and Paul’s three missionary journeys among the Gentile world. Peter’s importance to the early years of Christianity are important to understanding what Luke was doing in his “historical” theology of Acts.

Peter returns prominently in Acts 10 and 11 in the conversion of the first Gentiles, Cornelius and his household.

As above in the case of Luke, I have edited a long article from the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* to provide an excellent comments on Peter, the Apostle of Jesus.

“Peter’s Background. Peter was raised in Galilee. John 1:44 says that the home of Andrew (his brother) and Peter was Bethsaida, the whereabouts of which is difficult to place archaeologically ...

Peter and Andrew had a fishing business centered in Capernaum (Mk 1:21, 29), and perhaps were partners with James and John (Lk 5:10). It is also likely that they intermittently continued in their business while disciples, as indicated by the fishing scene in John 21:1–8 ...

The disciples certainly did not abandon their families, as evidenced by Peter, who returned to his home at the end of each tour. The NT says that Peter was married. In Mark 1:29–31 and parallels Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law, who perhaps was living with him, of a fever. In fact, it is possible that his home became Jesus’ headquarters in Galilee (Mt 8:14 may indicate that Jesus dwelt there). First Corinthians 9:5 says that Peter, along with the other married apostles, often took his wife with him on his missionary journeys ...

Peter’s Conversion and Call. Peter’s brother, Andrew, was a disciple of John the Baptist (Jn 1:35–40). This follows the witness of John in 1:29–34 and is the second stage of John’s discipleship drama in chapter 1, that is, after bearing witness John the Baptist now sends his own followers to Jesus. Andrew and the unnamed disciple (perhaps Philip as in v 43 or the “beloved disciple,” whom many identify with John) then “follow” Jesus (a term used often in the Gospel of John for discipleship) and answer his call. The next day Andrew follows the Baptist’s example and finds his brother Simon, saying “We have found the Messiah” (v 41). Peter’s conversion is presupposed in verse 42, where Simon is brought to Jesus by Andrew and there given a new name.”²

Peter the Rock. The key to the significance of Simon Peter is obviously Jesus’ Caesarea Philippi episode, found only in Matt 16:17–19. This is one of the premier texts regarding the church in the New Testament.

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?”¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to

² Elwell, and Beitzel, “Peter, The Apostle”, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, pp. 1659–1660.

you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

A similar kingdom promise of binding and loosing was also made to all the disciples of Jesus at Matt 18:18f:

¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Jesus’ comment to Peter has generated considerable discussion, some of it controversial regarding Peter being promised that he would be *the first head of the church or kingdom*, the Pope. This view is accepted by the Roman Catholic Church but denied by almost every other Christian organization.

The promise that Peter would be given the keys of the kingdom built on his being the rock is a poor translation or interpretation of the foundation of the church. The question debated is *upon which rock would Jesus build his church and kingdom?* Roman Catholics say that Peter is that rock since the name Peter is derived from the Greek *pétra* means a rock or stone cliff. However the debate also centers around which language Jesus was using in Galilee, Greek or Aramaic. The debate is long and beyond the parameters of his study. The majority of Protestants since the Reformation have taken this rock statement to be a *reference to Peter’s faith confession regarding Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, rather than to Peter himself.* This view keeps Jesus, and a confession of Jesus as the Christ, as the foundation of the church, and Peter a prominent leader in the church.

Peter’s Place Among the Twelve. The prominence of Simon Peter in the Gospels and Acts cannot be disputed. However, Scripture does reveal that Peter was the leader of the disciples when they chose a replacement of Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15), and who preached the first Christian sermon after the death and resurrection of Jesus to the Jews (Acts 2), and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

At Acts 15:7 during the meeting of Paul and Barnabas with the Jerusalem church leaders, Peter was a prominent spokesperson. Peter’s strong character repeatedly identified him as a strong leader even though he was, beside Judas Iscariot, also the first disciple to deny Jesus!

The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus—Paul the Apostle.

The narrative of Saul of Tarsus’ conversion reveals one of the striking of Jesus’ soteriological missional purposes in Scripture. To get the full picture we need to let Luke explain this to us. It begins with the stoning of Stephen in Jerusalem, recorded by Luke:

Acts 7:54. “Now when they (the Jews) heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him. ⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; ⁵⁶ and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 8:1. “And Saul was consenting to his death.

And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Acts 9:1. *“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. ⁴ And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; ⁶ but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” ¹³ But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name.” ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “**Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;** ¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, ¹⁹ and took food and was strengthened.”

Acts 22:1-21. Paul recounts the amazing narrative of his conversion experience.

¹ “Brethren and fathers, hear the defense which I now make before you.”

² And when they heard that he addressed them in the Hebrew language, they were the more quiet. And he said:

³ “I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day. ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵ as the high priest and the whole council of elders bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brethren, and I journeyed to Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶ “As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. ⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ⁸ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.’ ⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is

*appointed for you to do.’*¹¹ *And when I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.*

¹² *“And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well-spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,¹³ came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And in that very hour I received my sight and saw him.¹⁴ And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth;¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard.¹⁶ And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’*

¹⁷ *“When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance¹⁸ and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’¹⁹ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in thee.’²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I also was standing by and approving, and keeping the garments of those who killed him.’²¹ And he said to me, ‘Depart; for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”*

Saul of Tarsus and Disciple of Gamaliel.

From the few comments we have about Saul of Tarsus we assume he was born and raised in the Cilician City of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia in Asia Minor. In his defense before an angry crowd in Jerusalem he stated, “I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia” (Acts 22:3).

In his defense before the Roman Tribune in Jerusalem Luke recorded Paul’s defense, **Acts 21:37-22:5:**

³⁷ *As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, “May I say something to you?” And he said, “Do you know Greek?”³⁸ Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?”³⁹ Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; I beg you, let me speak to the people.”⁴⁰ And when he had given him leave, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying:*

Acts 22:1 *“Brethren and fathers, hear the defense which I now make before you.”*

² *And when they heard that he addressed them in the Hebrew language, they were the more quiet. And he said:*

³ *“I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day.⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,⁵ as the high priest and the whole council of elders bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brethren, and I journeyed to Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.”*

Elwell and Beitzel In the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* discuss the city of Tarsus:

“Tarsus was situated on the Cydnus River, some 12 miles upstream from the Mediterranean. The plain on which the city was built was very fertile, composed of alluvium carried down from the Taurus Mountains by the Cydnus and several other streams.

Although the river was navigable by small boats as far as Tarsus, the overland trade routes were the most important. Asia Minor was interlaced with roads long before the Romans came into the area. From the east there were two main routes, one of which began in northern Mesopotamia and went on to Carchemish or Aleppo, across the Amanus Pass. The other ran

from Nineveh through Malatya and Antioch to the Syrian Gates. These two routes converged near Caesarea, some 50 miles east of Tarsus.”³

Witherington observes regarding Tarsus and ancient traditions regarding mentioning “home town” importance:

“Tarsus was indeed widely recognized as an important city in various regards, not least as a center of Hellenistic culture, including the teaching of rhetoric and of Stoic philosophy (cf. Strabo, Geog. 14.5.13-15; Dio Chrysostom, Or. 33.48; 44.3). At the height of its importance Tarsus had approximately five hundred thousand residents, only a minority of whom were citizens. It had been proclaimed a free city (like Ephesus) by Antony in 42 B.C. It is important to note that Paul mentions his legal citizenship to the tribune, but not to the crowd (cf. 22:2), for the crowd, unlike the tribune, would not have responded well to a boast about being a citizen of one of the centers of Hellenization in the Empire. *It is important to recognize that to a great extent in antiquity people were judged by the importance of the place where they were born. Their own personal honor and dignity was in part derived from the honor rating of the place from which they came.* Paul is making a claim here to be a person of considerable social status, indeed probably higher status than the tribune himself, which can explain why the tribune allows him to address the crowd.”⁴

Saul’s father was a prominent Jew in Tarsus who had somehow obtained Roman citizenship, by purchase of otherwise undeclared.

In his defense before the Roman Tribune Paul had stated that he was a Roman citizen, Acts 22:25-28:

“²⁵ *But when they had tied him up with the thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen, and uncondemned?”* ²⁶ *When the centurion heard that, he went to the tribune and said to him, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.”* ²⁷ *So the tribune came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” And he said, “Yes.”* ²⁸ *The tribune answered, “I bought this citizenship for a large sum.” Paul said, “But I was born a citizen.”* ²⁹ *So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him instantly; and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.”*

Regarding his education, the main point was the statement he made in his defense before the Jews, Acts 22:3, “I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day.”

The statement *at the feet of Gamaliel* is informative!

Bruce states regarding Acts 22:3:

“Here Paul emphasizes that, while he was born in Tarsus, he was brought up in Jerusalem, exposed only to Jewish influences. *Some writers have given rein to free imagination as they have described the Tarsian influences which would have made their mark on Paul in his formative years; according to this account, however, his formative years were spent in Jerusalem.* When the time came for him to receive his higher education, it was to none of the academies of his native city that he was sent, but to the school of Gamaliel. We have met Gamaliel already as a leader of the Pharisees in Jerusalem and an illustrious teacher of the law. The “strict interpretation of our ancestral law” which Paul

³ Elwell, Beitzel, B., “Tarsus,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 2037.

⁴ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 1074-1075.

learned in his school accorded with Pharisaic tradition. What is said here may be compared with Paul's account in Gal. 1:14 of his advancing in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries and his zeal for the ancestral traditions. As in his letters, so here he emphasizes his persecution of the Way as the supreme manifestation of his zeal for God."⁵ Witherington observes that the term "*at the feet of*" can mean *under submission* to a teacher.⁶ Witherington cites Craig Keener:

"As a son in an educated and perhaps aristocratic home (his father being a citizen; cf. also 9.1), Paul probably began to learn the Law around his fifth year and other Pharisaic traditions around his tenth year, and was sent to pursue training to be able to teach the Law sometime after turning thirteen.... Paul's model for zeal may have been Phinehas, who killed for God (Num. 25.13), and his successors in the Maccabees."⁷

Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement.

David van Reken in *The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* fills in some of the information we need on Barnabas:

"A native of Cyprus, Barnabas was a Jew of the diaspora. His priestly family background gave him a special interest in Jerusalem. He probably came to live in the holy city. It is possible that he may even have become acquainted with Jesus in Jerusalem, but his conversion to Christianity probably resulted from the apostles' preaching soon after the resurrection of Christ.

Barnabas first appears as a property owner named Joseph (KJV Joses) in the Book of Acts who sold a field and gave the money to the Christian community (Acts 4:36, 37). When persecution of Hellenistic Christians broke out in Jerusalem, Barnabas remained in the city though others of similar background fled (8:1–8; 11:19–22). His good reputation in Jerusalem may have influenced the apostles to select him as Paul's companion for missionary work.

As many of the scattered Christians gravitated to Antioch of Syria, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to help in the growing work (Acts 11:19–22). The writer of Acts said of Barnabas, "He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large company was added to the Lord" (v 24). Barnabas recruited Paul, now a Christian, to help in Antioch, and the two men worked in the church for a year, teaching "a large company of ... Christians" (v 26). When famine hit Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were sent with relief funds. On their return to Antioch John Mark went with them (12:25).

Barnabas was commissioned with Paul to preach beyond the boundaries of Antioch (Acts 13:2, 3). The placing of Barnabas's name before Saul (Paul) may indicate the priority of Barnabas at this time. They went to Cyprus and to v 1, p 265 p 265 several key centers in Asia Minor. At Lystra the citizens identified Barnabas with the mythical god Zeus and Paul with Hermes (14:8–12).

At a Jerusalem Council, Barnabas and Paul reported on their mission to the Gentiles (Acts 15). Following that council, as the two men planned another mission, a serious disagreement arose which led to their separating (vv 36–41). Barnabas wanted to take his

⁵ Bruce, F.F., *The Book of Acts* (New International Commentary on the New Testament) (p. 415). Eerdmans Publishing Co - A. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 1082.

⁷ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 1082-1083.

cousin John Mark (Col 4:10), but Paul refused on the grounds that Mark had deserted them on the earlier mission (Acts 13:13). Barnabas left for Cyprus with John Mark, and Paul went to Syria and Cilicia with Silas. After that separation the focus shifted from Barnabas to Paul.⁸

Luke, historian, missionary, and theologian.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries German scholars were engaged in a serious debate regarding the historicity of Luke's *Acts of the Apostles*. Although Luke claimed to research report the narrative incidents carefully and accurately in his book, critical scholars felt that the historical accuracy of the book did not hold up to normal standards of scientific history, whatever that was! For instance there seemed to be discrepancies between Luke's account of Paul's ministry accounted in his Epistles. German scholars failed to see that Paul makes no attempt provide us a historical narrative to his journeys, and neither was Luke interested in a "chronological biographical" testimony to Paul's work.

The debate on the historicity of Acts became most vehement between 1895 and 1915. Ferdinand Christian Baur viewed it as unreliable, and mostly an effort to reconcile Gentile and Jewish forms of Christianity. Adolf von Harnack in particular was known for being very critical of the accuracy of Acts, though his allegations of its inaccuracies have been described as "exaggerated hypercriticism" by many scholars.

Nineteenth attitudes towards the historicity of Acts have ranged widely across scholarship in different countries with most of the criticism coming from scholars who were locked into an extremely narrow model of measuring history.

Leading British scholar and archaeologist in the closing years of the nineteenth century, Sir William Mitchell Ramsay, considered Acts to be remarkably reliable as a historical document.

However, as an archaeologist Ramsay early in his career did not believe in, or accept the accuracy of Luke's book of Acts. Consequently, he made a research trip to Asiatic Turkey, biblical Asia, to debunk views of Luke's accuracy as a historian. After considerable archaeological discoveries and research, however, he became an avid fender of Luke's accuracy as both a historian and theologian.

Several scholars have written in support of Ramsay's research and conclusions, among the Professors F. F. Bruce and W. Ward Gasque,⁹ I. Howard Marshall, and others.

I have in my files a copy of an article by Professor W. Ward Gasque titled *Sir William M. Ramsay: Archaeologist and New Testament Scholar. A Survey of His Contribution to the Study of the New Testament*. It was published by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, in 1966. It is in itself an enjoyable and informative article by a world renowned New Testament scholar. Unfortunately the book is out of print, but can be found on the internet under Gasque's name.

Ramsay argued that nineteenth century theologians, working with German standards of history, had "filtered" Luke's narrative through their standard of nineteenth century views of history which were contrary to the ancient Greek and Roman philosophical and theological norms of Luke's day. Ramsay argued that if Luke was measured by ancient standards of history and biography most of the Liberal German objections to Luke would not be as serious as they claimed.

Following the example of William Ramsey scholars began to examine standards by which scholars evaluated history. In Germany, Wolfhart Pannenberg and a group of theologians who

⁸ Elwell and Beitzel, "Barnabas," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 1, pp. 264–265.

⁹ W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, Ore., 2000.

became known as the Pannenberg Circle rejected the German nineteenth century Liberal Theology interpretation of history depicted in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Barth, (who in turn rejected Hegel's view of salvation history). Pannenberg presented a view of history that accepted reliable testimony in which he held that God had revealed himself in history, notably the historical resurrection of Jesus, and argued that all evidence that cohered with and was consistent should be used in one's historical philosophy.¹⁰

In 1970 a British New Testament scholar, I. Howard Marshall published a book, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*. Marshall, like Pannenberg, challenged the negative historical philosophy of the nineteenth century. In line with Ramsay, Marshall affirmed Luke's trustworthiness as a historian, pointing out that Luke is more than a historian. He was also a theologian who found his interpretive key in God's great theme of salvation revealed in the Prophets and culminating in Jesus' death and resurrection. Marshall provides us with a lucid guide to Luke's theology of salvation which he had outlined in his Gospel narrative, but always with an eye on its progressive development in its companion work, the Acts of the Apostles. Marshall cites Hans Conzelmann, with approval, for arguing that in order to understand Luke one must see him as a historian who sets his history in a theological context, but also as a theologian who sets his theology on a historical context.¹¹

In several contexts Marshall defines Luke as an *evangelist*, not simply a historian or theologian. Marshall states that to miss Luke's theme of *evangelism* is to miss his primary purpose, to tell the atoning story of Jesus of Nazareth and the purpose of the apostolic witnesses. Marshall states:

“Second, our exposition of the main theme of Luke's theology consisted of a corrective to the thesis associated with Conzelmann. *We shall argue that Luke's concern is with salvation* as such rather than with salvation-history [a theme of Hans Conzelmann]. This may seem to be simply exchanging one rather broad term for another. “Salvation” is a broad term, and Luke's use of the concept extends beyond his use of the specific word-group. But our point is that Luke's concern is basically salvation established by the work of Jesus as an experience of men.”¹²

I will argue that Luke's thesis is *salvation* or *evangelism* set in a larger *missiological historical theology* that fits under the broader concept of a *missional salvific theology* set in a historical traditional *narrative* (classical *narratio*) framework.

Most evangelical scholars¹³ today support in some form the historicity of Luke and Acts, pointing out that Luke was writing a *theological historical* account of God's *saving activity in history* which was inaugurated by Jesus' death and resurrection, and carried forward by Peter's and Paul's *missional activity*. Luke was *not writing a chronological historical biographical narrative*. It is stressed by most evangelical scholars that Luke was writing within the criteria of historical thinking of his age, and within a theological understanding of eschatological history in keeping with the prophetic program of God's redemptive activities in Israel's history.

¹⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, MacMillan & Co; 1969; *Jesus: God and Man*, SCM Press, 1968; *Basic Questions and Answers*, Vol. 2, Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1971, pp. 30 ff; Ian A. Fair, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, University of KwaZulu Natal, 1975.

¹¹ Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, pp. 18, 19.

¹² Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, p.19.

¹³ Daniel L. Bock; Craig Keener; David E. Garland; W. Ward Gasque; Joseph A. Fitzmyer; Carl R. Holladay; Temper Longman III, and David E., Garland; Luke Timothy Johnson; I. Howard Marshall; N. T. Wright; David G. Peterson; John B. Polhill; Eckhard J. Schnabel; C. Peter Wagner, Ben Witherington.

This line of thought is in keeping with the general narrative of Jesus' ministry as recounted in the four canonical Gospels, none of which attempts to develop a strictly historical biographical approach to Jesus' ministry.

Conclusion to Luke's *theological history* of God's plan of salvation.

Several salient points surface in examining Luke's theological agenda in Acts.

First, it is set in the Gospel narrative of what Jesus' came to do and set in motion in his ministry, death, and resurrection.

Second, his introductory statement to Theophilus in both Luke and Acts support the fact that Luke was primarily interested in telling how the gospel story that began in Israel and Jesus was carried out by his disciples into the Gentile world for all nations.

Third, from beginning to end it is missional, expressing the results of Jesus' missionary instructions as in Matt 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and Acts 1.

Fourth, the promised covenant made by God to Abraham (Gen 12, 17) was solidified in Jesus' death and resurrection, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on both the Jews (Pentecost, Acts 2) and Gentiles (Cornelius, Acts 10, 11).

Fifth. This divine plan of redemption, inaugurated by Jesus' earthly historical life and ministry, was carried out into all the world through *real live persons* who suffered and died to see that the gospel message was proclaimed to all people.

Sixth, God's eternal plan of redemption was *realized* in his *historical soteriological and eschatological redemptive acts in human history*; Abraham, Israel, Egypt, Moses, the Prophets, Jesus, and the apostolic church.

The missional¹⁴ trajectory of Acts

One cannot legitimately speak of the purpose of Acts without first connecting it to vol. 1, the Gospel of Luke! Luke clearly had in mind a two-part narrative telling the story of Jesus' and the early church's life and purpose.

Each of the three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke close with a commission to go out into the world, preach the gospel, baptize, and make new disciples by teaching them, Matt 28:1,19; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47.

The Lord's commission to his disciples is well expressed in Matthew and Mark emphasizing that they were to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to follow Jesus' teachings. This is the epitome of missional work. I said *missional* rather than *mission work* for the reason that mission work is often described as going and doing good deeds with a church on a foreign field, and that is certainly a mission endeavor. **However, *missional* conveys planting churches that are mature and are able to do their own good deeds as defined in footnote 7 below as *the development of those congregations to become self-standing, self-supporting, self-governing contextually self-theologizing churches*. This aspect is more clearly expressed in the Gospel of Luke and Acts.**

Luke 24:45-47 is particularly interesting on that it leads smoothly into **Acts 1:6-8** which is in my opinion the premier *missional* command in the New Testament.

Lk 24:45-47. "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the

¹⁴ In *missiological* terms *missional* does not simply refer to doing some mission work, but technically refers to the theological practice or planting of churches belonging to Christ, and the development of those congregations to become self-standing, self-supporting, self-governing contextually self-theologizing churches.

dead, ⁴⁷ *and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.* ⁴⁸ *You are witnesses of these things.* ⁴⁹ *And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.”*

Acts 1:6-8. *“To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. ⁴ And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me, ⁵ for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

⁶ *So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”*

Although much of the missionary narrative of Acts is devoted to *Paul’s three missionary journeys*, Acts is structured around *four missional regional perspectives* in a centrifugal dynamic.¹⁵

Acts 1:1-7:60 – Jerusalem

Acts 8:1-9:31 - Judea and Samaria

Acts 9:8-12:25 - Peter and the Gentiles - Cornelius

Acts 13:1-22:30 - Paul’s three missionary journeys into Asia, Achaia, and Europe

Acts 23:1-28 - Paul’s arrest and move to Rome

Paul’s three missional journeys in Acts.

In Acts Luke describes these three journeys in the following manner:

Journey 1: Acts 13:1-15:35, ca CE 46-48.

Journey 2: Acts 15:36-18:22, ca CE 49-52.

Journey 3: Acts 18:23-21:16, ca CE 53-57.

Luke does not attempt to describe *all of Paul’s mission efforts in his mission career, but for geographic and theologically strategic reasons records three missional journeys*. At least nine chapters of the narrative of Acts are comprised of Paul’s *missional* journeys.

Paul had early preached the Gospel in the region of Damascus before returning to Jerusalem where he was greeted by the Apostles in Jerusalem, from where went to Caesarea and Tarsus, his home city. Barnabas was sent by the church in Jerusalem. Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Paul to Antioch in preparation for his safety in Acts 11:19ff, and preparation for his extensive missional journeys, cf. Acts 13:1-21:16.

At a later point in the study, in the context of the exegetical section of our study, we will examine these three journeys in more detail noting the significant theological missional principles Luke unfolds.

At this point we need only note Luke’s *missional theological purpose* in writing Luke/Acts; the gospel message and spread of the church begins in *Jerusalem* then spreads through the region of *Judea, Samaria*, and to foreign Gentile regions of the *diaspora* where self-supporting, self-governing and self-discipling churches were established.

Luke’s *missional* understanding of Jesus’ commission to *go and make disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them*, is reflected in Luke’s *narrative* in Acts that includes Paul and his co-

¹⁵ Centrifugal is defined as moving outward and away from a center point.

workers returning often *to strengthen the new churches he had established, appointing leaders/elders, correcting their doctrine and behavior, and encourage them to take care of their own people.*

This lies at the *missional* heart of mission work. Planting congregations in the name of Jesus, establishing them to function autonomously, and the “return often,” or to continue contact with them by letters as in Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Phillipi.

John Livingstone Nevius’ understanding of establishing congregations that would be “self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing” is evident in almost every page of Luke’s Acts!

I understand fully that implementing John Nevius’ self-propagating proposal involves several methodological missional philosophical considerations. Included are such practical factors as the political context of the mission region, its cultural, sociological, and financial concerns. But Luke and the apostolic evangelists were able to navigate these under the primary theological dynamic of Jesus’ commission to go out under the power of the Holy Spirit from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, *witnessing*¹⁶ to Jesus and propagating his eschatological kingdom program through planting and establishing churches. Hence, Professor’s course *The Mission and Expansion of the New Testament Church*.

The following “Idowu” discussion may seem out of place to some in a commentary on Luke’s Book of Acts! However, careful attention to the theological missiological theme developed by Bolaji Idowu one will notice that it is precisely what Paul did as he and Luke moved from a Jewish culture and theology through the Greek world travelled over Asia. Achaia, and into Europe. Although these regions were Greek speaking, each was shaped by local deities, cults, and religions alien to the Christian culture. In establishing congregations in each of these regions, many far removed from leading Christian centers like Antioch and Jerusalem, Paul had to address local cultural issues of a self-sustaining, self-propagating, and self-theologizing church.

Professor Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria.

In 1958 an African missiological scholar, Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria highlighted a weakness in Western missiological practice essentially relating to Africa. However, his concerns were applicable in reference to other non-western European societies. I was introduced to the thinking of Professor Bolaji Idowu through missiological studies with the *Southern African Society for Missiological Studies* in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa when working with Zulu and Xhosa church leaders 1970.

Idowu was born on 28 September 1913, in the city of Ikorodu, Lagos State, Nigeria. His early education was at the Anglican and Methodist schools in Ikorodu. There, he was converted to Christianity. After graduating from Wesley College in Ibadan, he became headmaster of a primary school in Remo Nigeria. He was later ordained in ministry in 1942.

From 1945 to 1948, he continued his studies at Wesley House, Cambridge. From 1957 to 1958, he was posted to minister in Germany in *an effort to resolve some of the problems that were facing cultural and religious African and Asian students there*. In 1958 he joined the staff of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan and served as its head from 1963 to 1976.

¹⁶ We will note shortly at Acts 1:8 that the disciples of Jesus understood witnessing to be preaching, teaching, and dying for him in his ministry.

In the process of preparing a doctoral thesis for the University of London in 1955, Idowu discovered that the available material on African religion was outdated, culturally, and sociologically inaccurate.

As a result, he set out to describe the religious beliefs of his own Yoruba people addressing universal cultural and theological concerns such as the nature of the Deity of God, morality, and the ultimate destiny of mankind.

His writings on the subject are among the first examples of African religion seen from the viewpoint of an African, but not framed in a traditional western European religious concerns.¹⁷

Idowu who one of the first theologians and missiologists to seriously challenged Africans to produce theologies that would meet their own spiritual needs as Africans. Since his call, numerous books have been written and many conferences and consultations have been held on the subject of African theology and missiology. Idowu emphasizes that a meaningful and profitable study in African theology can only be done by concentrating on only one African culture at a time. The smaller the area covered the better and deeper the study. This is because African cultures and societies are vast and diverse.

¹⁷Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: a Definition*, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1973; *Towards an Indigenous Church*, London, Oxford University Press, 1965.

Chapter 2: Acts 1:1-26. The church founded in Jerusalem.

Preface Acts 1:1-5.

¹ *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,* ² *until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.* ³ *To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God.* ⁴ *And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me, ⁵ for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

One cannot engage Acts 1:1-5 without relating this to Luke’s opening statement to his Gospel at Luke 1:1-4! Luke obviously intended the reader of the *Acts of the Apostles* to root his Part 2, the *Acts of the Apostles*, back to Part 1, the *Gospel of Luke: life and intended kingdom missional ministry of Jesus*.

Acts 1:1-5 is so fundamental to understanding the message of Luke’s narrative in the *Acts of the Apostles* since it sets both the historical and theological tone for the “*narrative*”.

Several things in Luke 1:1-4 are vital to understanding Luke’s theological purpose of setting the gospel message in the *eternal plan of God’s eschatological*¹ kingdom and ministry of Jesus.

God had set this in motion before creation in his atoning plan in sending Jesus into our world (Eph 1:3-11), then his call of Abraham (Gen 12, 17), his powerful deliverance of Israel from Egypt under Moses (Exod 1-15), and his settling of Israel in Canaan under the prophetic ministry of Isaia, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the other prophets of Israel.

God had inaugurated his *eschatological* kingdom plan in Jesus’ incarnation and ministry which culminated in his death and resurrection. In his Gospel Luke also explained how God had planned to propagate Jesus’ atonement through Jesus’ disciples as witnesses to all nations what God had achieved in Jesus, beginning in Jerusalem (Lk 24:44-47).

Luke 1:1-4. *“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative² of the things which have been accomplished among us, ² just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.”*

As I was underlining the different emphasis points above in this text I was impressed by the fact that almost every phrase made an emphatic point!

First, Luke defines what he is writing as *a narrative*. In the Greek and Latin tradition this meant more than telling an interesting story! It carried a sense of an *accurate full account of*

¹ The term *eschatological* is a loaded theological concept shaped by the two Greek words ἔσχατος, *éschatos*, *last*, *final*, and λόγος, *lógos*, word, saying, discussion. In Jewish and Christian theology it refers to *the last or final stage of God’s kingdom work in Jesus*, the final age of God’s redemptive scheme. In the apostolic age it refers to the establishment of the church as he agent of carrying out God’s eschatological message.

² *Zodhiates*, διηγέομαι, *diēgéomai* To conduct a narration *through to the end*. To recount, relate in full.

what had happened.³ As I stated in the introduction Luke was presenting a full or real *theological history* set in God's redemptive acts in in the history of his people.

Second, Luke intends Theophilus to understand that this narrative was not imaginative, but of "things which have been accomplished among us." The Greek *πεπληροφορημένων*⁴ is a *perfect passive participle* implying things that had taken place in the past but remain true today.

Third, Luke had received his information, first hand, from those who had been witness to Jesus' ministry, "just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word."

Fourth, the statement that Luke had "followed all things closely" is important since the word *ἀκριβῶς* means *diligently, accurately, exactly*⁵ a term associated with careful historical research.

Fifth, Luke's intention was to write an *orderly account*, *καθεξῆς*, in consecutive order.⁶

Sixth, Luke wrote his narrative to a person of some dignity showing due respect, *most excellent Theophilus*.

Seventh, his goal was to share what was truth, genuine, that Theophilus *may know the truth* (*ἀσφάλειαν*, that which is genuine, has certainty⁷) *concerning the things of which you have been informed*.

With the Lukan narrative as a background, which scholars identify as *narratio*,⁸ Luke opens Part 2 of his *theological narrative* with a paragraph, Acts 2:1-5, that is schematically parallel to Luke 1:1-4:

Acts 1:1-5. "*In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,*² *until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.*³ *To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God.*⁴ *And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me,*⁵ *for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*"

As in the case of Luke 1:1-4, Luke begins to unwrap in Acts 1:1-5 the foundation for Jesus' theological scheme of redemption for the remainder of his *eschatological missional kingdom* narrative.

First, Luke reminds Theophilus of the missional core of narrative of Part 1, "*In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,*² *until the day when he was taken up.*" Note that h indicates that there still remained some teaching which Jesus

³ For a detailed discussion of Luke's literary and history style see Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, pp. 1-21; Carl Holladay, *Acts*, pp. 34ff; Eckhard Schnabel, *Acts*, pp. 36ff; Ben Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 74ff; I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, pp. 18,19, *passim*.

⁴ *Zodhiates*, *πληροφορέω, plérophoréō* ... To fulfill, *thoroughly accomplish*, equivalent to persuade fully, give full assurance.

⁵ *Zodhiates*, *ἀκριβῶς, akribōs*.

⁶ *Zodhiates*, *καθεξῆς, kathexēs*; *orderly, in order, according to the order* or succession, successively, *consecutively in connected order*.

⁷ *Zodhiates*, *ἀσφάλεια, aspháleia* ... *firmness, security, safety, certainty*. Balz and Schneider, *Ἀσφαλής* signifies in the literal sense *secure, unshakable*.

⁸ *Narratio*. In classical rhetoric, *narratio* is the part of an argument in which a speaker or writer provides a narrative account of what has happened and explains the nature of the case. *Narratio* was one of the classical rhetorical exercises known as the *progymnasmata*, a series of preliminary rhetorical exercises that began in ancient Greece and continued during the Roman Empire. Luke, an educated Greek, obviously understood the nature of a *narratio*.

began to do and teach. He was preparing Theophilus and his readers for the understanding that the missional evangelistic kingdom message needed to be carried forth to a new world audience by his disciples, the church.

Second, he reminded Theophilus that Jesus had given his chosen Apostles *commands associated with the promised Holy Spirit*.

Third, Jesus had *presented himself, appeared*, to his disciples teaching them over 40 days⁹ involving special instruction of the *kingdom of God*.

Fourth, he *charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me.”* The arrival of the Holy Spirit, which we read about in Acts 2, was to be the “trigger” to the inaugural preaching of the arrival of the eschatological kingdom promised by the Prophets (Joel 2:28, Dan 7).

Fifth, Jesus promised he disciples that “*before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*”

The nature of the eschatological kingdom.

Because the topic of an *eschatological* kingdom is so pivotal in understanding Jesus; ministry and God’s eternal purpose in Christ for humanity some special instruction on the nature of an eschatological kingdom is necessary. After all, Jesus spent forty days instructing his disciples of the kingdom, and they still missed the point in asking Jesus at Acts 1:6 whether he intended to restore the kingdom to Israel!

First we examine the term *eschatological* which is a primary concept in understanding the kingdom of God preached by Jesus. Eschatological derives from two Greek terms, *éschatos* and *lógos*. *Éschatos* means *last or final*, *logos* means *word, discussion, instruction, speech*. *Eschatological* in the context of biblical theology, therefore, means the *last or final aspect of the kingdom, the final stage of the kingdom*. In both Jewish and Christian concepts it refers to the kingdom prophesied by Daniel and preached by Jesus. *It is also a reference to the Christian age or the church age*.

Daniel, among several prophets of Israel, notably during Israel’s Assyrian and Babylonian captivity foresaw and proclaimed a future kingdom in which God’s “messianic prince” would establish an everlasting kingdom. Daniel 7 is devoted to this discussion. For space convenience I will select several verses the emphasize this “messianic” kingdom. Daniel’s prophecies are set in the context of four beast who represent fours oppressive kingdoms who would be opposed to God’s people and the nation of Israel. In various fashion these kings would conquer and subject Israel to captivity and slavery.

The prophets explain that Israel’s captivities were the result of Israel’ faithlessness and idolatry. Daniel, probably in greater detail than others describes God’s power over the “beast-kings” with *horns* representing *power*, and the coming of a future kingdom that would endure until the “end of time,” an *eschatological* kingdom, a *final* kingdom.

For emphasis I have *underlined certain sections*, and have **set the highpoints in bold**.

Dan 7:8-28. “*I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots; and behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.*”

⁹As I looked, thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat; his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery

⁹ Forty days 40 in the Bible generally **symbolizes a period of testing, trial, instruction, and then, finally, triumph.**

flames, its wheels were burning fire. ¹⁰ *A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.*

¹¹ *I looked then because of the sound of the great words which the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.* ¹² *As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.* ¹³ ***I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.***

¹⁴ ***And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.***

¹⁵ *“As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious and the visions of my head alarmed me.* ¹⁶ *I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me, and made known to me the interpretation of the things.* ¹⁷ *‘These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.* ¹⁸ *But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, for ever and ever.’*

¹⁹ *“Then I desired to know the truth concerning the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrible, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze; and which devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet; ²⁰ and concerning the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up and before which three of them fell, the horn which had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and which seemed greater than its fellows. ²¹ As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom.*

²³ *“Thus he said: ‘As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces.*

²⁴ *As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. ²⁵ He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time. ²⁶ ***But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end.****

²⁷ ***And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.*** ²⁸ *“Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed; but I kept the matter in my mind.”*

Such prophetic promises are the foundation of an everlasting, eternal kingdom that God would establish under his own messianic king.

Mark, citing Isaiah 11:10, Mal 3:1, picked up this *messianic theme* in recording John the Baptist's opening witness to Jesus' birth which led up to Jesus' kingdom preaching, Mark 1:1-15:

¹ *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* ² *As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,*

*“Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,
who shall prepare thy way;*

³ *the voice of one crying in the wilderness:*

*Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight—”*

⁴ *John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins ...*

⁹ *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* ¹⁰ *And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove;* ¹¹ *and a voice came from heaven, “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.”*

¹² *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.* ¹³ *And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.*

¹⁴ *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,* ¹⁵ *and saying, “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.**”*

Matthew picks up on this same theme regarding Jesus' ministry, Matt 4:12, 23:

¹² *Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee;* ¹³ *and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,* ¹⁴ *that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

¹⁵ *“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
toward the sea, across the Jordan,*

Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶ *the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”*

¹⁷ ***From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”***

¹⁸ *As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.* ¹⁹ *And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* ²⁰ *Immediately they left their nets and followed him.* ²¹ *And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.* ²² *Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.*

²³ *And he went about all Galilee, **teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom** and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people.”*

In fact, Jesus had taught his disciples to pray for *the kingdom to come on earth* just as it is in heaven, Matt 6:10, “*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.*”

Later in his ministry as recorded by Matthew at Matt 12:28, Jesus stated that the kingdom had come in his ministry, “*But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*”

Summary of eschatological kingdom comments.

When referring to the church or kingdom of God we mean that *the church is an agent of the eschatological kingdom* in the sense that the kingdom was realized or fulfilled in Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection, and when *the church preaches* that the *Christian age* as the *final age of God’s eternal redemptive kingdom to save his people, and that it will end when Jesus returns for the parousia* (Jesus’ second coming), and the *final judgment*.

The church or kingdom age *prophesied by the prophets of Israel, preached by Jesus and inaugurated in his kingdom ministry, and already present in his personal ministry, began with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, is the final age or dispensation before Jesus final second coming to judge the world in righteousness.*

Jesus kingdom commission: Acts 1:6-8.

This pericope is a fundamental key to understanding Luke’s reason for writing this narrative and for understanding his “theological historical narrative.”

“*6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”*” *7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”*

The opening statement is a technical one in both the Old and New Testaments, “*when they had come together*” and carries the sense of *community or congregational assembly*. It is too early to consider this a church assembly, but it certainly was an assembly or gathering of the disciples *for some purpose*. This meeting soon became a “formalized” gathering *for the purpose of a pre-command* by Jesus. Jesus had previously spent forty days instructing the disciples about the kingdom. This instruction to the disciples generated a *kingdom* question which became in every sense an incisive *messianic kingdom* commission.

Notice Luke’s emphasis on *kingdom* which certainly had a larger dimension than simply a church commission. Luke’s intention throughout this narrative from the first paragraph, Acts 1:1-5, was to demonstrate that Jesus’ mission was much broader than a localized congregation of Jewish believers. It was a *kingdom mission to all nations “to the end of the earth.”*

Luke focused on their initial question to set the tone for the remainder of the pericope and theological narrative, “*6 Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*”

7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”

Jesus’ answer to the disciples is perhaps somewhat obscure, but his statement in vv. 7 and 8 add some clarity. The solution to such concerns is the Father God’s, not theirs! The disciples’ response is to wait for the Father to act! The adversative particle *but, ἀλλά, allá*, implies in

speech some diversity or superaddition to what preceded. It serves, therefore, to mark opposition, or transition.¹⁰

The intensive conjunction *and*, καί *kai*, can read *indeed*, implying *in addition, something more*.¹¹ Perhaps the expression “however...” expresses it well. “When this happens, the Father will determine, *however*, you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit as a sign to set the kingdom process in motion.”

Patrick Schreiner has an interesting comment on Jesus’ response to the question of the disciples in v. 6, “*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*”

“Jesus answers with a “no, not now” in v. 7, and “yes, now” in v. 8. Verse 8 affirms that kingdom restoration continues with the gift of the Spirit, though its consummation will need to wait. The restoration plan entails three things according to Jesus: how they will accomplish it (the empowering Spirit), what they are to do (witness), and where they will go (Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth). Each of these has echoes in the OT, and all are important threads for Acts as a whole.”¹²

The evangelistic missional nature of this commission is seen in v. 8, “*and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.*”

First, it is necessary that we note what Jesus intended by referring disciples as “**witnesses**,” μάρτυρες, plural noun from μάρτυς, *mártus*, which Zodhiates defines as “*a witness, one who has information or knowledge of something, and hence, one who can give information, bring to light, or confirm something.*”¹³ Schreiner observes regarding the concept of witnessing:

“Jesus outlines what they are to do: be witnesses. *Witnesses are people who testify to something important.* Martus (witness) is the choice word for the ark of the “testimony” (Exod 25:22) and the tent of “meeting” (Exod 29:4).²³⁵ More importantly, the word links to the second half of Isaiah, and specifically to the servant’s task. Isaiah 43:10 says, “*You are my witnesses . . . and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. No god was formed before me, and there will be none after me.*” To be a witness is to be God’s servant. In Acts a martus is connected to *seeing, telling, and embodying Jesus’s new life*. When they select the twelfth apostle to replace Judas, they say, “It is necessary that one *become a witness with us of his resurrection*” (1:22; emphasis added). In Peter’s Pentecost speech he says, “*God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this*” (2:32; emphasis added). At the end of Acts, Paul keeps saying before kings and governors he is on trial because of the resurrection (23:6; 24:15,21). *Drawing these threads together means they witness to the speaking and living God in opposition to false idols and gods.* This is why they specifically focus on Christ’s resurrection, which proves Yahweh is the living God.”¹⁴

I like Fitzmyer’s comment regarding this pericope and v. 8 and is summary of the *evangelistic missional* purpose of Acts:

“This statement sums up the main theme of Acts; the apostles are to give testimony to all peoples about what Jesus did and taught (1:1), in effect, about the word of god he preached: “in his name repentance and forgiveness of sins shall be preached to all nations—

¹⁰ Zodhiates, ἀλλά *allá*.

¹¹ Zodhiates, καί *kai*.

¹² Schreiner, Patrick. *Acts*, pp. 126-127.

¹³ Zodhiates, μάρτυς *mártus*.

¹⁴ Schreiner, Patrick. *Acts*, pp. 127-128.

beginning from Jerusalem! You are witnesses of this!” (Luke 24:47-48). It must now spread abroad through such testimony borne by Jesus’ followers, first of all by the apostles, then by others; The are all to become ministers of the Word empowered by the Spirit. Testimony thus becomes a literary them in Acts.”¹⁵

In other words, witnessing, or brining testimony means preaching and teaching the Gospel message of salvation. It is important to note this emphasis since there is a tendency of some who are motivated by social justice to interpret this witnessing as *performing good social justice services such benevolence and taking care of the poor, elderly, and orphaned*. This statement should not be interpreted to imply that doing good deeds and being concerned for the needy and those experiencing social injustice are not ministries of the church. Such good deeds are certainly within the church’s ministry and service, see James 1:23 for example, but there is a profound difference between preaching and teaching the Gospel to the lost who need repentance and forgiveness of sins. Giving oral testimony to the Gospel was obviously the intent of Jesus in giving this evangelistic missional commission.

Certainly doing good deeds, and demonstrating concern for those oppressed by social injustice, will open doors for evangelism, but there is a profound difference between opening doors and going through them!

It has been the tendency of those stressing social justice to refer to Luke 4:16-30 as a commission from Jesus to become involved in social injustice. However, this is a gross misrepresentation of Luke 4:16-30! In this great text Jesus was not giving any commission but only citing Isa 16:1, 2 to prove his messianic commission through Scripture and his deeds. The result of Jesus’ proclamation was the fury of the Jews of the Nazareth Synagogue who attempted to throw Jesus headlong of a hill!

It might be helpful to see how Luke explains the disciples understanding and obedience to this commission! They went everywhere preach ing the good news of Jesus and establishing churches everywhere who would in turn do good deeds and address social justice concerns. That is the narrative of Luke’s missional kingdom theology of Acts. It takes only one text to illustrate this principle! Acts 6:1-7:

“Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ² And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴ while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” ⁵ What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

It is obvious from this text that Luke was keenly aware of the difference between *witnessing* and addressing *social justice*!

¹⁵ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 206.

Second, as we have already observed above in Fitzmyer’s observation of the disciples commission to witness, the commission held not only a theological or sociological dimension, but it was also overtly geographic in structure. They were to preach and teach *beginning in Jerusalem but even to the end of the earth*, ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς.

Commentators debate whether *the end of the earth* in Luke’s thinking referred to either Rome, where the book of Acts ends, or to Spain which would have reference to Paul’s Roman proposed visit to Spain. However, although the geographic nature of the commission, that is, *the exact meaning of the earth*, τῆς γῆς, may be uncertain, the *theological import and dimension* was clear, this witnessing to the Word was *for all nations*, not only Israel and Jerusalem, but *for all nations!*

Third, this commission had at its heart an *eschatological kingdom* dimension! It started with the disciples still focused in on a regional Jewish kingdom, *but the kingdom of God and Jesus was for all nations*. It was the *eschatological kingdom age*, remember that *eschatology* conveys the meaning of *final age* kingdom. The *eschatological kingdom* was the culmination of God’s eternal purpose working through Abraham, Moses, the prophets of Israel, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

Kingdom eschatology carries within it a double meaning! It is the *final age* (*éscatos – final, end*) which will culminate with God’s judgment of the world, but it is also the age in which God will redeem and save those who believe in him, repent, and are united with Christ in baptism. It is the *Christian age*, the *kingdom age* of both *inaugurated* and *realized* eschatology, it is the “*almost but not yet*” age that will be fulfilled when Jesus returns at his *parousia* which Christians call his *second coming*.

“*For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming (παρουσία parousia) of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, ¹⁶ will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.*”¹⁷

Note the closing points of Jesus’ commission in Luke 24:44-49, and Matthew 28:20.

Lk 24:44-49. “*Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*”

¹⁶ D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, New American Commentary, p. 150. “Finally, both Jewish and Christian images of God’s arrival at the end to gather his people, execute judgment, and establish his kingdom include the announcement of his arrival with the trumpet (Isa 27:13; Zech 9:14; Ezra 6:22; Apoc. Mos. 22; Rev 8:2–12; 9:1, 13; 11:15). Used in conjunction the voice of the archangel and the shout of command and the trumpet depict a grand fanfare. No one will be able to miss the event. No one will fail to realize that something remarkable is about to occur.”

¹⁷ 1 Th 4:15–18.

Jesus had implied in this commission that this apostolic testimony was to *begin in Jerusalem*, not end in Jerusalem, as most Jews perceived it.

Matt 28:16-20. “⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and **make disciples of all nations, baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and **teaching** them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the **end of the age.**”

Matthew, like Luke, understood that the commission was to make disciples by *baptizing and teaching* them, and this was to continue to the *end of the age*, meaning the eschatological final age!

Donald Hagner has the following comment regarding Jesus’ promise “*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*”

“And the promise of Jesus’ continuing presence with them is not restricted to any special circumstances (but includes persecution as well as ministry), nor is it made simply for the immediate future. He will be with them *πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος*, “*all the days until the consummation of the age.*” The last phrase, “the consummation of the age,” is also found in 13:39–40, 49; 24:3 and for Matthew (contrast Heb 9:26) *refers to end of the present age through the parousia of the Son of Man and the experience of the final judgment of the wicked and reward of the righteous* [in other words, the end of the eschatological age of the kingdom, IAF]. Jesus promises his disciples that he will be with them until *the end of time as presently known*. The promise thus applies not only to the future of the disciples themselves but to their successors and their successors’ successors in the church. The evangelist here not only writes history but provides a promise having relevance to his own contemporaries and indeed to the disciples composing the church down to the end of the eon.”¹⁸

Zodhiates comments on the meaning of αἰών, *aiōn*, age in Matt 28:20 as referring to different ages, the pre-messianic mosaic age, the messianic age of Jesus, and the Christian messianic kingdom age. I have interpreted Zodhiates as follows on the word age, *aiōn*. It was:

“Spoken in reference to the advent of the Messiah, meaning: (1) The age or world before the Messiah, the Jewish dispensation ... (2) The age or world of the Messiah, (3) the gospel age or world, the kingdom age of the Messiah ...”¹⁹

Jesus’ ascension of Jesus: Acts 1:9-11.

⁹And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

¹⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, p. 889.

¹⁹ Zodhiates, αἰών, *aiōn*.

The coming, going, and appearing of God in clouds had a long standing tradition representing the presence of God with his people. Fitzmyer shows that the reference to clouds in both the Jewish and Apocalyptic traditions represented *divine presence, power, and glory*.²⁰

That Jesus ascended in a cloud indicated his complete divine nature, presence, and power of God just as the pillar of fire and cloud with the *tent in the wilderness* represented God constant presence, although God himself was not seen.

That Jesus would return in clouds emphasized the presence and power of Jesus with the disciples, even to the end.

The beginnings of a church: Acts 1:12-14.

“¹² Then they [the eleven disciples] returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away; ¹³ and when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

First, they entered *the upper room*. Fitzmyer²¹ observes that this room had probably become *the place of worship assembly* for this small group of disciples, possibly where Jesus had celebrated the last supper with them, and probably where they were when the Holy Spirit descended on them with power (Acts 2:1).

Second, The number of the disciples or Apostles was now eleven, Judas had committed suicide. They was they are listed with Peter and John first, James and Andrew is interesting! Peter and Andrew were brothers, and John and James were brother, but here their kinship is not mentioned by Luke! Luke associated Peter and John together in this text.

No good reason is obvious as to why Peter and John are mentioned together other than they were possibly present together at Jesus resurrection, John 20:3ff. Bruce however adds an interesting thought:

“Of the apostles here listed, only Peter, James, and John are mentioned again in Acts (or in any other New Testament document apart from the Gospels)”.²²

Witherington adds an interesting thought to the listing of the Apostles:

“The list of the eleven in v. 13 differs little from the list in Luke 6:14-16 with two notable exceptions. John is placed in the second spot, presumably because Luke knew some traditions about John (cf. Acts 3–5)³⁷ but not about Andrew and so wanted to place him at the forefront at this point, and of course Judas is left out of this list.”²³

Third, The fact that they were devoting themselves to prayer indicates that this room was already seen *as a place of assembled worship and prayer*. This would be seen as a Temple or Synagogue alternative place for worship assembly.

Fourth, The presence of the women in this gathering is important for Luke who makes an effort to demonstrate that women were also included in the close relationship of the disciples,

²⁰ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 210.

²¹ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 213; Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, pp. 39, 40.

²² Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 41.

²³ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 238.

and the future church. We could note this in regard to the role of Priscilla in Acts, and Phoebe in Romans.

The replacement of Judas Iscariot: Acts 1:15-26.

“¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty), and said, ¹⁶ “Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. ¹⁸ (Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ For it is written in the book of Psalms,

*‘Let his habitation become desolate,
and let there be no one to live in it’;
and*

‘His office let another take.’

²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”

²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, “Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place.” ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles.”

This brief narrative was important to the early beginnings of the apostolic church for several reasons.

First, as Peter explains it was necessary for someone to be chosen to take Judas Iscariot’s place in the apostolate. To demonstrate continuity with the Jewish tradition of 12 tribes someone needed to fill the Jewish traditional “roster” of twelve!

The number twelve is prominently featured in Scripture. According to the Old Testament, Jacob had twelve sons, which resulted in the formation of the twelve tribes of Israel. According to the Book of Revelation, the gates of the New Jerusalem are guarded by twelve angels. In both heaven and on earth, the number twelve represents God’s spiritual kingdom.

Bruce adds:

*“On this occasion Peter takes the lead in filling the vacancy among the apostles caused by the treachery and death of Judas Iscariot. With one exception, where the term “apostles” bears a somewhat different sense, Luke restricts the use of this term to the Twelve. *The total of twelve was significant: it corresponded to the number of the tribes of Israel, and may have marked the apostles out as leaders of the new Israel.*”²⁴*

Marshall adds some interesting points to the discussion of the selection of a twelfth apostle:

“The story is concerned with the choice of a successor to Judas to become a witness to the resurrection and take his place among the twelve apostles; woven in with this is an account of how Judas died and lost his place. There can be no doubt that the choice of

²⁴ Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 44.

Matthias instead of the alternative candidate is historical. Problems are raised, however, by the account of Judas's death (which differs in some particulars from the record in Matt. 27: 3–10) and also by the speech of Peter.⁵ According to Haenchen, (pp. 163f.), Luke's purpose was to show that in the apostles the church possessed reliable guarantors of the truth of its message. But there is probably more to it than this.⁶ In the Gospel the Twelve had a special function as apostles to the Jews and could look forward to sitting on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 9: 1–6; 22:28–30); the filling up of the number was probably meant to indicate that the task of witness to Jesus as the Messiah for the Jews was to be continued after the resurrection. It is not so likely that we are to see here information about how the leadership of the church ought to be organized. 15. The initiative in the story is assigned to Peter, who had been the most forceful personality among the disciples in the Gospels and now naturally took the lead with his proposal. The story is interrupted by an awkwardly placed parenthesis which indicates that the number of 'brothers' present was about 120. Here we have the first use of 'brothers' to designate Christians; Hanson (p. 46) thinks that this was the earliest Christian designation for members of the church. *The reason for the parenthesis about the number of disciples is that in Jewish law a minimum of 120 Jewish men was required to establish a community with its own council; in Jewish terms the disciples were a body of sufficient size to form a new community.*²⁵

Second, this narrative is important because establishes the *qualities* or *qualifications* of an Apostle of Jesus.

“So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”

Third, in a brief period of time Saul of Tarsus, Paul, was chosen to be the *thirteenth Apostle* out of the normal order of such matters, but specifically for the purpose of *being the apostle for the Gentile ministry*.

At 1 Cor 15:3-11 Paul defended his apostleship demonstrating that he had met the qualifications necessary for apostleship.

³ *For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.”*

Fourth, we know little of Matthias other than he must have been a disciple of Jesus during his ministry and have witnessed Jesus' resurrection. This is not important since we know little of most of the other Apostles other than the major characters in Acts. Luke's theology was to trace

²⁵ Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 67-68.

the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, and Paul and Peter were the major Apostolic characters in Luke's narrative.

Fifth, this narrative is important because it demonstrates the early church going about its business as a corporate body of believers under the leadership of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit. We should note that it was not the eleven Apostles that chose Matthias to take Judas Iscariot's place. It was the grouping of one hundred and twenty disciples that were involved.

Peter, as an Apostle, provided the initiative and leadership in this selection. He invoked Scripture, the help of the Holy Spirit, prayer, the Lord's will, and the wisdom of the congregation deeply committed to prayer.

The statement that they cast lots in the decision has caused concern for some. However, casting lots was a common experience in ancient communities. **Alexander Campbell with tongue in the cheek once stated that those who vote against voting or casting lots just did so!**

J. W. McGarvey in his commentary on Acts observed regarding the process:

"It will be observed that the brethren did not themselves select Matthias; but, having first appointed two persons between whom the choice should be made, they prayed the Lord to show which one he had chosen, and then cast lots, understanding that the one upon whom the lot fell was the Lord's choice. The reason that they did not make the selection themselves was evidently because they thought proper that the Lord, who had chosen Judas, should also choose his successor. If it be inquired why, then, they ventured to confine the Lord's choice to these two ..."²⁶

Elwell and Beitzel in the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* wrote regarding casting lots in Scripture:

"The practice was common in the OT, less common in the NT prior to Pentecost, and absent in the biblical narrative after Pentecost.

In the Bible the practice was used in a variety of circumstances, including (1) the selection of the scapegoat (Lev 16:8–10); (2) the allocation of the tribal inheritance in the Promised Land (Nm 26:55, 56; Jos 14:2; Jgs 1:3; etc.); (3) the determination of the families who had to relocate to give a proper distribution of the populace or of those warriors who had to go to war where only a percentage was required (Jgs 20:9; Neh 11:1); (4) the order of the priests and their duties (1 Chr 24:5–19; Neh 10:34); (5) the determination of an offender (Jos 7:14–18; cf. Prv 18:18).

According to biblical usage lots seem to have been used *only when the decision was important and where wisdom or biblical injunctions did not give sufficient guidance*. One of the advantages of the casting of lots was the impartiality of the choice. *It was held that the Lord directed the lots* (Prv 16:33).

The method of casting lots is not specified or described and seems to have varied according to the need of the situation (cf. Lev 16:8; Num 26:55, 56; Jgs 20:9)."²⁷

²⁶ McGarvey, J. W., *Original Commentary On Acts*, Acts 1:23-26.

²⁷ Elwell and Beitzel, "Lots, Casting," *Baker Encyclopedia of The Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1356.

Chapter 3: Acts 2:1-47. The beginnings of the Jerusalem Church.

The heart of Luke's narrative in his Gospel and Acts of the Apostles.

When speaking of the heart of the Gospel, Paul focused on the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 1:16, 17; 1 Cor 1:18-2:2). Luke obviously would agree with that statement! However, in regard to his extensive narrative that began with his Gospel chronicle of Jesus birth, ministry, death, and apostolic commission, and includes the remarkable missional theological narrative in Acts, Luke would focus on the dramatic events of *Acts 2 as the heart of his eschatological missional kingdom narrative.*

Craig Keener observes that this narrative, Acts 2:1-4 is “pivotal to Luke.”¹ McGarvey states that this was Luke's “main theme.”² Marshall elaborates on the significance of the *pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the disciples:*

“Luke alone refers to the story of how the Spirit came upon the church for the first time, but the essential historicity of the incident is firmly assured.¹⁰ Its placing in Acts corresponds to the position of the birth of Jesus in the Gospel, and its significance is that the church is now equipped for the task of witness and mission, and proceeds straightaway to undertake it. The story contains the fulfilment of the prophecy in 1: 4f., and thus describes how the disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit; more correctly, it is the first occurrence of this experience. At the same time, the event fulfils the prophecies of Isaiah 32: 15 and Joel 2:28–32, and thus indicates that the last days have arrived.”³

Witherington observes that although some scholars criticize the historical nature of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, *Luke sees this as the heart of the missiological commission:*

“Only the book of Acts records this story that we find in Acts 2, and this has seemed historically problematic to some scholars, even though Acts is the only Christian historical narrative we have from this period. *For Luke, it is clearly a critical event which sets in motion all that follows. Without the coming of the Spirit there would be no prophecy, no preaching, no mission, no conversions, and no worldwide Christian movement.* Luke, then, encourages us to examine this material very carefully. The feast of Pentecost was in NT times the name for the celebration of the Feast of Weeks because it occurred on the fiftieth day after Passover. It was a one-day festival in which special sacrifices were offered, and originally it was a harvest (firstfruits) festival (Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:15-21; Num. 28:26; Deut. 16:9-12). *It is possible, but not certain, that as early as this time this festival was associated with the giving of the Law on Sinai.* There is an interesting tradition, of a later period, that the Law had been initially promulgated in the seventy languages of the nations that made up the whole world (b. Shab. 88b). *Even more intriguing is what Philo, writing well before the time of Luke, says about the giving of the Law: “Then from the midst of the fire that*

¹ Keener, *Acts*, p.121.

² McGarvey, *Acts*, Acts II:1, Kindle location 565.

³ Marshall, I. Howard. *Acts*, pp. 72-73.

streamed from heaven there sounded forth to their utter amazement a voice, for the flame became the articulate speech in the language familiar to the audience” (Decal. 46). If Luke knew such traditions his portrayal of these Pentecost events could be taken to suggest not only that Christianity will have a worldwide impact, but that the giving of the Spirit is parallel to (and supersedes?) the giving of the Law. In favor of this connection is the fact that Luke uses the Moses typology consistently as he tells the story of Jesus, and of course in Luke’s view it is Jesus who is sending the Spirit. More broadly this feast was associated with the renewal of the covenant with Noah, before and during the first century A.D. (cf. Jub. 6:17, 18).”⁴

Along similar lines N. T. Wright comments on the impact of this text on nearly all Christian traditions:

“All Christians, not only those who call themselves Pentecostals, derive their meaning from the first Pentecost. For a first-century Jew, Pentecost was the fiftieth day after Passover. It was an agricultural festival. But Passover and Pentecost also awakened echoes of the great story of the exodus from Egypt, when the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea and God rescued his people from slavery. Fifty days after Passover, the Israelites came to Mount Sinai, where Moses received the law. *Pentecost is about God giving to his redeemed people the way of life by which they must now carry out his purposes.* Now Jesus has gone up into heaven in the ascension, and he is now coming down again, not with a written law carved on tablets of stone, but with the dynamic energy of the law, designed to be written on human hearts.”⁵

Bock asserts that this pericope *is a fulcrum account of Luke-Acts* around which the whole narrative swings”

“Much of Luke’s Gospel has been leading up to the Messiah’s pouring out of the Spirit (Luke 3:15–17; 24:47–49; Acts 1:4–5). Peter’s explanation is the first missionary speech in Acts and one of the most significant because of its detailed explanatory use of the OT and its possession of the core elements of gospel preaching. The unit is important, as the juxtaposition of the ascension and Pentecost in terms of proximate literary space shows (Spencer 2004: 33). Spencer also notes a few parallels between the events: (1) unusual manifestations (to and from heaven); (2) prophecy and fulfillment; (3) Galilean disciples experiencing important events in Judea; and (4) twelve apostles as major figures. Two key events of the earliest church are placed one after the other.”⁶

In a dramatic way, Luke records the dynamic way God and Jesus initiate the inauguration of God’s eternally planned *great eschatological soteriological kingdom* for all nations, not only for the Israel, but for all people.

Acts 2:1-47: Pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost

This text is so important that we will break it down into four sections:

Acts 2:1-13 - The miraculous outpouring

⁴ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 267-268.

⁵ Wright, N. T., *Acts*, p. 16.

⁶ Bock, *Acts*, p. 166).

Acts 2:14-36 – Peter’s first Christian sermon
Acts 2:37-42 – The response to the Sermon
Acts 2:43-47 – The first church in Jerusalem

Acts 2:1-13: The miraculous outpouring

¹ *When the day of Pentecost had come, they [the disciples and apostles] were all together in one place.* ² *And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.* ³ *And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them.* ⁴ *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*

Luke does not indicate why God and Jesus chose the day of Pentecost, other than Pentecost was an Old Testament festival day required of Israel. Interestingly, it is closely associated with another celebration, the Passover.

The word *Pentecost* is derived from the Greek, πεντηκοστή, *pentēkostē*, meaning *fiftieth*. Elwell and Beitzel in the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* observe regarding Pentecost:

“Pentecost stood for the festival celebrated on the 50th day after Passover. In the OT this festival, called *Shavuoth* (Weeks) in Judaism, is referred to as the *Feast of Weeks* (Ex 34:22; Dt 16:10) because it occurs *7 weeks after Passover* ...

The Feast of Weeks was one of three OT pilgrimage festivals when individuals were to appear before the Lord with gifts and offerings (Ex 23:14–17). The festival was primarily a harvest festival and *celebrated the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest* ...

... This harvest festival was a time of great rejoicing and a holy assembly when no work was to be done (Lev 23:21; Dt 16:11) ...

Pentecost is first mentioned in the NT as the occasion for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Christ, an event which many theologians understand as marking the beginning of the church (Acts 2:1). *Since this was a required festival Jews had gathered from great distances to observe Pentecost in Jerusalem, making it an appropriate time for God’s work.”*⁷

Luke’s expressions “*all together in one place*” and “*filled all the house where they were sitting*” indicates some form of worship experience which would be experienced following the exciting promise Jesus had recently made of the fulfillment of the promises of the coming upon them of the Holy Spirit. It must have been an intense time of spiritual expectation. One can assume that much time was spent in prayer and discussion. The Day of Pentecost followed the Sabbath days rest and was an intense day of celebration for fruitful harvest. Large crowds from all over the Jewish diaspora would gather in Jerusalem for the feast of harvest.

Luke explains that suddenly, “*a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.*” That the sound came from heaven defines the sound as a heavenly sound from God. It certainly got their attention for it filled the whole house!

Luke adds “*And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them.*” ⁴ *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.”* The purpose of the tongues as of fire obviously indicated a powerful *theophanic* visual experience.

Marshall points out that in these first few verses of Acts 2 Luke uses the principle of analogy to make his point supernatural point:

⁷ Elwell and Beitzel, “Pentecost,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, pp. 1639–1640.

“The whole company of 120 people is doubtless meant, and not just the reconstituted twelve apostles.

The symbolism is reminiscent of *Old Testament theophanies* (2 Sam. 22:16; Job 37: 10; Ezek. 13:13): *the wind is a sign of God’s presence as Spirit. A second symbol was fire. A flame divided itself into several tongues, so that each rested upon one of the persons present. Again the description is analogical—as of fire. And again we are reminded of Old Testament theophanies, especially of that at Sinai (Exod. 19:18), but the primary background is probably John the Baptist’s association of the Spirit with fire as a means of cleansing and judgment (Luke 3:16).*

With these outward signs came the Holy Spirit as an inward, invisible reality that *demonstrated his presence by the effects wrought upon the disciples.* Luke uses the word *fill* to describe the experience. *This word is used when people are given an initial endowment of the Spirit to fit them for God’s service (9:17; Luke 1:15) and also when they are inspired to make important utterances (4:8, 31; 13: 9); related words are used to describe the continuous process of being filled with the Spirit (13:52; Eph. 5:18) or the corresponding state of being full (6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24; Luke 4: 1). These references indicate that a person already filled with the Spirit can receive a fresh filling for a specific task, or a continuous filling.”*⁸

Witherington adds an interesting thought to the tongues of fire:

The tongues were like fire but were not fire. In v. 3 Luke is reserved in his description. He says there seemed to be tongues like fire that came to rest on each believer. In any case, the sound of this event is said to fill or echo throughout the whole house where the disciples were sitting. Divided tongues like fire appeared and rested upon each one there present (cf. Luke 3:22). There is no indication that this phenomenon was only experienced by the Twelve, as some sort of empowerment for leadership”⁹.

Luke then moved from the one hundred disciples gathered in the room/house to a large gathering of Jews in Jerusalem. He does not describe where they met but one would assume it to be in the Temple precinct.

“⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language, διάλεκτος, diálektos. ⁷ And they were amazed and wondered, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language, διάλεκτος, diálektos? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues, γλῶσσα glōssa, the mighty works of God.” ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Marshall notes the different regions listed in the “ethnic groups” listed by Luke and observes that the list of region,:

“was not invented by Luke himself. It must suffice to observe that the list is clearly meant to be an indication that *people from all over the known world were present, and perhaps that they*

⁸ Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 73-74.

⁹ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 268-269.

would return to their own countries as witnesses to what was happening. All of them as worshippers of Yahweh could tell that the Christians were celebrating the mighty works of God.”¹⁰

Luke tells us that the crowd was bewildered “because each one heard them speaking in his own language.” Luke later defines as in “own native language ... telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

Twice, Luke uses the Greek word διάλεκτος, *diálektos*, *dialect*, which our translations render as *language* in vv. 6 and 8. In v. 11 Luke uses the word γλῶσσα, *glṓssa*, to define the dialects, implying that what was spoken were not *ecstatic utterances* or *mysterious tongues*, but normal *language* or *dialects* that the different ethnic groups could understand. In Luke’s usage, the words διάλεκτος, *diálektos* and γλῶσσα, *glṓssa* are synonyms relating to known dialects or languages.

One can enter a significant debate regarding Paul’s use of γλῶσσα, *glṓssa*, in 1 Corinthians, but the contexts are different, and whereas the tongues referred to in 1 Cor 14 may be unknown mysterious tongues that in Corinth needed translation, in Luke’s case, no translation was necessary. The tongues were known dialects or languages that the people could clearly understand.

The natural impulse drawn of the Jews in Jerusalem by many was that the disciples were drunk! Peter’s response in vv. 14, 15 contains some sarcasm, for Peter reminds the Jews that it is only 9:00 am, the *third hour of the day*, and since ceremonial wine at Jewish feasts was most likely diluted, drunkenness was hardly a reliable accusation.

Acts 2:13-21 – Peter’s first Christian sermon.

¹⁴ *But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.*

¹⁵ *For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day;*

¹⁶ *but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

¹⁷ *‘And in the last days (ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, the last days, the eschatological days) it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;*

¹⁸ *yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.*

¹⁹ *And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath,*

blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

²⁰ *the sun shall be turned into darkness*

and the moon into blood,

before the day of the Lord comes,

the great and manifest day.

²¹ *And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

That Peter was the first to preach a major eschatological kingdom sermon was in keeping with Jesus’ promise to Peter at Matt 16:16-20 that he would give him *the keys of the kingdom*.

¹⁰ Marshall, I. Howard. *Acts*, p. 76.

Keys open doors! In similar fashion at Acts 10 it was Peter who preached the first sermon to a Gentile, Cornelius, and opened the door of the kingdom to Gentiles.

The center and strength of Peter's sermon and argument was his reference to one of the best known Old Testament Holy Spirit prophecies, Joel 2:28-32.

²⁸ *“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹ Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit.*

³⁰ *“And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ³² And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.”*

Note a profoundly important concept in Peter's sermon. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit would usher in the last days, the *eschatological age* of the Christian kingdom.

The “theological history” of this *eschatological kingdom* is central to the Christian message and theology.

It was *planned* by God before the creation of the earth (Eph 1:3-11); it was *promised* through the prophets (Dan 7); it was *prophesied* by the prophets (Joel 2:28); it was *introduced* on earth at the incarnation of Jesus, the Messiah, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism; it was *inaugurated* on Jesus' ministry (Matt 12:28f); it became *integral* to Christian experience on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, and *realized* as part of Christian experience when 3000 Jews were baptized by faith in Jesus death and resurrection as preached by Peter in his great inaugural sermon.

In my application of Wolfhart Pannenberg's insightful comment the kingdom experience of the Christian experience on Pentecost was the *arrival* of the *future* in the *present*. The *eschatological kingdom* of the Christian age was the *final act of God's redemptive activity in Jesus* which will culminate when Jesus returns to judge the world in righteousness at the end of the age! The eschatological kingdom is the “already but not yet”!

Shortly after this Pentecost experience the kingdom became missional when the disciples carried it out from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria to the end of the earth (Acts 1:6-8).

In the following text I have set certain high points in bold or underlined for emphasis.

Acts 2:22-42: the content of Peter's sermon.

²² *“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.*

²⁵ *For David says concerning him,*

*I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
moreover my flesh will dwell in hope.
²⁷ For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades,
nor let thy Holy One see corruption.
²⁸ Thou hast made known to me the ways of life;
thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.'*

²⁹ *"Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear.*

³⁴ *For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says,
'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,
³⁵ till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.'*

³⁶ ***Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.***"

³⁷ *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ And Peter said to them, "**Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." ⁴⁰ And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ⁴² **And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.***

The high points of Peter's sermon.

His sermon focuses on Jesus' death and resurrection arguing that David had prophesied in Ps 110 that God would raise Christ, the *Messiah*, to sit on his throne with him in heaven.

Peter then charged the Jews that they had crucified their Messiah who God had raised from the dead:

"Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

The power of Peter's sermon, and the effect of the confirmation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit convicted many of the Jews present; they were *pricked in their heart, deeply convinced and believing*, they cried out to Peter and the disciples, most likely the Apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do (ποιήσωμεν, an aorist potential subjunctive verb raising a question)?" A possible translation could be "what should or must we do?"

On the surface, Peter's answer is straightforward and if read as most translators translate this in our English Bibles¹¹, it should cause no problems. However, some scholars are not willing to

¹¹ Or as in other major language translations render it.

read Peter's response just as Luke wrote it! "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"

The Jews already believe what Peter had claimed, *they already believed that Jesus was the Messiah* and they had crucified him, and that God had raised Jesus from the dead to sit with him in heaven! What should they do about this? "*Repent and be baptized*".

Every Jew would know what repent meant, (μετανοήσατε, an aorist *active* imperative from μετανοέω, *metanoéō*, a change of mind and heart toward God), John the Baptizer had been preaching this for some time and many had followed him! It meant a radical turning of life to God.

"*Repent and be baptized*" is not difficult! *Repent* is joined to *be baptized*, an aorist *passive* imperative verb as in *repent*, by a coordinating conjunction *καί*, and, "*be baptized*". Every Jew would know what John the Baptizer had been doing out in the Jordan river, immersing people in water based on *repentance for the forgiveness of sins* (Mark 1:4, "*John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*"!)

So what should we assume Peter meant and Luke recorded when Peter answered, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"?

In the name of Jesus Christ meant by the authority of or Jesus Christ. Remember, Matt 28:18-20, "¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."*

So far, we have been following good sense and exegetical process. However, we must examine the little preposition *εἰς*, *eis for*. Greek grammars explain that when *eis* is followed by a noun in the accusative case it points *forward* or *toward* the meaning of the noun¹² it is modifying, that is, forgiveness of sins. That is exactly what Luke wrote and all of our major translations read one is baptized *for* the forgiveness of sins, not *because of* forgiveness of sins as some evangelicals read it.

However, Julius Mantey has determined that the translation *for* is what the preposition means except for one case in the New Testament, acts 2:38 where Mantey argues it must be translated *because of*! Mantey argues that to translate *eis* as *for* goes against his evangelical theology of *salvation by faith* and not by works, therefore, we should read *because of* and not *for* remission of sins even though *eis* basically means *for*!

What do we say about this? *Shame on you, Dr. Mantey!* You should know that a biblical theologian does not read one's theology into one's exegesis, but works out of one's exegesis toward theology. *Dr. Mantey, why not stay with what our best Greek-English scholars have written rather than to invent a translation that suits your theology?*

For those who would like a deeper discussion of acts 2:28 and the Greek preposition I have provided an extended study under the *addendum* at the conclusion of this commentary.

Discussion on the gift of the Holy Spirit, vv. 38b-40.

^{38b} *...and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*³⁹ *For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him.*"

¹² Read Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 103f; and any major Greek Grammar of the New Testament. Amazing, since this grammar is the product of Mantey's own work!

⁴⁰ *And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."*

Attaching the statement regarding the gift of the Holy Spirit has caused some confusion for those who fail to understand that the atonement prepared and carried out by God was a trinitarian, triune activity. All three persons of the Godhead are active in our salvation and redemption. Our salvation was not limited to Jesus' death on the cross, but was "inaugurated" by Jesus on the cross but involved the Father's act of forgiveness and the sanctification of the activity of the Holy Spirit, 2 Thess 2:13, 14, "¹³ *But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.* ¹⁴ *To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" and 1 Pet 1:2, "*To the exiles ...* ² *chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.*"

Without the *sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit* there can be no salvation. Luke aware of this included the gift of the working of the Holy Spirit in his narrative of Jesus ministry.

Luke adds an interesting aspect of this in Acts 5:29-32,

"²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

Acts 2:41-42. The early church gathering assembly as a church.

⁴¹ *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.* ⁴² *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."*

Several commentators have observed that in this paragraph and the next, Acts 2:41-47 Luke gives us two summaries of what the early church did after the momentous outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the conversion and baptism of three thousand new Christians.

Marshall comments on the remarkable event following this Holy Spirit activity, the disciples gathered together:

"Finally, Luke records what happened to the new converts. *Four activities* are listed in which they took part. These are generally regarded as four separate things, *but a case can be made out that they are in fact the four elements which characterized a Christian gathering in the early church, and on the whole this is the preferable view.* *First*, there was the teaching given by the apostles, who were qualified for this task by their companionship with Jesus. They may have been regarded as in a special sense the guardians of the traditions about Jesus as the church grew and developed. *Secondly*, there was *fellowship*; the word means 'sharing', and, while it could refer to the sharing of goods described in verses 44f., *it is more likely that here it refers to the holding of a common meal or to a common religious experience.* *Thirdly*, there was the *breaking of bread*. This is Luke's term for what Paul calls *the Lord's Supper*. It refers to the act with which a Jewish meal opened, and *which had gained peculiar significance for Christians in view of Jesus' action at the Last Supper and also when he fed the multitudes (Luke 9:16; 22:19; 24: 30; Acts 20: 7, 11).* It has been claimed that the thought is simply of a fellowship meal, perhaps a continuation of the meals

held with the risen Lord, without any specific relation to the Last Supper or the Pauline form of the Lord's Supper which celebrated his death, *but it is much more likely that Luke is simply using an early Palestinian name for the Lord's Supper in the proper sense. Finally, there is mention of prayers.* If the reference is not to part of a Christian meeting, it will be to the way the Christians observed the set Jewish hours of prayer (3:1). *Here are the four essential elements in the religious practice of the Christian church.*"¹³

Acts 2:43-47: The Fellowship of the church in Jerusalem.

It is apparent from Luke's account that the new disciples soon built a closeknit fellowship. They began to assemble for *the apostles teaching*, Acts 2:41-42, and then for local "brotherhood" care and benevolence, Acts 2:43-47. At Acts 2: 47 Luke indicates that their behavior made a striking impression on others in the city. The church was growing and beginning to spread—a Lukan theme! *Luke intended such activities to be a summary of the early Christians growth.*

Marshall, reflecting the view of many commentators, observes that Luke uses short summary paragraphs at strategic points to illustrate various stages of the church's growth and progress :

"One of Luke's characteristics is to separate off the various incidents in the first part of Acts by means of short summary paragraphs or verses which indicate the situation of the church at the several stages of its progress. This is the first such section, and it bridges the gap between the story of Pentecost and the next set of incidents in which the relation of the church to the Jewish authorities is depicted. Others follow in 4:32-37 and 5:12-16, and *have much the same general content as the present passage.* Some scholars have found a parallelism between the four items in verse 42 and the contents of the present summary (apostles; all things in common; breaking of bread; praising God), but the parallelism is not especially exact."¹⁴

"⁴³ And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

¹³ Marshall, I. Howard. *Acts*, pp. 88-89.

¹⁴ Marshall, I. Howard. *Acts*, p. 89.

Chapter 4: Acts 3:1-5:11. The church in Jerusalem serves others.

Peter heals a blind man, and preaches: Acts 3:1-26.

I have inserted comments within the text at certain points for emphasis on Peter's activity and sermon, **in the name and power of Jesus!**

¹ Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. (a good crowd could be expected for preaching and teaching) ² And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. ³ Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. ⁴ And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, "Look at us." ⁵ And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ And leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

¹¹ While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico¹ called Solomon's, astounded. ¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people, (the focus of Peter's sermon was not on what he had done, but on what the Jews and done; Peter preached Jesus crucified and raised from the dead.) "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" ¹³ The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

¹⁷ "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your rulers. ¹⁸ **But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled.** ¹⁹ **Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,** ²⁰ and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. ²² **Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.'** ²³ And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people (Deut 18:15)' ²⁴ **And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days.** ²⁵ You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' ²⁶ **God,**

¹ "Solomon's Portico," was a long, covered, but open gallery created by two parallel rows of columns supporting a long wooden roof. It was an open place where people gathered for discussion and community fellowship.

having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness.” (Luke and Peter were aware that the message was for the Jews first, but later for the Gentiles.)

Peter and John arrested and then freed: Acts 4:1-22.

*“¹And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ²**annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.** ³And they arrested them and put them in custody until the morrow, for it was already evening. ⁴But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand. (The witnessing of Peter and John, and most likely of the many disciples in Jerusalem, had obviously created concern among the Priests and rulers of the Jews, three thousand had become five thousand! Note Luke’s emphasis, the Gospel witnessing was spreading! “Got to stop this revolution—throw them in Jail!”)*

*⁵On the morrow their **rulers and elders and scribes** were gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶with **Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.** (The obvious power structure of Judaism!) ⁷And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸Then **Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit,** said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. (Isa 28:16; Ps 118:22, both prophetic utterances that the Priests, High Priest, and the Scribes knew well!) ¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (The mention of “name” in ancient tradition, Hebrew and Greek, was a euphemism for person with authority.)*

*¹³Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, (meaning unlettered men, having no formal education, not graduates from the rabbinic schools.² This does not mean they could not read!) they wondered; and they **recognized that they had been with Jesus.** ¹⁴But seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. (They were not sure how to handle the situation!) ¹⁵But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” ¹⁸So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹**But Peter and John answered them,** “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; ²⁰for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” ²¹And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; for all men praised God for what had happened. ²²For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.”*

² Marshall, *Acts*, p. 107; Polhill, *Acts*, p.145; Bock, *Acts*, p. 315.

Peter, John, and the Jerusalem church: Acts 4:23-37.

²³ *When they were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, **didst say by the Holy Spirit**, (Ps 2:1, which in its later verses has a clear Messianic reference.)*

*‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples imagine vain things? ²⁶
The kings of the earth set themselves in array,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—*

²⁷ *for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, ³⁰ while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus.”*

³¹ *And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. (A good analogy to the Pentecost Holy Spirit experience—the presence and power of God to speak with boldness!)*

³² *Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common.*

³³ *And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles’ feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles **Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”** (Barnabas will shortly come into prominence in the mission of the kingdom, a supporter and encourager of Paul.)*

The narrative of Ananias and his Sapphira: Acts 5:1-11.

This is a strange narrative considering the positive nature of what Luke has been narrating so far! Two Christians who are not honest with the community and with God and the Holy Spirit die for their sin!

N. T. Wright perhaps sets this pericope in a reasonable context. It presents the early life of a Christian community made up of people who struggle with the temptations of the world on a daily basis! Wright observes:

Luke is telling us that the early Christian community was functioning somewhat like the temple itself. It was a place of holiness, a holiness so dramatic and acute that every blemish was magnified. If you want to be a community which seems to be taking the place of the temple of the living God, *you mustn’t be surprised if the living God takes you seriously, seriously enough to make it clear that there is no such thing as cheap grace.* If you invoke the power of the Holy One, the one who will eventually right all wrongs, and sort out all cheating and lying, he may just decide to do some of that work already, in

advance ... *We either choose to live in the presence of the God who made the world and who longs passionately for it to be set right, or we lapse back into some variety of easy-going paganism, even if it has a Christian veneer. Holiness is not an optional extra. To name the name of Jesus and to invoke the Holy Spirit is to claim to be the temple of the living God, and that is bound to have consequences.*"³

Brock introduces this pericope by noting that even in a strong congregation with strong lordship, Satan still works to destroy God's work through the failure of human beings, and God is still a sovereign God in his judgment of evil.

"In contrast to Barnabas stands the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira. This passage includes an instant-judgment miracle that has been the topic of much discussion ... Luke is honest that not everyone acted with virtue in the new community. God, however, watches the affairs of this nascent community very closely, even judging its members. Actions of deceit that represent lying to the apostles are presented as acts against God and the Spirit. The passage shows that God knows the hearts of believers. Peter is not the major figure in the text; God is. Luke is teaching about respect for God through one's action. Divine judgment against the act of disrespect produces the fear noted in verses 5 and 11. There also is a figure lurking behind the scenes. Satan is noted as having influenced Ananias and Sapphira... This does not excuse them. It simply means that cosmic forces are very interested in what happens in God's church, some for ill and others for good. God overcomes this effort of Satan to undercut God's people. Sometimes judgment makes this victory possible... This is one of two detailed judgment miracles in Acts (see also 13:11). In addition, there is a note of divine judgment on Herod in Acts 12:23 and a severe warning to Simon Magus (8:18–24). The scene has been called a "rule miracle of judgment."

The very uniqueness of the story argues for its credibility. Peter's remarks and the divine action bringing death are tightly linked as cause and effect (but this is not "magical power," since Peter utters no incantation to call down the judgment ... This is presented as a unique judgment at a sensitive point in the church's early days. It is not a normal act of God in terms of its instantaneous timing (Polhill 1992: 161). *The omniscience of God and the accountability to God the story represents are the key points Luke is making.* In addition, the proper and improper handling of resources constitutes another teaching point of the scene, positively by Barnabas and negatively by Ananias and Sapphira (Johnson 1992: 91). God sees and notes it all."⁴

"¹But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, ²and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." ⁵When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

³ Wright, *Acts*, pp. 32-33.

⁴ Bock, *Acts*, pp. 348, 349.

⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹ But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Hark, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things."

Chapter 5: Acts 5:12 -7:60. Persecution breaks out in Jerusalem.

The growth of the church in Jerusalem sees significant challenges:

Acts 5:12-16 The Apostles preach; converts multiply.

Acts 6:1-7 The first deacons are appointed.

Acts 6:8-7:60 Stephen becomes the first martyr.

The Apostles preach and people come to hear them: Acts 5:12-16.

¹² *Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico.* ¹³ *None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor.* ¹⁴ *And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women,* ¹⁵ *so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.* ¹⁶ *The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.*

The Gospel message is spreading to the towns around Jerusalem!

The Apostles are arrested by the high priest and Jewish council, assumably the Sanhedrin.

They are thrown into the common prison.

¹⁷ *But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy* ¹⁸ *they arrested the apostles and put them in the common prison.* ¹⁹ *But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said,* ²⁰ *"Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."* ²¹ *And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and taught.*

Now the high priest came and those who were with him and called together the council and all the senate of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²² *But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, and they returned and reported,* ²³ *"We found the prison securely locked and the sentries standing at the doors, but when we opened it we found no one inside."* ²⁴ *Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were much perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to.* ²⁵ *And some one came and told them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people."* ²⁶ *Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.*

²⁷ *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them,* ²⁸ *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."* ²⁹ *But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.* ³⁰ *The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."*

You can imagine the confusion of the authorities! There did not seem to be any way the Jewish authorities could silence the Apostles!

You have to admire the faith and courage of the Apostles! **The will obey only God**, not the Sanhedrin and High Priest.

Their strength lay in the fact that **they had seen the resurrected Jesus**, and the **Holy Spirit**, whom Jesus had promised them, **was with them** and working in them to comfort and encourage them. As John had recorded in his Gospel in John 14-17, The Holy Spirit as the *paráklētos, paraclete, comforter, an advocate, and strength* was with them!

The counsel of Gamaliel: Acts 5:33-42.

Most commentators believe that this Gamaliel is the same person under whom Saul of Tarsus received his Jewish Pharisaic education. The *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* records this on Gamaliel:

“A Jewish scholar. This man lived in the first century AD and died 18 years before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by Titus, the Roman general.

When Peter and the other apostles were brought before the enraged and threatening council in Jerusalem, Gamaliel, who was highly respected by the council, offered cautionary advice that probably saved the apostles’ lives in that situation (Acts 5:27–40).

Gamaliel is also mentioned in Acts 22:3 as the rabbi with whom the apostle Paul studied as a youth in Jerusalem. During that period in Israel, a number of rabbinical schools evolved. Two of the most influential were the rival Pharisaic schools of Hillel and Shammai. Both of those teachers had vast influence on Jewish thinking. Hillel’s school emphasized tradition even above the law. Shammai’s school preserved the teaching of the law over the authority of tradition. Hillel’s school was the more influential, and its decisions have been held by a great number of later rabbis.

Traditionally, Gamaliel is considered to be the grandson of Hillel, and he was thoroughly schooled in the philosophy and theology of his grandfather’s teaching. Gamaliel was a member of the Sanhedrin, the high council of Jews in Jerusalem, and he served as president of the Sanhedrin during the reigns of the Roman emperors Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. Unlike other Jewish teachers, he had no antipathy toward Greek learning.

The learning of Gamaliel was so eminent and his influence so great that he is one of only seven Jewish scholars who have been honored by the title Rabban. He was called the “Beauty of the Law.” The Talmud even says that “since Rabban Gamaliel died, the glory of the Law has ceased.”¹

Marshal comments regarding the Gamaliel mentioned here that he was Gamaliel I. He notices that there are some issues regarding the historical nature of the two Jewish insurrectionists Gamaliel mentions, *Theudas* and *Judas*, but whatever evidence is available regarding them is also uncertain:

“Gamaliel I (who is confused in Jewish tradition with his grandson Gamaliel II) was a leading Pharisaic teacher who belonged to the more moderate ‘school’ founded by Hillel and who was renowned for his piety. He moved that the court should go into closed session.

Essentially, however, Gamaliel was making a plea for restraint and caution in deciding what to do about the apostles. He claimed, by citing two examples, that movements of human origin would come to nothing without any interference by the Jewish authorities; whereas, if the movement were inspired by God, it would be dangerous to take action against it. More precisely, he contended that once the leaders of mass movements had been killed, their followers soon lost enthusiasm for their cause; now that Jesus was dead, there

¹ Elwell and Comfort, “Gamaliel”, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, p. 513, 2001.

was no need to take action against his disciples. ... Gamaliel draws the moral from his two examples. The Sanhedrin should take no action against the Christians.”²

³³ *When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them.* ³⁴ ***But a Pharisee in the council named Gamali-el, a teacher of the law, held in honor by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a while.*** ³⁵ *And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you do with these men.”* ³⁶ *For before these days Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.* ³⁷ *After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered.* ³⁸ ***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 men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!***”

⁴⁰ *So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.* ⁴¹ *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 at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.***”

The First Deacons: Acts 6:1-7.

Luke introduces a shift in directions in this short pericope and the following chapters. A Greek dimension is introduced to the narrative. For the first time we have a direct reference to a Hellenistic influence—the Greek speaking Hellenist Christians and the Aramaic speaking Jewish Christians in the Jerusalem church. They were obvious Jews, but Jews of different cultural makeups. The Hellenist Christians were in many ways more Greek than Jewish!

Marshall draws our attention to this shift in kingdom spread direction!

“The first five chapters of Acts have seen the establishment of the church in Jerusalem and the beginnings of opposition to it because of its preaching of Jesus. In the next main section of Acts we see the missionary work of the church beginning to expand in various ways. *First*, we have the story of the increase in the church in Jerusalem and its spread among Greek-speaking Jews; this led to the martyrdom of Stephen (6:1–8: 3). *Secondly*, we have the spread of the church to Samaria (8:4–25). *Thirdly*, there is the conversion of an Ethiopian (8:26–40). *Fourthly*, there is the conversion of Saul, who was to be the most significant Christian missionary to the Gentiles (9:1–30). The Jewish persecution of the Christians comes to a peak in the death of Stephen, but at the same time this incident leads to the geographical spread of the church and *hence to the beginnings of witness outside the strict limits of Judaism; the ground is being prepared for the critical question of the place of non-Jews within the church.*”³

In this interesting paragraph we will also note that Luke uses a *noun* and a verbal *infinitive* form of the Greek *diákonos*, a *servant*. The English translation of *diákonos* explains who a *deacon* is, and what the deacon does—they serve.

² Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 128-130.

³ Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 132-133.

The same word *diákonos* is also translated in different contexts as *minister*, one who *ministers* or *serves*. The English word *deacon* in church structure is one who *has been appointed by the congregation to serve*. Note that in Acts 6:1-7 the seven men *were chosen and appointed, commissioned, to serve the congregation*. Every Christian should be a servant, *but some Christians are specifically appointed by the church to serve as special servants*. We refer to these *special servants* as *deacons*!

This short narrative in Acts 6:1-7 is significant because it demonstrates a critical ingredient of the *self-governing principle* of missional methodology and mission work in that it *explains what deacons do, they are the agents of social benevolent service in the church!*

Up to this point Luke's emphasis has been on the *evangelistic mission* of the Apostles, Peter and John. Luke now turns to *a congregational concern*, not an *eschatological missional kingdom* concern; how do you minister to a fast growing congregation's need, especially regarding the benevolent need of caring for people who have significantly uprooted and "surrendered" their Jewish Temple and synagogue membership by joining this new Christian community? *Benevolence was not the commission of Jesus for the Apostles!* This might seem a radical statement, but hear below what the Apostles themselves comment on this occasion.

We have already observed the disciples in Jerusalem sharing their money, homes, and food, Acts 2;44, Acts 4:32, Acts 5, so they were aware of the need for benevolent activity.

*"¹Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution (τῆ διακονίᾳ, the service). ² And **the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve** (note the noun τῆ διακονίᾳ in v. 1 and the infinitive verb in v. 2, διακονεῖν, to serve) **tables.** ³ Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. ⁴ **But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.**" ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose **Stephen**, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and **Philip**, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them."*

⁷ And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."

From their names we can assume that the seven were Hellenist-Jewish Christians. They were well chose for the sensitive task of caring for the Hellenist widows.

Of the seven, two, Stephen and Philip receive more attention by Luke. Stephen as the first martyr, and Philip as the first non-apostle to be sent out by the Holy Spirit, Acts 8:4, 29.

The martyrdom of Stephen: Acts 6:8-7:60.

In this extended pericope regarding the martyrdom of Stephen, several interesting facts are mentioned. *First*, Stephen was most likely one of the *seven Hellenist deacons* in the church in Jerusalem. He was not an Apostle but was highly respected in the Jerusalem Christian community. Luke spoke of his prestige among the Christians and of his ministry.

False charges against Stephen.

"⁸ And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia,

arose and disputed with Stephen. ¹⁰ **But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.** ¹¹ *Then they secretly instigated men, who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”* ¹² *And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council,* ¹³ **and set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law;** ¹⁴ *for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us.”* ¹⁵ *And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel (a remarkable comment by Luke!).”*

Stephen’s defense.

Stephen’s defense was an amazing recounting of God’s redemptive narrative beginning with Abraham, the story of Joseph, Egypt, Moses leadership, the exodus from Egyptian slavery, Moses and the Law at Mount Sinai, Israel’s sin of idolatry with the olden calf, the story of David and Solomon. He summed up the whole narrative with this citation from Isa 66:1, 2 and a serious condemnation of Israel and its leaders:

Acts 7:51. *“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.”* ⁵² *Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,* ⁵³ *you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”*

The response of the Scribes, High Priest and Sanhedrin was immediate!

Stephen dies as a martyr.

Acts 7:54. *“Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him.”* ⁵⁵ *But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;* ⁵⁶ *and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.”* ⁵⁷ *But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him.* ⁵⁸ *Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.* ⁵⁹ *And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”* ⁶⁰ *And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

Acts 8:1. *“And (δέ, emphatic conjunction to draw attention, now) Saul was consenting to his death.”* ¹ *And Saul was consenting to his death.*

And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

² *Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him.* ³ *But (δέ, emphatic conjunction to draw attention, now) Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.”*

Luke introduced Saul/Paul here at a strategic point in his narrative to heighten the extent of Saul’s opposition to the church and apostolic message.

Chapter 6: Acts 8:1- 40. The kingdom Spread

Acts 8:4-25: Philip and the disciples are scattered through Judea and Samaria and take the kingdom message with them.

Philip and Simon the Sorcerer in Samaria

The vehicle of this scattering of Jerusalem disciples, persecution, is in one sense discouraging, but in the plan and hands of God and the Holy Spirit it is in another sense a positive prophetic fulfillment and victory by Christ, his disciples, and the kingdom message over the Jewish Sanhedrin plans. The Jewish rulers and Saul had hoped to extinguish the spread of the Gospel message of Jesus, but in fact they only “fanned” the “incendiary fire”!

*“⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ **Philip** (one of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6) went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs (Holy Spirit inspired and empowered signs as prophesied by Joel 2:28f and commented on by Peter at Acts 2:17-20) which he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.*

⁹ But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is that power of God which is called Great.” (He most likely had claimed divine powers as a god) ¹¹ And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.”

A key thought to note in this pericope is that Luke refers to *the message* Philip preached was the *good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ*. Philip did not simply preach “believe, repent, and be baptized,” although this must have been included since Simon and others were baptized after believing in Jesus.

The heart of this Gospel message, however, was that *the missional eschatological kingdom of God was available to Samaritans as well as to Jews. All of this was made possible in the name of Jesus because Jesus had died and was resurrected to make this possible for all men including Samaritans*. In Luke’s narrative this *universal theme* of the kingdom message was *the power of the kingdom theology*.

Note the parallel expression *in the name of Jesus* at Acts 2:38, *baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins*, that is, by his death personal authority. Note also Matthew’s account of the great commission:

“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Luke records that Simon had called himself, and was known as, *somebody great*. He had apparently backed this up by some form of powerful magic. Luke records at v. 9, Simon had previously practiced magic, v. 9.

A fascinating narrative surrounds this Samaritan, Simon. Marshall records this interesting tradition:

“But before the conversion of the people is recorded, Luke turns his readers’ attention back to what had been happening before Philip arrived. There had been a man called Simon in the town who had claimed to be somebody great and gained credence by his magic powers. The people were sufficiently deceived by him to say that he was the great power of God. The facts about Simon are hard to disentangle from later legend. We have reliable information from Justin Martyr, himself a native of Samaria, that Simon lived there and later moved to Rome where he continued his mischief. Later, Irenaeus records how he travelled around with a certain Helen, a former slave, and said that she was an incarnation of ‘Thought’ (a Gnostic power). Hippolytus, another writer about heresies, tells a nice story about how Simon was worsted in a disputation with Peter. At last Simon said ‘that if he were buried alive he would rise again on the third day. Commanding a grave to be dug, he ordered his disciples to heap earth upon him. They did as he commanded, but he remained in it until this day. For he was not the Christ.’ What degree of truth there is in these and other stories is hard to assess. Certainly Luke is the earliest writer to give us information about him, and we must take seriously the claim which he puts on Simon’s lips, and which was corroborated by the people. It is hard to be sure exactly what Simon claimed to be, but at the very least he said that he was some kind of heavenly power ... Haacker ... argues convincingly that ‘the great power’ is a designation of divinity, and ‘of God’ is Luke’s explanatory addition. It is also possible to think of the great power of God as a Gnostic being, an emanation from the supreme God. *But it seems more likely that Simon claimed to be divine, and that later Gnostics interpreted this in their own way.* In any case, *Luke presents him solely as a magician who deceived the people by his tricks, and it is his role as a magician which is discredited in the story.*”¹

As we learn from vv. 18ff Simon was still at his tricks, seeking ways of gaining power. He was severely chastised and judged by Peter. As we noted above in the comment by Marshall, Simon never got over his worldly greed and deceit.

The Apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John to assist in the work in Samaria.

Acts 8:14-25. “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; ¹⁶ for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, “Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” ²⁰ But Peter said to him, “Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” ²⁴ And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.””

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.”

¹ Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 164-165.

Other than the continuing saga of Simon, the main point of interest involving some discussion hinges the Apostles Peter and John being sent from Jerusalem to lay hands on the Samaritan converts for them to receive the Holy Spirit reflected in the expression “the *falling of the Holy Spirit*” on the Samaritan disciples when the Apostles laid hands on them.

The discussion raises the question of the Holy Spirit *falling on the disciples* who had already been baptized and according to Acts 2:38, had already received the *indwelling* Holy Spirit as promised to those who *believe* and *obey* God when *baptized* as in Acts 2 and Acts 10 and 11.

Why was this extraordinary event of the Holy Spirit falling on the Samaritan disciples necessary when the Apostles laid their hands on those who had been baptized?

Apparently, there are two events involved in this text, as in Acts 10 and 11 when Cornelius and his household were baptized.

First, the discussion of *the falling of the Holy Spirit* on the Samaritans *is in the context of the salvation of Samaritans being recognized and established by miraculous signs when extraordinary divine action had occurred*. Up to this point only *Jews of Israel* had experienced salvation through faith, repentance, and baptism, Acts 1:1-8:3. Samaritans were not accepted as Jews by Jews of Israel because they were a mixed ethnic group, “half” Jewish and “half” gentile in ethnic makeup, and they had resister the building of the temple and walls of Jerusalem by Zerubbabel ca 530 BCE. In order to *demonstrate* and *prove* to *Jewish Christians* that the Samaritan believers had been saved, it was necessary for a powerful “Pentecost like” event to take place to take place on the Samaritan Christians. The reluctance of Jews to accept fellowship with Samaritans can be seen in Jesus’ disciples being concerned when Jesus was discoursing with the Samaritan woman at Sychar, John 4. The Samaritan woman herself had reflected on this, John 4:9f, “The Samaritan woman said to him, “*How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?*” *For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*”

A similar experience with the Holy Spirit took place with Cornelius, a Gentile convert, Acts 10, 11, when *the Holy Spirit was poured out on Cornelius*, in Peter’s words, as on us in the beginning, referring to Acts 2 and Pentecost. Note Luke’s comment at Acts 11:2-18:

“² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, ³ saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” ⁴ But Peter began and explained to them in order: ⁵ “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, something descending, like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came down to me. ⁶ Looking at it closely I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. ⁷ And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸ But I said, ‘No, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹ But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ ¹⁰ This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ At that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brethren also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³ And he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon called Peter;’ ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ ¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ If

then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”¹⁸ When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life.”

Simon saw the power exchange or powerful signs attached to it he asked the Apostles to “give me also this power” so that he could also do what the Apostles had done. Peter chastised him severely.

Second, the expression “not yet fallen on them” is found in other situations where proof of God’s saving activity was experienced for the first time, *first the Jews, now the Samaritans, later on Cornelius*. Note the progression from *Jerusalem and Judea, to Samaria, and to the end of the earth* of Acts 1:6-8.

A Similar expression of *the Holy Spirit being poured out* on disciples is mentioned at least *four times* in the New Testament, each in *the context of imparting miraculous powers*. Acts 2:17, 18; 2:33; 10:45 on occasions when *miraculous signs that could be seen and heard* were present at *the conversion of people, first the Jews on Pentecost, and then on Cornelius, the first Gentile converted*. Each occasion was to demonstrate the inclusion of people in the kingdom of God.

The action expressed in Acts 8:16 that *the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on any of them* is predicated by the fact that such an experience of *the Holy Spirit being poured out* on people proving divine redemption had been promised by God in the Old Testament in such texts as Joel 3:28 and Ezek 39:25-29, each in prophetic *powerful signs* of Israel’s redemption:

Ezek 39:29-29 “ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for my holy name.²⁶ They shall forget their shame, and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid,²⁷ when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies’ lands, and through them have vindicated my holiness in the sight of many nations.²⁸ Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore;²⁹ and I will not hide my face any more from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD.”

Although the long ending of Mark 16:15-20 is questioned by some scholars, it was well received by the early centuries of the church as *powerful proof of God’s redemptive action* as seen and heard in the above texts in Acts. Mark 16:17-20 reads as follows:

“And these signs will accompany those who believe in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues;¹⁸ they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.²⁰ And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen.”

Summary comments on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The gift of the Holy Spirit by God and Jesus *for or upon* disciples, or believers is expressed in two different ways;

First when a person believes, repents, and is baptized the Holy Spirit is engaged in their rebirth (John 3:3-5; Tit 3:4-7; 2 Thess 2:13, 14; Acts 2:38; Acts 5:31). At this point the Holy Spirit is said to dwell in Christians (Rom 8:9, 11; Eph 2:22; 2 Tim 1:14).

Second, the Holy Spirit is engaged in *confirming* certain divine activity as Jesus had said when he instructed his disciples to wait for the coming Holy Spirit with power as a sign that they should go and make disciples beginning in Jerusalem and then throughout the world (Lk 24:48; Acts 2:4, 8; Acts 8:14,16; 11:15f).

The falling out of the Holy Spirit on the Samaritans was a powerful confirmation that the Samaritans had a place in the kingdom of God. The same powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his household confirmed to Peter and the circumcision party in the church in Jerusalem that Gentiles were welcomed by God into the kingdom.

The Ministry of Philip in Gaza-the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch: Acts 8:26-40.

This is another fascinating account that Luke builds into his narrative. The theological narrative of Luke's is that the gospel of Jesus was not restricted to Jews in Jerusalem, it will shortly be carried out beyond Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria by the Apostles, Peter and Paul, but this missional mindset was not something restricted to the Apostles! Disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem scatter out to new regions and take the Gospel message with them. Here we encounter Philip, who like Stephen was one of the seven deacons chosen by the church in Jerusalem to care for their needy widows, sent by an angel to go out of the city toward Gaza, a city near the Palestinian coast, about 50 miles West of Jerusalem. It had been occupied by Jews almost continuously since ancient times.

Luke explains that an *angel of the Lord* delivered a message to Philip from God, for this is what angels do! (ἄγγελος *aggelos*, a messenger, one sent to announce or proclaim.²)

Polhill explains that although this is an unusual expression, angels of God are also functionally angels of the Holy Spirit!

“An angel of the Lord came to Philip in a vision and called him to witness in a most unlikely place. The angel was God's mouthpiece and was the functional equivalent to the Spirit, who continued to lead Philip throughout the story (vv. 29,39).”³

We might ask what a Eunuch from Ethiopia is doing in this narrative! Polhill has some interesting information on this Eunuch and Ethiopia!

“Obeying the divine directive, Philip started out and on his way encountered an unusual prospect for witness. He was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, an official in charge of the queen's treasury (v. 27). The Ethiopia referred to is in all probability the ancient kingdom of Meroe, the ancient Nubian empire that lay south of Aswan between the first and sixth cataracts of the Nile. It is not to be confused with modern Ethiopia, or Abyssinia, which is in the hill country to the east of the upper Nile. The ancient kingdom of Meroe was a flourishing culture from the eighth century B.C. until the fourth century A.D. Referred to in the Old Testament as the

² Zodiates, ἄγγελος, *aggelos*.

³ Polhill, *Acts*, p. 222.

Kingdom of Cush, its population consisted of blacks. *This remote, advanced culture was an object of endless curiosity for the Greeks and Romans and represented for them the extreme limits of the civilized world.* Their kings were viewed as incarnations of the sun god and held a primarily ceremonial role. The real administration of the kingdom was in the hands of powerful queen mothers who had the title of “the Candace.” In modern terminology the Ethiopian whom Philip encountered would perhaps be called the *Minister of Finance* ... In the ancient world slaves were often castrated as boys in order to be used as keepers of the harem and the treasury. Eunuchs were found to be particularly trustworthy and loyal to their rulers. So widespread was the practice of placing them over the treasury that in time the term “eunuch” became a synonym for “treasurer” ... In the present passage it is likely that Philip's Ethiopian was an actual physical eunuch, however, since the terms “eunuch” and “official over the treasury” are both given. His physical status was then highly significant for the story. *He had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was in all probability, like Cornelius, one of those “God-fearing” Gentiles who believed in the God of Israel but had not become a proselyte, a full convert, to Judaism.* In his case, *as a eunuch, full membership in the congregation of Israel was not even possible because of his physical blemish* (cf. Deut 23:1). He could visit the temple in Jerusalem, as he had done; but he could never enter it.”⁴

Acts 8:26. *“But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert road.* ²⁷ *And he rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship* ²⁸ *and was returning; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.* ²⁹ *And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.”* ³⁰ *So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”* ³¹ *And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.* ³² *Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this:*

*“As a sheep led to the slaughter
or a lamb before its shearer is dumb,
so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken up from the earth.”*

³⁴ *And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”* ³⁵ *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus.* ³⁶ *And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?”* ³⁸ *And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.* ³⁹ *And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.* ⁴⁰ *But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing on he preached the gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesarea.”*

⁴ Polhill, *Acts* pp. 223-224.

Chapter 7: Acts 9. The conversion of Paul.

Bruce introduces the Paul storyline.

“The narrative now returns to Saul of Tarsus and his campaign of repression against the believers in Jerusalem, which received passing mention in 8:3. *He was not content with driving them from Jerusalem; they must be pursued and rooted out wherever they fled*, not only within the frontiers of the land of Israel but beyond them as well. “In the excess of my fury against them,” as he was later to tell the younger Agrippa, “I pursued them even to foreign cities” (26:11). The great paragons of religious zeal in Israel’s history—Phinehas, Elijah, and Mattathias (father of the Maccabees)—were prepared to go to extremes of violence against the enemies of God, and they were the exemplars on whom Saul modeled himself in his zeal against the church.”¹

Witherington adds in an extended introduction to Paul’s conversion that:

“Without question, the story of Saul’s “conversion” is one of the most important events, if not the most important event, that Luke records in Acts. It has contacts with what has gone before in that by the end of the account Saul is evangelizing in Damascus without the direction or permission of the Jerusalem church, as was also the case with Philip in Acts 8. Yet Acts 9 is even closer to Acts 10 in that both recount a crucial conversion narrative involving two visions and the overcoming of considerable obstacles, first in the case of the future primary missionary to the Gentiles, then in the case of a prominent Gentile, Cornelius. *The importance of Saul’s conversion in Luke’s mind is shown by the fact that Luke gives the story no less than three full treatments, from three slightly different angles, with the later narratives in Acts 22 and 26 supplementing the basic third-person account in Acts 9.6* It is in order, before we look at Acts 9 in some detail, to compare and contrast the three accounts by means of a chart and some analysis of it.

As a prelude to this exercise something should be said about how conversion was viewed in antiquity. As A. D. Nock demonstrated in his classic study, there is a considerable body of evidence that “conversion” to various of the “newer” Eastern religions (including various of the mystery religions, Judaism, and then later Christianity) was not unusual during the Empire, and even before. Conversion should be distinguished from “adhesion,” which involves the acceptance of new worship as a useful supplement and not as a substitute and does not involve the taking of a new way of life in place of the old. *By conversion we mean the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right.* On this showing, what happened to Saul on the Damascus road must surely be seen as more than a matter of mere adhesion. As Barrett puts it: “*This was a radical change of religious direction, and it was accompanied by as radical a change of action: the active persecutor became an even more active preacher and evangelist. If such radical changes do not amount to conversion it is hard to know what would do so.*”²

¹ Bruce, *Acts*, p. 180.

² Witherington, *Acts*, pp. 530-531.

Saul on the road to Damascus

¹ But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. ⁴ And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; ⁶ but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank."

The expression designating the Christian life as the Way has an interesting background.

Witherington observes:

"The phrase "the Way" occurs six times in Acts (9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), and it is worthy of note that the Qumran community also referred to itself using this phrase (cf. CD 20:18; and for the use of the phrase in the absolute, 1QS 9:17, 18; 10:21; and CD 1:13; 2:6).⁴² Acts 22:4 and 24:14 taken together suggest that the phrase in Acts refers not only to a type of behavior but also to those who exhibit it (cf. 22:4), for we hear of the Christian "sect" (αἵρεσις) known as the Way. It seems clear from texts like Acts 16:7 and 18:26 that Luke means "the way of salvation" when he uses this phrase, and these soteriological overtones appear to mean that Luke's usage goes beyond the "two ways" discussion we find in early Jewish and Christian literature, which has more of a paraenetic focus (cf. 1 Enoch 91:18; 2 Enoch 30:15; Did. 1-6; Barn. 18-21).³

Saul's experience on the road to Damascus was without question a parallel Pentecost experience. It was unquestionably similar in its divine intrusion. It took a miraculous outpouring and "communication" from God, *thunderous sounds, fire like tongues, people hearing voices speaking to them in their own dialects* to shake the many Jews gathered in Jerusalem.

Now all of a sudden without warning a bright light flashed about Saul, and he fell to the ground! A voice called out to him by name, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" On top of all this Saul had lost his sight. Anyone in their sane mind would have been stunned! We just have to assume this must be the case, but Saul recognized that something unusual had taken place and he responds to the voice, "*Who are you Lord?*"

Witherington addresses this sequence of events well, discussing also the profound effect this experience initially had on Paul:

"V. 3 suggests that it was near Damascus that Saul was suddenly accosted from above. Light or lightning is a regular feature of theophanies in the Bible (cf. Exod. 19:6; 2 Sam. 22:15), but here we are talking about a Christophany. Saul's response to this assault is that he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, according to v. 4, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*" This suggests a connection between the exalted Christ and his followers on earth of a sort similar to that spoken of in the gospel (cf. Matt. 25:40). More to the point, this seems very similar to Paul's own description of sharing in or filling up the sufferings of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:17; Phil. 3:10). Saul's response in v. 5 can be read one of three ways: (1) *κύριε* could be the polite term of respect, equivalent to our "sir"; in favor of this is that Saul does not know whom he is addressing; (2) *κύριε* could have overtones of divinity or at least a

³ Witherington, *Acts*, pp. 547-548.

supernatural being (“Sir”⁴) (whom Saul addresses as lord), but Saul simply does not know who it is; (3) κυριε could mean Lord, in the Christian sense, in which case it is anachronistic at this point since Saul doesn’t yet really know the identity of the one who has accosted him. Against this last rendering is the fact that elsewhere Luke is quite careful in how he uses the term “Lord” in the dialogue portions of his two-volume work, avoiding anachronism. Either (1) or (2) is possible, but since Saul knows he is involved in some sort of divine-human encounter (2) *is perhaps most likely*. Vv. 5b-6 provide the direct response, which indicates that the speaker is Jesus, who commands Saul to get up and continue on his journey into Damascus, where he will be told what to do. V. 7 is added to make clear that this was an objective experience. Those traveling with Saul knew something significant was happening, for they remained speechless, hearing the sound of the voice but seeing no one. Vv. 8-9 indicate Saul arose from the ground, and at this point he also saw no one, because he had been blinded by the light. He was led into Damascus by the hand, and for three days he neither ate nor drank.”⁵

Jesus’ response to Saul was, “rise and enter the city (Damascus), and you will be told what you are to do.”

Saul in Damascus

“¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” ¹³ But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name.” ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may **regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**” ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, ¹⁹ and took food and was strengthened.”

Saul preaches in the Synagogue in Damascus

“For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰ And **in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, “He is the Son of God.”** ²¹ And all who heard him were amazed, and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests.” ²² But **Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.**”

⁴ Ian Fair, κυριε, a word more flexible than our “Lord”, with three progressive interpretations, “sir, Sir, Lord.” Most likely Luke intended the “Sir” as a term of *high respect* for such a *divine like experience*, a *theophany* experience. Saul soon learned that it was a *messianic experience* with Jesus, for Jesus answered him, “I am Jesus, who you are persecuting”.

⁵ Witherington, *Acts*, p. 545-549.

Saul escapes from the Jews in Damascus

“²³ When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night, to kill him; ²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket.”

Note the social incongruity of Saul’s arrival and departure in and out of Damascus. He arrives from Jerusalem for Damascus with authority and a support entourage from the Sanhedrin; he departs from Damascus in a basket with authority from Jesus!

Saul arrives in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Tarsus

“²⁶ And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, ²⁹ preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. ³⁰ And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹ So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied.”

Chapter 8: The ministry of Peter. Acts 9:32-43, Acts 10, 11, 12: The conversion of Cornelius.

Acts 9:32-43: Peter in Lydda and Joppa.

Acts 9:32-43. “*Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints that lived at Lydda.*”³³ *There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years and was paralyzed.* ³⁴ *And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose.* ³⁵ *And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.*

³⁶ *Now there was at Joppa a disciple named Tabitha* (Aramaic, meaning Aramaic name meaning “gazelle”; the name in Greek is Dorcas. Providing clothing was part of Tabitha’s ongoing ministry. It is thus quite possible that we are meant to see Tabitha as an important patroness or benefactor for the Christian community in Joppa. If this is true, the loss of Tabitha, and perhaps her home and material support, could have been a serious blow not only to the widows but to the Joppa Christian community in general.¹) *which means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.* ³⁷ *In those days she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.* ³⁸ *Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him entreating him, “Please come to us without delay.”* ³⁹ *So Peter rose and went with them. And when he had come, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing tunics and other garments which Dorcas made while she was with them.* ⁴⁰ *But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed; then turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, rise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.* ⁴¹ *And he gave her his hand and lifted her up. Then calling the saints and widows he presented her alive.* ⁴² *And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.* ⁴³ *And he stayed in Joppa* (a natural harbor on the Mediterranean coast between Egypt and the OT town of Acco) *for many days with one Simon, a tanner.”*

Witherington observes an interesting point in Luke’s narrative in Acts 9:43. It serves as a link or introduction to Peter’s experience with *Cornelius*, a Roman centurion in Caesarea.

Simon was a *tanner*, a dealer and worker with animal hides which was considered unclean according to the Jewish custom of religious cleanliness.

“This verse would normally be the closure to a miracle story, but Luke has added v. 43 to link the story with what follows in Acts 10. We are told that Peter remained for some days in Joppa with a certain Simon the tanner. This is interesting on several scores ... tanners, because of their contact with the hides of dead animals, were considered unclean by more scrupulous Jews. In fact the Mishnah and Talmud suggest they were despised because of their ongoing uncleanness caused by their trade, not to mention the bad smell associated with the tanning process (cf. m. Ketub. 7:10; b. Pesah 65a; Qidd. 82b). This is worth pointing out in view of the story that follows in Acts 10 about unclean human beings. Peter, not known for his consistency (cf. Galatians 2), had no problems of conscience (apparently) about staying with an unclean Jew, but balked at unclean Gentiles!”²

¹ Witherington, *Acts*, p. 575.

² Witherington, *Acts*, p. 576-577.

Acts 10, 11: The Conversion of Cornelius.

In many ways this series of events is crucial to the narrative Luke was presenting in Luke/Acts. Luke was emphasizing that the *missional eschatological kingdom* message was not simply for Jews or half-Jews like the Samaritans

Luke introduces the narrative with some fascinating events of “*divine intervention*”; *angelic messengers* to Peter, and the action of the Holy Spirit with Cornelius and his household.

Chapter 10 is easy reading as Luke unfolds this fascinating narrative. Five points stand out:

First, Jesus had promised Peter that he would open the doors of the kingdom. Obviously the implication was that he would do this through preaching, witnessing, to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. As one of the Apostles, this commission was for Peter as well as the others to go beyond the city limits of Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth—a global *missional eschatological kingdom* for all nations.

Second, Peter, a good disciple was still a Jew and carried with him some of the kosher prejudices all Jews had for association with Gentiles. Jesus was asking Peter to go and disciple a Roman Gentile, breaking all of the Jewish taboos regarding contact with Gentiles. Peter was aware of Jesus’ own examples, but it was still difficult for him to grasp the extent of this kingdom. The vision of the sheet from heaven and eating unclean animals visualized and dramatized Peter’s apprehension.

Third, It to an angel appearing to Cornelius, a vision from God, and the Holy Spirit to get Peter to listen to what Jesus was instructing.

Fourth, Cornelius was a generous Roman who Luke refers to as a devout God fearing man who spent much time in prayer. God fearing men were a class of Gentiles who respected the Law of Moses who were associated with the synagogue without being proselytized.

Fifth, Luke’s use of the Greek term φοβούμενος, *phomoumenos*, to describe Cornelius as a Godfearer is informative. Questions arise for some as to whether Luke was using this as a technical term which had been used to describe non-Jews who worshipped God. Witherington, among others, adopts this view.

“It is necessary to start with the relevant data from the LXX. There are at least five important instances in the LXX where we hear about οι φοβουμενοι (2 Chron. 5:6; Pss. 115:9-11; 118:2-4; 135:19-20; Mal. 3:16). Even more striking is the fact that in the Psalms and Malachi references we have the phrase οι φοβουμενοι τον κυριον. In the Psalms texts it is possible but not probable that the reference is to non-Jews, while in the reference in Malachi the phrase seems to be used in a very general way to refer to those Jews who are pious, righteous, and loyal to the true God. Especially noteworthy is 2 Chron. 5:6, where the LXX differs from the Hebrew text in a crucial regard. The Hebrew text has no mention of “those fearing,” but in the LXX not only are they mentioned but they seem to be distinguished from the Israelites, for the verse in question reads: *πασα συναγωγη Ισραηλ και οι φοβουμενοι*. As A. Overman says, *these data alone are enough to show that Luke did not invent the phrase “those who fear the Lord”* (or as in Acts, “God”). In fact a plausible explanation can be given for why he changed the term from “Lord” to “God” in the key phrase, namely, that for Luke Christ was the Lord.”³

³ Witherington, *Acts*, pp. 585-586.

Polhill, like Witherington, Bock, Marshall, and others feel that Luke's use of the term as a technical allusion to devout Gentiles as phoboumenoi was legitimate.

"Cornelius already had some preparation for the gospel he was soon to hear. Luke described him as "devout" (eusebs) and "God-fearing" (phoboumenos ton theon) There is some question about whether the term "God-fearer" should be seen as a technical term designating a special class of Gentile adherents to the Jewish synagogue who had not taken the full step of becoming proselytes to Judaism.⁷¹ Cornelius, however, was clearly a Gentile who worshiped God and supported the Jewish religious community. In fact, he was described as performing two of the three main acts of Jewish piety—prayer and almsgiving. (Only fasting is not mentioned.) In short, his devotion to God put him well on the way, preparing him for receiving the gospel and for the full inclusion in God's people that he could not have found in the synagogue."⁴

Acts 10:1-48. Since this is a long text, to save space I will insert exegetical comments at appropriate point withing the text.

"At Caesarea (a Roman provincial capital) there was a man named Cornelius, (most likely a wealthy Freedman by citizenship) a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man (εὐσεβῆς, a worshipper of God) who feared God (phoboumenoi, Godfearer) with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day (3:00 pm) he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ And he stared at him in terror, (although Cornelius was a devout man, he hardly expected God to speak to him) and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. (which indicated that God hears the prayers of non-Jews and non-Christians!) ⁵ And now send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter; ⁶ he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those that waited on him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, Peter went up on the housetop (Jews often used their flat housetop for a quiet place of prayer) to pray, about the sixth hour (noon, not any special hour of prayer). ¹⁰ And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air (all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds would include animals forbidden in the Jewish kosher food supply). ¹³ And there came a voice to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, (one wonders whether the figure three is of Petrine denial significance) and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

¹⁷ Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate ¹⁸ and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men (that figure three again) are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down, and accompany them without hesitation; for I have sent them." ²¹ And Peter went down to the men and said, "I

⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, p. 252.

am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?" ²² And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house, and to hear what you have to say." ²³ So he (Peter) called them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴ And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his kinsmen and close friends. ²⁵ When Peter entered, **Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.** ²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, "**Stand up; I too am a man.**" ²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered; ²⁸ and he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit any one of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean." ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

³⁰ And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house; and behold, a man stood before me in bright apparel, ³¹ saying, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.

³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the seaside.' ³³ So **I sent to you at once**, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

³⁴ And Peter opened his mouth and said: "**Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality,** ³⁵ **but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.**

³⁶ You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷ the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: ³⁸ **how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power** (presumably meaning the Holy Spirit at his baptism by John, Matt 3:16); how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ And we are witnesses (they preached what they had seen in Jesus' ministry) to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ **but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest** (Jesus' resurrected body and appearances); ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

⁴⁴ **While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.** ⁴⁵ **And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles** ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God (a Pentecost experience). Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ "**Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?**" ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days."

Acts 11:1-18. Peter's defense before the circumcision party of Christians in Jerusalem of his baptism of Cornelius.

In this interesting narrative note the emphasis on the angle and *the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, as at the beginning*, obviously Pentecost and Acts 2).

Luke was progressively unfolding the theological nature of his Gospel of Luke—Book of Acts narrative.

We need to remember much of the background to this discussion regarding the spread of the *missional nature of the eschatological kingdom from Jerusalem (Israel) out to the end of the earth* (possibly Rome and the Gentile world) Acts 1:6-8).

¹ Now the apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, ³ saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” ⁴ But Peter began and explained to them in order: ⁵ “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision (divine intervention), something descending, like a great sheet, let down from heaven (obviously of divine origin) by four corners; and it came down to me. ⁶ Looking at it closely I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. ⁷ And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸ But I said, ‘No, Lord; (Peter is fully aware of the origin of this vision. It was as close to a theophany as possible!) for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹ But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ ¹⁰ This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ At that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brethren also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³ And he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house (again a reference to the divine nature of this experience, for Cornelius, Peter, and the *circumcision party*!) and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ ¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. (The Pentecost Acts 2 experience) ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord (divine instruction), how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them (salvation and the Holy Spirit) as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” ¹⁸ When they heard this they (the *circumcision party*) were silenced (they dropped their objection to Peter’s and God’s activity). And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life.”

Acts 11:19-30, Barnabas in Antioch.

Polhill provides a helpful discussion in demonstrating another geographic and ethnic spread of the kingdom message. He introduces a theme of Hellenists in Antioch.

“Acts 11:19 refers to the “Hellenists” and looks back to 8:1, repeating the verb “scattered” and reminding the reader of these Greek-speaking Jewish Christian associates of Stephen who had to flee Jerusalem as a result of his martyrdom [into the Greek speaking diaspora] ... The principal cities were Tyre, Sidon, and Zarephath. *Others began work on the island of Cyprus*, the easternmost island of the Mediterranean and some 100 miles off the Syrian coast. Paul and *Barnabas would later continue the witness on Cyprus* (13:4-12). *Those who traveled farthest north arrived in Antioch.* These coastal towns were all heavily Hellenized, and the Greek language would have been dominant. *It was thus an appropriate area for witness by*

these Greek-speaking Hellenist Christians. Quite naturally, they witnessed at first to Jews only, probably to fellow Greek-speaking Jews, as Stephen had done in the Diaspora synagogues of Jerusalem (6:9). *But at Antioch they took a bolder step and began preaching to Gentiles as well. ... Barnabas, who himself was a native of Cyprus, would later become active in this witness (cf. 4:36). Paul was a Diaspora Jew from Cilicia (cf. 22:3).* It was only natural that a concern for evangelization of the Gentiles should be especially felt by the Jewish Christians of the dispersion who had grown up in a Gentile environment *and had a more worldwide perspective than the more provincial Palestinian Christians ...* They did not preach Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) but rather as *Lord, a title far more familiar to Gentiles than Jewish messianic ideas.* Their witness bore great results; a large number of the Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord (v. 21) because “the hand” of the Lord, that is, his power and Spirit, was with them, just as it had been so dramatically in the conversion of Cornelius.”⁵

“Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews.”²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord.²² News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose;²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large company was added to the Lord.²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul;²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.

²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world; and this took place in the days of Claudius.²⁹ And the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea;³⁰ and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.”

Luke provides an informative missional conclusion to the arrival of the kingdom message in Antioch.

Luke explains an interesting shape in the narrative.

*The kingdom message travelled to Antioch by the power of the Holy Spirit and two diaspora Jewish disciples, **Barnabas and Paul.***

*Now kingdom benevolence and concern for the Christians in Jerusalem are returned to Jerusalem by the same two diaspora Jews from Antioch, **Barnabas and Paul.***

⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, pp. 270-271.

Acts 12: Herod, James, and Peter: A Lukan narrative interlude.

Herod exerts his power and determines to stamp out the Christian movement.

¹ *About that time Herod the king laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church.* ² *He killed **James** the brother of John with the sword;* ³ *and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.* ⁴ *And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.* ⁵ *So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.*

Peter is delivered from prison by an angel of the Lord

⁶ *The very night when Herod was about to bring him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison;* ⁷ *and behold, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly."* *And the chains fell off his hands.* ⁸ *And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals."* *And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your mantle around you and follow me."* ⁹ *And he went out and followed him; he did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.* ¹⁰ *When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened to them of its own accord, and they went out and passed on through one street; and immediately the angel left him.* ¹¹ *And Peter came to himself, and said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."*

¹² *When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.* ¹³ *And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a maid named Rhoda came to answer.* ¹⁴ *Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and told that Peter was standing at the gate.* ¹⁵ *They said to her, "You are mad." But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel!"* ¹⁶ *But Peter continued knocking; and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.* ¹⁷ *But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.* *And he said, "Tell this to James and to the brethren."* *Then he departed and went to another place.*

Peter escapes Herod again and goes to Caesarea

¹⁸ *Now when day came, there was no small stir among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.* ¹⁹ *And when Herod had sought for him and could not find him, he examined the sentries [Herod scourged the sentries and sentenced them to death for letting Peter escape] and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he [Peter] went down from Judea to Caesarea, [where Cornelius lived] and remained there.*

The citizens of Tyre and Sidon appeal to Herod for assistance.

²⁰ *Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and they came to him in a body, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.* ²¹ *On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and made an oration to them.* ²² *And the people*

shouted, "The voice of a god, and not of man!"²³ **Immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory; and he was eaten by worms and died.**

²⁴ **But the word of God grew and multiplied** [The expression *the word multiplied* meant the preaching of the gospel].²⁵ **And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, bringing with them John whose other name was Mark.**

Chapter 9: Acts 13:1-15:35. The First Mission Journey, ca. CE 46-48

Up to this point Luke had primarily developed the successful spread of the missional kingdom message from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and into the immediate diaspora region of northern Judea; Sidon and Tyre, and Syria; Damascus and Antioch, largely among Hellenistic Jews.

In Acts 12 and the remainder of Acts Luke will move further North among diaspora Jews and Greek speaking Gentiles in three major *missional kingdom church planting* journeys.

Paul's First Mission Journey, ca CE 46-48.

It is significant that the concept or plan to engage in a mission effort was not the idea of Paul and Barnabas. The following text sets this mission effort withing the theological purpose of Luke, demonstrating that the whole evangelistic mission plan Luke was presenting to Theophiles was an integral part of God's eternal purpose revealed in his soteriological work in the history of Israel and culminating in Jesus' great missional commission of Acts 1:6-9.

Darrell Bock has an informative introduction to Paul's and Barnabas' first missionary journey:

“This subsection finds Barnabas and Paul on the move, primarily to Cyprus and Galatia. They visit Cyprus (13:4–12), Pisidian Antioch (13:13–52), Iconium (14:1–7), Lystra (14:8–20), and then return to Syria (14:21–28; Schnabel 2004: 1074–1124). The journey covers about 895 miles¹ (Schnabel 2004: 1076). *The account of the visit to Pisidian Antioch includes an example of how Paul preaches in the synagogue, and Lystra gives a sense of what preaching in a Gentile-dominated context is like.* Themes arising from a Gentile context will be developed in more detail in Acts 17 at Athens. This is a “journey” in the real sense, as the missionaries move from place to place very quickly (Marshall 1980: 214). Schnabel (2004: 1076) estimates that they cover about 15 miles a day by foot. Later “journeys” involve longer stays in specific places to solidify the results. The account describes the first step in “missions” as the called-out and divinely directed activity of a group organized for this specific goal. This contrasts with the less-systematic work of individuals, which we have seen earlier. The church is becoming more organized and intentional about outreach.”²

The Holy Spirit and church prophets and teachers in Antioch commission Paul and Barnabas for their first extensive mission journey.

Acts 13:1-4. ¹ *Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Mana-en a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.* ² *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”* ³ *Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

⁴ *So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus.”*

¹ Barbes, Professor at Freed Hardeman University in Arkansas has estimated that including the journey by ship the trip covered over 1,200 miles. Cf. www.biblecharts.org. His extensive notes are a valuable library of Bible information.

² Bock, *Acts*, p. 670.

The Antioch Church.

Polhill has some interesting information regarding the Antioch church.

“The Antioch church was the first Christian congregation to witness to the Gentiles in its own city (11:19f.). It then became the first to send missionaries forth into the larger world. Judging from Acts, Antioch was the first church to catch the vision of “foreign missions.” The leadership is described in unique terms as comprised of “prophets and teachers” (v. 1), and five names are listed. Although it is possible grammatically to construe the first three as being prophets and the last two as teachers, it probably is best to see all five as comprising the congregational leadership as prophet-teachers. Paul and Barnabas already had been described as “teaching” the congregation (11:26), and the additional designation of “prophet” would emphasize the inspired, Spirit-led dimension to their teaching. In Paul's epistles the role of “prophet” is regularly depicted as a gift of the Spirit (cf. Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:10,28; 14:1-5,24-25,31; Eph 4:11). The gift of prophecy can be that of foretelling future events, as with Agabus (Acts 11:27). More often it is that of speaking an inspired word from God for the edification and direction of the community. In this latter sense the gift is exemplified in the present passage, as these “prophetic teachers” were inspired by the Spirit to set Paul and Barnabas apart for a special mission (v. 2). One is intrigued by the list of five names. Those of Barnabas and Paul are quite familiar, and they become even more so in the following narrative. Of the other three, nothing else is known for certain.”³

On this evangelistic journey Paul took with him two fellow evangelists, Barnabas and John Mark [according to Col 4:10 we learn that Mark was a young relative/cousin of Barnabas].

Whenever you see the Holy Spirit engaged in kingdom activity you can safely assume that the mission has global eschatological missional kingdom implications reflecting on God's overall eternal kingdom as per Dan 7 and Jesus' kingdom commission.

Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark began their mission in Antioch in Syria, travelled to Cyprus, Salamis and Paphos; then into Perga in Pamphylia; then into Southern Galatia, that is the Roman Province of Galatia, to Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe; then back again to Antioch.

³ Polhill, *Acts*, pp. 288-289.



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Acts 13:5, At Cyprus and Salamis.

*“When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. [In other words, they were witnessing to Jesus by teaching about Jesus including his death and resurrection.] And they had John to assist them. ⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. ⁷ He was with **the proconsul, Sergius Paulus**, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, who is also called Paul, **filled with the Holy Spirit**, looked intently at him ¹⁰ 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?” ¹¹ And now, behold, **the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.**” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, **for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.**”*

Points of interest in this paragraph of Paul’s and Barnabas’ evangelistic activity in Salamis.

First, their mission was at the commission of the Holy Spirit through Holy Spirit inspired prophets and teachers. It is profoundly important to remember the role of the Holy Spirit’s presence and activity in the missional commission of Jesus’ eschatological kingdom. The kingdom was for all people, not simply Israel and Jerusalem.

Note that we are moving away from Jerusalem “with the Holy Spirit” into the diaspora and Antioch as the leading missional church and the global eschatological kingdom of the day.

Second, Paul and Barnabas began their ministry first with the Jews in the Synagogue, somewhat inline with what Paul wrote in *Rom 1:16, 17*, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*” ¹⁷ *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.”*

Third, note that the mission activity was *preaching and teaching the message of Jesus*, the word of the Lord, witnessing to Jesus as per Acts 1:6-8, “*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*”⁷ *He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.*”⁸ *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”*

Witnessing in Jesus’ commission is not doing benevolent social work, which is what Christian should do, but *witnessing is evangelistic missional work spreading the eschatological kingdom message by teaching, preaching, and planting new churches.*

Fourth, Paul does not claim credit for any of the amazing works he performs, he gives all credit to the Lord and the Holy Spirit.

Fifth, although the *proconsul, Sergius Paulus must have been impressed by the power of the Holy Spirit working through Paul*, Luke explains that “*the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*”

Sixth, this pattern of beginning where there would be people interested in God, in the Synagogue, *preaching and teaching the message of Jesus accompanied by Holy Spirit empowered miracles*, became the standard *modem operandum* for Paul’s and Barnabas’ mission activity.

Acts 13: 13-52. Paul and Barnabas sail out of Paphos in Cyprus, to Perga in Pamphylia, and on to Pisidian Antioch in Southern Galatia.

The content of Paul’s sermon in the Pisidian Antioch Synagogue was a prototype of homily that became *Paul’s primary evangelistic message*. Paul, like Stephen at his martyrdom, recounted God’s faithful and patient working with the Jews *until they ultimately crucified Jesus on the cross. Paul witnessed (preached and taught) that God had raised Jesus from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the disciples on the day of Pentecost, ushering in the eschatological kingdom of God.*

Polhill introduces this lengthy pericope with some helpful comments to this series of events in Pisidian Antioch:

“As was their custom, Paul and Barnabas went first to the synagogue in the city. The Diaspora synagogue was more than a house of worship. It was the hub of the Jewish community—house of worship, center of education, judicial center, social gathering place, general “civic center” for the Jewish community. If one wished to make contact with the Jewish community in a town, the synagogue was the natural place to begin. It was also the natural place to begin if one wished to share the Christian message. Jesus was the expected Jewish Messiah, and it was natural to share him with “the Jews first.” There had perhaps been an arrangement already for Paul to speak that day, as the invitation from the rulers of the synagogue would suggest (v. 15b). Usually a synagogue had only one ruling elder, but evidence suggests that the title was retained by those who formerly served as well as sometimes being conferred strictly as an honor, which explains why it occurs sometimes in the plural, as here. The ruling elder was responsible for worship, appointing lay members to lead in prayer and read the Scripture lessons. He also would invite suitable persons to deliver the homily on the day’s Scripture when such were available. The form of the service as depicted in v. 15 is exactly that known from rabbinic sources, the sermon following the readings from the Law and the Prophets. There seem to have been a number of styles of

homilies, but one that linked the Torah and prophetic texts together was considered ideal. One is tempted to try to derive the texts on which Paul expounded in Pisidian Antioch...

The keynote of Paul's sketch of Old Testament history was God's mercy to Israel, his acts of lovingkindness. This is particularly to be seen in the verbs he used to depict each stage of history. God "chose" the patriarchs (eklegomai, "elected," v. 17). He "made the people prosper" in Egypt ("exalted," v. 17). He "led them out" ... of Egypt. He "endured their conduct," or "cared for them in the wilderness" (v. 18). He "gave the land of Canaan to them as an inheritance" (kataklronome, v. 19). He "gave" them judges (v. 20). Upon their request he "gave" them Saul as king (v. 21).³⁰ Finally, he "made" (literally "raised up,") David as king (v. 22)."⁴

Acts 13:13-52. *"Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem."¹⁴ but they passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia. And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.¹⁵ After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it."¹⁶ So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:*

"Men of Israel, and you that fear God, listen.¹⁷ The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it.¹⁸ And for about forty years he bore with them in the wilderness.¹⁹ And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years.²⁰ And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.²¹ Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.²² And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king; of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.'²³ Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.²⁴ Before his coming John had preached a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.²⁵ And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

²⁶ *"Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation.²⁷ For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him.²⁸ Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death, yet they asked Pilate to have him killed.²⁹ And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb.³⁰ But God raised him from the dead;³¹ and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.³² And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers,³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm,*

*'Thou art my Son,
today I have begotten thee.'*

³⁴ *And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way,*

'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'

⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, pp. 297-300.

³⁵ Therefore he says also in another psalm,

‘Thou wilt not let thy Holy One see corruption.’

³⁶ For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption; ³⁷ but he whom God raised up saw no corruption. ³⁸ **Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,** ³⁹ and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰ Beware, therefore, lest there come upon you what is said in the prophets:

⁴¹ ‘Behold, you scoffers, and wonder, and perish;

for I do a deed in your days,

a deed you will never believe, if one declares it to you.’ ”

⁴² **As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next sabbath.** ⁴³ And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ The next sabbath almost **the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God.**

⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. ⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so **the Lord has commanded us, saying,**

‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles,

that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.’ ”

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region.

⁵⁰ But **the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.**

⁵¹ But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

The results of the visit to Pisidian Antioch

As anticipated, Paul and Barnabas and their disciples started their mission with the Synagogue where Paul was invited to preach. Paul recounted God’s faithful deliverance of Israel from Egypt and his patient saving activity with Israel in the wilderness and Canaan. Paul was invited to return the next Sabbath to preach and teach again.

The reaction to Paul’s and Barnabas’ preaching of God’s “universal” kingdom message was as anticipated; many devout Jews and Gentiles responded well, believing the message of a crucified and resurrected savior as prophesied in the Old Testament Prophets.

Luke does not lay out the same proscriptio for salvation as he had in Acts 2:38 and Acts 10:47, 48. By this time it was taken for granted that those who believed in the death and resurrection repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Luke picks up this theme again in Acts 16 where Lydia and the Philippian jailor believed and were baptized,

On the other hand, deeply entrenched Jews refused the universal kingdom message and set about persecuting Paul and Barnabas. In keeping with the tradition phrase of leaving people who

refused the divine message, Luke adopts the traditional phrase, they shook the dust of the Jews off their feet and went to Iconium. Bock expresses this well:

“Paul and Barnabas leave the city, shaking the dust from their feet, a symbolic act against those who oppose them (Mark 6:11 = Luke 9:5; Luke 10:10–11 = Matt. 10:14). This custom is a way of signaling that responsibility for an action is with the people or town (Str-B 1:571; Cadbury 1933). It portrays leaving defilement behind and moving on. In other words, no trace of their presence is left, even on their feet. This response was also commanded by Jesus in Luke 9:5. Other texts where Paul notes the judgment for rejection are Acts 18:6; 28:25–27.”⁵

Acts 14:1-7. Paul and Barnabas move on to Iconium.

Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were cities in Southern Galatia in the region of *Lycaonia*. Some discussion is engaged in commentaries of Paul’s *Epistle to the Galatians* as to whether the mention of Galatia was to a geographic or a Roman political region. Here the location would be geographic, not a reference to the Roman Province of Galatia which spread much further north-ward.

Bock describes this interesting move to Iconium in some detail:

“Iconium was in the central part of what is now Konya province in Turkey, a rugged, somewhat isolated location on a plateau in the steppes of central Turkey. *It was a ruling center in the region ... Strabo ... describes the region aptly as cold, bare of trees, with scarcity of water, while the town is well settled. Le Cornu and Shulam ... note that little else is known about the Jewish community there. Barnabas and Paul go to the synagogue, after their pattern ... This is a reference to their custom of initially going to the synagogue (Barrett 1994: 667). So they begin with the Jews, and they meet with some success. A large multitude ... of both Jews and Greeks believe ... Here the response is described in terms of belief, not repentance or turning ... The Greeks here are likely God-fearers and/or proselytes ... In contrast stands the reaction of unbelieving Jews. The expression οἱ ἀπειθήσαντες (hoi apeithēsantes) can mean “the disobedient.” In the LXX, it is often used of rebellion (Lev. 26:15; Num. 11:20; Deut. 1:26; 9:7, 23–24; 32:51; Isa. 30:12; Johnson 1992: 246). ... So lack of belief is the point, which is disobedience to God. They work against the effort of Paul and Barnabas to reach Gentiles.”⁶*

Acts 14:1-7. “Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue, and so spoke that a great company believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. ² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. ³ **So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.** ⁴ But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. ⁵ When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to molest them and to stone them, ⁶ **they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country;** ⁷ and there they preached the gospel.

⁵ Bock, *Acts*, p. 714.

⁶ Bock, *Acts*, pp. 719-720.

Acts 14:8-18. The mission to Lystra.

Paul's and Barnabas' initial success in Lystra was positive, demonstrating the power of God. However, this led to the citizens supposing Paul and Barnabas were divinities from their pantheon of gods, Zeus and Hermes.

Unfortunately an opposition of Jews and Greeks was gathering with a mob from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium **seizing Paul, stoning him, and believing him to be dead, left him.** But, Ch 14: 20, *disciples gathered about him, at which he rose up and entered the city; and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.*

⁸ *Now at Lystra there was a man sitting, who could not use his feet; he was a cripple from birth, who had never walked.* ⁹ *He listened to Paul speaking; and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well,* ¹⁰ *said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and walked.* ¹¹ *And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"* ¹² ***Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, because he was the chief speaker, they called Hermes.*** ¹³ *And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the people.* ¹⁴ *But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments (Jewish signs of rejecting blasphemy) and rushed out among the multitude, crying,* ¹⁵ *"Men, why are you doing this? We also are men, of like nature with you, and bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.* ¹⁶ *In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways;* ¹⁷ *yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."* ¹⁸ *With these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.*

¹⁹ *But Jews came there from (Pisidian) Antioch and Iconium; and having persuaded the people, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.*

Acts 14:20-23. Paul and Barnabas leave Lystra for Derbe, and then begin a return journey for Antioch through Lystra, Iconium.

Brock sums up this closing section to the first missionary journey:

"In the conclusion of the first journey, Paul and Barnabas return to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch, *encouraging these new communities to continue in the faith and warning them that tribulation may well come in the future* (vv. 21–22). *They also appoint elders for these communities, appointments that come with prayer and fasting* (v. 23). They return to Pisidia, Pamphylia, and Perga before returning to Antioch (vv. 24–26).

Here they report on *what the Lord has done, especially in opening a door among the Gentiles.* They remain in Antioch for a time (vv. 27–28). *Now that Gentiles are entering the church in large numbers, how they should do so becomes an important issue. This will be the topic of Acts 15;* the first journey is a bridge to that section of the book. In form, the account is a simple summary narrative with little detail about what takes place at each stop ... Paul and Barnabas remain concerned about and in touch with these (mostly Gentile) communities after their ministry to them. *Their primary goal is to ensure that solid leadership is put in place and that all understand what the walk of faith entails.* (Although Bock and others do not use the following missiological terms, it is vital to Luke's eschatological kingdom theology; In missiological terms this is what missional kingdom church planting is; planting self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating churches.) This is shown in part by the missionary team's choosing not to take the shortest route home, which would have been to continue east from Derbe through Tarsus. *Instead, they purposely*

retrace their steps (Witherington 1998: 428). Follow-up and nurture are a priority for them (Polhill 1992: 318).⁷

Acts 14:20. *But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city; and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.* ²¹ **When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to (Pisidian) Antioch,** ²² *strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.* (Luke's point in making this statement was that becoming a disciple of Jesus and the kingdom comes at a cost to life, Matt 10:16-23⁸.) ²³ **And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.**

This is the first occasion we read in Acts of elders *being appointed* a church. Prior to this we read of elders in the Jewish Sanhedrin and elders in the church in Syrian Antioch, the home church of Paul's and Barnabas' mission, but for the first time here we read of *elders being appointed in the church*.

In a discussion that is of particular interest to churches of Christ who have a strong position on congregational leadership by elders, sometimes referred to in the New Testament as bishops or shepherds, I refer the interested student to my two books on *Leadership in the Kingdom*⁹ where I discuss at length the role of elders and bishops in the life of congregations.

A point of interest regarding congregation governance, as the congregation matures the Apostles "retire" from congregation supervision and Elders/Bishops were chosen from within a congregation to provide leadership for that congregation, Elder/Bishops in the first century Apostolic churches were responsible only for their own flock or congregations. No cross-congregational oversight was provided by Elders or Bishops.

In the Lukan tradition the tendency was to refer to these congregation leader as elders, whereas in the Pauline churches the terms *elder (presbúteros, elder, a person of experience, wisdom, and dignity)* and *bishop (episkopos, supervisor, manager)* were used interchangeably for the same leaders emphasizing different aspects of their leadership. In addition, the term (*poimén*) shepherd was also used to define these persons with an emphasis on their shepherding, feeding, and protecting service.¹⁰

In keeping with the above comments on the selection of elders, note Bock's comments on χειροτονέω, cheirotoneō below:

"Paul and Barnabas appoint leadership for the churches and leave elders behind *to oversee the congregations*. They do so in each church, as the preposition κατά (kata) is used distributively (BDAG 512 §B.1.d). The verb χειροτονέω (cheirotoneō) means "*select [someone] by raising hands*" but came to mean "choose, elect, or appoint," which is the meaning here (2 Cor. 8:19 is the only other NT occurrence, where Titus is appointed;

⁷ Bock, *Acts*, pp. 736-737.

⁸ Matt 10:16-23, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

¹⁷ Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹ Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes.

⁹ Ian A. Fair, *Leadership in the Kingdom*, ACU Press, 1996; *Leadership in the Kingdom*, Second Edition, 2008.

¹⁰ For a discussion of these terms and ministry refer to my two *Leadership in the Kingdom* books.

Josephus, Ant. 6.13.9 §312; Philo, Rewards 9 §54; EDNT 3:464–65). Paul notes such leadership in his letters.² Thus it is an exaggeration to suggest that these positions are a reflection of the post-Pauline church, although Paul does not use the term “elders” outside the Pastoral Epistles (see the discussion of Acts 11:27–30). Perhaps Luke applies a later, equivalent term to this function, but the role is surely likely to have already been present, based upon the analogy with Jewish leadership structures (Marshall 1980: 241). Later churches appointed their own elders (Ign. Phld. 10.1; Smyrn. 11.2; Pol. Phil. 7.2). There was more than one elder per community. Elders are mentioned in Acts 11:30 as those who receive the offering to relieve the famine in Jerusalem. Up to that point in Acts, “elders” referred to Jewish town leaders. Here we have the appointment of elders to lead a Christian community. This is the first mention that Paul and Barnabas appoint such leaders as they establish new believing communities. They commit them—and probably the church as a whole—to the Lord’s service. The verb παρατίθημι (paratithēmi) means “set [someone] before another” (in Acts this verb appears four times: 14:23; 16:34; 17:3; 20:32). It is into the Lord’s care and safekeeping that Barnabas and Paul place these leaders in a context of prayer and fasting (BAGD 623 §2bβ; BDAG 772 §3b). This is not a mere administrative exercise but a spiritual one, with prayer and fasting (13:2–3). Παρατίθημι also describes Paul’s action regarding the Ephesian elders in 20:32 (the other occurrences of the verb in Acts are non-theological: to bring someone to a house [16:34] and to set forth the content of something [17:3]). The faith of the community is expressed with a pluperfect (πεπιστεύκεισαν, pepisteukeisan, *had believed*) in verse 23, making a point about *the ongoing nature of faith*.¹¹

Bock also perceptively discusses the suffering persecution experienced *related to “membership”*: *in the kingdom*, having in mind *the final end or duration of the eschatological kingdom*, commenting on the fact that although Luke had up to this been discussing the *already present eschatological kingdom*, *in this instance Luke has in mind the final end experiencing of the kingdom when Jesus returns at the end of the age for the final judgment*.

“Next they bravely go back through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. There they encourage the believers in three ways: encouraging or strengthening their souls (Acts 15:32, 41; 18:23), exhorting their continued faith (11:23; 13:43), and warning them about continuing tribulation. Souls can be induced to evil (14:2), and so they need strengthening (Schweizer, TDNT 9:640). This is Paul’s characteristic call and encouragement to believers who have embraced the gospel, so that they continue in the faith (see discussion on 11:23 and 13:43; 15:32; 16:40; 20:1–2; Rom. 1:11; 16:25; 1 Thess. 3:2, 13; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:3; Johnson 1992: 254). They are to “remain” (ἐμμένειν, emmenein) solid with respect to the faith (τῇ πίστει, tē pistei), an expression close to the idea of abiding that one sees in John 15:1–7. This is a dative of reference or respect syntactically (Wallace 1996: 146). The verb appears only four times in the NT (Acts 14:22; 28:30; Gal. 3:10; Heb. 8:9). *Such perseverance*, however, will not come easily. *It will entail tribulation* (Phil. 1:28–30; 1 Thess. 3:3; 2 Thess. 1:5; Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:11; Bruce 1990: 326, “no cross, no crown”; Schneider 1982: 166, “suffering before glory” in Luke 24:26). *Sufferings and persecution will precede the full arrival into the kingdom*. *Unlike other texts in Acts, where “kingdom” refers to God’s entire program, here the term refers to the moment of final vindication that one enters after death* (Barrett 1994: 686; 2 Tim. 4:18). Jesus addressed this issue in the Olivet Discourse (Luke 21:5–36, esp. 12–19).

¹¹ Bock, *Acts*, pp. 738–740.

“Tribulations” could well be a reference to messianic woes that precede the end (on entering the kingdom, see Luke 18:25; John 3:5; Mark 9:47; 10:23–25) ... *Paul, however, sees all the events from the time of Jesus’s first coming to the end as eschatological and as part of birth pangs* (Rom. 8:12–25: creatures and believers long for redemption in the midst of suffering). The great example of such a reassuring speech is the one Paul gives to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. Christianity is now called “the faith,” pointing to the dynamic that drives the community.”¹²

Acts 14:24-28. Passing through Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga, and Attalia they, return to Antioch.

²⁴ Then they passed through Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵ And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia; ²⁶ and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. ²⁷ And when they arrived, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they remained no little time with the disciples.

Luke does not record any positive results at Perga other than that they *preached the word* there before moving on to Attalia from where they sailed to their home base, Antioch in Syria.

It is interesting that Luke does not declare all that Paul and Barnabas had done on this trip, but only “*all that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.*” This gives us some idea of what Luke had on his mind in writing his *Gospel* and the *Book of Acts*—**opening the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles!**

Summary of Paul’s and Barnabas’ preaching on their first missionary journey.

We noted above that on this first missionary journey Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark were commissioned by the teachers and prophets in the Syrian Antioch Church that had become a hub for Hellenistic Jewish Christians following their exit from Jerusalem as a result of Jewish persecution.

Barnabas had brought Paul from Tarsus to assist him in the teaching in Antioch. Paul, being an expert on Old Testament theology and practice who had witnessed the resurrection of Jesus on the road to Damascus was an ideal choice for the task. He would be an excellent teacher of new Hellenistic Jewish and Greek converts in Antioch. He and Barnabas taught there for some time.

Luke explains that it was not only the leaders of the church on Antioch who commissioned Paul and Barnabas, the Holy Spirit had set them apart for their missionary journey.

Paul and Barnabas began their mission in Syrian Antioch, travelled South West by ship to Cyprus, Salamis and Paphos; they moved on to Perga in Pamphylia; then into Southern Galatia, that is the Roman Province of Galatia, to Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, preaching the Gospel of Jesus death and resurrection at each stop, most often with good results, but also facing persecution and opposition from the Jews in several cities. Finally they traced their way back through the cities where they had planted churches, appointing elders in each church and

¹² Bock, *Acts*, p. 737.

encouraging the Christians to remain faithful to Jesus and reported to the Antioch church on their work and what God had done through them.

We noted that in several cities they began their preaching in the Synagogue for they knew they would have an interested audience in the Synagogue. The core of their preaching was on what God had done through the Fathers of Israel prophesying and preparing Israel for the coming Messiah who according to Daniel 7 would establish an eternal kingdom for his people, both Jews and Gentiles. God had inaugurated this kingdom, an eschatological end of the age kingdom through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the pouring out of his Holy Spirit in confirmation of his atoning action

Paul and Barnabas encouraged the Jews and Greeks to believe in the power of Jesus death and resurrection, confirming their message with powerful signs of the Holy Spirit.

Their planned return to the churches they had planted was indicative of their *missional ministry of planting and establishing churches* that would be *self-supporting, self-propagating, self-governing, and self-theologizing*.

Before any further missionary work was engaged a critical problem had been emerging ever since Peter baptized Cornelius, a Roman Gentile, and incorporated the Gentile convert into the fellowship of the predominantly Jewish Christian communities. This issue was engaged by Paul as a result of his mission to Southern Galatia on his first mission journey. Paul's early epistle to the Galatians focussed on this issue in which even Peter, who had baptized Cornelius, a Roman Gentile, experienced concerns over fellowship with Gentiles which Jewish "circumcision party" Christians took issue.

Luke's chapter 15 in his theological narrative, the Book of Acts, was inserted by Luke at a strategic point of his narrative to Theophilus to address this issue which could have seriously impacted the spread of the kingdom beyond Jerusalem and Judea into the Gentile world of Asia, Achaia, and Europe.

We should not at this point that the pericope, Acts 15:1-32, was not intended by Luke to be a *biographical historical narrative* of Paul's missionary activity. Attempts to conceive it as such have generated a major discussion among scholars as to how Luke/Acts meshes with Paul's mention of his two journeys in Galatians since Luke mentions three such journeys. The result of this highly speculative exercise has produced no reasonable solution other than to observe that it was a totally unnecessary exercise since neither Luke nor Paul had intended their writings to be historical accounts of Paul's mission efforts.

Luke's theological purpose was to explain to Theophilus how the eschatological missional kingdom message spread with God's and the Holy Spirit's support into the Gentile *end of the earth* concept of Jesus' commission to the disciples in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts 1:6-8.

Chapter 10: Acts 15:1-22. The Jerusalem Meeting.

I like Bock's introduction to this pericope as it explains the importance of this pericope to Luke's purpose in writing to Theophilus:

“Acts 15 is a central chapter in terms of both its location in Acts *and the theological issue it presents*. Fitzmyer (1998: 538) notes that Acts 1–14 has about 12,385 words in English translation and Acts 15–28 has about 12,502 words. *So we are right in the middle of the book. This passage shows the church decisively addressing the question of Gentile involvement in the new community. What should be the basis of their inclusion? This is a major point of concern in Acts. The resolution issuing from the consultation at Jerusalem is an affirmation of Gentile inclusion and equality with Jews.* The hope that Jesus represents is designed to bring reconciliation between people as well as between people and God. *After this chapter, the role of the Jerusalem church recedes into the background until Acts 21.* For example, Peter's last appearance in the book is in this chapter. *From here on, the main theme is the gospel going out into all the world.* We call this meeting a consultation. It is not a council in the later technical ecclesiastical sense ... It includes more than the apostles and engages the Jerusalem congregation in a major way.”¹

Apparently there were some in the Jerusalem church, we will call them *members of the circumcision party* who were still not comfortable with Greeks being accepted fully in the fellowship of the church. In fact, Paul would continue to have brushes with this mindset in his continuing ministry.

Although it is difficult to put a date to when Paul engaged Peter as reflected in his Galatian Epistle, some scholars date Galatians early while others prefer a later date. I have for years preferred an early South Galatian context for the Galatian Epistle, but do not make the dating of Galatians a major issue in my scholarly research.

Nevertheless, if we date Galatians early then it is a good guess to see Paul's Galatian Epistle dated around the time of this Jerusalem meeting, ca CE 49.

Serious questions arise among scholars regarding the relation of the *two trips to Jerusalem* Paul mentions in his *Galatian Epistle, Gal 1:18f and Gal 2:1f*. Luke mentions at least *three trips to Jerusalem, Acts 9, Acts 11, and Acts 15*.

Reconciling Paul's agenda in Galatians and Luke's agenda in Acts has generated volumes of serious debate in attempts to reconcile the difference between Paul's account and Luke's, with little agreement among scholars². Much of the scholarly debate hinges around speculation of *who said what and why* without much input from the text itself.

Scholars are tempted to read too much of their own theological interest into the discussion, much of which is interesting, but not helpful in resolving the debate. It would be more helpful to simply let Luke set the context, flow, and conclusion to what was truly an important concern. How was the church to create an environment in which both the Jewish and Gentile concerns regarding the *Torah* and freedom in Christ would be manageable.

¹ Bock, *Acts*, p. 744.

² For reference to these cf. the commentaries listed in our bibliography, notably Bock, Polhill, Marshall, Witherington, *et al.*

The problem is that neither Paul nor Luke were attempting to provide a clear historical account to their mention of visits to Jerusalem! Each mentions the visits in their own different theological arguments or narratives.

Several scholars recognize that Luke's account in Acts 15 comes *at a decisive midpoint in the missional theological narrative he is recounting for Theophilus*, and others! Neither Paul (Galatians), nor Luke (Acts), is attempting to be historical in their Galatian/Acts narratives.

Acts 15:1-35. *“But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.””*² *And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.*

The question of salvation would not have been a point of argument for Paul. He knew full well that salvation had nothing to do with Law keeping! His argument at Gal 1:6-9 would settle what Paul believed and taught:

*“⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—⁷ not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”*⁸ ***But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.***⁹ *As we have said before, so now I say again, **If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.**”*

There can be no clearer statement in scripture regarding *where Paul stood on salvation*. The problem was that the Jews of the circumcision party were making a *fellowship* argument into a *salvation* argument, and Paul and Barnabas would have nothing to do with that!

³ *So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting the conversion of the Gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the brethren.*⁴ *When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.*⁵ *But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.”*

In the text which follows it seems at first that the meeting was initially between the apostles and the elders of the Jerusalem church, but later Luke includes the involvement of the whole church. This indicates that what we have in this pericope is a condensed version of a much longer meeting.

⁶ *The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.*⁷ *And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear **the word of the gospel and believe.**”*⁸ *And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; ⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith.*¹⁰ *Now therefore **why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?***¹¹ *But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”*

It seems from what Luke recounts that Peter focused the argument on *the salvation issue* which God and the Holy Spirit had approved, **hearing the word of the gospel and believing**, a salvation issue.

James, one of Jesus' bothers now a believer and leading member of the Jerusalem church joins the discussion. Polhill adds:

“Paul also mentioned James's role at the Jerusalem Conference (Gal 2:9; cf. 1:19) and called him one of the “pillars” of the church, along with Peter and John. James had evidently become the leading elder of the Jerusalem congregation.”³

Polhill indicates that James in quoting from the Greek Septuagint version of the *Torah* was making a point!

James used the word *laos* to describe the Gentiles, a term usually applied to Israel. In Zech 2:11 (LXX 2:15), *the Septuagint also applies the term laos to the Gentiles who will in the final days come to dwell in the renewed Zion and be a part of God's people*. Something like this seems to be the meaning here. In Christ God brings Jew and Gentile together into a single *laos*, a single people “for his name.” *James now showed how the coming of the Gentiles into the people of God was grounded in the Old Testament prophets*. Basically he quoted from the Septuagint text of Amos 9:11-12, with possible allusions from Jer 12:15 and Isa 45:21.92 In the Hebrew text of Amos 9:11-12, the prophet spoke of the coming restoration of Israel, which God would bring about.⁴

¹² *And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.* ¹³ *After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brethren, listen to me.* ¹⁴ *Simeon (Simon Peter, his Hebrew or Aramaic name) has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.* ¹⁵ *And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written,*

¹⁶ *‘After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen;
I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will set it up.*

¹⁷ *that the rest of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,*

¹⁸ *says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.’*

Following the strong argument from Paul, Barnabas, and Peter that God had intended the Gentiles to share in his kingdom plans, **James** turned the direction of the discussion to a *recommendation* that would be *reasonable* for the Gentile Christian *God-fearers* to respect. Gentile Christians show respect for their neighbor Jewish religious concerns and rejection of idolatry, and be sensitive to their social kosher food and blood issues. This would create an environment in which the Gentile Christians could engage the Jews in meaningful discussion. James' point was strengthened by his observation that there were Jews everywhere, for wherever there was a Synagogue there would be sincere Jews to whom the Christians might be able to preach. This would be made easier if the Jews recognized that the Gentile Christians respected their religious and cultural concerns.

¹⁹ *Therefore my judgment* (that is James' judgment or opinion) *is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,* ²⁰ *but should write to them to abstain* (ἀπέχεσθαι,

³ Polhill, *Acts*, p. 328.

⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, p. 329.

apechesthai, a present middle infinitive, *with the mind of abstaining*) from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. ²¹ For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues.”

Luke then turned to the practical side of the decision, how to implement the *recommendation* to the Christians in Antioch, and elsewhere. The decision of the church elders and apostles in Jerusalem was not a “court ruling,” It was a recommendation made after all consideration of both parties concerns. They sent two faithful disciples, *two leading and respected men*, **Judas** (of Judas we know very little) and **Silas** (Silas was the same person as Silvanus who accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey⁵) to accompany and explain the letter they had written to the church in Antioch. The two men would be able to convey the sensitivity and spirit of *Christian fellowship (koinōnia)* in the *recommendation*.

²² *Then it seemed good* (a reasonable idea) *to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,* ²³ *with the following letter: “The brethren, both the apostles and the elders, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting. ²⁴ Since we have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, ²⁵ it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”*

The results of the Jerusalem meeting and recommendation.

³⁰ *So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ And when they read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation. ³² And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them. ³³ And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brethren to those who had sent them. ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others* (“other Christian evangelists”) *also.*

Polhill observes in summary of the events reflected in this Jerusalem meeting:

“Summary. The concord reached at the Jerusalem Conference was a most remarkable event and established a major precedent for dealing with controversy within the Christian fellowship. One should realize the sharp differences that existed between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Jewish Christians were faithful to all the traditions of their heritage. They observed the provisions of the Torah, circumcised their male children, and kept all the Jewish holy days. They did not cease to be Jews when they became

⁵ Polhill writes of Silas that he was “a major New Testament character, is another story. He accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey and is mentioned often in that connection (nine times in the Greek text of 15:40-18:5; fourteen times in the NIV since it often supplies subjects). Silas is a shortened form of the Greek name Silvanus, and the Greek name has led some to suggest that he may have been a Hellenist. That would certainly be likely if he is the same Silvanus who served as Peter’s amanuensis (1 Pet 5:12). He definitely seems to be the Silvanus whom Paul mentioned as a coworker in several of his epistles (2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1).” Polhill, *Acts*, p. 333.

Christians. James was himself a perfect example. In their accounts of his later martyrdom, both Josephus and Eusebius noted the tremendous respect the nonbelieving Jews gave him because of his deep piety and scrupulous observance of the law.¹⁰⁸ Not requiring Gentiles to be circumcised upon entry into the covenant community was a radical departure from the Jewish tradition. That James and his fellow Jewish Christians were willing to bend on such a basic principle is testimony to two things about them. First, they were open to the leading of God. Throughout the account God's leading is stressed—in his sending the Spirit on Cornelius (v. 8), in the “signs and wonders” that God worked through Paul and Barnabas (v. 12). It was this evidence of God's acceptance of the Gentiles that determined the decision of the council to accept Gentiles with no further burden. And the Spirit of God was present with them in the conference, leading them in their decision (v. 28). This is a consistent picture in Acts: wherever Christians are open to God's Spirit, there is unity.”⁶

⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, p. 337.

Chapter 11: Acts 15:36-18:21. The Second Mission Journey, ca. CE 49-52.

Polhill provides some interesting comments on Luke's next extended mission narrative, Acts 15:36-18:21:

“Acts 15:36-18:22 covers what has customarily been referred to as Paul's second missionary journey. The term is particularly applicable for the first part of the narrative, where Paul was extensively involved in travel from Antioch to Troas (16:1-10). The pace slowed down thereafter with more extensive stays and *the establishment of the churches in Philippi* (16:11-40), *Thessalonica* (17:1-9), and *Berea* (17:10-15). After a seemingly *brief visit to Athens with his notable address from the Areopagus* (17:16-34), *Paul concluded this period of work in Corinth, staying there at least eighteen months, perhaps half the time of the total mission* (18:1-17). Most of his time was thus spent in a major urban center, which set the pattern followed in Ephesus on his third mission.”¹

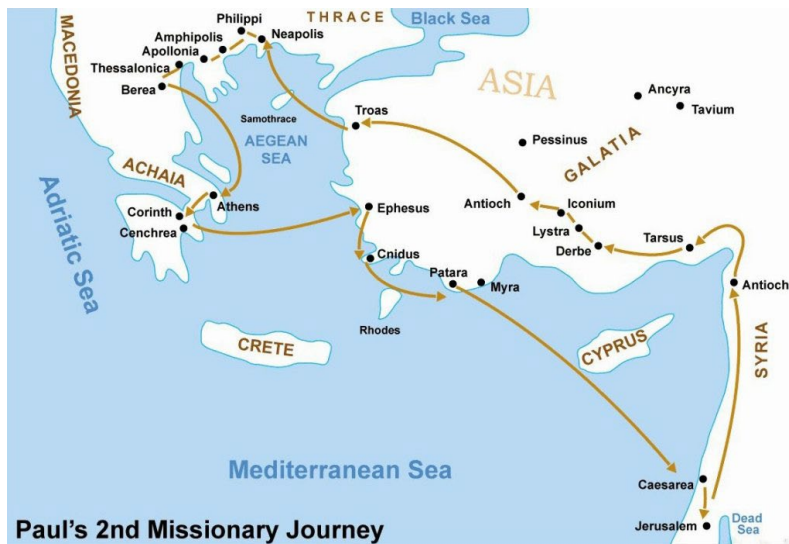
The importance of Paul's second journey is seen in that it forms the background to much of the remainder of the New Testament reflected in several of Paul's major epistles.

Picking up on the events following Paul's, Barnabas', and Silas' return to Antioch from the Jerusalem meeting, Luke records:

Acts 15:35. “But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. (Notice the emphasis on teaching and preaching the word! This is what Jesus meant by *witnessing* in Acts 1:6-8.)³⁶ And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Come, let us return and visit the brethren in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” (sound missional church strategy!)³⁷ And Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark.³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.³⁹ And there arose a sharp contention, (Luke does not develop the ground reason for this sharp contention other than Mark had left the team early on their first mission journey when things were getting rough.²) so that they separated from each other; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed (south) away to Cyprus,⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.⁴¹ And he went (north-west) through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

¹ Polhill, *Acts*, p. 340.

² Scholars get into all kinds of speculation as to the reason for this split, but Luke did not think such concerns related to the missional challenge of kingdom mission work. Other than to say it had to do with Mark leaving early and using the term *contention*, Luke says little.



Map: <https://images.search.yahoo.com>

Acts 16:1-3. Paul adds another worker to his mission team.

Luke introduces us to a young man who over the ministry life of the apostle Paul, along with Luke and Silas, played an important part of Paul's missionary effort.

This short paragraph also describes Paul's "pastoral" concerns for the churches he and Barnabas had planted on their first journey.

*"¹And he came also to **Derbe** and to **Lystra**. A disciple was there, named **Timothy**, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. ²He was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek."*

Eckhard Schnabel discusses this surprise action in Paul having Timothy circumcised:

"Paul's initiative to circumcise Timothy, motivated by the opinions of unbelieving Jews, seems surprising, following Paul's rejection of the demand that Gentile believers should be circumcised (15:1-2), a position that was confirmed by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (15:5-21) and by the letter that reported the apostolic decree, delivered by Paul to the churches, including Lystra and Iconium (16:4) ... Several arguments and scenarios plausibly explain Timothy's circumcision by Paul. (1) Luke portrays Paul as a flexible missionary who was prepared to become a Jew to the Jews (1 Cor 9:20) and circumcised Timothy for the benefit of his continuing missionary work among Jewish communities, without according salvific value to Timothy's circumcision. (2) While Paul consistently objected to Gentile believers being circumcised in order to have full salvation, he never argued that Jews should no longer circumcise their children. Paul's loyalty to the Mosaic law expressed in Timothy's circumcision does not contradict his basic theological position regarding the salvation-historical role of the law in view of the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus as Israel's Messiah and Savior, but remedies the ambiguous ethnic and social status of Timothy. If his Jewish mother made him legally Jewish (matrilinear principle), Timothy is an uncircumcised Jew, a status that was untenable for Jews, constituting a violation of the covenant, and strange for Gentiles, who knew that Jews were circumcised. The belated circumcision thus becomes plausible. If his Gentile father made him legally a Gentile (patrilinear principle), his Jewish upbringing in the context of a synagogue (2 Tim 3:15) suggests a quasi-Jewish identity in

social terms, a situation that would be clarified by circumcision. Paul's circumcision of Timothy shows two concerns of Luke (Paul). (1) The apostolic mission, whose terms had been confirmed at the Apostles' Council (Acts 15), does not require Jews to abandon their traditions since "everything appropriate to that tradition could still be practiced, so long as it was understood to have cultural rather than soteriological significance." (2) Paul's focus on the proclamation of the gospel among Gentiles does not mean that he has abandoned the Jewish people, whom he continues to introduce to the good news of Jesus, Israel's Messiah and Savior."³

Acts 16:4-5. Paul and Silas, accompanied by Luke and Timothy move on to the region of Phrygia and Galatia.

The paused to inform the churches in Galatia of the Jerusalem meeting decision regarding Jewish/Gentile fellowship.

"⁴As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily."

Paul's intention after this was apparently to move on into Bithynia and preach there, but the Holy Spirit had other ideas!

Acts 16:6-10. The Holy Spirit again intruded into Paul's life and plans – the "famous" Man from Macedonia!

This experience left Luke with little doubt that the Holy Spirit intended Paul's second mission trip to move into Europe, and then Asia where God had plans for Paul!

*"⁶And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, **having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.** ⁷And when they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; ⁸so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰And when he had seen the vision, **immediately we sought** to go on into Macedonia, **concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.**"*

The narrative of divine intervention in this text is interesting but not disturbing for the Holy Spirit had been acting in this mission endeavor right from the beginning, cf. Acts 13:2 when the Holy Spirit said, "set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Acts 16:10. The famous "we" passages of Luke in Acts.

Schnabel observes regarding the occurrences of the we expressions in Acts:

"Paul and his associates decide to travel to Macedonia. Paul had seen the vision, but he did not make the decision to act on what he had seen and heard by himself: he evidently presented the content of the vision to his coworkers, and *together they* "came to the conclusion" (*συμβιβάζοντες*) that the vision represented God's guidance. This verb denotes rational reflection and inference, the plural indicates the involvement of others, and the participle signals cause: because Paul and his associates have concluded that God had revealed his will through the vision, they seek to leave Troas and sail to Macedonia.

³ Schnabel, *Acts*, pp. 1168-1169.

The first-person plural of the verb marks the beginning of the first “we passage” in Acts (16:10–17), which is most naturally interpreted in terms of the author being involved as an eyewitness. Paul involved Silas and Luke (perhaps even young Timothy?) in the interpretation of the vision. Once they concluded that it was God who had called them, they attempt to leave “immediately,” i.e., without delay. They knew that God’s call concerned the proclamation of “the good news” of Jesus (εὐαγγελίσασθαι; see on 5:42), Israel’s Messiah and Savior of humankind. And they now understand that the “negative” guidance of the Spirit regarding missionary work in the provinces of Asia and Bithynia (vv. 6–7) was meant to prepare them for the “positive” guidance through the vision, so they accept the challenge of a new missionary initiative—the evangelization of Europe.”⁴

Paul and the Macedonian Campaign

Strategically, the trip into Macedonia, the northern region of ancient Greece, was important to the future spread of the multi-ethnic kingdom of Christ. For instance, Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, and Thessalonica were cities on the major trade route from Italy to Byzantium (Constantinople or Istanbul in Asia).

Furthermore, both Philippi and Thessalonica were cities of major Roman political and cultural influence, with Thessalonica a major Greek religious center and large seaport. Macedonia was an important region in the formation and history of the later Roman Empire.

“To strengthen their control of Macedonia, the Romans built a great military road, the Egnatian Way, across it from the Adriatic Sea to the Aegean.

The province of Macedonia became a base for the extension of Roman power into West Asia, on whose peoples the Roman overthrow of the Macedonian kingdom had made a deep impression (1 Macc 8:5). Some of the crucial battles of Roman history in the 1st century B.C. were fought on Macedonian soil ... Six years later Antony and Octavian (the future Emperor Augustus) defeated Brutus and Cassius (Caesar’s assassins) at the battle of Philippi (October 21, 42 B.C.).

Octavian (Emperor Augustus) *made Macedonia a senatorial province* in 27 B.C. In A.D. Macedonia and the senatorial province of Achaia to the south were combined by Emperor Tiberius, at their own request, with the imperial province of Moesia (north of Macedonia) to form one large imperial province ... under Claudius, this united province was divided back into its component parts, and Macedonia became once more a senatorial province, governed by a proconsul.⁵

Thessalonica was a city with an ancient historical and religious history, a prime location for the establishment of a center for the multi-ethnic eschatological kingdom of Christ and a church.

“The city of Thessalonica is mentioned in Acts 17:1–13; 1–2 Thessalonians; Phil 4:16; and 2 Tim 4:10. It was founded in 316 B.C.E. by Cassander, the son of Antipater, whom Alexander the Great had left in charge of Macedonia. It was named in honor of Cassander’s wife, Thessalonike, a stepsister of Alexander and the last surviving member of the ancient royal family of Macedonia. Built at the head of the Thermaikos Gulf below the Hortiades mountains, the city rose steeply above its harbor.

⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, pp. 1175-1176.

⁵ Bruce, “Macedonia (Place),” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, p. 455.

It is possible that Thessalonica was constructed on the site of an earlier settlement, Therme. Remains of foundations and fragments of an archaic temple (ca. 500 B.C.E.) have been found in the Western part of the city, but it has not been possible to ascertain the deity in whose honor it was erected or the structure's precise size and plan. A series of ancient Greek coins without a legend but bearing a Pegasus obverse type found at Thessalonica has been connected with Therme⁶



Location of map source

Acts 16:11-15. Paul meets Lydia, a Gentile Godfearer, teaches her and her household. Lydia and her household are baptized.

Notice from Acts 16:10 following, the repeated plural personal pronoun **us**, which indicates Luke's personal interest and involvement in the events that take place.

*“¹¹Setting sail therefore from **Troas**, we made a direct voyage to **Samothrace**, and the following day to **Neapolis**,¹² and from there to **Philippi**, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days;¹³ and on the sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.¹⁴ One who heard **us** was a woman named **Lydia**, from the city of **Thyatira** (a city in Asia Minor, Turkey today), a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God (Greek, σεβομένη, *sebomenē*,⁷ a person who was attached in a loose way with the Synagogue who believed in and worshipped God, respected the *Torah*, and obeyed God) **The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.**¹⁵ And when*

⁶ Hendrix, “Thessalonica (Place),” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, p. 523.

⁷ Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary*, and James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, *sebomai*, *sebomai*, verb, *to worship, to reverence, be devout, be God-fearing*. In the NT, only in the middle voice. (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7 quoted from Is. 29:13; Acts 16:14; 18:7, 13; 19:27; Sept.: Josh. 4:24; Job 1:9). The participle noun *sebómenos*, a worshiper of the true God (Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17). These were Gentile proselytes as expressed in Acts 13:43.

she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.”

The Philippian “synagogue” style meeting for prayer.

Marshall draws attention to Paul’s missionary style of beginning his mission effort in cities where there was a Synagogue, or synagogue-like meeting place of Jews. In Philippi there did not seem to be a physical synagogue, but somehow Paul learned of *a sabbath meeting* near a river where some Jewish women or possibly God-fearing Greek women met for prayer. Marshall observes:

“Paul’s missionary practice usually took him to the synagogue in the first instance to proclaim the coming of the Messiah to the Jews and proselytes who gathered there (13:4–5 note). He did not start his missionary work, therefore, until the sabbath when he went to the Jewish meeting place. The RSV text, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, implies that Paul and his companions did not know for certain where the Jews met, and that they had not been lodging with Jews. This would not be surprising if Jewish worship was being practiced by a mere handful of women, at least one of whom was a proselyte; the missionaries would be dependent on what vague information they could pick up from the local people ... A synagogue could be established only where there were at least ten men. Since there is no mention here of men, it is probable that place of prayer here simply means a place where the women gathered by custom to pray (perhaps in a house); the phrase, however, can be used to mean a synagogue building. It was probably outside the town because the authorities would not allow the Jews to meet inside it.”⁸

Schnabel adds some detail to Lydia’s background and relationship with God. *In Luke’s narrative the conversion of an influential woman in a prominent public relationship was an important symbol of the new age, the eschatological age of the kingdom which was significantly different from the Jewish public cultural role of women:*

“Lydia is a “merchant dealing in purple cloth” (πορφυρόπωλις). A Latin inscription from Philippi refers to dealers in purple, an inscription from Thessalonica documents a guild of purple dyers, and an inscription from Philippi mentions purple dyers from Thyatira. The purple dye was extracted from the purple fish ... The purple industry had a long history in the cities of the Phoenician coast, particularly Tyre, but played an important role in Lydia and Phrygia in Asia Minor as well. Contrary to the opinion of many, “the use of purple was not restricted to the wealthy, for the majority of purple dyes was manufactured and readily accessible, in different grades of quality and color variation,” although colorfast purple extracted from the Murex was expensive. Purple could also be derived from rubia, the madder plant, the so-called “Turkey red,” which was used in Asia Minor. As a dealer in purple products (garments, blankets, carpets), Lydia would have been well-to-do. Lydia’s hometown was Thyatira, for which the dye industry is attested. Lydia may have lived in Thyatira while owning a retail shop in Philippi that she occasionally visited, or she may have settled in Philippi permanently. Her professional status as a merchant—evidently working on her own initiative and independently of a husband—suggests that she was widowed or divorced. If she

⁸ Marshall, *Acts*, p. 283.

was a freeborn woman with three children, or a freedwoman with four children, she would have been given a range of legal privileges according to Roman law, including “the right to undertake legal transactions without the necessity to obtain the consent” of her legal guardian (kyrios). The fact that she owned a house in which she evidently could accommodate Paul and his coworkers as well as the meetings of the emerging church (vv. 15, 40) confirms that she is a woman of means.

Lydia is a “God-fearer” (σεβομένη τὸν θεόν); the Greek term replaces the expression “those who fear God” (φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν; see on 10:22) that Luke used earlier. She attends the Jewish synagogue; i.e., she is a Gentile who sympathizes with the Jewish faith and prays to Israel’s God. Luke describes her as hospitable, gracious, and humble (v. 15); like Cornelius, she is the ideal God-fearer. Luke notes that Lydia “listened” (ἤκουεν); the imperfect may indicate that she listened for an extended period of time. Luke does not state that she was baptized (v. 15) on the very day that she met Paul and his coworkers. Paul spoke, Lydia listened, but it was the Lord who “opened” (διήνοιξεν) Lydia’s heart, causing her to understand and accept the gospel. On account of the Lord’s initiative, Lydia “followed” closely the words spoken by Paul and turned to the proclamation of the good news of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, whose death, resurrection, and exaltation provides for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who put their trust in Jesus. According to Rom 10:9, the “heart” is the “organ” of faith whose cause is Jesus, the Messiah, whose word is proclaimed, who has sent the apostle, and who opens the hearts of those who believe (Rom 10:14–17).⁹

Acts 16:16-40. The demonic possessed slave girl and the conversion of the Philippian Jailer.

Luke could have moved on from Lydia’s conversion, an impressive narrative for Luke’s missionary narrative, but he deliberately chose another extremely significant event in his mission theology, one that emphasized his *theological theme, the eschatological kingdom is for all people, Jews, Greeks, God-fearers, women, and even Roman officials.*

Some insight we can one draw from four dramatic events, in Philippi.

First, the first church, the Philippian church, was planted in Europe (Macedonia was considered a Roman province in Europe, not Asia). *Second*, three “ethnic” types are represented, *Lydia*, a Gentile *God-fearer* from Thyatira in Asia, the *demonic Gentile slave girl* in Philippi, and the *Romana jailor* in Philippi, these three *different people types* demonstrate Luke’s amazing theological “global” missional insight!

Acts 16:1-32. The mission in Philippi.

In this perceptive narrative reflecting remarkable insight, Luke addressed several missiological interests. Bock, citing Bruce, observes the following socio-theological foci:

“Bruce (1988a: 312) notes that in Philippi *three very different kinds of individuals are singled out: religious women, a possessed woman from the “dark side”* (Deut. 18:10–12; 1 Sam. 28:8; Ezek. 13:6; 21:29; Mic. 3:11), and a *simple “secular soldier.”* Williams (1990:

⁹ Schnabel, Acts, pp. 1195-1196.

280) argues that *they are the three groups held in contempt by Jews: women, slaves, and Gentiles—so all gender, ethnic, and social barriers are crossed.*¹⁰

The demonic possessed slave girl exorcised by Paul.

“¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.’ ¹⁸ And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, ‘I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And it came out that very hour.

The exorcism of the demon from the slave girl has raised questions for some scholars, but those familiar with Jesus’ ministry in Matt 12:28 are aware that for Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit this was no problem but a sign of the arrival of the Messianic eschatological kingdom. Demon or spirit possession may be a problem for some western materialist people who even question the reality of divinity, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, but this would not be an issue for most people living in many large regions and nations like Africa in which ancestor worship and spirit powers are an everyday part of life.

Marshall adds some helpful comments on the strangeness of this piece, and the “demon possessed” slave girl.

“The second part of the story takes us out of the world of Judaism into contact with the popular superstition of the Hellenistic world. On one of Paul’s visits to the place of prayer, he and his companions were met by a slave girl who had the gift of second sight, and made money for her owners by telling fortunes. Her gift is attributed by Luke to a spirit of divination, literally ‘a spirit, a Python’. The latter word originally meant a snake, and in particular the snake which guarded the celebrated oracle at Delphi and which was said to have been slain by Apollo. The word was also used to mean a ventriloquist. Ventriloquists acted as fortune-tellers, the unusual character of the sounds which they produced no doubt having a numinous effect; they were probably thought to be inhabited by a demon. In the present case the girl presumably spoke like a ventriloquist and had the gift of clairvoyance, and therefore Luke has described her as having a spirit (i.e. an evil spirit), namely one capable of ventriloquism.

The girl met Paul and his companions in the street and shouted after them that they were servants of the Most High God, proclaiming the way of salvation. The description of the supreme God in this way is found elsewhere on the lips of pagans (Luke 8:28), but it was also in use among Greek-speaking Jews; probably pagans copied the usage of Jews when referring to their God. Salvation was a common term for the content of the Christian message (4:12; 13:26, 47). The girl’s cry could thus have depended simply on what was common knowledge about the activity of the missionaries in Philippi. *Nevertheless, the story is told in a manner like that of the exorcism stories in the Gospels, in which the demon-possessed proclaim their knowledge of the identity of Jesus (Luke 4:34, 41; 8:28) as a means of showing their would-be superiority over him. It seems likely that Luke attributed the girl’s knowledge to the supernatural insight of the demon-possessed. Elsewhere in the New Testament the lines between demon possession, mental unbalance, and charlatanry are equally hard to draw.*

¹⁰ Bock, *Acts*, p. 817.

The effect of the girl's proclamation, which was repeated over a few days whenever she met Paul, was to give the missionaries some unexpected publicity. Paul made no attempt to deal with the situation on the first occasion for reasons which are not clear. The girl's cries may not have seemed dangerous at first; indeed there is no suggestion that she was hostile to the missionaries. *But it became clear to Paul that she was in the grip of an evil spirit, and he proceeded to exorcise the spirit by means of the name of Jesus.* The story does not tell whether the girl became a convert; Luke's interest was solely in the effect of the incident on the fate of Paul and his companions. Consequently, we cannot draw conclusions about the problem of exorcism in the modern church from this incident. What is clear is that the exorcism deprived the girl of her ability or willingness to tell fortunes.

Whether or not the girl's owners were with her during the exorcism, they quickly discovered that not only the spirit had left the girl, but also their source of profit (Luke has deliberately used the same verb for humorous effect in verses 18 and 19), and they knew who was responsible for it. As in the later case in Ephesus (19:23–27), the effect of the gospel was to ruin the business of those who traded on or made use of human superstitions and vice. So the owners, no doubt with the help of friends or bystanders, promptly acted in their own cause by seizing Paul and Silas and dragging them to the town square where they could present their case against them before the magistrates. The other members of the party (Timothy and Luke) were not involved in the scene (the use of 'we' ceases in verse 17), either because they were of less importance than the principals or simply because they were elsewhere at the time. (Or were only the fully Jewish members of the party arrested, as Bruce, Book, p. 335, suggests?) The town square was the business centre; it has been excavated by archaeologists."¹¹

Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten, and thrown in jail.

¹⁹ *But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers;* ²⁰ *and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city."* ²¹ *They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice."* ²² *The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.* ²³ *And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely.* ²⁴ *Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

²⁵ *But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,* ²⁶ *and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened.* ²⁷ *When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.* ²⁸ *But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."* ²⁹ *And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas,* ³⁰ *and brought them out and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?"* ³¹ *And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."* ³² *And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house.* ³³ *And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family.* ³⁴ *Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced*

¹¹ Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 284-286.

with all his household that he had believed in God.³⁵ But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go."³⁶ And the jailer reported the words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go; now therefore come out and go in peace."³⁷ **But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now cast us out secretly? No! let them come themselves and take us out."**³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens;³⁹ so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city.⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison, and visited Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they exhorted them and departed."

Marshall provides some good background information to the circumstances of the arrest of Paul and Silas:

"So the owners, no doubt with the help of friends or bystanders, promptly acted in their own cause by seizing Paul and Silas and dragging them to the town square where they could present their case against them before the magistrates. The other members of the party (Timothy and Luke) were not involved in the scene (the use of 'we' ceases in verse 17), either because they were of less importance than the principals or simply because they were elsewhere at the time ... The town square was the business centre; it has been excavated by archaeologists. The magistrates are referred to by a general title as 'rulers' in verse 19, but here they are more specifically named. Their proper title was *duoviri*, as is attested by inscriptions. The Greek word used here, *strategoï*, may simply be the nearest Greek equivalent to this word ... but it also could be used to translate the more grandiloquent title of *praetores*; older commentaries suggest that the magistrates may have affected this title ... but it is unlikely that this archaic usage was still current. It is significant that when the accusers make their charge, the economic considerations retreat into the background and other pretexts are found. The charge in fact falls into two parts. The *first* is that Paul and Silas were causing a public disturbance. This was backed up by a comment that they were Jews, so as to take account of the anti-Jewish feeling which was not uncommon at the time (see 18: 2, 12–17). The *second* part of the charge was that Paul and Silas were advocating non-Roman customs. This put the exorcism into the broader context of missionary activity. We see here the specifically Roman self-consciousness found in a colony. The Romans were officially not supposed to practice foreign cults, although in practice they might do this so long as these did not offend Roman customs. The principle was clearly a flexible one which could be invoked as necessary. During the first century and onwards it was used when foreign cults led to criminal practices; here the complaint is the archaic-sounding one that the cult in question was 'un-Roman'. It has sometimes been argued that the Jews were banned from proselytizing, but this does not appear to have been the case (Sherwin-White, pp. 78–83)."¹²

Polhill provides some additional insight into the significance of this event.

"To this point the reader *would have expected* the story of Paul and Silas's escape. *It was not to be so.* The miraculous release did not lead (only) to their escape **but to the far more significant event of the jailer's conversion.**"¹³

¹² Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 286-287.

¹³ Polhill, *Acts*, p. 355.

Acts 17:1-34. Paul and his group in Macedonia; Thessalonica, Berea, and then Achaia; Athens.

Acts 17:1-9. Planting a church in Thessalonica.

Thessalonica was an important trade center on the

*“¹ Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued (διελέξατο, from διαλέγομαι, *dialégomai*; to speak back and forth or alternately, to converse with, reason, present intelligent discourse, to teach publicly, discourse, present intelligent arguments¹⁴) with them from the scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “*This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.*” ⁴ And some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas (were converted to Christ); as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. (In the maturing nature of the new kingdom, the eschatological kingdom, it was important for Luke to emphasize the increasing number of women, most likely in the context of Thessalonica, who were Greek God-fearers, who were becoming part of the church.) ⁵ But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked fellows of the rabble, they gathered a crowd, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason¹⁵, seeking to bring them out to the people. ⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brethren before the city authorities, crying, “*These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,*” ⁷ and Jason has received them; and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” ⁸ And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard this. ⁹ And when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.*

Polhill explains,

“Jason was required to post bond, depositing a sum of money that would be forfeited should there be any sequel to the civil disturbance. That meant the absence of Paul and Silas.”¹⁶

Shortly after leaving Thessalonica and journeying in haste to Berea, where he left Silas and Timothy, and then moving on to Athens, where he was not welcomed with much enthusiasm, At a low point in his ministry, Paul wrote two letters to his fledgling congregation in Thessalonica, which we call 1 and 2 Thessalonians. This again demonstrated Paul’s pastoral care for his young congregations, as seen in his Galatian epistle, and his return visits to Derbe and Lystra.

Acts 17:10-15. A new church in Berea.

“¹⁰ The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, stirring up and inciting the

¹⁴ Zodiates, διαλέγομαι *dialégomai*.

¹⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, p. 361. “We know nothing more about him than his role in this scene. Evidently Paul and Silas had been lodging with him. Consequently he probably was a convert and may have been a Jew since Jason was a name often taken by Diaspora Jews.”

¹⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, p. 362.

crowds. ¹⁴ *Then the brethren immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there.*”

A striking point in this short narrative is that the Jews in Beroea were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that “*they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things* (Paul’s preaching) *were so* (according to the *Torah*).”

Acts 17:15-34. Paul in Athens.

Although Paul was born in a large major city with a famous university, Tarsus, and had lived in Jerusalem where another major seat of learning was centered, Gamaliel, the Sanhedrin, and the Temple, arriving in Athens must have impressed Paul. We notice this in his opening discussion at the Areopagus, the famous pace of Greek academic and philosophic debate in Athens on Mars Hill, Acts 17:22.

Elwell and Beitzel in the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* describe the Areopagus as follows:

“**Areopagus.** A hill northwest of the Acropolis in Athens overlooking the marketplace (Acts 17:19). “Areopagus” also refers to the Athenian council or court that met there. The irregular limestone outcropping was also known as Mars Hill, Mars being the Roman equivalent of the Greek god Ares. Paul was taken to the Areopagus after he had been reasoning with Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in the Athenian synagogue and marketplace (*agora*) for several days (Acts 17:16–21). Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers involved in those discussions brought Paul before the council, but evidently not for an official arraignment. Trials were held at the Areopagus; there, some five centuries earlier, Socrates had faced those who accused him of deprecating the Greek gods. By Paul’s day the council of the Areopagus was responsible for various political, educational, philosophical, and religious matters as well as for legal proceedings. The general tone of Paul’s address does not suggest judicial proceedings. He spoke as an intelligent Christian believer who was able to meet the intellectual Athenians on their own ground (Acts 17:22–31). Some remained skeptical, but his address was convincing to a few who “joined him and believed” (Acts 17:32–34).”¹⁷

Acts 17:15-32. “*Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.* ¹⁶ *Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.* ¹⁷ *So he argued* (διδέχεται, *discussed back and forth, dialogued*) *in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there.* ¹⁸ *Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him. And some said, “What would this babblers say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he preached Jesus and the resurrection.* ¹⁹ *And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is which you present?”* ²⁰ *For you bring some strange things to our ears; we wish to know therefore what these things mean.*” ²¹ *Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.*

The response of the Stoic philosophers and Areopagites was that Paul was confused, snatching strange truths and blending them with others to make a chattering speech. Not praise for a speech at Mars Hill and the Areopagus. They accused him of being a “babbler”, a word derived from the Greek *spermalogos* was a challenge to Paul’s credibility.

¹⁷ Elwell and Beitzel, “Areopagus,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 1, pp. 167–168.

Peterson adds to the sarcasm of their denigration of Paul's speech.

"Some of those who argued with Paul were far from polite, asking one another, 'What is this babbler trying to say?' The word translated babbler (*spermalogos*) was originally used of seed-eating or scavenging birds and meant 'picking up seeds' ... Metaphorically, it was applied to people who obtained scraps of information from others and retailed them as their own. So they were accusing Paul of being an ignorant plagiarist and a religious charlatan."¹⁸

Acts 17:22-31: Paul's *Universal Missional* Areopagus speech.

Luke captured the import of Paul's "global" missional theological sermon well. Paul's astute ability to quote philosophically well-known Epicurean and Stoic principles and blend them into an overall Christian world view demonstrate that he was more than a "confused babbler."

Mashall notes the significance of Paul's arguments and Greek philosophic points and poetry.

²⁸ At this point Paul illustrated his argument by two quotations from Greek poets in which the relation of humanity to the supreme God was set forth. One of these appears to have been the fourth line of a quatrain preserved from a poem attributed to *Epimenides* the Cretan (c. 600 B.C.), but actually of later date: "They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one— The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!— But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest forever, For in thee we live and move and have our being." The other is part of the fifth line of the *Phainomena* of Paul's fellow-Cilician *Aratus* (born 310 B.C.), which opens with the words: "Let us begin with Zeus. Never, O men, let us leave him unmentioned. All the ways are full of Zeus, and all the marketplaces of human beings. The sea is full of him; so are the harbors. In every way we have all to do with Zeus, for we are truly his offspring."

In both these poems Zeus is considered not as the ruler of the traditional pantheon of Greek mythology but as the supreme being of Greek, and especially Stoic, philosophy. But did Paul intend to identify the Zeus of Greek philosophy *simpliciter* with the God of biblical revelation, whom in his letters he repeatedly calls "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"? Quite certainly not. Is he then simply detaching from their original contexts sentiments which, so far as their actual phraseology goes, lend themselves to incorporation into his Judaeo-Christian context? Again, no. Even in their contexts, the words quoted (especially those of Aratus) could be taken as pointing to some recognition of the true nature of God—that recognition which, according to the writer to the Hebrews, is his reward to "those who seek him" (Heb. 11:6); they "could be acknowledged," says N. B. Stonehouse, "as up to a point involving an actual apprehension of revealed truth."

²⁹ We are, then, the offspring of God, says Paul, not in any pantheistic sense but in the sense of the biblical doctrine of man, as beings created by God in his own image."¹⁹

The Christian faith provided a real historical foundation in the death and resurrection of Jesus whereas the Greek philosophers had no certain historical roots to their theories. Furthermore, the Christian faith offered an inclusive faith for all nations and people, not only to the philosophical theories of the "philosophical elite" of Mars Hill!

Peterson concisely captures the theological essence of Luke's narrative and Paul's eschatological global sermon.

¹⁸ Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 490.

¹⁹ Bruce, *Acts*, pp. 338-340.

“This is the second of three major speeches by Paul in Acts (17:22-31; cf. 13:16-41; 20:18-35). It is closest in style and content to the brief message delivered to Gentiles at Lystra (14:15-17). Tannehill suggests that ‘there is an internal as well as an external impulse toward the viewpoint expressed by Paul in Athens’. The external impulse is outlined in 17:16-21. *Internally, in a variety of ways, Luke-Acts has been highlighting the universal scope of God’s saving work. ‘Effective mission, however, requires reflection on theological foundations in order to discover a message that can address the whole world. More than instruction in the Jewish gospel is needed.’* I would modify the last sentence by saying that the biblical roots of the gospel which make it a message with universal appeal needed to be explored and articulated. *Paul’s speech in Athens is ultimately messianic and evangelistic because it concludes with a proclamation of the resurrected man by whom God will judge the world and calls upon all people everywhere to repent in response to this* (17:30-31). But the earlier part of the speech sounds more like a reflection on the opening chapters of Genesis (even though no text is actually cited), moving from a proclamation of the one true Creator, to an assertion of his purpose for humanity, and concluding with a declaration of universal accountability before God as judge (cf. Genesis 1–11).”²⁰

Acts 17:22- 34. “So Paul, standing in the middle of the Are-opagus, said: *“Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’;*

as even some of your poets have said,

‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

²⁹ *Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.”*

³² *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, “We will hear you again about this.” ³³ So Paul went out from among them. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Arepagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.”*

²⁰ Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 493.

Chapter 12: Acts 18:22-21:16.

The Third Mission Journey,

ca. CE 53-57

Marshall explains that Luke compressed significant time and mission travel into a short pericope as he prepared to introduce Paul's significant mission in Ephesus.

“Although Paul's destination was said to be Syria in verse 18, in fact his journey home took him first to Caesarea. It appears that the direction of the prevailing winds made it easier for ships to reach Caesarea than Seleucia, the port for Antioch (13:4), which was about 250 miles to the north. Luke's narrative does not make it clear whether Paul went deliberately to Caesarea or merely as a result of the weather. When he goes on to say that Paul went up and greeted the church, this 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. If this is a correct assumption, it means that each of Paul's missionary campaigns concluded with a visit to Jerusalem ... it is possible that Luke simply means that Paul greeted the church in Caesarea ...

23. Paul spent some time at Antioch before beginning his next campaign. *His goal was Ephesus*, and he went there by the inland route, taking the opportunity to visit in turn the various groups of Christians formed on earlier missionary journeys and to give them spiritual encouragement. The region of Galatia and Phrygia is probably the area in south Galatia evangelized in Acts 13–14.

Before Luke takes up the story of Paul's return to Ephesus and his work there he inserts an account of the arrival of Apollos on the scene. The reader is thus brought up to date on what had been happening in Ephesus during Paul's absence. Apollos was to be an important figure in the church at Corinth and indeed he became the focus of some rivalry to Paul; the present passage indicates that although he himself had not been instructed by Paul, he nevertheless received his Christian education from Paul's colleagues, so that he can be assumed to have shared Paul's theological outlook, and indeed Paul himself implies this (1 Cor. 3: 5–9).”¹

Polhill introduces this section of Acts, which we have traditionally titled *Paul's third missionary journey*. Unfortunately, our tradition overlooks the fact that Luke was also part of the Pauline mission team, and the narrator recording the events of the mission and shaping the missiological theology of the narrative.

“Acts 18:23-21:16 covers the third and culminating period of Paul's mission in the east. The narrative revolves primarily around the city of Ephesus, beginning with Priscilla and Aquilla's ministry to Apollos there (18:24-28). All of chap. 19 is devoted to Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus, and the major portion of chap. 20 treats his farewell address to the leaders of the Ephesian church.

¹ Marshall, *Acts*, p. 319-320.

As was the case with Paul's first two missionary periods, the narrative begins and ends with a travel motif. This is extremely brief for the beginning of the third mission, covering but two verses (18:23; 19:1). The conclusion of the Ephesian period, however, is marked by extensive travel and constitutes a major journey-to-Jerusalem emphasis. This begins with Paul's decision while still in Ephesus to visit Jerusalem and to go from there to Rome (19:21). The determination to visit Rome marks a major turning point in the story of Paul's witness. From then on, Rome becomes the major focal point in the narrative. The road to Rome, however, leads Paul first by way of Jerusalem; and his journey to Jerusalem is a major theme of 20:1-21:16. Much as Jesus' own journey to Jerusalem was marked by his awareness that he would suffer in that city, Paul's journey was marked by his premonition of trials that awaited him there (20:22f.) and constant warnings from fellow Christians about the danger of his going to the holy city (21:4,11-14). Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus followed the pattern already established at Corinth of setting up his mission in the major metropolitan center of a region and working outward from there. In Paul's day Ephesus was the most populous city of Asia Minor and the commercial and political hub of the entire province. An ancient city, there was a settlement on the site well back into the second millennium before Christ.”²

Paul’s and Luke’s journey to Ephesus. Acts 18:18-19:10

¹⁸ *After this Paul stayed many days longer [in Corinth], and then took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchre-ae he cut his hair, for he had a vow. ¹⁹ And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there; but he himself went into the synagogue and argued with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined; ²¹ but on taking leave of them he said, “I will return to you if God wills,” and he set sail from Ephesus.*

²² *When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. ²³ After spending some time there he departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.* [It is possible that at this point he made a short trip to Jerusalem because of his vow, Acts 18:18. The cancellation of such vows took place at the Temple in Jerusalem.]

²⁴ *Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately. [Obviously, they included instruction regarding the Gospel message including baptism into Christ for the remission of sins.] ²⁷ And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, ²⁸ for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.*

^{19:1} *While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ² And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy*

² Polhill, *Acts*, pp. 393-394.

Spirit.”³ And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.”⁴ And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.”⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus [at which point they received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit according to Acts 2:38, 5:32, 10:47, 11:15-17].⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, [apostolic imparting or passing on miraculous gifts] the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.⁷ *There were about twelve of them in all.*”

Laying on of Apostolic hands after baptism. Acts 19:6, 7

Marshall observes regarding this apostolic activity:

“As part of the rite Paul also laid his hands upon the men, and thereupon the Spirit came on them, his presence being signified by the gifts of tongues and prophecy. Laying on of hands is also associated with the gift of the Spirit in 8: 17f., *but elsewhere it is not mentioned in this connection* (1 Tim. 4:14 and 2 Tim. 1:6f. refer to ordination for Christian service). Some scholars have concluded that Luke regarded it as part of the rite of baptism even in those instances where it is not mentioned ... no such association of the laying on of hands with the gift of the Spirit at baptism can be traced before AD 200, and then only sporadically. It seems more likely that the laying on of hands should be understood as *a special act of fellowship, incorporating the people concerned into the fellowship of the church*. This was necessary in the case of the Samaritan converts in chapter 8 to make it quite clear that they were accepted fully into the Jewish church centered on Jerusalem; and it was necessary in the present instance to make it clear to these members of a semi-Christian group that they were now becoming part of the universal church. The fact that the story demonstrates that Paul had the same authority as Peter and John to convey the gift of the Spirit is probably merely a secondary motif. The effect of the baptism was to produce ‘charismatic’ manifestations of the Spirit (2:4, 17f.; 10:46). *It is clear from the other stories of conversion in Acts that such manifestations took place spasmodically and were not the general rule* (8:17 note; 8:39; 13:52; 16:34); in the present case some unusual gift was perhaps needed to convince this group of ‘semi-Christians’ that they were now fully members of Christ’s church.”³

Along similar lines, Polhill agrees with Marshall regarding the laying on a Paul’s hands and the reception of Holy Spirit giftedness:

“Unlike Apollos, who had already been instructed in “the way” and who accurately taught about Jesus, this group was totally unacquainted with the gospel. They knew only John's preparatory message. But John had prepared them well, and they immediately responded to Paul's good news that Christ the Messiah had come; they were baptized in his name (v. 5). Paul then laid his hands on them, and they received the Spirit. Some argue on the basis of this text that the gesture of hand-laying accompanied early Christian baptism. This, however, is the only instance in Acts where hand-laying directly follows baptism; and there is no evidence it was associated with baptism as a regular practice before A.D. 200. In this instance the gesture is closely associated with the disciples' receiving the Spirit, much as with the case of the Samaritan disciples in 8:15-17. In both instances the reality of their experience

³ Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 325-326.

was demonstrated in an ecstatic manifestation, with this group speaking in tongues and prophesying. *As throughout Acts, there is no set pattern.* The Spirit came at various times and in various ways. *What is consistent is that the Spirit is always a vital part of one's initial commitment to Christ and a mark of every believer.*⁴

Paul's missionary teaching ministry in Ephesus. Acts 19:8-10

⁸ *And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing, and pleading, [ἐπαρρησιάζετο ἐπὶ μῆνας τρεῖς διαλεγόμενος, speaking openly and dialoguing or discussing] about the kingdom of God [a meaningful theological point for Jesus, Paul, and the message of Christ for the Jewish age long anticipation of the reestablishment of God's kingdom]; ⁹ *but when some were stubborn and disbelieved, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, [Luke introduces a new description of the Christian movement. The background of this was Jesus' claim to be the true "way, truth, and life," John 14:6.] he withdrew from them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus. [A striking move from the Jewish Synagogue to a Greek "hall or school" of Tyrannus . Tyrannus is thought to have been a Greek sophist, a teacher of rhetoric or philosophy.] ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. [This symbiotically supported Luke's Gentile mission purpose in writing *Acts*.]**

Regarding the nature of Paul's mission ministry in Ephesus, Schreiner points out that the Trinitarian focus of Paul's ministry is clear, "By the power of the Spirit (boldness), Paul preaches Jesus (word of the Lord), and this message can be summarized as concerning the "kingdom of God."⁵

Paul's ministry of miracles in Ephesus. Acts 19:11-20

Up to this point, Paul has been an apostle of preaching and teaching the *Word of God*. Now in this pericope we see Paul a man of *significant apostolic power*. It is clear that Luke attributes Paul's miraculous power to God and not Paul himself. This was necessary in a ministry in Asia and the Greco-Roman world of miracle-workers and sooth-sayers.

The power of god which Paul manifest is greater than the power of the local magicians, their sorcery, and their divinities.

Luke wats to show the Gentile readers of his message and power of his *Gospel*, the *Book of Acts*, and that of the Christian faith can compete with and surpass any of the Greco-Roman religions, gods, and powers. Threads of this theme have been evident in the previous narratives of Paul's mission, but they rise to the surface in Ephesus where the power of the magicians of the great city of Artemis and its pagan gods and religion were universally admired.

Schreiner observes a universal principle that Luke was obviously emphasizing:

"When the good news enters new territories, other powers attempt to control their terrain through representative agents (cf. 8:9–24; 13:4–12; 16:16–18). Satan may have been cast down to the earth, but he still makes war against the woman and her child (Rev 12). Luke proceeds with his typical pattern: witnesses proclaim Jesus is Lord, and then a turf war ensues. The word continues to flourish and conquer the forces of evil and magic. Reactions to Paul's ministry dominate the Ephesus narrative, but here in the center Luke provides the content and

⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, pp. 399-400.

⁵ Schreiner, *Acts*, p. 579.

form of Paul's ministry. Paul is a prophetic figure in word and deed. Though the narrative begins in the synagogue, rejection causes Paul to move out to a lecture hall. However, the narrative is not primarily about Paul, for Luke explicitly notes this is God the Father's action, as Paul preaches the Son, by the power of the Spirit."⁶

Witherington has some interesting comments regarding Luke's purpose in including miracles in his narrative:

"Chiefly, in the Lukan view of things, miracles serve conversionist ends, *either by attracting people to the faith or by validating that the faith is powerful once believed*. Inasmuch as spiritual gifts fall under the category of the miraculous, *they, too, have an evidentialist function in Acts, bearing witness to the authenticity of a conversion* (see Acts 10). What this means is that Luke is not interested in miracles for their own sake, or even for their entertainment value in a narrative, but *he is interested in them insofar as they punctuate the central message about the spread of the word and the conversion of the various sorts of people that make up the Greco-Roman world*. This also means that miracles in Acts are not seen as means of mere benevolence, making a person whole but without changing his or her own worldview, but rather *they tend toward the transvaluation of the healed one's values*. In Luke's hierarchy of values conversion is the primary value, and others, such as health, are subservient to it. Nevertheless, wholeness, involving the entire person, is a real concern for Luke, and both body and spirit are seen as a part of salvation."⁷

"¹¹ And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" ¹⁶ And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ And this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks; and fear fell upon them all; and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. ¹⁸ Many also of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹ And a number of those who practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily."

Paul's future plans. Acts 19:21, 22

"²¹ Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." ²² And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while."

⁶ Schreiner, *Acts*, p. 577.

⁷ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 945.

Paul's clash with Demetrius and the siler-smiths in Ephesus. Acts 19:23-41

Marshall introduces this pericope intending to explain the theology behind Luk's inclusion of the narrative:

"The opposition to Paul which arose in Ephesus was like that in Philippi in *springing from pagan sources. To the charge that Paul was interfering with the vested interests of those who made their living from idolatry was added the accusation that he was striking at pagan religion itself.* The incident, as Luke relates, expresses the wide effects of the Christian mission, and also brings out the arbitrariness and confusion of the opposition which had no clearly concerted plan of action. It is also made clear that those who were in positions of authority were opposed to action against the missionaries, except by the proper legal processes. *The story is in effect a statement that Christians do not constitute a danger to the state and a plea that they be treated with toleration in a pluralistic society; only when properly defined criminal charges can be preferred against them should they be summoned before the courts.*"⁸

The text

²³ *About that time there arose no little stir concerning **the Way**.*²⁴ *For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis [one of the primary Greek and Roman divinities of Ephesus], brought no little business to the craftsmen.*²⁵ *These he gathered together, with the workmen of like occupation, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.*²⁶ *And you see and hear that not only at Ephesus but almost throughout all Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable company of people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.*²⁷ *And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis [the temple to Artemis was one of the outstanding features of ancient Asia and Ephesus] may count for nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."*

²⁸ *When they heard this they were enraged, and cried out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"*²⁹ *So the city was filled with the confusion; and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.*³⁰ *Paul wished to go in among the crowd, but the disciples would not let him;*³¹ *some of the Asiarchs [respected political, religious, and social leaders and aristocracy of Asia Cities] also, who were friends of his, sent to him and begged him not to venture into the theater.*³² *Now some cried one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion [συγχέω, *sugchéō*, confused uproar] and most of them did not know why they had come together.*³³ *Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, wishing to make a defense to the people.*³⁴ *But when they recognized that he was a*

⁸ Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 332-333.

⁹ The *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* observes regarding the expression **the Way**. "It was one of the earliest names applied to the Christian community (Acts 9:2). It was apparently used by both the Jewish and the secular community and appeared in both positive and negative assessments of the church (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Paul's use of the term in his defense before Felix suggests that the name had at least quasi-official acceptance (24:14, 22). Though the OT develops a rich repertoire for the term, its application to the NT derives primarily from Jesus' statement in John 14:6 that he was the "way." Though it was regularly used during the 1st century, it seems to have dropped out of general use shortly thereafter. Mohammed later appropriated the term in the Koran as a title for Islam."

*Jew, for about two hours they all with one voice cried out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”*³⁵ *And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, “Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky?*³⁶ *Seeing then that these things cannot be contradicted, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash.*³⁷ *For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess.*³⁸ *If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against any one, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges against one another.*³⁹ *But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly.*⁴⁰ *For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, there being no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.”*⁴¹ *And when he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.”* [The Roman authorities would not have put up with such confusion and outcries over local civil and religious issues.]

Paul’s journey from Ephesus to Macedonia . 20:1–4

“Paul’s plans included a return visit to Macedonia and Achaia before his journey to Jerusalem (19:21). His original plan would have been to go directly from Corinth to Palestine, by-passing the west coast of Asia, but in view of his fears of a Jewish plot against him he resolved to avoid his enemies by returning the way he had come through Macedonia and down the coast of Asia via Troas.”¹⁰

*“¹ After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples and having exhorted them took leave of them and departed for Macedonia.*² *When he had gone through these parts and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece.* [The popular term for the Roman Province of Achaia.]³ *There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, [he actually ended up in Tyre, Acts 21:3, then on to Caesarea and Jerusalem] he determined to return through Macedonia.*⁴ *Sopater of Beroea, the son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.”*

From Philippi in Macedonia to Miletus in Asia. Acts 20:5-16

Marshall picks up the narrative explaining that some of Paul’s party went on before Paul and arrived in Troas in North-western Asia.

“*Paul’s companions* went on ahead of him for reasons unknown and *crossed over to Troas*, where they waited for the rest of the party. *Now the narrative resumes the ‘we’ style which indicates that the author is again a member of the party.* Clearly he is not to be identified with any of the persons named in verse 4. The last we passage terminated in Philippi where this one commences, but it is possible that the author had already joined Paul before he reached Philippi. By ‘we’ the author apparently means ‘Paul and I’ — and possibly other unnamed persons; but we should note the suggestion ... that the ‘these’ in verse 5 could refer just to Tychicus and Trophimus, so that the ‘we’ would then include the rest of the names mentioned in verse 4. *The Asians would go on ahead to prepare for the main party. Paul and the others waited till after the feast of Unleavened Bread before departure.* It is probable that he was celebrating the *Christian Passover, i.e. Easter, with the church at*

¹⁰ Marshall, *Acts*, p. 340.

Philippi (1 Cor. 5: 7f.) rather than that this is merely a Jewish time note (cf. 20:16 and contrast 27: 9). The journey from Neapolis, the port for Philippi (16:11), to Troas took longer than the journey in the reverse direction, no doubt owing to adverse wind conditions.”¹¹

Acts 20:5-16. Note the several we pronouns indicating that Luke had joined the group. Note also Paul’s respect for the Jewish *fest of Unleavened Bread*, the *Passover*, and the concern for arriving in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost, the Christian memorial of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:1ff.

Acts 20:7 records one of the earliest Lord’s Day communion services, on the *first day of the week*, the day following the Jewish Sabbath. Being in a Gentile culture, the time and the day would have been measured from 12:00 pm to 12:00 pm, not 6:00 pm, sunset, to 6:00 pm sunset.

Acts 20:7 is a well-known text for the Lord’s Supper, but imbedded in the text is a pivotal behavioral point!

Polhill has an interesting comment on this text since it is one of the earliest texts of the church celebrating the Lord’s Supper:

“Paul and his traveling companions spent a week in Troas (20:6), evidently awaiting the departure of their ship. *On their last day there, which happened to be a Sunday, Paul met with the Christians for worship. This is one of the earliest references to Christians meeting for worship on Sunday, the first day of the week.* Christians may have continued to observe the Jewish Sabbath as well, *but eventually the Lord’s resurrection day became the sole day of worship for Christians.*”¹²

“7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and he prolonged his speech until midnight.”

The Greek text introduces us to an interesting point! “*Ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων συνηγμένων ἡμῶν κλάσαι ἄρτον.*” The Greek word *συνηγμένων* is a *perfect passive participle* indicating that this practice had *its roots in the past but continued in the present*. In other words, *the perfect participle implies a habitual practice, not an occasional practice!*

Early church history confirms this. Testimony to the regular celebration of the *Eucharist* on the Lord’s Day, or the first day of the week, abounds in the Apostolic Fathers’ writings.¹³

“5 These went on and were waiting for us at Troas, 6 but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and he prolonged his speech until midnight. 8 There were many lights in the upper chamber where we were gathered. 9 And a young man named Eutychus was sitting in the window. He sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer; and being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. 10 But Paul went down and bent over him, and embracing him said, “Do not be

¹¹ Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 343-344.

¹² Polhill, *Acts*, p. 418.

¹³ Cf. Ferguson, Everett, *Early Christians Speak*, ACU Press, 1999; Ferguson, Everett, *Encyclopedia of Early Christian History*, Garland Publishers, 1997.

*alarmed, for his life is in him.”*¹¹ *And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed.*¹² *And they took the lad away alive, and were not a little comforted.*

¹³ *But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there; for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land.*¹⁴ *And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene.*¹⁵ *And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we came to Miletus.*¹⁶ *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, [Ephesus was a major seaport in Asia, but Paul had completed his mission to Ephesus and sailed on past the city] so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.”*

Acts 20:17-38: Paul meets with the Ephesian Elders Miletus

Polhill draws attention to this speech as one of three important Pauline speeches recorded by Luke in Acts.

“Paul’s address to the Ephesian elders is the third and final example in Acts of his speeches during the course of his missionary work. The first, delivered in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (13:16-41), was given during the course of his first mission and was to a Jewish audience. The second, delivered before the Athenian Areopagus (17:22-31), was given during his second mission and was to a Gentile audience. The Miletus address was delivered in the course of his third mission and was given before a Christian gathering. Of all Paul’s speeches in Acts, the Miletus address has the most in common with Paul’s epistles. There are many parallels both in wording and in general thought. This striking similarity may be due to the fact that this address is not a missionary sermon or a legal defense as with his other addresses in Acts. It is delivered to Christians and thus has more affinity to the epistles, which were also addressed to Christians. In form the address can be characterized as a “farewell address.” *It is delivered as a conscious final legacy of the apostle to the leaders of the Asian church.* Paul did not expect to return. As a farewell speech it has much in common with similar speeches in both the Old and New Testaments ... The most striking parallels to the Miletus speech are Paul’s words to Timothy in 1 Tim 4:1-16 and 2 Tim 3:1-4:8.⁷⁵ Certain common features characterize these addresses: the assembling of the family or followers, the note that the speaker will soon depart or die, sometimes an appeal to the personal example of the speaker, exhortations to desired behavior on the part of the hearers, and often a prediction of coming times of trial and difficulty. All of these features are present in Paul’s Miletus address. *Although delivered specifically to the Ephesian elders, it is a suitable legacy from the apostle for all his churches as he left his field of mission and challenged the church leaders to continue in his footsteps.”*¹⁴

Paul’s speech to the Ephesian elders

¹⁷ *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.*¹⁸ *And when they came to him, he said to them:*

“You yourselves know how I lived among you all the time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was

¹⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, p. 422-423.

profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ **testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.** ²² *And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there;* ²³ **except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.** ²⁴ *But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.* ²⁵ *And now, behold, I know that all you among whom* **I have gone preaching the kingdom will see my face no more** [Paul had other plans—preaching in Rome, and he knows his missionary-lie is limited. He knows from experience the Holy Spirit guides his life¹⁵]. ²⁶ *Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you,* ²⁷ **for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.** ²⁸ **Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son.** ²⁹ *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;* ³⁰ **and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.** ³¹ **Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.** ³² *And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.* ³³ *I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.* ³⁴ *You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me.* ³⁵ *In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'* ”

³⁶ *And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all.* ³⁷ *And they all wept and embraced Paul and kissed him,* ³⁸ **sorrowing most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they brought him to the ship.”**

Acts 21:1-16. Following this meeting, Paul left Miletus travelling to Judea, Caesarea and Jerusalem.

Schreiner draws attention to Luke's literary and missiological scheme, bringing Paul's three mission journeys to a theological closure:

“Each of Paul's missionary journeys concludes with a travel narrative (14:21–28; 18:18–23), and the third journey is no different. *However, this last journey is unique as it is Paul's farewell circuit. Paul has already decided “by the Spirit” to go to Jerusalem (19:21; 20:16).* Though he travels a circuitous route, he ends up at Jerusalem's doorstep ...

If in Ephesus the focus was on groups on the edge or outside the Christian movement, *then the following narrative turns to believers.* Paul journeys to encourage and say goodbye to saints. His farewell speech at Miletus uniquely displays Paul's great affection that reveals Paul's pathos (personal relationships and character) more than anywhere else in Acts. Paul

¹⁵ Cf Acts 21:10ff “*While we were staying for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.* ¹¹ *And coming to us he took Paul's girdle and bound his own feet and hands, and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”* ¹² *When we heard this, we and the people there begged him not to go up to Jerusalem.* ¹³ *Then Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”* ¹⁴ *And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, “The will of the Lord be done.”*”

travels to encourage the church, to spread light in the midst of darkness. Christians must link arms with one another in the race to the finish line.

Bracketing the farewell speech, Luke recounts detailed travel narratives (20:1–16; 21:1–15). These journeys display the success of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles. These communities do exactly what the Jerusalem Christians did in 2:42–47 and 4:32–35: they devote themselves to teaching (20:7–12), break bread in their homes (20:7,11), show hospitality to Paul (21:4,7–8,10), devote themselves to prayer and prophecy (21:5,9,11–14). New temple communities now pepper the landscape. This is Luke’s survey before Paul goes on trial.

Structurally, Luke toggles between travel narratives and events, portraying Paul as encouraging churches (20:1–12), partaking in painful farewells (20:36–38; 21:5–6,12–15), and spreading resurrection life (20:7–12), but a foreboding sense of Paul’s destiny also creeps in (21:1–14). All these short narratives and “small gatherings are venues for the operation of the Spirit.” Overall, Luke indicates that Paul is not beginning another journey or going about business as usual. *This is his farewell tour.*¹⁶

New Testament scholarship in the field of Luke-Acts

Reliable scholars in the field of Luke-Acts, such as those cited in this study, universally acknowledge their indebtedness to Sir William Ramsey, British archaeology of the early 20th century, for his remarkable history of archaeological and theological discoveries in the history and geography of the New Testament.

Sir William Mitchell Ramsay¹⁷

15 March 1851 – 20 April 1939

Ramsay was a British archaeologist and New Testament scholar. By his death in 1939 he had become the foremost authority of his day on the history of Asia Minor and a leading scholar in the study of the New Testament.

Early in his academic career Ramsay was impressed by the Tübingen school of thought (founded by F. C. Baur) which doubted the reliability of the New Testament, but his extensive archaeological and historical studies convinced him of Baur’s error and the New Testament’s historical and geographical accuracy.

Ramsay studied at the University of Aberdeen, where he achieved high distinction and later became Professor of Humanity. He won a scholarship to St. John’s College, Oxford, where he obtained a *first class* in classical moderations (1874) and in *literae humaniores* (1876). He also studied Sanskrit under Theodor Benfey at the University of Göttingen, Germany.

While holding the position of Professor of Classical Art and Architecture at Oxford, he was appointed Regius Professor of Humanity (the Latin Professorship) at Aberdeen.

He was knighted in 1906 to mark his distinguished service to the world of scholarship, Ramsay also gained three honorary fellowships from Oxford colleges, nine honorary doctorates from British, Continental and North American universities, and became an honorary member of almost every association devoted to archaeology and historical research.

In 1880 Ramsay received an Oxford fellowship for travel and research in Greece. At Smyrna, he met Sir C. W. Wilson, then British consul-general in Anatolia, who advised him on inland areas suitable for exploration. Ramsay and Wilson made two long journeys during 1881 and 1882.

Ramsay travelled widely in Asia Minor and rapidly became the recognized authority on all matters relating to the districts associated with St Paul’s missionary journeys and on Christianity in the early Roman Empire. Greece and Turkey remained the focus of Ramsay’s research for the remainder of his academic career. In November 1881, he

¹⁶ Schreiner, *Acts*, pp. 597-598.

¹⁷ Cf. I Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian & Theologian*, IVP Academic, 1970, 1998. Some information on Ramsay is based on comments in Wikipedia and other resources, IAF.

discovered two of the most important Phrygian monuments in the rock tombs "Aslantaş" (Lion Stone) and "Yılantaş" (Snake Stone). In 1883, he discovered the world's oldest complete piece of music, the *Seikilos epitaph*. In 1890 he discovered inscriptions in an unknown Anatolian language, Pisidian, a description of which he published in 1895.^[2] He was known for his expertise in the historic geography and topography of Asia Minor and of its political, social, cultural, and religious history.

Ramsay's studies in Asia Minor led him to accept the trustworthiness of Luke's account in the Book of Acts. He wrote:

"I may fairly claim to have entered on this investigation without any prejudice in favour of the conclusion which I shall now attempt to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavorable to it for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tubingen theory had at one time quite convinced me. It did not lie then in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely but more recently I found myself often brought in contact with the book of Acts as an authority for the topography antiquities and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne in upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvellous truth."

At the time when Ramsay first went to Asia Minor, many of the cities mentioned in the *Book of Acts* had no definite location. Later in life he concluded: "Further study ... showed that the book could bear the most minute scrutiny as an authority for the facts of the Aegean world, and that it was written with such judgment, skill, art and perception of truth as to be a model of historical statement" (*The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, Andesite Press, 2017, p. 85).

On page 89 of the same book, Ramsay comments on the reliability of Luke, he observes "You may press the words of Luke to a degree beyond any other historians".

The mission conclusion summary text

¹ *And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.* ² *And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard, and set sail.* ³ *When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo.* ⁴ *And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. **Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.*** ⁵ *And when our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey; and they all, with wives and children, brought us on our way till we were outside the city; and kneeling down on the beach we prayed and bade one another farewell.* ⁶ *Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.*

⁷ *When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the brethren and stayed with them for one day.* ⁸ *On the morrow we departed and came to Caesarea; and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist [Acts 6:5; 8:5-40], who was one of the seven, and stayed [Acts 6:5] with him.* ⁹ *And he had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.* ¹⁰ *While we were staying for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.* ¹¹ *And coming to us he took Paul's girdle and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' "* ¹² *When we heard this, we and the people there begged him not to go up to Jerusalem.* ¹³ *Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."* ¹⁴ *And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "The will of the Lord be done."*

¹⁵ *After these days we made ready and went up to Jerusalem.* ¹⁶ *And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge."*

Chapter 13: Acts 21:17-26:32. Paul arrested in Jerusalem; tried by the Sanhedrin and Roman authorities

Polhill sets the agenda for this next long section of Luke's missional theological narrative:

“This long section of Acts could be considered the most tedious portion of the whole book. It consists of seemingly endless legal scenes and has more than its share of speeches. That Luke considered this material of vital importance, however, is indicated by the fact that these chapters constitute the fulfillment of the divine promise given to Paul at the time of his conversion that he would bear the Lord's name before Gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel (9:15).

The *three major speeches* that comprise the framework of this section illustrate the accomplishment of that promise. At the beginning is *Paul's witness before a mob in the Jewish temple square (22:1-21)*. It is in every sense a testimony before the people of Israel. *The testimony before Gentiles is seen in the constant conversation between Paul and the Roman officials and particularly in the defense before Felix, which stands at this section's midpoint (24:10-21)*. Finally, *there is the climactic speech before the Jewish titular King Agrippa II (26:2-29)*. Considerable overlap occurs in the content of the speeches. *This repetition should be a clue in itself that Luke considered the material to be of vital importance*. Indeed, it is in this portion of Acts where the major themes of the entire book come together. In this sense these chapters comprise the climax to Acts.

A useful manner of delineating these themes is to consider the main characters who appear in these chapters. Basically, there are three—*Paul, the Roman officials, and the Jews*. As for Paul, one could consider this period as the nadir of his career. At the beginning he was nearly killed by an angry mob, was placed in chains by the Roman cohort, and thereafter was shunted from one official to another, one place of confinement to another. He was constantly under accusation, continually placed on the defense.

If one looks carefully at Paul's “defense,” however, it always appears as more of a witness, a positive testimony to his Christian faith. This is in keeping with the words of 9:15. Paul is not to be seen as having to give his legal defense so much as to bear his witness to the name of the Lord. With this section 23:11 is a key verse. Whomever Paul stood before—whether the Jews, the Roman procurator, or Caesar himself—it was above all to testify for his Lord. In so doing, he fulfilled the commission of Jesus (cf. Luke 21:12-19). The role Paul shared with the Twelve was that of witness. This was perhaps Paul's time of greatest witness. Far from a low point, it was in many respects the high point of Paul's career. His witness had no social or political bounds. He would ultimately testify to Christ before Caesar himself ...

The major theological difference centered around the resurrection, and the resurrection was perhaps the major motif in the picture of the Jews in Acts 22-26. Luke's treatment begins with Paul's announcement in the Sanhedrin that he was on trial because of his hope in the resurrection of the dead (23:6). This has often been seen as a clever ploy to divert attention from himself because it provoked a sharp division between the Sadducees and the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin. Actually it was no ploy, since the resurrection was indeed the central matter that separated Paul from the Jews. In the Sanhedrin scene the stage was set ...

The Pharisees sided with Paul because they shared his hope in the resurrection. Theologically the Pharisees were at one with him. Where they differed was their failure to acknowledge the resurrection of Jesus. They had no Damascus road vision of the risen Christ. Twice in the trial before Felix, Paul spoke of the resurrection. In fact, his concluding remark was almost identical to that in the Sanhedrin, stating that the resurrection was the real agenda for his trial (24:21).

The climactic treatment of the theme occurs in the final “trial” scene, Paul's hearing before Agrippa. Again there are two references to the resurrection in Paul's speech. The first is part of a complex that involves the hope of the Jews, the promises to the fathers, and God's raising of the dead (26:6-8). The second unites the Old Testament proofs of the Messiah's death and resurrection with the mission to the Gentiles and to Israel (26:22f.).”¹

Paul arrives in Jerusalem and visits James

Chapter 21:17

“¹⁷ When we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. ¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James; and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed; they are all zealous for the law, ²¹ and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs. ²² What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. ²³ Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; ²⁴ take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you but that you yourself live in observance of the law. ²⁵ But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity.” ²⁶ Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself with them and went into the temple, to give notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for every one of them.

Although Paul's report was received well by the Jewish leaders of the church in Jerusalem, there remained concern as to how many other Jewish Christians would react to what they had heard regarding Paul's apparent rejection of the Law of Moses. To demonstrate that Paul was still true to his Jewish culture and background, the leaders advised Paul to participate in Jewish purification rituals normally for a Jew having been in contact to non-kosha elements such as socializing with Gentiles. They also demonstrated concern over reaction to Gentiles being included in the new “quasi” Jewish Christian fellowship. They sent a letter to the “Gentile” churches of the diaspora encouraging them to observe Jewish kosher laws out of respect for their Jewish neighbors.

¹ Polhill, *Acts*, pp. 439-443.

Paul's arrest

²⁷ *When the seven days [required for the Jewish ritual cleansing] were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, who had seen him in the temple, stirred up all the crowd, and laid hands on him,* ²⁸ *crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching men everywhere against the people and the law and this place; moreover he also brought Greeks into the temple, and he has defiled this holy place."* ²⁹ *For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.* ³⁰ *Then all the city was aroused, and the people ran together; they seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut.* ³¹ *And as they were trying to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.* ³² *He at once took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.* ³³ *Then the tribune came up and arrested him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains.* *He inquired who he was and what he had done.* ³⁴ *Some in the crowd shouted one thing, some another; and as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.* ³⁵ *And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd; ³⁶ for the mob of the people followed, crying, "Away with him!"*

The Roman Tribune held an office in the Roman army just above a Centurion. The Tribunal's job was to maintain civil law and peace in the city. This was necessary because the Jews were notorious for creating mass demonstrations as a means of expressing their political and religious frustrations and fears.

Paul's defense before the Roman Tribunal

³⁷ *As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?"* *And he [the Tribune] said, "Do you know Greek?"* ³⁸ *Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"* [The Tribune mistook Paul for an Egyptian assassin notorious for insurrection against Rome] ³⁹ *Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; I beg you, let me speak to the people."* ⁴⁰ *And when he had given him leave, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying:*

Chapter 22:1

Paul turned his defense into an occasion to preach Jesus to the Jews assembled.

¹ *"Brethren and fathers, hear the defense which I now make before you."*

² *And when they heard that he addressed them in the Hebrew language [most likely Aramaic, the local spoken dialect of Jews in Judea], they were the more quiet. And he said:*

³ *"I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamali-el, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day.* ⁴ *I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,* ⁵ *as the high priest and the whole council of elders bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brethren, and I journeyed to Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.*

⁶ *"As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. ⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul,*

Saul, why do you persecute me?’⁸ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.’⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.¹⁰ And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’¹¹ And when I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

¹² “And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well-spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,¹³ came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And in that very hour I received my sight and saw him.¹⁴ And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth;¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard.¹⁶ And now why do you wait? **Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.**’

¹⁷ “When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance¹⁸ and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’¹⁹ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in thee.²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I also was standing by and approving, and keeping the garments of those who killed him.’²¹ And he said to me, ‘**Depart; for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.**’ ”

²² Up to this word they listened to him; then they lifted up their voices and said, “**Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he ought not to live.**”²³ And as they cried out and waved their garments and threw dust into the air,²⁴ the tribune commanded him to be brought into the barracks, and ordered him to be examined by scourging, to find out why they shouted thus against him.²⁵ But when they had tied him up with the thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “**Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen, and uncondemned?**”²⁶ When the centurion heard that, he went to the tribune and said to him, “What are you about to do? **For this man is a Roman citizen.**”²⁷ So the tribune came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” And he said, “Yes.”²⁸ The tribune answered, “I bought this citizenship for a large sum.” Paul said, “**But I was born a citizen.**”²⁹ So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him instantly; and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

Paul’s trial before the Sanhedrin

³⁰ But on the morrow, desiring to know the real reason why the Jews accused him, he [the tribunal] unbound him, and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

Chapter 23:1

¹ And Paul, looking intently at the council, said, “Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day.”² And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.³ Then Paul said to him, “**God shall 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?**”⁴ Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?”⁵ And Paul said, “**I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’** ”

⁶ *But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial.”* [This is an important point since the resurrection is a major aspect of the Christian faith, and Paul knew of the difference between the Pharisee’s and Sadducee’s² views on the resurrection, he set them up to debate among themselves over the resurrection!] ⁷ *And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.* ⁸ *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.* ⁹ *Then a great clamor arose; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ party stood up and contended, “We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?”* ¹⁰ *And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks.* ¹¹ *The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome.”*

Paul moved to Caesarea under Roman guard

¹² *When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.* ¹³ *There were more than forty who made this conspiracy.* ¹⁴ *And they went to the chief priests and elders, and said, “We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul.* ¹⁵ *You therefore, along with the council, give notice now to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near.”*

¹⁶ *Now the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush; so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.* ¹⁷ *And Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the tribune; for he has something to tell him.”* ¹⁸ *So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, “Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you.”* ¹⁹ *The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, “What is it that you have to tell me?”* ²⁰ *And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him.* ²¹ *But do not yield to them; for more than forty of their men lie in ambush for him, having bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you.”* ²² *So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, “Tell no one that you have informed me of this.”*

²³ *Then he called two of the centurions and said, “At the third hour of the night get ready two hundred soldiers with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea.* ²⁴ *Also provide mounts for Paul to ride, and bring him safely to Felix the governor.”* ²⁵ *And he wrote a letter to this effect:*

²⁶ *“Claudius Lysias to his Excellency the governor Felix, greeting.* ²⁷ *This man was seized by the Jews, and was about to be killed by them, when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen.* ²⁸ *And desiring to know the charge on which they accused him, I brought him down to their council.* ²⁹ *I found that he was*

² The Sadducees accepted only the first five books of the Pentateuch as canonical, which did not predict a resurrection, and since Jewish/Pharisee resurrection views were supported by the other books of the Old Testament, the Sadducees and Pharisees spent considerable time arguing over such issues.

accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment.³⁰ And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him.”

³¹ So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.³² And on the morrow they returned to the barracks, leaving the horsemen to go on with him.³³ When they came to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him.³⁴ On reading the letter, he asked to what province he belonged. When he learned that he was from Cilicia³⁵ he said, “I will hear you when your accusers arrive.” And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod’s praetorium.

Paul before Felix

Chapter 24:1

¹ And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul;² and when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:

“Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your provision, most excellent Felix, reforms are introduced on behalf of this nation,³ in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude.⁴ But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly.⁵ For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.⁶ He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him.⁸ By examining him yourself you will be able to learn from him about everything of which we accuse him.”

⁹ The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all this was so.¹⁰ And when the governor had motioned to him to speak, Paul replied:

“Realizing that for many years you have been judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.¹¹ As you may ascertain, it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship at Jerusalem;¹² and they did not find me disputing with any one or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues, or in the city.¹³ Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me.¹⁴ But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets,¹⁵ having a hope in God which these themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.¹⁶ So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men.¹⁷ Now after some years I came to bring to my nation alms and offerings.¹⁸ As I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia—¹⁹ they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, if they have anything against me.²⁰ Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council,²¹ except this one thing which I cried out while standing among them, ‘With respect to the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you this day.’ ”

²² But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.”²³ Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but should have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

²⁴ After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess; and he sent for Paul and heard him speak upon faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ And as he argued about justice and self-control and future judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present; when I have an opportunity I will summon you." ²⁶ At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. ²⁷ **But when two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.**

Chapter 25:1

¹ Now when **Festus** had come into his province, after three days he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. ² And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they urged him, ³ asking as a favor to have the man sent to Jerusalem, planning an ambush to kill him on the way. ⁴ **Festus** replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and that he himself intended to go there shortly. ⁵ "So," said he, "let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them accuse him."

⁶ When he had stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea; and the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. ⁷ And when he had come, the Jews who had gone down from Jerusalem stood about him, bringing against him many serious charges which they could not prove. ⁸ Paul said in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended at all." ⁹ But **Festus**, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem, and there be tried on these charges before me?" ¹⁰ But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried; to the Jews I have done no wrong, as you know very well. ¹¹ 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 in their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar." [cf. Acts 26, 31, 32] ¹² Then **Festus**, when he had conferred with his council, answered, "**You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you shall go.**"

¹³ Now when some days had passed, **Agrippa the king** and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to welcome Festus. ¹⁴ And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix; ¹⁵ and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews gave information about him, asking for sentence against him. ¹⁶ I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up any one before the accused met the accusers face to face, and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. ¹⁷ When therefore they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought in. ¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed; ¹⁹ but they had certain points of dispute with him about their own superstition and about one Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. ²⁰ Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wished to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. ²¹ But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I commanded him to be held until I could send him to Caesar." ²² And Agrippa said to Festus, "I should like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," said he, "you shall hear him."

²³ So on the morrow Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then by command of Festus Paul was brought in. ²⁴ And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵ **But I found that he had done nothing deserving death; and as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to send him.** ²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you, and, especially before you, King Agrippa, that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. ²⁷ For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."

Chapter 26:1

¹ **Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:**

² **"I think myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ because you are especially familiar with all customs and controversies of the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.**

⁴ "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. ⁵ They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now I stand here on trial for hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! ⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

⁹ "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem; I not only shut up many of the saints in prison, by authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.

¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme; and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

¹² "Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining round me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.' ¹⁵ And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles—to whom I send you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

¹⁹ "Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. ²² To

this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³ that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles.”

²⁴ And as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad.” ²⁵ But Paul said, “I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. ²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.”

²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time you think to make me a Christian!” ²⁹ And Paul said, “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.”

³⁰ Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them;

³¹ and when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” ³² And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. [Acts 25:10, 11]”

Chapter 14: Acts 27:1-28:31. Paul sent to Rome

Acts 2:38: Baptism *for* Forgiveness of Sins.

Introduction

Since baptism plays such a significant role in the Lukan narrative, and since many evangelical views have a faulty understanding of the theology of Christian baptism, I have included a chapter of the soteriological role of baptism in New Testament theology.

This study is written, therefore, in response to some evangelical attempts to reinterpret Acts 2:38.

³⁸ *And Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

³⁸ Πέτρος δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς· Μετανοήσατε, (φησὶν) καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν καὶ λήμψεσθε τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.

As we will note below, all major English translations translate Acts 2:38 as “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*”, or something close to this!

Some evangelicals, predominantly Southern Baptists, would reinterpret this text to read “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **because of** the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” In this interpretation they suggest that *because of* means *as a result* of the remission of sins.

We reject this evangelical translation as unsound Greek syntactical¹⁴² translation, and one influenced by denominational theology rather than careful biblical Greek syntactical grammatical context.

Bibliography on Baptism

We recommend the following studies on Baptism:

Beasley-Murray, G. R., *Baptism in the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1962.

Beasley-Murray is a Baptist scholar who has taught at some of the finest Baptist universities and seminaries. He was professor emeritus at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and a former principal of Spurgeon’s College, London. Beasley-Murray discusses all of the major baptism texts in the New Testament, including Acts 2:38 and the other baptism texts in Acts.

Ferguson, Everett, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*, 2009.

Ferguson is a Distinguished, internationally acknowledged Professor of Church History and Biblical Studies at Abilene Christian University.

Schreiner, Thomas R. and Shawn D Wright, *Believers Baptism: A Sign of The New Covenant in Christ*, 2006.

Cottrell, Jack, *Baptism: Zwingli or The Bible?* 2022.

Cottrell, Jack, *Baptism A Biblical Study*, 1999.

Zodhiates, Spiros, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 1993.

Kittel, Gerhard *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

¹⁴² I refer to syntactical translation since all Greek words are influenced and shaped in relation to their immediate grammatical context rather than personal or denominational theological views. This will be discussed in detail below.

Arndt, William F. and Gingrich, F. Wilbur, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

Our Response to Some Evangelical Reinterpretation of Acts 2:38

This study explores the meaning of Peter's response in Acts 2:38 to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. After preaching a sermon on the Holy Spirit and Jesus' Death and Resurrection based on Joel 2:28 and Psalm 16, Peter concluded "*Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.*" Luke continues "*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"*" We can safely assume that at this point these Jews believed in Jesus; that he was both Lord and their promised Messiah, that they had crucified him, and that God had raised him from the dead. Peter responded telling them to "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"

It is clear from Luke's account of this sermon that these Jews really believed in Jesus. When they asked what they should do, Peter did not respond, "You do not have to do anything, you now believe and are therefore saved"! His instructions were "*repent and be baptized every one of you.*" But why should they be baptized? Quite clearly his answer gave the reason, "*for the forgiveness of sins.*" Luke tells us that Peter then encouraged them "*with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."*" The result was that "*those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*"

This brief account of the baptism of the 3000 on Pentecost is not difficult to understand. They heard Peter's preaching concerning Jesus, they *believed in Jesus*, they asked what they should then do, they were told to *repent* and *every one* of them to *be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins*. They were then encouraged to save themselves from their crooked generation. They responded in faith by being baptized.

Some evangelical Christians have difficulty reconciling this brief narrative with their doctrine of *salvation by faith only*. They consider baptism a *work of obedience* in response to salvation, and not faith responding *for* salvation.

There is no question regarding the fundamental Christian doctrine of justification or salvation by grace through faith in Jesus! This is deeply imbedded in New Testament and Christian doctrine. *The question is how baptism fits into this equation.* The evangelical response is that baptism is *a work of obedience* experienced *after salvation*, Baptism in their view is *because of* the salvation already received, and in response to that salvation. Baptism in Peter's view in Acts 2:38 is *the result of faith and repentance, and is for or unto salvation.* The error in evangelical views of baptism is that baptism is not simply a work of obedience *because of*, or after salvation, but *is in fact faith expressing itself in response to grace and for salvation.* This is clearly what Peter laid out in Acts 2:38 stressing that baptism is not a work we engage in, but it is faith in the working of God.

At Col 2:12 Paul clearly explains that baptism is *faith in the working of God*. Baptism is not faith in our working as an act of obedience, but *faith in God's working!*

We will argue that baptism and faith are both "acts, activities, or actions" we must *personally engage* in for salvation. The debate we have with many evangelicals' hinges relates to *how one interprets works*, as works of *merit* or works of *faith!*

Jesus, in a discussion with some Jews regarding the works that God desired of us explained that faith is the work God requires of us! John 6:28, 29: "*Then they said to him, "What must we*

do, to be doing the works of God?”²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

Baptism is as much a work of faith as are believing and repenting! They re-present *action in response* to God’s saving grace and redemptive activity in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

No one has faith *for us*, we must believe or have faith in Jesus for ourselves. Likewise no one is baptized for us, we must personally submit to being baptized as a matter of faith in Jesus! *Faith and baptism are therefore acts we must experience and engage in. However, neither faith nor baptism are acts or works of merit from which earn salvation.*

Salvation has its roots in God’s love and is a free gift of God’s grace, for which believing, repenting, and baptism are faith responding to God’s grace. We respond to the preaching of God’s grace and the Gospel message through faith, trusting and believing the preached gospel message of his atoning death and resurrection. As in Acts 2:36 with the Jews on Pentecost, this gospel message challenges us to repent and submit to God’s working in baptism *for* the forgiveness of our sins.

Faith it is not something we do that earns us salvation or gains us merit! Faith and baptism are however the *appropriate response to God’s grace.*

This is what Peter explained in 1 Pet 3:21 when he discussed Noah and baptism. After stating that Noah was “*saved through water*” Peter added, “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” Baptism is the *response of a good conscience in faith to God’s call for faith and obedience*, and as Peter explains in both Acts 2:38 and 1 Pet 3:21, baptism is *for the purpose of forgiveness and salvation.*

Faith and baptism are *intricately connected as two indispensable poles in a continuum pointing to salvation!* and not as two separate but important points. The minute you separate faith from baptism you end up in a situation of no real faith! To say you believe in and trust Jesus and separate baptism from that equation you no longer trust in Jesus and his Word! To separate baptism from faith in the equation of Acts 2:38 you likewise end up in a situation of no real faith and no salvation!

Whichever way you approach salvation, it is a matter of God’s saving grace and not your effort, either in having faith or in being baptized. Salvation remains a matter of God’s saving and powerful grace bound in Acts 2:38 to faith and baptism, and in 1 Peter 3:21 to salvation bound to baptism! To separate baptism from either faith and salvation in either text is to abuse and denigrate the text! The Greek preposition *καὶ* is a coordinating conjunction¹⁴³ joining or coordinating words or clauses in a sentence or statement! In this case, Acts 2:38, *Μετανοήσατε ... καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν*, *repent and be baptizing each one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.* Peter does not speak here of *faith* or *belief* since that would have been redundant since they had already confessed their faith in Jesus in the response to Peter’s sermon!

Furthermore, baptism is not a work we do, that is an active verb, but something that is done to us as we submit to baptism! Baptism in Acts 2:38 is expressed in the *passive voice*, *βαπτισθήτω*, *baptisthētō*, and not the active voice. This is likewise true at Acts 22:16, Rom

¹⁴³ Zodhiates, καὶ ... *As simply joining single words and clauses, As a continuative in respect to time, i.e., connecting clauses and sentences in the order of time, As continuative in respect to sense, i.e., before the apodosis and connecting it as a consequent with the protasis as its antecedent, As an explicative copula meaning, i.e., namely, to wit, even, between words and clauses, between nouns which are strictly in apposition...*

6:1ff, Gal 3:26! We submit *in faith* to being baptized, and it is God who works salvation in our submission to baptism!

The result of the difficulty experienced by evangelicals to understand faith and baptism as equal responses to God's saving grace is seen clearly in their attempts to interpret Acts 2:38 in a manner that makes baptism the result of salvation rather than of faith leading to salvation. We then encounter the following **false** interpretation of Acts 2:38, "*Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ because of the forgiveness of sins...*" implying *looking back* or as a result of *forgiveness of sins*! However, Peter clearly charged "*Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for (unto) the forgiveness of sins...*"

It is interesting to note a smooth move here on the part of Mantey and some evangelicals! All Greek lexicons recognize that one meaning of *eis* can be *causal, because of, or for unto*! However, *because of* does not necessarily *look back* and mean *as a result of forgiveness*! That is clarified by the use of an *accusative noun* following *eis*, i.e. ἄφεσιν, *forgiveness*, which indicates that *eis* points forward to the direction of the action of the verb, βαπτισθήτω, *be baptized*!¹⁴⁴ Mantey clearly and intentionally ignores the syntax of *eis* ἄφεσιν in Acts 2:38. A smooth but false move!

The translation **for the forgiveness of sins** or **unto the remission of sins** is the translation found in all major English translations of Acts 2:38, KJV, ASV, NASV, RSV, NRSV, NIV.

In similar fashion those adopting this false solution to Acts 2:38 should reinterpret the final statement of the Nicene Creed¹⁴⁵ to fit into their own doctrine of atonement. The Nicene Creed reads "*We acknowledge one baptism for (unto) remission of sins.*" In similar fashion Mantey would have us interpretate the Nicene Creed as **because of remission of sins**.

We reject this tendency to change the reading of Acts 2:38 and the Nicene Creed to fit a particular doctrine of salvation by faith only!

In light of these problems, this study of Acts 2:38 is written with the purpose of examining the meaning of the Greek preposition εἰς, *eis* in Acts 2:38. We will also examine the implications of this for New Testament theology in general.

Since many evangelicals follow the proposals of Julius R. Mantey in regard to Acts 2:38, and his preference for *because of* in place of *for* or *unto*, much of the following discussion is focused on Mantey's thought as set out specifically in Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 1957. We will notice that Mantey falls into the same error as some modern evangelical groups in that he interprets *eis* according to his personal doctrine of atonement rather than according to normal Greek syntax and use.

The Translation of Acts 2:38 in the Major English Translations

KJV 1611³⁸ *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

¹⁴⁴ Check this in any of the Greek-English lexicons cited in this study. See the discussion of this below!

¹⁴⁵ The Nicene Creed is the most common creed used in Christianity. The creed was originally formulated in 325 at the council of Nicea. It was later revised at the council of Constantinople in 381. At the time the church was struggling with the Arian heresy, which denied that Christ was truly God, but rather that he was a created being. The creed was formulated to repudiate Arianism and clearly states that Christ is eternal and part of the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It clearly reflects the New Testament views on Baptism as *for* or *unto* and not *because of*! In most branches of Christianity, the creed is widely used or referenced today.

ASV 1901 ³⁸ *And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **unto** the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

RSV 1973/77 ³⁸ *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

NASV 1977 ³⁸ *Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

NIV 1984 ³⁸ *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

NRSV 1989 ³⁸ *Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **so that** your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

NASV 1995 ³⁸ *Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Not one of the recognized major English translations interprets the Greek *eis* as *because of* as does Julius Mantey and some evangelicals!

*The question we are addressing here I touched on above relating to the syntax of *eis* ἄφ’ ἑσιν. On what grounds do some translate or interpret the Greek *eis*, **for**, as **because of**?” Certainly not on the Greek syntax of the preposition and noun it modifies, *but solely on a preconceived doctrinal view!**

The Meaning of the Greek Preposition *Eis*

Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1957. This is a standard and widely recognized Greek English Lexicon (Dictionary).

Arndt and Gingrich, list over 20 different uses of *eis*.

A leading and important consideration regarding this preposition *eis* is that *eis* with the *accusative* noun (simply put, the direct object in a sentence), *indicates motion toward or into something, or into its immediate vicinity.*

Arndt and Gingrich list the following ways in which *eis* can be translated:

- a. Of place, *into, to, toward*
- b. With verbs of sending, *to, into, among*
- c. It can simply mean direction, *toward something*
- d. Of time, *to the end*
- e. Indicating degree, *fully*
- f. Indicating goal, *to, toward*
- g. The result of an action, *into, to, so that*
- h. To denote purpose, *in order to, to*
- i. With the dative noun, *for*
- j. They list one reading as controversial, namely as *because*, and indicate that this possibility derives from J. R. Mantey, of whom much will be said below!
- k. Regarding *Acts 2:38*, they indicate that ***it denotes purpose, in order to, so that.***

Kittel, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, TNDT*

Kittel lists several categories in which *eis* must be considered.

- a. Spatial, cosmic and psychological
- b. Temporal
- c. Modal

- d. In logical connection *stating reason*
- e. With a noun or pronominal accusative, *a final sense*
- f. With Personal reference, *with reference to*

The critical point emphasized here is that the noun or *pronominal accusative* used with *eis* indicates **a final sense or result**.

In Greek, the accusative *indicates the limitation, result, direction, or end of the verbal action*.

(Simply put, pronominal refers to a pronoun. A pronominal accusative is a pronoun serving as *a direct object*.)

Spiros Zodhiates, A Complete Word study of the New Testament.

Zodhiates explains, εἰς *eis*; a preposition governing the accusative with the primary idea of motion into any place or thing; also of motion or direction to, toward or upon any place, thing. The antithesis is expressed by *ek* ... out of.¹⁴⁶

The Greek Preposition *Eis* and Greek Syntax

Syntax refers to how words work together in any language, especially in Greek.

In Greek, prepositions work in conjunction with and define nouns and other grammatical forms such as the infinitive.

Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 1927/1957, p. 103, states that *eis* occurs more than 1,700 times in the Greek New Testament, and only with the accusative form of noun.

Blass, Debrunner, Funk, *A Grammar of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1961, agree with Dana and Mantey.

Dana and Mantey argue that the fundamental compositional meaning of *eis* is *into, in, to go inside*.

They demonstrate that in conjunction with the *accusative* noun the resultant meanings of *eis* are *into, unto, to, for*.

Several remote meanings are offered such as *upon, against, among, with respect to, in reference to*.

As we have noted above, at this point Mantey demurs and argues for an interpretation that some (Arndt and Gingrich) have termed *a controversial meaning*, implying that it is not generally recognized as such by grammarians! Mantey argues for a translation of *eis* which *might or could* read as *because of*.

We will discuss Mantey's controversial and unusual interpretation in detail below demonstrating that it is *forced* to meet Mantey's doctrinal theological stance on baptism, salvation, and *faith only*, and not based on the normal meaning as used in the Greek of the New Testament.

Greek Grammars on *Eis* and the Accusative Case of the Noun.

Most Greek grammars indicate that *the accusative case*, simply stated, *limits or describes extension*. By this they mean that *the accusative indicates the limit or direction of the verbal action*. In relation to the preposition *eis*, the *accusative case indicates the direction or limitation of the preposition eis*. This can be observed and corroborated in the following standard Greek Grammars.

H. P. V. Nunn, *A Syntax of New Testament Greek*.

¹⁴⁶ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

W. H. Davis, *Beginner's Grammar of the Greek New Testament*.

James Hope Moulton and Henry G. Meecham, *An Introduction to the Study of New Testament Greek*.

Blass, Debrunner, Funk, *A Grammar of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*.

Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 1927/1957, pp. 91ff.

“The *accusative* case relates primarily to *action*, and indicates *direction*, *extent*, or *end*.

“*The accusative signifies that the object referred to is considered as the point toward which something is proceeding: that it is the end of the action or motion described...The accusative embraces three ideas: the end, or direction, or extent of motion or action...The root meaning of the accusative is limitation.*”

Discussion on Mantey's Arguments for Translating *Eis* as *Because*

As mentioned previously we have considerable disagreement with how Julius Mantey manages the Greek preposition in his comments in The Dana and Mantey Greek Grammar included in our bibliographies. This should not be interested as a criticism of the Grammar, only of Mantey's observations on *eis*! In this section we will examine reasons why Mantey translates *eis* as *because* or because of rather than as *for*, *toward*, *unto*.

- a. As indicated above, none of the major translations deviates from the normal translation of *eis*!
- b. Mantey's discussion of the normal translations of *eis* in his grammar are excellent and to the point. *Eis* indicates *direction* and with the accusative it indicates *limitation*, not source or origin!
- c. The major reason for Mantey seeking a different translation from the norm is his difficulty in taking Acts 2:38 at face value!
“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
- d. We quote Mantey's argument on Acts 2:38 in detail:
“When one considers in Acts 2:38 repentance as self-renunciation and baptism as public expression of self-surrender and self-dedication to Christ, *which significance it certainly had in the first century (Italics IAF)*, the expression εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν may mean *for the purpose of the remission of sins*. But if one stresses baptism, without its early Christian import, as a ceremonial means of salvation, he does violence to Christianity as a whole, for one of its striking distinctions from Judaism and Paganism is that it is a religion of salvation by faith while all others teach salvation by works...”

Here in this last sentence we find the root of Mantey's problem or faulty theology. He reads modern day evangelical thoughts or doctrine of *salvation as faith only* into both the text and theology of Judaism and Christianity. We will demonstrate below that the definition of faith only cannot and is not supported by the teachings of in either the Old or New Testaments! Mantey and other evangelicals confuse Paul's teaching of *faith only* by taking it out of the context of Paul's argument against strict Judaism that would bind works of Law on salvation and justification, which Paul radically challenges by stressing that it is *only by faith on Jesus* and not by works of Law that one is saved or justified.

Here we find the root of Mantey's problem! He sets his Greek interpretation in the context of his evangelical theology of faith only and not in the context of Greek syntax, and Dana and Mantey's claim to be a Geek grammar, not a theology of salvation.

One should set *theology* on the context Peter's proclamation in Acts 2:38, Luke in Acts *passim*, and Paul in his doctrine of justification by faith only on Jesus and not the Law of Moses.

One should set one's grammar in the context of Greek literature as a whole, Greek words, Noun cases, Verb tenses and actions, pronominal pronouns, and the unique syntax of Greek and not evangelical theology!

We pause here to examine Mantey's argument in some detail at this point.

Mantey points out that in the context of the first century Greek syntax *eis afesin* may mean for the purpose of the remission of sins! Yet he demurs from this!

Why if it could be, and most likely was, translated in this manner in the first century should it not be translated in the same manner in the 20th or 21st centuries?

The reason is that it does not fit Mantey's and some evangelical 20th century doctrinal positions!

First, the translation *for the purpose of the remission of sins* does violence, not to the remaining teachings on baptism in the New Testament, but only to Mantey's doctrinal position.

Second, Mantey's description of Paganism teaching salvation by works may be correct, but his understanding of Judaism is faulty when he maintains that Judaism taught salvation by works! Refer to recent studies on Judaism by E. P. Sanders, W. D. Davies, *et al.* who argue correctly that 2nd Temple Judaism at the time of Christ did not see justification as a result of works, but of faith.

Third, furthermore, since the New Testament apparently does teach salvation or the washing away of sin as a result of baptism (see Acts 22:16, 1 Pet 3:21) then we must assume, according to Mantey, that the New Testament teaches salvation by works! However, this does not follow. What is defective is Mantey's understanding of the relationship of works, faith and baptism in the New Testament. Cf G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament passim* for an excellent theology of faith and baptism at this point.

Fourth, we return now to the Dana and Mantey grammar's primary argument on *εἰς* with a comment they make on Mat 12:41: μετενόησαν εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωνᾶ, "*they repented at the preaching of Jonah*".

Mantey argues from this text for a *causal* point. We have no question on that, but lurking in our mind is the question "what kind of causal understanding does Mantey hold?"

"The sentence "*metanohsen eis to kerugma Iona*" in Mt. 12:41 and Lk. 12:32 is *forceful evidence for a causal use of this preposition*. What led to their repentance? Of course it was Jonah's preaching." (We should note that there are different senses of *because of*; it could mean *as a result of*, looking back, or *for the reason of* looking forward! Context and syntax with pronouns will define the meaning, which in regard to Acts 2:38 is missed by many evangelicals.)

We should examine Mantey's argument on Mat 12:41 closer which he considers *forceful evidence for a causal use of eis!*

"The RSV translates this as "for they repented *at* the preaching of Jonah."

The KJV translates this as "because they repented *at* the preaching of Jonas."

The ASV 1901 likewise translated this as "for they repented *at* the preaching of Jonah".

The NASV likewise translated this as "they repented *at* the preaching of Jonah".

We can safely assume that the *eis* in these translations should be rendered as *at!*

We ask, "how does Mantey render or understand *at*?"

Adopting Mantey's own category of "remote meanings" for *eis* he suggests "*with respect to, with reference to*" as possible meanings for *eis*. In this case we can translate Mat 12:41 "they repented *with reference to the preaching of Jonah*" or "*with respect to* the preaching of Jonah"!

The question we must ask is what has this to do with Acts 2:38? The context of Mat 12:41 and Acts 2:38 are radically different! As Mantey himself has indicated it would be permissible to translate ὅτι μετενόησαν εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωνᾶ as *because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah* to mean *they repented with respect to the preaching of Jonah!*

According to Mantey's own correct meaning *with respect to*, then Acts 2:38 could be translated *repent and be baptized with respect to (for) the remission of sins!*

Mantey has done nothing less that argue for being baptized for the remission of sins! He argues grammatically for the major translation of *eis* as *for* or *unto!*

Mantey's *forceful argument* for his *theological* translation of Acts 2:38 as baptism *pointing back* to or *resulting from* their salvation is unsustainable based on Greek Grammar and syntax!

Arndt, and Gingrich likewise suggest that when used with a person or thing that *eis* can be translated as "*with respect or reference to*" the person or thing. In Mat 12:41, they interpret *eis* as "*repented with respect to the preaching of Jonah!*"

Mantey has in regard to Mat 12:41 agreed with most that *eis* can be translated safely as "*with respect to the preaching of Jonah,*" but this is not a forceful argument for translating *eis* as *because of looking back to salvation* as indicated by Mantey with *eis look back to salvation* rather than baptism *eis with respect to* or *for* salvation!

The *supposed evidence* assumed by Mantey above is not a *forceful reason* at all, as he would have us believe! In fact it is no argument at all for a *causal because of, looking back to salvation* in Acts 2:38, as he claims!

Again, we return to Mantey:

"Mt 3:11 furnishes further evidence: *ego men humas baptizō en hudati eis metanoian*. Did John baptize that they might repent, or because of repentance? If the former we have no further Scriptural confirmation of it. If the latter, his practice was confirmed and followed by the apostles... In connection with this verse we have the testimony of a first century writer to the effect that John the Baptist baptized people only after they had repented. Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, book 18, chapter 5, section 2..."

Once again, Mantey fails to permit the translation of the text to work within his own category of definitions, that is, *eis* being understood as *in reference to*. In this case the translation would be "I baptize you in water *with reference to* (your) repentance!"

However, contrary to Mantey the NASV translates Mat 3:11 as "*I baptize you with water for repentance.*"

Likewise, the KJV translates this as "*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance.*"

The RSV and NIV translate this as "*I baptize you with water for repentance.*"

Our conclusion is that Mantey has proven nothing at all! He is merely inserting his definition of *eis* into the equation of Mat 3:11 to prove his point, ignoring the context of what Mat was stating. In agreement with the KLV, RSV, and NIV we conclude from the context of the discussion that it was *for the purpose* of *encouraging* repentance that John was baptizing!

As our major translations indicate, there are categories within the accepted possibilities for *eis* that would be suitable for translating Mat 3:11 without resorting to categories not normally accepted that would fit one's own doctrinal biases as does Mantey!

His forceful evidence falls far short of being either forceful or convincing!

Every argument Mantey has proposed can be better explained from within Dana and Mantey's "*Resultant*" or "*Remote*" meanings, without resorting to what Arndt and Gingrich call a "controversial" translation *because of*. Well within the *resultant meanings* our major

translations translate grammatically and syntactically without resorting to doctrinal presuppositions as does Mantey.

There is, however, yet a far greater problem for Mantey's and some evangelical's proposals!

This has to do with how we use or read Scripture, and how we determine theology and doctrine!

Mantey reads Scripture *deductively* through *the lens of preferred doctrine*, rather than determining doctrine through *the lens of Scripture in an inductive approach* which works from within a Scriptural reading *toward* a theological meaning!

A major question we must ask theologians, *do we interpret Scripture from within our doctrine, or do we interpret our doctrine from within Scripture?*

Mantey wants us to interpret Scripture so it agrees with a particular doctrine he holds dear!

However, we do not interpret Scripture according to our doctrine, but we interpret our doctrine according to Scripture.

What Mantey and similar evangelical arguments do is called *deductive theology*, as opposed to *inductive theology*, in which they interpret things, even Scripture, *from within their own doctrine*, or *to agree with their own doctrine*.

In Mantey's deductive system he moves from doctrine to Scripture, rather from Scripture to doctrine.

Biblical theology works differently from the way Mantey proposes! In Biblical theology you move inductively from Scripture to doctrine and interpret doctrine from within Scripture.

New Testament Scriptures with Similar *Eis* Constructions to that of Acts 2:38

There are a number of New Testament texts related to *baptism* and *forgiveness* which are not translated in our major translations as *because* or *because of*. We will note that they retain the traditional *for*, *into*, or *unto* translation.

We will examine several of these texts in which *eis* is in a parallel construction with Acts 2:38, and where *eis* was *preceded* by the *verb form baptize* and is followed by a noun in the *accusative case*.

The purpose of this section of the study is to demonstrate that there are many Greek constructions in the New Testament that are parallel to Acts 2:38 where none of the major translations have been compelled to follow Mantey's controversial handling of Acts 2:38!

The only reason Mantey and some evangelicals translate *eis* in Acts 2:38 as *because of* is that they ignore the rules of Greek Syntax which require a rendering of *for* or *unto* when used with an accusative noun which would then *violate their specific doctrine of salvation by faith only!* Mantey himself describes the form of translation as seen in the major translations as "*doing violence to Christianity as a whole*" by not stressing *faith only* as opposed to *salvation by works* as the ground of forgiveness that he sees in early Judaism and Christianity.¹⁴⁷

We stress again, that doctrine should be shaped by Scripture, and not Scripture by doctrine!

First, we begin by examining Matt 26:28 since it contains wording and syntax similar to Acts 2:38.

¹⁴⁷ Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar*, p. 104. Reading Mantey is enlightening!

In order to demonstrate the parallel nature of this text with Acts 2:38 we will quote both Matt 26:28 and Acts 2:38. For those not familiar with the Greek text we will also demonstrate the parallel nature of the texts by underlining the parallel words in the Greek text.

Matt 26:28 - τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

“this is my blood of the covenant, which is *poured out* for many for the forgiveness of sins”

Acts 2:38 - βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν

Acts 2:38 “be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”

None of the major translators translate Matt 26:28 as Mantey would have us do with Acts 2:38, “*this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many because of the forgiveness of sins.*”

In fact, at the time Matthew is describing at Matt 26:28, Jesus’ blood had not yet been shed. His blood *was to be shed in the very near future* for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is not saying that his blood was shed because of forgiveness, but for the forgiveness of sins!

The sense of Jesus’ statement was that his blood was to be shed with respect to or in regard to the forgiveness of sins.

There is no need to translate this text other than according to the normal criteria for standard Greek grammar and Syntax (and in accordance with Dana and Mantey’s own primary criteria), which is what the major translations have done.

I find the diagram illustrating the direction of prepositions in their Manual for Greek Grammar to be most informative and helpful! It clearly describes direction *forward into* for *eis*, and not *out of* as in *ek*!

Neither is there any grammatical ground for translating Acts 2:38 as Mantey would, *because of*. On both occasions the *eis* should be translated for the forgiveness of sins.

Second, let us turn to Rom 6:3 reads “*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*” ἢ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι, ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν.

Notice in Rom 6:3 that as in Acts 2:38 the *eis* follows a *baptism* verb, *baptized*, and is followed by an *accusative noun*, *death*, *θάνατον*.

The natural translation of this text calls for the English preposition into as in the major translations, and not because of as Mantey argues at Acts 2:38!

The construction of the clause of Rom 6:3 closely parallels Acts 2:38!

Third, at Gal 3:26 Paul writes “*for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*” ²⁷ *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*” Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ· ²⁷ ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε.

Notice again that the preposition eis is preceded by the baptism verb, and followed by a noun in the accusative case, Christ, Χριστὸν. In this case the word order in Gal 3:26 is a little different, for the baptism word follows *eis*. We are reminded that Greek does not follow the English conventions of word order, but changes word order for emphasis.)

Here the preposition *eis* is correctly translated and interpreted in our English translations as *into*, not *because*.

Notice in this Gal 3:26 that Paul considers baptism to be a matter of faith, not works!

We become children of God *through faith, for* as many as have been *baptized into Christ* have *put on Christ*. The Greek particle or conjunction *gar, for*, indicates the *reason* or *ground* for their becoming children of God through faith. Dana and Mantey observe that the conjunction *gar*, “may express a ground or reason, an explanation, a confirmation or assurance...”¹⁴⁸.

Following the context of Paul’s argument in Gal 3, Christian baptism may not be removed from the faith dynamic and considered a work without doing baptism and faith an injustice.

Baptism is a faith principle, not a work principle, just as repentance and confession of faith are faith principles and not work principles.

Fourth, in fact, Paul explains in Col 2:10-12 that *baptism is faith in the working of God!* *you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.* ¹¹ *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ;* ¹² *and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.* ¹³ *And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...*

Fifth, Rom 10:10 is a fascinating case for an *accusative* noun following *eis* in *justification* and *salvation*.

The construction is almost parallel to Acts 2:38 here *forgiveness* stands for *salvation!*

RSV “For man believes with his heart (*eis*) *and so* is justified, and he confesses with his lips (*eis*) *and so* is saved.”

ASV “for with the heart a person believes, (*eis*) *resulting in* righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, (*eis*) *resulting in* salvation.”

KJV “For with the heart man believeth *unto* righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made *unto* salvation.”

The NIV is somewhat different, yet still conveys the same meaning, “For it is with your heart that you believe *and are justified*, and it is with your mouth that you confess *and are saved*.”

The Greek reads καρδιά γὰρ πιστεύεται εἰς δικαιοσύνην, στόματι δὲ ὁμολογεῖται εἰς σωτηρίαν... Both nouns following *eis* are accusative nouns!

Notice that in each case above the *eis* points forward to the accusative nouns following, that is, *righteousness* and *salvation!*

Presumably Mantey and those evangelicals who follow Mantey’s views of Christian doctrine stressing *salvation by faith only* would have no problem with the first part of this verse! Using the ASV, “*For with the heart man believes resulting in righteousness*.” There should be no problem here since salvation is by faith, the faith principle, but not works principle!

But with the second part, “*with the mouth he confesses, (eis) resulting in salvation*” they should have problems *since confessing with the mouth should be a work in their definition!* In this case they would need to translate the second clause “*with the mouth he confesses, because of salvation*”! However, by doing this they would destroy the syntactical parallelism Paul has used to make his point.

The only way around Mantey’s problem is to argue that *confessing faith is a faith principle and not a work principle!* But that is what we have been saying all along!

However, if confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord is a faith principle, why is confessing one’s faith in baptism a work principle?

¹⁴⁸ Dana and Mantey, *Grammar*, p. 242f.

We stress here that *believing in Jesus Christ is something we do*, as is *repenting of one's sins something we do*, as is *confessing one's faith something we do!*

Yet both actions are considered by evangelical's *faith principles and not work principles!* Yet *you have to do both!*

Likewise we stress that baptism is something we surrender to as a faith principle and not something we do to merit or earn forgiveness.

Sixth, we now turn to examine Mk 1:4. In a section above we considered Mantey's arguments on Matt 3:11 and found them faulty. In similar fashion we examine Mk 1:4.

RSV "John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance *for* the forgiveness of sins."

KJV "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance *for* the remission of sins."

NASV "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance *for* the forgiveness of sins."

NIV "And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance *for* the forgiveness of sins."

The Greek reads ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης (ὁ) βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν

Notice that John was preaching a *baptism of repentance*, that is, a baptism *characterized by* repentance (the genitive construction of repentance provides the *of* repentance), and that this *baptism was for* (εἰς) the *forgiveness* of sins.

Notice also that the Greek construction εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, *for the forgiveness of sins* here in Mk 1:4 is *exactly parallel to that of Acts 2:38*, εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, *for the forgiveness of sins* other than for the presence of the definite article τῶν, *the* in Acts 2:38 which does not impact or effect the syntax of the sentence at all.

Now if we were to follow Mantey's Acts 2:38 reasoning in Mk 1:4, then the translation would be, "*John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance because of the forgiveness of sins*"! We know from our study of the Gospels that John would not baptize anyone unless they demonstrated repentance! Mantey's interpretation would, therefore, have *John baptizing unrepentant sinners because of forgiveness* already received before they had in fact repented!

This demonstrates Mantey's confused theology! We then have people baptized *because* they had been forgiven *before they had repented!*

This does not fit in with Peter's instruction in Acts 2:38 that the believing Jews must *repent and then be baptized!*

What Mark was implying was that John was preaching a baptism *for* the forgiveness of sins, that is, a baptism being *characterized by repentance!*

We should note here a technical but important syntactical point in the clause κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, *preaching a baptism of repentance*. The noun preceding *for forgiveness* is βάπτισμα, an accusative noun modifying the verb *preaching*, κηρύσσων. This accusative noun βάπτισμα is in turn modified by a *descriptive genitive noun*, μετανοίας, which defines the accusative noun βάπτισμα and modifies the *nature of the baptism!* Thus the baptism preached is *characterized by a repentance*, as in Acts 2:38!

Let me have another swing at this interesting text. Μετανοήσατε, *repentance*, is a genitive noun modifying the *nominative* noun *báptisma*, so it was not John preaching *repentance for forgiveness* but a baptism, *characterized by repentance*, for forgiveness!

Likewise, in Acts 2:38, Peter was preaching a *baptism, characterized by faith and repentance, for the forgiveness of sins.*

Seventh, Luke 3:3, Luke's parallel statement regarding John's preaching, follows the same pattern as does Mark. ³ *καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς πᾶσαν (τὴν) περίχωρον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*, "*and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*"

A Survey of Some important Scriptures on Baptism and Salvation that Teach that Baptism has a Major Role in Salvation.

Mk 16:15, 16: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ *He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*"

This text has been contested by some on the ground that the ending of Mark's Gospel is uncertain. Whether or not one accepts the text as original to Mark, one must as the early church did, acknowledge the *apostolicity* of the text and consider the *teaching of the text to be consistent with New Testament doctrine.* It is considered apostolic even by the most ardent challengers who question its being part of Mark's Gospel.

The text clearly connects belief and baptism as conditions of salvation.

Again, some evangelicals argue that since the second clause of the verse does not expressly mention *not baptized*, for example, "*but he who does not believe "and is not baptized" will be condemned*" this negates the strong connection of baptism to the first clause believe.

Typical of this is a statement in an article by the NT Restoration Foundation "*Notice, however, those who Jesus said would be condemned: "whoever does not believe." No mention was made of not being baptized. The emphasis is on unbelief, not baptism. Condemnation comes as a result of unbelief, not the lack of any ritual activity.*" The article continues, "*Indeed, it is unthinkable that anyone would believe in Jesus and refuse to be baptized*"!

Did the NT Restoration Foundation miss the point? By their own confession *it is unthinkable* that one who does not believe will want to be baptized!

However, the NT Restoration Foundation did miss the point! It would be redundant for Jesus to add *not baptized* after *not believing*, for those not believing would not want to be baptized!

The statement "*and is not baptized*" in the second clause would be redundant and is not necessary and self-explanatory!

Acts 22:16: "*And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*" *Καὶ νῦν τί μέλλεις; ἀναστὰς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.* Interestingly, the Greek is stronger than the RSV translation, it reads *rising be baptized and wash away your sins calling on his name!* The verbal command is an active aorist participle, ἀναστὰς, that can, *and* should be interpreted be rising up, indeed wash away your sins, calling on the name of Jesus! The *καὶ*, *and*, is a coordinating conjunction that acts as an exegetical conjunction emphasizing *why* he should rise and be baptized – *to was away his sins.* All of this is predicated by *faith in Jesus, calling on his name*, implying believing in Jesus.

In this text Paul is explaining to the Roman Tribune the circumstances of his conversion (see Acts 9 for his conversion). That he believes in Jesus is obvious from the context of his conversion. He explained that Ananias called on Paul telling him to *arise and be baptized*, but for what purpose? Mantey and evangelicals would have his baptism *because of his forgiveness and cleansing*, and see baptism as an act of obedience following salvation.

However, *that is not what the text clearly states!* In keeping with Mark 16:15, 16, and Acts 2:38, *baptism here clearly preceded cleansing and the forgiveness of sin.*

Beasley-Murray makes a strong point that in both Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16 baptism is associated with the name of Jesus, either “*in the name of Jesus Christ*” or “*calling on his name*.” This would imply that the power of salvation lies primarily in the person of Jesus, and not in the believing, repenting, and baptizing! Beasley-Murray argues that there is more in the expression “*in the name of Jesus*” than merely the authority of Jesus. *It is in his death and resurrection that salvation is focused*, and “*in the name of Jesus Christ*” or “*in the person of Jesus Christ*” *connects us dynamically with his death and resurrection.*¹⁴⁹

Rom 6:1-5: *Paul’s argument is critical to our understanding of what happens in baptism. We symbolically die to ourselves and our old manner of life and are united with Jesus in baptism! Likewise, we are symbolically buried and raised with Christ to begin a new birth and walk in life! The baptism is real but in it we are symbolically united with Jesus and his death!*

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Paul’s leading point is that in baptism *we are united with Christ and his death, with the life giving power of the gospel*, Rom 1:16, 17!

If we are saved before baptism, as per Mantey and some evangelicals, then according to this verse *we are saved before dying to our old sinful life and being united with Christ in a new life like his!*

According to Mantey’s view, by being baptized we are then *dying to a salvation and an experience of a new birth!* We are dead to salvation! This argument patently misses the point Paul is making!

The new birth Paul is describing is not the result of our working. It is the heart of the atoning gospel he has been preaching.

The new birth spoken of by Jesus to Nicodemus and his disciples, and our new life in Christ comes about through our faith in the working of God, our dying to our past life of sin in baptism, and our being raised with Christ to walk in newness of life!

Col 2:12,13: Paul writes to the Colossians stressing that now in Christ they must live lives radically different from their pagan or Jewish neighbors! He based his argument on the same major point that he later stressed in Rom 6, “*you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*”¹³ *And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.”*

In this text, Paul is making the point that the Colossian Christians were not in a covenant relationship with God through physical circumcision, as had been the case with Israel prior to Christ’s atoning death on the cross. Their covenant relationship with God was through a “*circumcision not made with hands.*” Which he equates with baptism. He continues to explain that they had entered this new covenant relationship with God by dying to their past lifestyle and being raised in a new birth with Jesus, cf. Rom 6:1-5 above. Their covenant relationship was based on *what God had worked and brought about through Jesus*, and their connection with this

¹⁴⁹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 1973.

new covenant had taken place through *their baptism which expressed their faith in the working of God*. Note the parallel statement of Col 2:12 and Rom 6:1-5:

“And you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

Christians take on a new life by dying to their old life and being born again, anew, with Christ through their faith and baptism into Christ. Paul clearly teaches in Rom 6 and in this Colossian text that this takes place at baptism. It is in baptism that they were united with Christ in a death like his and raised with him to a new life.

At Col 3:1ff Paul built on this theme by stating that *since (if, Εἰ ... συνηγέρθητε, ei with the indicative verb)* they had been raised with Christ, *baptism*, they should therefore seek the things of Christ, things that are above!

This text emphasizes that in baptism the believer is *trusting (faith) in the working of God*, not in their own working. *In baptism we surrender in faith to the working of God.*

1 Pet 3:21. *“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.”*

Peter clearly connects salvation to water and baptism in this verse!

Peter is making an analogy to Noah’s experience in the flood, observing that eight souls were saved on that occasion by water. He then connects his analogy to Christian baptism

We should note that the salvation of Noah and his family experienced in the flood came about as a result of God’s grace and Noah’s obedient faith in God, not in his own ability to build a boat! His faith resulted in his obedience, but he was saved by his faith in God! Notice what the writer of Hebrews says regarding Noah, Heb 11:7

“By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.”

Now notice Peter’s statement regarding Noah and Christian salvation, *“God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for (eis) a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*

Peter clearly states that Christians are saved by water and baptism.

We must note that it was not the water that saved Noah or that saves the Christian in baptism. *It is faith in God expressed in an obedient baptism.*

However, in this action baptism becomes the prayer, request, or appeal to God *for (eis) a clear conscience.*

It would take a stretch of imagination to translate this in a way that would imply that baptism is an appeal to God *because of* a clear conscience, as Mantey would be forced to do to be consistent in his theology! That is what some evangelical theology would imply, but it is clearly not what Peter implied or stated very clearly!

In this case in Peter's argument and reference to Noah, what is baptism an appeal to God for, if not for salvation!?

The task of the translator

This section discusses the task of the translator in making a translation of the Greek text. I have included it in light of Julius Mantey's and some evangelicals wrong-headed process of doing theology!

C. H. Dodd, noted New Testament scholar, once observed that the translator must realize that he undertakes an impossible art!

Dodd would agree that his observation was an overstatement, but would observe that it indicates the difficulty faced by translators who translate from an ancient text into a modern language.

The following are principles that the translator must take seriously when translating from one age, language, culture, and era to a modern era.

The translation should:

- a. Be true to the idiom, language, and message of the original text.
- b. Speak accurately in the idiom of the readers.
- c. Be clear and intelligible.
- d. Strive toward a measure of consistency in its choice of words.
- e. Manifest a literary style that is suitable to the tenor of the message.
- f. Be accurate in its reproduction of the original message.
- g. Be true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rather than to a particular theological or denominational persuasion.
- h. Be made by a committee that is reasonably widespread in theological conviction, and qualified in the field of textual criticism and translation.

It is patently obvious that Mantey was not faithful to these proven principles!

The task of the interpreter, commentator, teacher, preacher, or theologian.¹⁵⁰

- a. The interpreter must be true to the language, syntax, and wording of the original message
- b. The interpreter must faithfully render the meaning of the original text
- c. The interpreter must be careful not to read into the text or his/her interpretation his/her own religious convictions
- d. The interpreter must work from (out of) the text toward doctrine, and not from doctrine back into the text. Technically we refer to this as *exegesis* (out of the text) rather than *eisegesis* (into the text)
- e. The exposition of the text must be true to the words, idiom, grammar, and syntax of the original text
- f. The meaning of words and sentences must be determined from the historical, sociological, and theological context of the original writer and not from that of the interpreter.

Problems with Mantey's and some Evangelical interpretations of Acts 2:28

- a. Mantey in his grammar recognizes that the syntax of the text calls for *eis* to be translated *for* or *unto*, but forces his interpretation to comply with his preferred Christian doctrine.

¹⁵⁰ Bruce Metzger, *The Bible in Translation, passim*, Baker Academic, 2001, F, F, Bruce, *A History of Translations*, 1961.

- b. Mantey shapes his interpretation according to his preferred doctrine, rather than have Scripture shape his doctrine.
- c. Mantey is inconsistent in applying his views relating to *because of* two texts that are parallel but which do not threaten his doctrine.