

ACTS ARGUMENT

Introductory Matters¹

Title

The title of the book is “The Acts of the Apostles.” The Anti-Marcionite Prologue (A.D. 150–180) of the Gospel of Luke is the oldest reference to the book as having this name. However, this title is misleading in several respects. First, the ultimate source of the miraculous acts recorded in the book was the Holy Spirit rather than the apostles themselves. Second, the focus of the book is not upon apostolic acts but rather upon the geographical outreach of the early church from Jerusalem to Rome. Third, the book is not a comprehensive treatment of all of the acts of the apostles. Rather, the acts of only two apostles, Peter and Paul, are emphasized.

Authorship

External evidence supports Lukan authorship of Acts. External sources include Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Polycarp, Jerome, Origen, the Muratorian fragment, and the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Gospel of Luke (A.D. 150–180). By the time of Eusebius, a near unanimous consensus existed that Acts should be considered part of the New Testament canon.

Internal evidence also favors Lukan authorship. The book contains several “we passages” indicating that the author was a participant in some of the book’s events (Acts 16:10-40; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16). Thus, the author claims to have accompanied Paul to and during his imprisonment. According to the prison letters, numerous figures accompanied Paul during his first

¹ Material for this introductory section was compiled from various sources, including Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1983), 349-52; *Nelson's Complete Book of Charts and Maps*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 357-67; Mark Bailey and Thomas L. Constable, *New Testament Explorer* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1999), 195-98; Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Acts,” online: www.soniclight.com, accessed 7 February 2006, 1-5; David Malick, “An Introduction to the Book of Acts,” online: www.bible.org, accessed 7 February 2006, 1-7; Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 109-11, 49-59.

imprisonment. Among them were Aristarchus, Demas, Epaphras, Epaphroditus, Jesus called Justus, Mark, Onesimus, Tychicus, and Luke (Eph 6:21; Phil 2:25; Col 4:7-14, Phlm 10, 23-24). By process of elimination, Luke is the most likely candidate. Epaphras and Epaphroditus did not accompany Paul to Rome but arrived after Paul was already imprisoned there (Phil 4:18; Col 4:12). Aristarchus (19:29), Mark (12:25), Tychicus (20:4), and Timothy (16:1) are spoken of in the third person in Acts. Onesimus also came to Paul after he was already in prison. Because Demas later deserted Paul (2 Tim 4:11), he would be an unlikely candidate for writing Acts. Justus is also unlikely since no tradition exists ascribing the book to him. Luke is the only remaining possibility.

If it is accepted that Luke is the author of the third Gospel,² then Lukan authorship of Acts can also be defended on the grounds of the internal similarities between the books. Both works are addressed to Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). The writer of Acts refers to the previous work as his “former account” (1:1). Both books demonstrate a similarity of language and style. A thematic continuity can be found between the works. Similarities include a worldwide outlook, an interest in women and Gentiles, and apologetic purposes. The ending of Luke seems to be in harmony with the beginning of Acts. Both sections feature Christ’s post resurrection ministry, Christ speaking, and an emphasis upon the Holy Spirit. Moreover, both books also refer to Christ’s appearing before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:7-12; Acts 4:27).

Other factors make it likely that Luke wrote Acts. For example, the book’s orderly content may have required the literary ability of an educated person (Col 4:14). Moreover, Luke’s close affiliation with Paul (2 Tim 4:11) qualified him to write such a work featuring the Apostle’s exploits. Also, the early church probably accepted the book on the basis of this relationship between Luke and Paul.

² See my Luke argument for a defense of Luke as the writer of the third Gospel.

Biographically, not only was Luke a close companion of Paul (2 Tim 4:11), but he was also a physician (Co 4:14). Most believe that he was a Gentile on the grounds that Paul excludes Luke when mentioning his fellow workers who were of the circumcision (Col 4:11) and because Luke refers to the Hebrew language as “their own language” (Acts 1:19) rather than “our own language.”³ Tradition is divided regarding how Luke died. Some say he died a martyr’s death while others say that he died of natural causes.

Recipients

Both Luke (1:3) and Acts (1:1) are addressed to Theophilus. The Gospel of Luke explains to Theophilus what Christ began to do and to teach while Acts explains to him what Christ continued to do and to teach by the Holy Spirit working through the apostles. The title “most excellent” (Luke 1:3) may indicate that Theophilus was some kind of Roman official. If this is true, then Theophilus was a Gentile. However, it is likely that Luke had a much broader audience in mind than just Theophilus. Wallace notes:

Although Luke-Acts is addressed to Theophilus, something must be said for the probability that Luke intended to have this work published and consequently envisioned an audience broader in scope than one man. His prologue to both the gospel and Acts emulates so much the ancient historians’ prefaces that it is quite evident that he wanted the work published. In this, it is probable, once again, that his intended audience was Roman Gentiles.⁴

Place of Writing

The “we sections” make it apparent that Luke gathered much of his information for his book from his personal contact with Paul. Thus, Paul’s two-year Cesarean imprisonment (Acts 24:27) in A.D. 57–59 would have been a logical place of Luke to write his book. However, it is also possible

³ For a presentation arguing that Luke was a Jew, see Thomas S. McCall, “Was Luke a Gentile?” online: www.levitt.com/newsletters/1996, accessed 9 February 2006, 1-6.

⁴ Daniel Wallace, “Acts: Introduction, Outline, and Argument,” online: www.bible.org, accessed 9 February 2006, 5.

that Luke gathered information during the Cesarean imprisonment and wrote the book during the voyage to Rome (Acts 27) or during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Because the book abruptly ends with Paul's Roman imprisonment, it is likely that it was completed during this time. Thus, a place of writing from Caesarea or Rome or some combination of the two seems most likely.

Date

Acts must have been written prior to A.D. 66–70 since it makes no mention of the Jewish revolt against Rome or of the destruction of Jerusalem or the temple. Surely Luke would have mentioned these historical events if they had occurred before Acts was completed since they represent God's final break with Israel in this dispensation. Such a break is a theme that Luke seems most interested in developing in Acts. Other historical events suspiciously missing from Acts include the martyrdom of Paul (A.D. 68), the second Pauline Roman imprisonment (A.D. 66), Paul's activity between imprisonments (A.D. 62–66), the first imperial persecution (A.D. 64–67), and the burning of Rome (A.D. 64). Thus, Acts must have been written prior to their occurrence. This is especially true regarding the martyrdom and other details about Paul since he is the central figure in Acts 13–28.

If, as many argue, Acts is an apologetic for Christianity's exemplary conduct before Roman authorities, then it must have been written before the Neronian persecution. There would have been no need for such a defense during the reign of Nero since it was already the emperor's intent to destroy Christianity. The book must also have been written prior to A.D. 62 since it abruptly ends with Paul still under house arrest (Acts 28:16-31) with no mention of the outcome of his impending trial. Because this trial was such a key issue earlier in Acts, it would be unthinkable for Luke to omit the verdict if the book had been written after Caesar's ruling. Luke's archeological accuracy also

argues that his book was completed not long after the described events transpired. All things considered, a date of A.D. 60–62 for the composition of Acts seems appropriate.

Method and Sources

Luke's *method* was to record history. This method is evident from his prologues (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1), which are similar to those of other ancient historians. However, his history is not comprehensive but rather selective in order to accomplish his goal of presenting Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth of the early church as well as its territorial expansion from Jerusalem to Rome. Luke drew from numerous *sources* for the purpose of recording history.

First, the “we sections” make it clear that Luke was able to draw from his own personal experiences and first hand involvement with Paul’s missionary endeavors. Second, Luke obviously had access to the Apostle Paul. In fact, elsewhere Paul referred to Luke as his friend (Col 4:14). Third, while in Caesarea (24:27), Luke would have had access to other key witnesses such as Philip (21:8), Mnason (Acts 21:16), and James (21:18-19). Certainly Philip and James could have helped Luke reconstruct the events recorded early on in Acts. Fourth, others mentioned in Acts such as Silas, Timothy, Mark, Peter, and John may have been accessible to Luke as well. Fifth, some of those that Luke interviewed for his first book (Luke 1:1-4) could have also provided him with key pieces of information regarding the birth and growth of the early church. Sixth, Luke seems to have had access to certain written sources as well (Acts 15:23-29; 23:26-30).

Purpose and Message

Luke’s primary *purpose* in writing was to present Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth and growth of the early church (Matt 16:18). The *message* of the book is the birth of the church as well as its progress and expansion numerically, geographically, and ethnically. Luke

routinely charts the numerical growth of the church through the inclusion of various “progress reports.” He also tracks the geographical expansion of the church by tracing its growth from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and eventually all the way to Rome (1:8). Finally, he notes the ethnic development of the church from its beginning as a mere extension of Judaism to its primarily Gentile composition.

Sub Purposes

In addition, to this over-arching purpose, Luke wrote in order to accomplish several sub purposes. *First*, Luke wrote for the apologetic purpose of confirming Theophilus in the faith. *Second*, Luke wrote to catalogue the northwest expansion of the church. Interestingly, the book contains no references to the church’s expansion into the south (Africa) or the east (Babylon and Persia). However, representatives from these areas are mentioned (2:9-10; Acts 8:27). *Third*, Luke wanted to show the numerical growth of the church. He does so through the inclusion of various progress reports. The six clearest progress reports are found in Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31. Other less clear progress reports are alluded to in 1:15; 2:41; 4:4, 31; 5:14, 42; 8:25, 40; 11:21; 13:49; 17:6.

Fourth, Luke wrote to validate Paul’s apostleship. Three entire chapters are devoted to detailing Paul’s conversion (Acts 9, 22, 26). Also, the lives of Peter and Paul seem to be paralleled.⁵

Peter	Paul
Heals a man lame from birth (3:1-11)	Heals a man lame from birth (14:8-18)
Heals people by his shadow (3:15-16)	Heals people by his handkerchiefs (19:11-12)
Success is a cause for Jewish jealousy (5:17)	Success is a cause for Jewish jealousy (13:45)
Confronts Simon, a sorcerer (8:9-24)	Confronts Bar-Jesus, a sorcerer (13:6-11)
Raises Tabitha (Dorcas) to life (9:36-41)	Raises Eutychus to life (20:9-12)
Jailed and freed miraculously by God (12:3-19)	Jailed and freed miraculously by God (16:25-34)

⁵ Nelson's Complete Book of Charts and Maps, 367.

Luke's point in employing such symmetry is to show that Paul's ministry is just as legitimate as Peter's. Perhaps Paul's ministry needed authentication since he was the apostle abnormally born (1 Cor 15:8) who had the responsibility of violating Jewish conventions by evangelizing the Gentiles (Gal 2:7-8).

Fifth, Luke wrote to explain to the Roman authorities that Christianity was not a threat to the empire. He accomplishes this by consistently showing that trouble involving the church was instigated by the unbelieving Jews (4:1-3, 21; 5:17-18, 40; 7:54, 58; 8:1-3; 9:23; 12:1-3; 13:50; 14:1-2, 19; 17:5-9, 13; 18:12; 19:3; 20:3; 21:31; 23:12). In the few instances where the Gentiles persecuted Paul, they did so for purely pecuniary reasons (16:18-19; 19:23-41). Luke also takes pains to establish that the authorities routinely vindicated Paul's innocence against the false charges from the unbelieving Jews (17:2-7; 19:35-41; 26:31-32). Perhaps he planned on submitting this information in the form of a trial brief at Paul's impending hearing before Caesar.

Sixth, Luke wanted to show Gentile receptivity to the gospel in comparison to Jewish unbelief. The Jews continually rejected the Gospel in spite of the fact that Paul dutifully preached it to them first (13:5, 14, 46; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4; 19:8; 28:17, 28). *Seventh*, Luke wanted to show that although the church had its roots in Judaism, it is also distinct from Judaism. Luke does this by transitioning the reader away from Peter's primarily Jewish ministry (Acts 1–12) to Paul's primarily Gentile ministry (Acts 13–28). This transition would demonstrate God's new program of redemption in light of Israel's rejection of her messiah.

Eighth, Luke wanted to show the universality of the gospel by showing its accessibility to people in all walks of life. Thus, he shows the gospel going to Samaritans, Ethiopians, Jews, Gentiles, poor, rich, educated, uneducated, men, women, exalted, and humble. *Ninth*, Luke wanted to show how the ministry of Christ continued through the apostles (John 13–17). This point can be

seen by comparing the statements of both Christ and Stephen as they died (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:50).

Structure

The structure of the book can be derived from its theme verse found in 1:8. Here, Christ predicts that the apostles will be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth. Thus, this verse furnishes a threefold structure. Part one of the book is the church's outreach in Jerusalem (1–7). Part two of the book is the ministry in Judea and Samaria (8–12). Part three of the book is the ministry to the remote parts of the earth (13–28). This third section can be further partitioned into the first missionary journey into Southern Galatia (13–14), the Jerusalem Council (15:1-35), the second missionary journey into Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Greece (15:36–18:22), the third missionary journey into these same regions (18:23–21:17), and Paul's journey to Rome (21:18–28:31).

Part one encompasses a two-year period in between A.D. 33–34. Part two encompasses a thirteen-year period in between A.D. 35–48. Part three encompasses a fourteen-year period in between A.D. 48–62. Thus, the total scope of the Book of Acts is a twenty-nine year period in between A.D. 33–62. Acts can be further structured on the basis of the distinction between the ministries of Peter and Paul (Gal 2:7-8).⁶

Early Church's Account in Acts				
Reference	Center	Main Person	Main Places	Gospel
Acts 1–12	Jerusalem	Peter	Judea & Samaria	Jewish
Acts 13–28	Antioch	Paul	The utmost part of the earth	Gentiles

Unique Characteristics

The Book of Acts boasts several outstanding characteristics. *First*, the book contains numerous first time events (1:23-26; 2:14-40; 3:1-11; 4:1-4; 5:1-11; 6:1-7; 7:2-53, 54-60; 10:44-48; 11:26; 12:2; 13:1-2; 15:1-30; 16:12-13). *Second*, the book is transitional. It represents historical transition from the Gospels to the epistles, religious transition from Judaism to Christianity, divine transition from Law to grace, a people of God transition from Jews to Jews and Gentiles, a program of God transition from the kingdom to the church, and a leadership transition from Christ to the apostles. Because of these transitions, Acts contains numerous non-normative events (1:1-3; 2:1-4; 2:45; 4:34; 5:1-11, 19; 12:7; 16:26; 7:55; 8:39; 9:1-6; 10:1-8). Thus, normative doctrine must be established from the epistles rather than merely from Acts. While Acts is descriptive, the epistles are prescriptive. *Third*, Acts mentions the Holy Spirit over fifty times, which is more than any other biblical writer.⁷ Thus, the title “Acts of the Apostles” is a misnomer. The book is more appropriately entitled the “Acts of the Holy Spirit.”

Fourth, the book focuses upon prayer (1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:24; 6:4; 7:60; 8:15; 9:11; 10:2; 11:5; 12:5; 13:3; 14:23; 16:13; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 27:35; 28:15). *Fifth*, Acts represents the missionary endeavor to testify about Christ to the rest of the world (1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-41; 13:31; 26:16, 22). *Sixth*, the book contains 23 sermons, which provide different evangelistic approaches for different circumstances.⁸ Most of these sermons focus upon Christ’s prophesied

⁷ The following verses from Acts represent key pneumatological contributions: Acts 5:3, 9; 7:51; 2:4; 9:31; 13:2; 16:6-7; 20:28; 1:16; 28:25; 2:4; 5:32; 8:39; 15:28; 1:8; 2:17, 33; 10:45, 47.

⁸ For a list of these sermons, see Constable, “Notes on Acts,” 327-28. Of the 23 sermons, Peter gives four, Paul gives six, James gives one, and Stephen gives one.

death, Resurrection, and Ascension. *Seventh*, Acts is a book of miracles. The different categories of miracles include those wrought by Peter (3:1-11; 9:32-35; 36-43), those wrought by Paul (14:8-10; 16:16-18; 20:6-12; 28:1-6, 7-8), miracles of discipline or wrath (5:1-11; 12:20-23; 13:6-12), miracles of general healing (5:12-16; 6:8; 8:6; 19:11-20; 28:9), and miracles exhibiting unusual phenomenon (1:9; 2:1-4; 5:19; 12:7; 8:39; 10:1-6).

Eighth, Acts records non-normative receptions of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2, 8, 10, 19).⁹ *Ninth*, Acts furnishes the background for the Pauline epistles by conveying how the various churches mentioned in the letters were founded (Romans: 28:14-31; 1–2 Corinthians: 18:1-18; Galatians: 13:3–14:28; Ephesians: 19:1-41; Philippians: 16:6-40; 1–2 Thessalonians: 17:1-9; 1 Timothy: 19:1-41; 20:17-38; Titus: 27:1-13) and where Paul was when he wrote the various letters. *Tenth*, Acts furnishes accurate history by giving precision when citing locations (provinces, cities) and titles (consul, Tetrarch, proconsul, Asiarch).¹⁰ *Eleventh*, Acts is a book of places and names. It gives close to eighty geographical references and mentions over a hundred people by name.

Twelfth, Acts is large. Altogether, Luke's writings comprise 28% of the New Testament. *Thirteenth*, Acts is the only historical, canonical account of the birth and growth of the early church. Thus, only Acts furnishes the necessary bridge between the Gospels and the epistles. *Fourteenth*, Acts is extremely practical as it relays both the internal and external problems confronting the infant church. Therefore, the book serves as a useful guide for those involved in church organizing, planting, and growth. *Fifteenth*, more than any other New Testament book, Acts emphasizes the church's continuity and discontinuity with Israel.

⁹ For a discussion of these, see Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 156-58.

¹⁰ Examples include *anthupatoi* (13:7; 18:12), *strategoi* (16:20, 22, 35, 36, 38), *politarchoi* (17:6, 8), *grammateus* (19:35), *hegemon* (23:24), *ho protos* (28:7).

Sixteenth, Acts stresses the sovereignty of God. Such sovereignty is seen in how God uses the free choice of individuals to accomplish His ends (2:23), how people respond to the Gospel (13:48), and how the church continues to grow despite opposition. *Seventeenth*, the book emphasizes eschatology. The book opens and closes with eschatological statements (Acts 1:6; 28:31). The phrase “kingdom of God” occurs multiple times in Acts (1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Because the church is an heir to the kingdom, Acts “shows how the kingdom message moved from mostly Jews to mostly Gentiles and from Jerusalem to Rome.”¹¹ *Eighteenth*, the book focuses upon Soteriology. It emphasizes the spiritual benefits that can be instantaneously received through justification by faith alone (Acts 16:31).

Outline

- I. Outreach in Jerusalem (1-7)
 - A. Prologue (1:1-2)
 - B. Christ’s post-resurrection appearance (1:3-8)
 - 1. Presentation of the infallible proofs (1:3)
 - 2. Instruction to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit (1:4-5)
 - 3. Church’s lack of relation to the Davidic kingdom (1:6-7)
 - 4. Church’s geographical mission (1:8)
 - C. Christ’s ascension (1:9-11)
 - D. Disciples await the Holy Spirit (1:12-14)
 - E. Matthias appointed (1:15-26)
 - F. Birth of the church on Pentecost (2:1-47)
 - 1. Coming of the Holy Spirit (2:1-12)
 - a) Miraculous occurrences (2:1-4)
 - b) The beneficiaries of the miraculous tongues (2:5-12)
 - 2. Peter’s sermon (2:13-41)
 - a) Charge of drunkenness (2:13)
 - b) Peter’s defense (2:14-36)
 - i) Too early for drunkenness (2:14-15)
 - ii) Analogy from Joel 2:28-32 (2:16-21)
 - iii) Explanation of the source of the Spirit (2:22-35)
 - (a) Christ identified through miracles (2:22)
 - (b) Jewish guilt and God’s predetermined plan (2:23)
 - (c) Christ’s resurrection predicted in Psalm 16:8-11(2:24-29)

¹¹ Toussaint, “Acts,” 351.

- (d) Christ is the Davidic descendent of Psalm 132:11(2:30-32)
 - (e) Christ's present session predicted in Psalm 110:1 (2:33-35)
 - iv) Conclusion (2:36)
 - c) Jewish reaction (2:37)
 - d) Peter's exhortation (2:38-40)
 - e) Jewish reaction (2:41)
 - 3. Activities of the first church (2:42-47)
 - G. Peter heals the lame man at the temple's beautiful gate (3:1-26)
 - 1. Healing (3:1-11)
 - 2. Peter's sermon (3:12-26)
 - H. The arrest of Peter and John (4:1-37)
 - 1. Peter and John arrested (4:1-4)
 - 2. Peter preaches to the Sanhedrin (4:5-12)
 - 3. The Jewish leadership commands the apostles not to preach (4:13-22)
 - 4. The church condemns Israel (4:23-28)
 - 5. The church's prayer for boldness (4:29-31)
 - 6. The unity of the first church (4:32-37)
 - I. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)
 - J. Many miracles wrought by the apostles (5:12-16)
 - K. Persecution by the religious leaders (5:17-32)
 - L. Gamaliel's speech spares the apostles (5:33-42)
 - M. Deacons appointed (6:1-7)
 - N. Stephen's martyrdom (6:8-7:60)
 - 1. Stephen's effectiveness and arrest (6:8-15)
 - 2. Stephen's speech (7:1-53)
 - a) Abram's partial obedience (7:1-5)
 - b) Israel's pattern of initial rejections (7:6-38)
 - i) Example of Joseph (7:6-17)
 - ii) Example of Moses (7:18-38)
 - c) Rebellion against Moses (7:39-41)
 - d) God gave Israel over to idolatry because they were not faithful to Moses' teaching (7:42-45)
 - e) Tabernacle and Temple never intended as permanent manifestation of God (7:46-50)
 - f) Current generation imitating previous generation (7:51-53)
 - i) Resisting the Spirit (7:51)
 - ii) Prophet killers (7:52)
 - iii) Law breakers (7:53)
 - 3. Stephen's martyrdom (7:54-60)
- II. Outreach in Judea and Samaria (8-12)
 - A. Persecution scatters church into Judea and Samaria (8:1-4)
 - B. Philip evangelizes Samaria (8:5-25)
 - 1. Samaritan ministry (8:5-8)
 - 2. Simon's conversion (the 8:9-13)
 - 3. Apostolic approval (8:14-17)
 - 4. Simon's remorse (8:18-24)
 - 5. Apostolic influence (8:25)

- C. Philip evangelizes the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40)
- D. Saul's conversion in Damascus (9:1-31)
 - 1. Converted and blinded (9:1-9)
 - 2. Filled with the Spirit (9:10-19)
 - 3. In Damascus (9:20-22)
 - 4. In Jerusalem (9:23-31)
- E. Extension of Peter's Ministry into Lydda and Joppa (9:32-43)
 - 1. Healing of Aeneas in Lydda (9:32-35)
 - 2. Raising of Dorcas in Joppa (9:36-43)
- F. Conversion of Cornelius (10:1-11:18)
 - 1. Cornelius' conversion (10:1-48)
 - 2. Peter's report of Cornelius's conversion to the Jerusalem church (11:1-18)
- G. Church at Antioch (11:19-30)
 - 1. Birth and maturation (11:19-26)
 - 2. Missionary zeal (11:27-30)
- H. James martyred (12:1-4)
- I. Peter imprisoned and miraculously released (12:5-19)
- J. Death of Herod Agrippa (12:20-25)
- III. Outreach to the remote parts of the earth (13-28)
 - A. First missionary journey (13-14)
 - 1. Paul and Barnabas commissioned (13:1-3)
 - 2. On Cyprus (13:4-12)
 - 3. Pisidian Antioch (13:13-52)
 - 4. Iconium (14:1-5)
 - 5. Lystra and Derbe (14:6-21a)
 - 6. Return to Antioch (14:21b-26)
 - 7. Report to the church (14:27-28)
 - B. Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)
 - 1. Necessity of Paul and Barnabas to travel to Jerusalem (15:1-6)
 - 2. Deliberations (15:7-21)
 - a) Peter's speech (15:7-11)
 - b) Paul and Barnabas' speeches (15:12)
 - c) James' speech (15:13-21)
 - 3. Resolution (15:22-35)
 - a) Antioch delegation: Paul, Barnabas, and Silas (15:22)
 - b) Letter (15:23-29)
 - c) Ministry in Antioch (15:30-35)
 - C. Second missionary journey (15:36-18:22)
 - 1. Paul and Barnabas split (15:36-41)
 - 2. Timothy joins team at Lystra (16:1-5)
 - 3. Team divinely rerouted into Europe (16:6-10)
 - 4. Philippi (16:11-40)
 - a) Lydia's conversion (16:11-15)
 - b) Paul casts out the demon (16:16-18)
 - c) Jailer's conversion (16:19-34)
 - d) Team departs for Thessalonica (16:35-40)

5. Thessalonica (17:1-9)
6. Berea (17:10-15)
7. Athens (17:16-34)
 - a) Paul reasoning in the synagogue (17:16-17)
 - b) Paul's speech on Mars Hill (17:18-34)
 - i) Paul brought to Mars Hill (17:18-20)
 - ii) Paul's sermon (17:21-31)
 - iii) Mixed response (17:32-34)
8. Corinth (18:1-17)
 - a) Paul's tent making (18:1-4)
 - b) Paul's ministry among the Gentiles (18:5-11)
 - c) Unbelieving Jews falsely accuse Paul before Gallio (18:12-17)
9. Paul returns to Antioch (18:18-22)
- D. Third missionary journey (18:23-21:17)
 1. Paul passes through Galatia and Phrygia (18:23)
 2. Ephesus (18:24-19:41)
 - a) Apollos' conversion (18:24-28)
 - b) John the Baptist's disciples converted (19:1-7)
 - c) Influential Ephesian Ministry (19:8-20)
 - d) Paul's missionary emphasis (19:21-22)
 - e) Silversmith's riot (19:23-41)
 3. Paul passes through Macedonia and Greece (20:1-5)
 4. Troas (20:6-12)
 5. Miletus (20:13-38)
 - a) Journey from Troas to Miletus (20:13-16)
 - b) Paul's address to the Ephesian elders (20:17-35)
 - c) Paul's tearful departure (20:36-38)
 6. Return to Jerusalem (21:1-17)
 - a) From Miletus to Tyre (21:1-6)
 - b) From Tyre to Caesarea (21:7-14)
 - c) From Caesarea to Jerusalem (21:15-17)
- E. Paul's journey to Rome (21:18-28:31)
 1. Paul in Jerusalem (21:18-23:22)
 - a) Paul's arrest in the Temple (21:18-40)
 - b) Paul's defense before the Jewish multitude (22:1-30)
 - c) Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin (23:1-11)
 - d) The conspiracy to kill Paul (23:12-22)
 2. Paul in Caesarea (23:23-26:32)
 - a) Paul's transfer to Caesarea (23:23-35)
 - b) Paul's defenses (24-26)
 - i) Before Felix (24)
 - ii) Before Festus (25)
 - iii) Before Agrippa (26)
 3. Paul's voyage to Rome (27:1-28: 10)
 - a) Voyage to Italy (27:1-44)
 - b) Ministry on Malta (28:1-10)

4. Paul in Rome (28:11-31)
 - a) Journey to Rome (28:11-15)
 - b) Paul under house arrest (28:16-31)

Argument

In the book's first seven chapters, Luke traces the birth of the church as well as its Jerusalem outreach. After the prologue (1:1-2), Luke describes Christ's brief forty-day post resurrection ministry to His disciples (1:3-8). After presenting to them many infallible proofs (1:3), Christ instructs His disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until they receive the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1:4-5).¹² Luke records this information because he wants his readers to understand that the coming church would not be the product of the efforts of fickle men but rather would come into existence through the sovereign work of God. In other words, God's Spirit would create the church.

Although the disciples mistakenly thought that this was the time of the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom, Christ tells them not to be preoccupied with the time of the kingdom's restoration (1:6-7).¹³ Luke includes this information to convey the notion that although the coming church has its roots in Judaism, it will constitute a separate and new work unrelated to the Davidic kingdom. In other words, God through the church is about to unfold a completely new phase in His redemptive program. This new phase is necessary in light of Israel's rejection of her messiah. It is this new work of God in the church age that will spread the message of Christ throughout the earth

¹² The Father's promise seems to relate to a new phase of the Spirit's ministry that was promised earlier (John 14:16-17, 26; 16:7, 13; Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33). In addition, these verses constitute the first of several proof texts showing that the church was birthed in Acts 2. The church did not exist in the Old Testament since Christ puts its formation in the future tense (Matt 16:18) and Paul connects the gifts necessary for it to function with Christ's resurrection (Eph 4:7-12). When did the church begin? Acts 1:5 indicates that the disciples would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. When Peter saw Cornelius' baptism in the Spirit (11:15-16), he conceded that the same thing had happened to the disciples earlier. This can only be a reference to what happened in Acts 2. The Spirit's baptism places someone into the body of Christ (1Cor 12:13). Thus, the baptizing ministry of the Spirit, which places people into the body of Christ, began in Acts 2. Thus, the body of Christ or the church began in Acts 2.

¹³ Interestingly, Christ never says that the Davidic Kingdom had been cancelled. He only says it had been postponed. It is also worth pointing out that the disciples, after spending so much time with Christ in His pre resurrection and post-resurrection ministry, never articulated the idea that the Davidic kingdom was already being spiritually fulfilled in the present. Rather, they still anticipated a literal, future fulfillment.

(1:8). Because this interim church age will be unrelated to the Old Testament expectation of a reigning Davidic king over a literal, repentant Israel, Christ's direct presence would not be necessary. Thus, Luke records His Ascension back into heaven (1:9-11).¹⁴

The disciples returned to Jerusalem to await the Holy Spirit (1:12-14). Luke is careful to record their names. Because he wants to document how a worldwide movement developed from this small group, he is careful to note the movement's size at its inception. As they were waiting, the apostles replaced the deceased Judas with Matthias (1:15-26).¹⁵ Luke records this information to show that the soon to be born church had the right foundation. Other verses imply that there would need to be twelve apostles who would constitute the foundation of the church (Matt 19:28; Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14). Thus, Luke records the selection of Matthias to show the proper foundation was in place for the coming church.¹⁶

Now that Luke has laid the foundation for the coming church (1:1-26), he goes on to record the events of Pentecost that birthed the church (2:1-47). The coming of the Holy Spirit accompanied by various supernatural phenomena marked this important day (2:1-4). The Spirit gave the disciples

¹⁴ The angelic insight that Christ would return in the same way in which He left allows one to develop characteristics of Christ's return. Such attributes include His bodily return, physical return, earthly return, etc...

¹⁵ The verses that Peter used to support the idea that Matthias should replace Judas are Psalm 69:25 and 109:8. These Psalms are directed toward the enemies of messiah in general and Peter applies them specifically to Judas. Also, some believe the description of Judas' death in 1:18 contradicts Matthew 27:5. However, it is possible that Judas hung himself over a cliff and when the rope broke his body fell and burst open. It is also possible that Matthew 27:5 is indicating that Judas strangled (*apagcho*) himself (2 Sam 17:23) rather than hung himself. After the strangulation, his body fell and burst open. J. Carl Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1997), 209.

¹⁶ Some believe that the disciples made a mistake in selecting Matthias. The fact that the Holy Spirit had not yet been given, that the disciples made the decision by casting lots, and that Paul would have been the last disciple are used to support this view. However, the notions that nothing in the text indicates that a mistake was made, that God can work through lots (Prov 16:33), and that Paul could not have met the qualification of verses 21-22 since he was abnormally born (1 Cor 15:8-9; 2 Cor 11:5) argue against this view. This choice seems to have been God's choice (1:24). Elsewhere the twelve are held in high esteem (2:14; 6:2).

the miraculous ability to communicate the gospel in the foreign dialects of those present.¹⁷ Luke is careful to record the diverse regions from where the onlookers came (2:5-12).¹⁸ Those impacted by these events would no doubt return to their homeland and share their experiences with others. These details are important to Luke since his purpose in writing is to explain the church's worldwide impact.

These miraculous events were immediately met with skepticism as the charge of drunkenness was hurled at the apostles (2:13). Thus, Peter explains the true source of these miraculous occurrences (2:14-41). Such behavior could not be attributed to drunkenness since it was too early in the morning for such behavior (2:14-15). Peter explains that his Jewish audience should have recognized these supernatural manifestations since their own Scriptures predict that the Holy Spirit is going to do something similar for the nation in the future Tribulation and millennium (2:16-21; Joel 2:28-32).¹⁹

¹⁷ Here, the purpose of tongues was to authenticate and proclaim the message to unbelieving Jews in their own dialect. Thus, the purpose of tongues was to be a sign to unbelievers rather than for the edification of believers (1 Cor 14:21-22).

¹⁸ The reason for the crowds is that the Law required that every Jewish male must appear at the sanctuary for the feast of Pentecost (Exod 23:14-17; Deut 16:16). For a helpful map showing where all those assembled on Pentecost came from, see *Nelson's Complete Book of Charts and Maps*, 362.

¹⁹ Evangelicals have posited various views for explaining Peter's use of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:16-21. Some believe Joel 2 was completely fulfilled in Acts 2. However, did the sun turn into darkness in Acts 2? Others believe that part of the verse (Joel 2:28-29) was fulfilled in Acts 2 while the rest of the verse (Joel 2:30-32) will be fulfilled in the future. However, why did Peter quote both sections if only one of them was fulfilled on Pentecost? What aspect of the first section was fulfilled on Pentecost? Still others teach that this verse is fulfilled in every age. However, why should believers today ask for the Holy Spirit if they already possess it (Rom 8:9)? It seems best to argue that Peter was using Joel's prophecy illustratively or analogically. This analogy view is based upon several pieces of textual evidence. **1.** The context of the book of Joel indicates that Joel was speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the entire nation of Israel in the last days. This is what Joel meant by "all flesh." In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit was poured out only on the twelve apostles and the 120. This was not the "all flesh" that Joel predicted. Also, a literal interpretation of the prophecies in Joel 2 indicate that Joel was speaking of the Holy Spirit's work with Israel during the future Tribulation (Joel 2:30-31) and millennium (Joel 2:28-29). These events were not fulfilled in Acts 2. **2.** It is obvious that Joel 2:28-32 as quoted in Acts 2:16-21, was not fulfilled on Pentecost. The sun did not turn into darkness and the moon did not turn into blood on Pentecost. In addition, Peter stopped quoting halfway through Joel 2:32. The rest of Joel 2:32 says, "For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant that the Lord calls." Thus, the rest of verse 32 deals specifically with Israel's deliverance in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem. These events were not fulfilled on Pentecost. Also, Acts 2 contains no references to blood, fire, billows of smoke, young men seeing visions, old men seeing dreams, and slaves and daughters prophesying. Yet these things are all mentioned in the Joel 2 passage. **3.** Many of the things that happened in Acts 2, such as believers speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4), were not

Peter also explains that the source of these miracles is none other than Jesus Christ. He was divinely authenticated through His miracles (2:22) and was the long awaited Davidic descendant (2:30-32; Ps 132:11).²⁰ Yet, according to the plan of God, Israel rejected Him (2:23). Consequently, He rose from the dead (2:24-29; Ps 16:8-11)²¹ and became seated at God's right hand (2:33-35; Ps 110:1).²² From this position of honor, He pursues a present session of high priestly ministry. Thus, the miraculous manifestations are attributable to Christ's current high priestly role (2:36).

predicted in Joel 2. 4. When quoting Joel 2 in Acts 2, Peter changed certain features of Joel's text. For example, Peter changed "After this" in Joel 2:28 to "last days" in Acts 2:17. Joel 2:29 does not contain the words "and they will prophesy." Peter, however, added these words in Acts 2:18. Such editing seems to indicate that Peter himself, did not believe that the prophecies of Joel 2 were being fulfilled in Acts 2. 5. If Peter wanted to indicate that the prophecies in Joel 2 were being fulfilled in Acts 2, he could have easily indicated this by using the word "fulfilled." Peter used this word in a previous speech in Acts 1:16. By Peter's use of the word "fulfilled" in this passage, he was showing that certain Old Testament prophecies were being fulfilled in Acts 1. However, Peter's omission of the word "fulfilled" in Acts 2 makes it difficult to conclude that he believed that the prophecies of Joel 2 were being fulfilled in Acts 2. 6. The analogical view also seems strengthened by the fact that the antecedent of Joel 2:28-32 is a remnant in Joel's day (2:12-14) just as there was a remnant on Pentecost. The main objection to this analogical view is that the text says, "this is what is spoken of by Joel" (Acts 2:16). However, the New Testament sometimes uses *touto estin* to communicate an analogy (1 Cor 11:24). Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 242-43; Constable, "Notes on Acts," 34-39; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Rabbinic Quotations of the Old Testament and How It relates to Joel 2 and Acts 2," online: www.pre-trib.org, accessed 10 February 2006, 5-7.

²⁰ Psalm 132:11 identifies Christ as the Davidic descendant by indicating that He will one day sit on David's throne. This is not the same thing as indicating that He is currently seated upon David's throne. John identified Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world even before He died upon the cross (John 1:29). Peter similarly uses an unfulfilled prophecy to identify Christ as the Davidic descendant.

²¹ Many argue that this Psalm is just speaking of David. The first line in verse 10 refers to David's soul. However, the second line in verse 10 adds details that go beyond David such as "thy holy one." Thus, these lines represent synthetic parallelism rather than mere synonymous parallelism. The biblical authors see messianic overtones in the second line (2:27; 13:35). Elliot Johnson, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005.

²² Several reasons make it unlikely that Peter is using Psalm 110:1 to argue for an inauguration of Christ's Davidic reign. First, the Psalm indicates that Christ is seated at God's right hand in heaven rather than upon the terrestrial Davidic throne. Prior revelation always refers to the Davidic throne in terrestrial terms. Second, Christ's first act in His present session was to dispense the Holy Spirit and such a manifestation is not promised in the Davidic covenant. Third, Psalm 110 has nothing to do with a present Davidic reign but rather speaks of Christ's present Melchizedekian priesthood. The word "until" makes this clear. In other words, Christ will not begin the Davidic reign "until" the Father makes His enemies His footstool. Fourth, no crucial linking allusion can be found between Psalm 132:11 and Psalm 110:1 since different verbs are used for "sit." While Psalm 132:11 (Acts 2:30) uses the verb *kaqizw*, Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34) uses the verb *kaqhmai*. While the former can be either transitive or intransitive, the latter is only intransitive. Had Peter wanted to establish an irrefutable link between the two Psalms he would have used the identical verb. Fifth, this Psalm lacks the coronation language that one would expect if it were speaking of an inaugurated Davidic reign. Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 169; Elliot Johnson, "Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (October-December 1992): 433.

Peter's emphasis upon Israel's rejection of Christ invoked conviction among Peter's Jewish listeners (2:37). Thus, Peter exhorted his listeners to no longer identify with national Israel, which was headed for the imminent A.D. 70 destruction. Instead, they, as well as all the other Jews in the Diaspora, should identify themselves with the newly formed church (2:38-40).²³ Peter's audience heeded his exhortation resulting in roughly three thousand converts to the new church (2:41). Luke records this number to show the church's numerical progress. The chapter concludes with a portrait of the communal life experienced by the new church (2:42-47).²⁴ The last verse mentions the church's further numerical progress. Luke records Peter's sermon and its results since it highlights the divine origin of the church and also explains that God has inaugurated a new phase in redemptive history in light of Israel's rejection of her messiah.

Peter's healing of the lame man in the temple (3:1-11) drew a large Jewish crowd thus giving him another opportunity to speak to Israel (3:12-26). In his address, Peter emphasized the guilt of the Jews. The very Jesus whom they had rejected had healed the lame man. Peter's emphasis upon Christ's present healing ministry provided further proof to Israel that Christ had risen from the dead. The guilt of the nation in rejecting Christ was overt since Christ was the fulfillment of their Old Testament expectation. Millennial blessings²⁵ would not come until the

²³ At first glance, verse 38 communicates that baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins. However, other options are available. First, a causal use of the preposition *eis* may be in play. Thus, the verse could be translated "because of the forgiveness of your sins." Second, "repent" should connect with "for" and the rest of the sentence could be taken as a parenthetical insertion between the words "repent" and "for." This argument is buttressed by the fact that both "repent" and "your sins" are plural, "be baptized" is singular thus disassociating it from the remainder of the sentence, and repentance results in the remission of sins elsewhere in Luke's writings (Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31). Third, Peter's audience may have already believed back in verse 37 making the whole discussion moot. These other options are preferable since Luke elsewhere indicates that faith alone without baptism is what forgives sin (Acts 3:19; 10:43). Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 243; Constable, "Notes on Acts," 50-52; Toussaint, "Acts," 359.

²⁴ The early church shared wealth because those converted on Pentecost who lived elsewhere wanted to stay in Jerusalem to learn more. However, they had no means of support. Thus, they depended upon the financial generosity of the church.

²⁵ Some attempt to separate the clauses in 3:19-21 so that the "times of refreshing" in verse 19 are being fulfilled in the present and that the "restoration of all things" in verse 21 will be fulfilled in the Millennium. However,

nation repented by changing its mind about Christ (Matt 23:37-39; 24:31; 25:31).²⁶ Luke includes this sermon since it gives further proof of why the nation of Israel had been put aside and why the church had been raised up in its place in the current dispensation.

Acts 4 inaugurates a series of external and internal attacks against the infant church that span all the way through the end of Acts 7. Luke is careful to document these attacks since they threaten the survival of the new church. Acts 4 begins with the arrest of Peter and John by the Sadducees (4:1-4). Because the Sadducees did not believe in the concept of resurrection (Matt 22:23), they were disturbed at the apostolic message of Christ's resurrection. They were also disturbed because of the effectiveness of the apostles' ministry. Luke is again careful to note the numerical progress of the church by observing that it had grown to around five thousand converts.²⁷

This arrest gave Peter and John the opportunity to preach to the Sanhedrin (4:5-12). Here, Peter uses Psalm 118:22 to explain to the Sanhedrin that they were questioning him for a healing and yet this healing was done by the one who the Jewish Scriptures predicted is the cornerstone of God's entire program. This is the very messiah whom the nation rejected. Luke records Peter's

this view represents an example of reading Scripture through an a priori "already not yet" framework rather than allowing the exegetical details of the text to speak for themselves. Because the two clauses follow *hopos*, are connected by *kai*, and both contain subjunctive verbs, nothing grammatically separates the two clauses. Thus, they are speaking of the same event rather than two unrelated events. Viewing both clauses as referring to the same event is strengthened upon recognizing that the plural *kairoi* (times) in verse 19 is parallel to the plural *cronon* (seasons or times) in verse 21. Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 208; Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 169-70; Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contingency of the Coming Kingdom," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*, ed. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 230.

²⁶ These verses represent a point of conflict among dispensationalists. Some maintain that they constitute a re-offer of the kingdom. However, this view seems unlikely since previous Scripture indicates that that generation's final decision had already been made (Matt 12; 13; 21:43). Moreover, the king was not present during Peter's sermon and His presence seems to be required in order to constitute a valid offer of the kingdom (Deut 17:15). Daniel's prophecy of the seventy sevens indicates that the nation will not return to Christ until the Tribulation (Dan 9:24-27; Jer 30:7). It seems better to view these verses as teaching simply that Israel will not enter into her covenanted blessing until she changes her mind about Christ.

²⁷ "The 120 disciples (1:15) plus the 3000 Pentecostal converts (2:41) plus the daily converts (2:47) plus the converts of this second message caused the total number of believers to mushroom to 5000." Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 162, n.2.

sermon since it reaffirms Israel's guilt in rejecting Christ and thus explains why it was necessary for God's redemptive plan to take a new course of action. Luke also records Peter's sermons since it forced the Jewish leadership to render a formal decision regarding the new church. God's decision to set Israel aside in this age and instead to raise up the church in her place is given further vindication as Israel's leaders order the apostles to no longer propagate the gospel (4:13-22).

After their release and report to the church of all that had happened, the present setting aside of Israel is further confirmed through the church's application of Psalm 2:1 to the nation (4:23-28). Although the Psalm originally spoke of Gentile animosity against Israel, the church's application of this Psalm to the nation shows that Israel had become just as culpable as the God-hating nations of David's time.²⁸ However, Israel's opposition motivated the church to pray. Luke records the prayer and God's answer so that his readers will understand the true source of the supernatural boldness and power that will accompany the church in the book's remaining chapters (4:29-31). The chapter concludes with a second portrait of the communal life enjoyed by the early church (4:32-37).

Luke's portrait of the church's communal life in the previous chapter naturally leads him to mention the tragic deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). While the rest of the church liquidated their assets and gave the proceeds to the apostles with the pure motive of desiring to help the needy within the congregation, Ananias and Sapphira performed the same action but with impure motives. After selling their property, they only gave part of the proceeds to the church. Their sin was not so much in keeping part of the money for themselves but rather in representing to the congregation, the apostles, and God that they had given all the proceeds to the church. In other words, they wanted to appear more generous than they really were. Consequently, they were guilty

²⁸ Israel, through her rejection of Christ, had become the seed of the serpent like the Gentiles. Thus, "Gentiles" here refers to enmity rather than mere nationality. Perhaps the original readers also understood this term in this manner. Elliot Johnson, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005.

of lying to the Holy Spirit. For this sin God struck them dead. Such severe discipline served as a deterrent preventing the rest of the congregation from participating in this same sin. Luke records this event to illustrate that only a pure church is a powerful church. In order for the church to fulfill its awesome task as unfolded in Acts of evangelizing the known world, it was necessary for God to keep the church pure at this infancy stage. Thus, the premature deaths of Ananias and Sapphira were a divine necessity for it to progress.

The church continued to make progress not only in the performance of numerous miracles but also in terms of numerical growth (5:12-16). Such effectiveness again provoked the jealousy of the Sadducees leading to the arrest of the apostles. However, an angel allowed them to escape and continue their effective ministry among the masses in the temple. Luke includes this exchange of events again to show the hardness of Israel as well as the constant miraculous intervention of God on behalf of His church. The subsequent arrest of the apostles provided Peter with yet another opportunity of condemning Israel for her rejection of Christ. Rather than denying Christ's Resurrection, the only option that the Jewish leadership had left was to attempt to suppress the apostolic message. Luke again uses these pieces of information as a justification for God's raising up of the church in view of Israel's sin (5:17-32).

Having experienced conviction as a result of Peter's condemnation of the nation, the religious leaders natural reaction was to aspire to have the apostles killed. However, one of their own, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, spoke on the apostles' behalf. His message was that time would tell if God was truly behind the new Jesus movement. Because movements typically do not outlast their leaders, they have a tendency to die naturally after their leaders die.²⁹ Gamaliel postulated that

²⁹ The two leaders that Gamaliel mentioned are Theudas and Judas. While Judas led a revolt in A.D. 6 (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 28. 4-10), we know very little about Theudas. Because a Theudas was executed in A.D. 44-46 (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 2. 97-99), some have speculated that Luke made a historical error in placing Theudas before Judas. However, we have no way of verifying that the Theudas spoken of by Josephus is the same one spoken of by

if the new movement endured, then it was sourced in God (5:33-39).³⁰ Luke records Gamaliel's speech to show how God used it to supernaturally spare the apostles so that they could continue the work of evangelism in subsequent chapters. Luke also calls attention to Gamaliel's words to show how they actually vindicated the legitimacy of the church since subsequent chapters show the church's endurance beyond the immediate influence of the original apostles. Thus, the formation of the church in lieu of Israel in the present dispensation was indeed a work of God. The chapter concludes on an optimistic note by observing the church's continued progress (5:40-42).

The church's progress led to another internal problem. Apparently, due to the church's numerical growth, there were too many widows in financial need within the church and not enough apostles to satisfactorily meet these needs. The situation was resolved through the appointment of deacons to meet the widows' needs thus liberating the apostles to pursue the priorities of prayer and the word.³¹ This pericope closes with the positive impact that this arrangement had upon the church's numerical progress. Luke includes the story since it represents another internal obstacle that the church had to overcome so it could continue to make progress (6:1-7).

Luke's mention of the appointment of the first deacon (6:1-7) naturally leads into a discussion of Stephen (6:8–7:60) who was one of the deacons. Because deacons were appointed upon the basis of their wisdom and good reputation, Stephen had an effective ministry since he too had these qualities. His effectiveness was heightened based upon his capacity to perform miracles. This effectiveness again caused the jealous and corrupt Jewish leadership to bring him before the council for interrogation. The corruption of the Jewish leadership becomes apparent by noting that

Luke. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 245.

³⁰ Gamaliel's words should be kept context specific and not used to build a general principle. Otherwise, one would have to concede that Islam's or Mormonism's global influence is the work of God.

³¹ "Although the title for deacon (*diakonos*) is not found here, the concept can be seen in the words 'ministration' (*diakonon*) and 'to serve' (*diakonein*)." Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 164, n.3.

the charge of speaking against the temple that they used against Stephen is the same false charge that they used against Christ. Luke skillfully connects these two events to show the ongoing wickedness of Israel and the need for God to raise up the church in its place (6:8-15).

However, Stephen's arrest gives him an opportunity to condemn Israel, which he does in a lengthy sermon (7:1-53). Stephen's speech contains six parts.³² First, Stephen emphasized Abraham's partial obedience. For example, Abraham took his father with him from Mesopotamia after God told him to separate himself from his relatives. Interestingly, Abraham never received an inheritance in the land (7:1-5). Second, Stephen emphasized Israel's pattern of initial rejections. The nation had a habit of rejecting God's spokesman at first only to accept them later (7:6-38). This pattern can be seen in the nation's interaction with both Joseph (7:6-17) and Moses (7:18-38). Third, Stephen notes the nation's rebellion against Moses only forty days after he ascended to Mount Sinai (7:39-41).

Fourth, Stephen observes how God gave the nation over to idolatry (Rom 1:24) because they were not faithful to Moses' teachings (7:42-45). They took Moses' teachings, which were readily available to them, and interpreted it through a polytheistic framework (Amos 5:26-27).³³ Fifth, Stephen observes that the Tabernacle and Temple were never intended as a permanent manifestation of God (7:46-50). While it is true that it was an ancient Near East custom to build a temple for one's deity (2 Sam 7), such a dwelling place was never to be considered God's permanent place of habitation. Sixth, Stephen explains that the current generation was imitating these sinful patterns of the previous generations by rejecting Christ and His church (7:51-53). In other words, the current generation of Jewish leaders was no different than its predecessors who

³² I owe this six-fold structure to Elliot Johnson, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005.

³³ Such a reinterpretation would explain Christ's desire to return to the true intent of Moses in His Sermon on the Mount.

resisted the Holy Spirit (7:51), killed the prophets (7:52), and broke God's Law (7:53). Of course, Stephen's speech enraged the Jewish leadership resulting in his subsequent martyrdom (7:54-60).³⁴

Two reasons caused Luke to mention these events. First, Stephen's speech and death provide the ultimate explanation of why God has set Israel aside in the present and instead has turned His attention to the church. Israel's guilt left God no choice.³⁵ Second, Stephen's speech and death furnish an appropriate introduction to Luke's coming focus upon Saul. Apparently, Stephen's speech troubled Saul's conscience. This inner conviction would not only allow God to use Saul to force the church out of Jerusalem and into the surrounding regions of Samaria and Judea, but it would also lead to his eventual conversion. Saul's conversion is obviously significant to Luke's argument since as a result he would become Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. Luke wants to show how the church's influence would reach the end of the known world and Paul is a key factor in this ecclesiastical expansion.

Saul's persecution of the church following Stephen's martyrdom (8:1-4) introduces the next major section of Luke's argument (1:8). Rather than merely being confined to Jerusalem, this persecution forced the church into the surrounding regions of Judea and Samaria. While the previous chapters focused on Stephen, who was the first of the previously named deacons, this chapter focuses upon Philip, who was the second deacon mentioned (Acts 6:5; 21:8). Philip's ministry is significant since he extended the church's influence into Samaria (8:5-25). Because the Jews hated the Samaritans (Matt 10:5-6; Luke 9:51-56; John 4:9), the gospel entry into Samaria was truly causing the church's influence to extend from Jerusalem to the "remote parts of the earth"

³⁴ Some may wonder how the Jews were able to execute Stephen if Rome had usurped from them the power of capital punishment (John 18:31). Apparently, the Jews still retained the right to execute criminals when the sanctity of their temple had been violated (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 6.126). The false charge brought against Stephen involved the sanctity of the temple (6:13-14). Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 246.

³⁵ Thus, these events furnish a fitting end to the first seven chapters of the book, which deal with the church's birth and Jerusalem ministry before she is forced into Judea and Samaria.

(1:8). On account of the miracles that Philip performed in Samaria,³⁶ many Samaritans believed. The church's progress in Samaria is also seen in its victory over the kingdom of darkness.³⁷ Not only did many unclean spirits come out of the Samaritans, but even Simon, a man prolific in magic arts, became a Christian.³⁸ The legitimacy of Philip's Samaritan ministry is also seen in the way the Jerusalem apostles, Peter and John, traveled to Samaria so that they might lay hands on the new Samaritan disciples so that they could receive the ministry of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ This paragraph closes with the ongoing progress of the church as many Samaritan villages came under the influence of the apostolic message.

However, in the midst of this successful evangelistic campaign, Philip is divinely instructed to go to the road that extends from Jerusalem to Gaza. There he encounters the Ethiopian eunuch and leads him to Christ (8:26-40). Presumably, the Ethiopian eunuch would return to his homeland and influence others with his newly discovered spiritual truth. Thus, Luke includes this story to show how the church even made inroads down south into Africa. Thus, the gospel was truly

³⁶ Although Philip was not an apostle (2 Cor 12:12) but merely a deacon evangelist, his working of miracles was still necessary in order to authenticate the gospel message in Samaria

³⁷ The theme of the church's victory over the demonic realm was first introduced back in Acts 5:1-11. There the church gained victory over Ananias and Sapphira who were influenced by satanic forces (5:3).

³⁸ Many presume that because Simon sought to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit after he believed that his conversion was spurious. Proponents of this position argue that Peter's description of Simon could only be descriptive of an unbeliever (8:20-23). However, there is no need to second-guess the biblical text, which clearly says Simon believed (8:13). Since he had not yet had time to mature as a Christian, he undoubtedly brought "baggage" from his former occultic way of life into his new Christian experience. Thus, he was still preoccupied with spiritual power. This preoccupation would explain his interest in buying the gift of the Holy Spirit. His remorse when confronted by Peter shows the Spirit's convicting ministry was at work in His life (8:24). "Perish" (8:20) may simply refer to a denial of a future ministry role or a loss of reward. Furthermore, verse 23 may be referring to his state of carnality as a new Christian.

³⁹ This event marks the first of several unusual receptions of the Holy Spirit in Acts. Here, an interim period transpired in between the Samaritans' conversion and their reception of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this delay can be explained in terms of the necessity for the Samaritans to realize that they were of the same faith as those in Jerusalem. A propensity to see their faith independently from the Jerusalem church would have been especially tempting for the Samaritans since they already had their own worship system rivaling the Jerusalem system. Having two faiths would have unnecessarily bifurcated the infant church. Thus, God taught the Samaritans the unity of the faith by delaying the giving of the Holy Spirit until the arrival of the Jerusalem apostles. However, it should be observed that such an interim between conversion and the receiving of the Holy Spirit is non-normative in the church age since believers are said to receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion (Rom 8:9). Charles Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 71.

traveling from Jerusalem to the remotest parts of the earth (1:8). Interestingly, the Spirit snatched Philip away to Azotus. From there Philip kept preaching to all the cities all the way to Caesarea. Thus, this paragraph closes with a continued reminder of the church's numerical and geographic progress.

Luke advances his argument further by recording Saul's conversion (9:1-31).⁴⁰ Because Luke is interested in explaining how the church's influence extended to the remote parts of the earth (1:8), Saul's conversion is quite significant. Saul was given the divine commission of bearing Christ's name before the Gentiles (9:15). Saul or Paul would fulfill this mandate through his three missionary journeys that are recorded later in Acts (13:1-21:17). He would also fulfill his mandate through his journey to Rome (21:18-28:31). Most significantly, Paul would pen his thirteen epistles introducing mystery doctrine that would be foundational to the new church. These letters would not only edify the Gentile churches of Paul's own day but also church age believers of many subsequent generations. Because of Paul's strategic role as the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7-8), Luke recorded Paul's conversion on three separate occasions in Acts (9, 22, 26). Because of his destiny, Luke also details Paul's escape from the Jews who sought to kill him shortly after his conversion. This important unit closes with another progress report testifying of the church's growing influence in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee (9:31).

Luke continues the theme of the territorial progress of the church by recording the expansion of Peter's ministry into Lydda and Joppa (9:32-43). After healing the palsied Aeneas, all who lived in Lydda turned to the Lord (9:32-35). Similarly, after raising the benevolent Dorcas from the dead, many in Joppa believed in the Lord (9:36-43). Because these miracles were performed in

⁴⁰ Some question whether Saul was actually converted on the Damascus road. However, his reference to Christ as "Lord" (9:5) as well as the reference of Ananias to Saul as "brother" (9:17) seems to indicate that his conversion was genuine. Also, Paul's autobiographical recount of what he experienced on the Damascus road (Gal 1:11-12, 15-17) also seems to argue for the legitimacy of his conversion at that time and place.

regions partially inhabited by Gentiles, Luke again shows how the church was progressing from Jerusalem into the remote parts of the earth (1:8).

The last verse in the chapter (9:43) also testifies to the church's continued progress. There, it says that Peter stayed in the home of Simon the Tanner while in Joppa. Because they were constantly in contact with the skin of dead animals, the Mosaic Law considered tanners ceremonially unclean (Lev 11:40). Yet Peter's stay with a tanner shows the church's outreach even to those considered socially undesirable. The church's ministry to those who lived in Gentile areas as well as to those who the Law categorized as unclean at the end of this chapter sets the stage for the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius. Luke will focus upon this conversion in the following two chapters (10:1–11:18).

God prepared Peter to preach to Gentiles by giving him the dream of the animals on the sheet. This dream conveyed to Peter the theological reality that God had broken down the barriers between the Jews and Gentiles. After experiencing initial reticence, Peter acquiesced and thus brought Cornelius and his household to faith in Christ (10:1-48).⁴¹ Cornelius' conversion marks a significant step in Luke's argument by showing that the church's influence was extending to the remotest parts of the earth (1:8). Because the Jews viewed the Gentiles as "dogs," Cornelius' conversion shows the church extending far beyond the cultural norms of Judaism and Jerusalem (10:45). In this regard, Cornelius' conversion marks an advance even beyond that of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Unlike the eunuch, Cornelius was uncircumcised and a member of the army that was occupying Israel. Despite the fact that both of these characteristics represented gross evils in Jewish eyes, the gospel was now going to a man who possessed both of these qualities. Truly the gospel was going to the remotest part of the earth (1:8).

⁴¹ Inclusivist theology contends that Cornelius was saved even before he had contact with Peter (10:1-2, 4, 34-35). However, Peter's report of this event to the Jerusalem church in the very next chapter indicates that Cornelius was not saved until he believed the gospel as presented by Peter (11:14).

Now that this transition had been made, it was necessary for Peter to convince the Jews in Jerusalem that it was legitimate (11:1-18). Because in New Testament times eating with someone was a sign of acceptance and intimacy (Rev 3:20), the believers in Jerusalem criticized Peter for eating with Cornelius, who was an uncircumcised Gentile (10:28). However, this objection gave Peter the opportunity to not only explain the circumstances of Cornelius' conversion but also to make the leaders of the church aware of how the gospel was now going to the Gentiles. Thus, the church was not only progressing numerically and geographically, but it was progressing ethnically as well. Cultural taboos emanating from tradition, which had the effect of ostracizing the Gentiles from the church, were being torn down.

The persecution following the death of Stephen not only had the effect of pushing the church out of Jerusalem and into Samaria and Judea (8:1-4), but it also had the effect of driving the church into Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch (11:19a). Thus, the church's geographical development was becoming more and more conspicuous. As the church expanded into Antioch, its evangelism was still primarily targeted toward Jews (11:19b). However, as evangelists came to Antioch, they began to evangelize Greeks as well (11:20). Their efforts were met with tremendous success leading to more numerical progress and the formation of the church at Antioch (11:21). The legitimacy of the church was evidenced by Barnabas' favorable testimony. Barnabas had been dispatched from Jerusalem to examine the developments at Antioch (11:22-24). Barnabas then sought out Paul and the two of them disciplined the new converts at Antioch. This discipling ministry proved so effective that the believers at Antioch were called "Christians" because they had become Christ-like (11:25-26). The fact that the church was now equated with Greeks who were Christ like rather than simply believing Jews demonstrates the church's ethnic development.

Luke includes all of this information regarding the birth and maturation of the church at Antioch because of the role that it will play in the evangelization of the Gentiles. All three of Paul's missionary journeys will be launched from the church in Syrian Antioch. In fact, the Antioch church's missionary zeal was already evident in the way it sent a financial gift to the Judean brethren when it learned through the prophecies of Agabus of an imminent famine (11:27-30). Thus, in discussing the church at Antioch, Luke prepares his readers for the greater ethnic progress of the church that will be unfolded in Acts' subsequent chapters (13-14; 15:36-21:17).

In the following chapter, Luke contrasts the love of the church at Antioch for Christ with the hatred for Christ exhibited by national Israel (12:1-25). Such hatred is manifested through James' martyrdom⁴² at the hands of Herod Agrippa (12:1-4).⁴³ National Israel's hatred for Christ is also evidenced by Herod's incarceration of Peter (12:5-19). Luke includes these examples of national hatred to once again show how God is justified in setting aside the nation in the present dispensation and instead raising up the church in Israel's place. In spite of these external attacks against the church, God's supernatural protection of the church is evident not only through Peter's miraculous escape from prison but also through the divine judgment imposed upon Herod for slaying James and incarcerating Peter (12:20-23). This chapter closes with a further progress report testifying to the further numerical development of the church (12:24).⁴⁴

Beginning with chapter 13, the focus shifts away from Peter and on to Paul (13:1-28:31). Furthermore, Antioch replaces Jerusalem as the church's central base of operations. All three of Paul's missionary journeys will be launched from Antioch (13:1-21:17). Whereas Jews are the

⁴² The James mentioned here is James the brother of John and not James the brother of Christ. This latter James was soon to write the epistle of James as well as play an instrumental role at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

⁴³ Herod Agrippa ruled from A.D. 37-44 and was the grandson of Herod the Great.

⁴⁴ The chapter also concludes with the return of Barnabas, Saul, and Mark from Jerusalem to Antioch in preparation for the first missionary journey (12:25).

primary evangelistic target in the first part of the book (1–12), Gentiles will become the primary evangelistic target in the second half of the book (13:1–28:31).

The first missionary journey (13–14) begins with the Holy Spirit setting aside and commissioning of Paul and Barnabas (and presumably Mark (13:1-3). This commissioning demonstrates the Spirit's eagerness through the church to reach the Gentiles. For the first time, the gospel will travel beyond the borders of Israel thus causing the church's influence to extend into the remote parts of the earth (1:8). On the island of Cyprus (13:4-12), Paul afflicts the magician Elymas or Bar Jesus with blindness because of his opposition to the gospel. Luke includes this event in order to show that those who stand in the way of the church's inevitable geographical progress will suffer divine repercussions. He also uses it to furnish yet another example of how the church's progress even includes victory over the demonic realm (5:1-11; 8:9-24). The blinding of Elymas also functions as a hinge event. Just as Peter confronted a sorcerer named Simon earlier in Acts (8:9-24), here Paul similarly confronts a sorcerer named Bar Jesus. This symmetry shows that Paul has now replaced Peter as the book's central character. With Bar Jesus neutralized, Paul and his team are then able to lead the proconsul Sergius Paulus to Christ as well as blanket the island of Cyprus with the gospel. These events are significant since they represent the extension of the church's influence outside of Israel's immediate borders.

When the team leaves Cyprus and lands in southern Galatia (13:13–14:28), Mark leaves the party and returns to Jerusalem (13:13).⁴⁵ Luke includes this event to lay a foundation for explaining a future split between Paul and Barnabas (15:36-41). Upon Paul and Barnabas' arrival in Pisidian Antioch, Paul gives a sermon in the synagogue that Luke records in detail. This sermon stresses that the messianic hope, as anticipated in the lives of Abraham and David, was fulfilled in Christ's life,

⁴⁵ The reasons for Mark's desertion are unclear. Among the possibilities are the lack of a direct call from God to ministry, an inability to cope with the rigors of ministry, a reaction against a Gentile oriented ministry due to his Jewish heritage, and a reaction against Paul's domination over his uncle Barnabas.

death, and resurrection.⁴⁶ The message of the sermon is that “true God-fearers ought to avail themselves of God’s holy and sure blessings from Jesus Christ thereby avoiding national judgment.”⁴⁷ Perhaps the most important aspect of the sermon was the reactions. The jealous Jews persecuted the apostles. Thus, Paul indicated that he was turning to the Gentiles (13:46). By contrast, the church enjoyed great numerical progress among the Gentiles of that region (13:48-49). Luke records the sermon and the reactions to it (13:14-52) as further validation for God’s raising up the church in the present dispensation in place of wayward Israel.

Although Paul’s ministry was also fruitful in Iconium (14:1-5), he again experienced persecution at the hands of the unbelieving Jews (14:2). Thus, the same pattern is repeated. While the church enjoys numerical and geographical progress among the Gentiles, unbelieving Israel resists the gospel. All of this indicates that the church is progressing not only numerically and geographically but ethnically as well. Ethnic progress is seen in the way the church is transitioning from being merely an extension of Judaism to being composed primarily of Gentiles.

The church’s numerical and geographical progress is also seen in Paul’s ministry into the areas of Lystra and Derbe (14:6-20). Because the healing of the crippled man in Lystra stands in a symmetrical literary arrangement to an identical miracle performed by Peter (3:1-11), Luke uses this event to again show how Paul has replaced Peter as the book’s central character. Paul’s disavowal of worship after healing the crippled man gives him an opportunity to preach to the inhabitants of Lystra. Paul’s message to them is that in the past God sent merely general revelation to the nations (14:16-17). However, in the present, God has sent the special revelation through His son and the

⁴⁶ Psalm 2:7 in verse 33 speaks of coronation in the millennium rather than the resurrection (Ps 16). The New Testament applies Psalm 2:7 to Christ here, during Christ’s baptism, and in Hebrews 1:5. Elliot Johnson, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005.

⁴⁷ Elliot Johnson, “Paul’s Synagogue Message in Pisidian Antioch, Acts 13:13-52: Gospel for Those Influenced by Truth for Israel,” (unpublished class notes in BE 32021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005), 1.

nations are accountable for responding to this new truth. Luke records these events to show how far the church's message had penetrated Gentile territory and to show how the gospel was indeed going to the remote parts of the earth (1:8). However, he once again shows that because the unbelieving Jews are the instigators of persecution against the apostles (14:19), God's decision to raise up the church in the place of wayward Israel in the present age is justified. However, this persecution by the unbelieving Jews was providential since it forced Paul and Barnabas into Derbe thus allowing the church to experience even greater numerical and geographical progress (14:20-21a).

The church's progress is further seen through the return of Paul and Barnabas through the regions they had previously visited (14:21b-26). Here, their ministry was not so much evangelism as it was edification. In other words, they were building up the believers in the faith that they had already received. Because the Great Commission should not be narrowly defined as merely consisting of evangelism but should also encompass edification (Matt 28:18-20),⁴⁸ Luke includes this return trip as further evidence of the church's continued progress. When Paul and Barnabas reported to the church the results of their first missionary journey upon their return to Syrian Antioch, they placed special emphasis upon the Gentile receptivity to the gospel (14:27-28). Thus, the church was progressing ethnically from merely being an extension of Judaism to being primarily composed of Gentiles.

This focus on Gentile receptivity during the first missionary journey thematically leads Luke to include the events surrounding the Jerusalem Council (15:1-35). Here, the issue was not whether Gentiles can be justified. This issue had already been settled not only earlier in the Book of Acts (10:45) but in the pages of the Old Testament as well (Gen 12:3; Amos 9:12). Rather, the issue here was whether it was necessary for the Gentile converts to submit to the Law of Moses in order

⁴⁸ Here, the edification seems to have taken the form of comfort, edification, instruction, and ecclesiastical organizing.

to become members of the church. Thus, the dilemma the council confronted pertained to an ecclesiological issue rather than an issue involving justification or sanctification.⁴⁹ The ruling of the council was that a Gentile did not have to submit to the Mosaic Law in order to become a member of the church. It was only necessary for the Gentiles to submit to some aspects of the Law so as not to unnecessarily offend Jewish Christians.⁵⁰ The council reached its decision by reasoning from God's purposes in history. Since Gentiles will participate in the millennial kingdom (Amos 9:12), the council analogically concluded that there is no reason to place any unnecessary encumbrances upon the Gentiles that would prevent them from becoming church members. Luke includes these events since they represent a significant step in the ethnic development of the church away from simply being an extension of Judaism and toward becoming an entity primarily comprised of Gentiles.

Luke continues to document the development of the church through the inclusion of the second missionary journey (15:36–18:22). While the first missionary journey (13–14) tracked the church's progress into Southern Galatia, the second missionary journey tracked the church's progress into Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Greece. The second missionary journey commenced with Paul's request to Barnabas to return and visit the areas that they evangelized on the first journey (15:36). However, a schism quickly developed between Paul and Barnabas regarding whether Mark, who had deserted the team on the first journey (13:13), should be allowed to

⁴⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost sees three types of New Testament phariseeism. The first type argued that adherence to the Law was necessary to be saved. This type of phariseeism was destroyed when Christ uttered the words found in Matthew 5:20. The second type argued that adherence to the Law was necessary in order to become a member of the church. This type of phariseeism was destroyed with the decision of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. The third type teaches that adherence to the Law is necessary in order for the believer to be sanctified. This is the type of phariseeism that Paul is dealing with in his epistles. The Book of Galatians undermines this last form of phariseeism. J. Dwight Pentecost, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2045A Seminar in Pauline Literature, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 2003.

⁵⁰ Blood and strangled animals pertained to the cultic provisions of the Law. Fornication and things contaminated by idols dealt with the moral provisions of the Law (15:20). The apostles had no problem adhering to the Law as long as the purpose was to avoid an unnecessary offense (1 Cor 9:20) and did not pertain to any issue involving justification, sanctification, or Ecclesiology.

accompany the team on the second journey. This dissension created a split. While Paul and Silas traveled to Syria and Cilicia, Barnabas and Mark traveled to Cyprus.⁵¹ This split was actually a blessing in disguise since it had the effect of creating two missionary teams instead of just one. Thus, the church's influence could be extended to more geographical areas. Thus, Luke includes the split as evidence of the church's continued numerical and geographical progress.

When Paul and Silas came to Lystra and Derbe, Timothy joined the missionary team (16:1-5). Because Luke is interested in tracing the church's progress, Luke includes this event due to the prominent role that Timothy will play later on in the church's development as the overseer of the work at Ephesus. Due to Timothy's mixed background, his circumcision allowed him to travel with Paul to Jewish populations. Thus, his circumcision enhanced his evangelistic usefulness. Because Luke is interested in the church's evangelistic progress, Luke records Timothy's circumcision since it had the effect of furthering the church's ability to evangelize.⁵² The team's progress in Lystra and Derbe consisted primarily of a ministry of edification as they shared the ruling of the Jerusalem council with the new believers. However, as the churches were edified they also experienced greater numerical progress (16:5).

Acts 16:6-10 explains how God supernaturally rerouted the evangelistic team so that the church's influence would penetrate Europe. When they were in Phrygia and Galatia the Holy Spirit forbade them to preach in Asia. When they were in Mysia, the Spirit of Jesus forbade them to minister in Bythinia. When they were in Troas, the vision of the Macedonian man pled with them to minister in Macedonia. God performed these events so that the team's message would not simply

⁵¹ From this point on, Barnabas is absent from the Book of Acts.

⁵² Does Timothy's circumcision contradict what Paul wrote elsewhere (Gal 5:6; 6:12-15) and the verdict of the Jerusalem council (15:19)? Paul had no problem submitting to the Mosaic Law for purposes of avoiding an offense (1 Cor 9:20) as long as such submission was not done in order to accomplish an objective related to justification, sanctification, and ecclesiological membership Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 248.

recapitulate in the same region but rather would penetrate Europe. Thus, the church's influence was being extended to the remote parts of the earth (1:8).

At this point Luke joined the team⁵³ and they all traveled together to Philippi (16:11-40). Luke shows the church's progress in Philippi not only through the conversions of Lydia (16:11-15) and the jailer and his household (16:19-34) but also through the church's victory over the demonic realm (16:16-18). These events led to the establishment of the Philippian church in Lydia's home. Paul's appeal to his rights as a Roman citizen hints at a practice of Paul that Luke will develop later on in the book. It is this Pauline practice that will allow the church's influence to extend all the way to Rome. Paul's appeal to his rights as a Roman citizen here expedited his leaving Philippi so that the church could make further geographical and numerical progress in Thessalonica (16:35-40).

In Thessalonica (17:1-9), Paul experienced a fruitful ministry among the Gentiles (17:4, 6). However, the jealous, unbelieving Jews forced him out of the city by defaming his ministry before the city's Gentile rulers. These actions were actually a blessing in disguise since they forced Paul out of Thessalonica so that the church could make further progress in Berea. However, in Berea, the same scenario repeats itself (17:10-15). Although Gentiles were receptive to Paul's message (17:12), the unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica stirred up trouble and forced Paul to leave for Athens. Luke includes these events for three reasons. First, they demonstrate the church's numerical and geographical progress (1:8). Second, they demonstrate the hardness of Israel thus further confirming God's decision to raise up the church in the place of Israel in the present dispensation. Third, they show the ethnic progress of the church regarding its transition from being merely an extension of Judaism to its primarily Gentile composition.

⁵³ Luke's joining of the team is apparent from the book's first "we section" (16:10-40).

Luke records the church's further progress in Athens (17:16-34). Although Paul spent some time reasoning with the Jews in the synagogue, it was the God fearing Gentiles as well as the Gentile philosophers who were most interested in Paul's message (17:16-21). This again shows the changing complexion of the church from Jew to Gentile. This Gentile curiosity gave Paul the opportunity of addressing them directly in the Areopagus (17:22-31). Since the Athenians had erected an altar to an unknown God, Paul observes their self-acknowledged ignorance of who God was (17:22-23). Because God is creator, sustainer, and provider it was foolish for the Athenians to erect such a temple since God does not dwell in mere habitations created by humans (17:24-29). In other words, the Athenians were unwilling to acknowledge basic evidence of God found in general revelation and to search for truth. Paul reminds the Athenians that they should take seriously their moral obligation to search for truth since Christ will judge them for their stewardship in this area. Christ's resurrection validates His identity thus giving Him the right to exercise final judgment (17:30-31). The message of the sermon is that "truly wise men ought to seek God according to the revelation that they have" and "the final and highest revelation has come in Christ."⁵⁴ Luke includes these events in order to show the beginning of the church's influence in Athens. Although the concept of resurrection caused some of the Athenians to sneer at Paul's message, others, such as Dionysius and Damaris, believed (17:32-34).

After arriving in Corinth (18:1-17), Paul practiced his tent making trade (18:1-4) and testified to the Jews in the synagogue regarding the identity of Christ (18:5). However, when they resisted, he turned his attention to the Corinthian Gentiles (18:6). Paul then enjoyed a fruitful 18-month ministry primarily among the Gentiles in Corinth under the Lord's supernatural protection (18:7-11). Thus, the church experienced more numerical and geographical progress in Corinth.

⁵⁴ Elliot Johnson, "Paul's Message in Athens, Greece, Acts 17:16-34" (unpublished class notes in BE 32021A Seminar in the Gospels and Acts, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005), 1.

However, although the unbelieving Jews sought to create trouble for Paul before the city's Gentile rulers, their charges were quickly dismissed on a "separation of church and state" type of argument (18:12-16). The infuriated Jews then began to pulverize one of their own (18:17). The receptivity of the Gentiles to the gospel against the backdrop of the wicked behavior of the unbelieving Jews in Corinth again shows the ethnic progress of the church as its demographic complexion changes from primarily Jewish to primarily Gentile. This contrast also further validates God's decision to raise up the church in the place of wayward Israel in the present dispensation.

From Corinth, Paul traveled to Cenchrae where he had his haircut in conformity with his Nazirite vow (18:18).⁵⁵ Paul presumably followed this practice so as to not be an offense to Jewish populations that were the target of his evangelistic efforts. Paul's haircut was of interest to Luke since his ambition was to record all the details regarding the church's evangelistic progress. Paul then took Priscilla and Aquila and traveled to Ephesus where he conversed with the Jews in the Synagogue (18:19). Thus, because the gospel had now reached Ephesus for the first time, the church was making further geographical progress. However, Paul refused the invitation from the Ephesian Jews to stay longer so that the gospel could make further progress through his journeys elsewhere (18:20). Paul's promise to return to Ephesus hints at his lengthy stay there during his third missionary journey. After leaving Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, Paul completed his second missionary journey by returning to Syrian Antioch via Caesarea and Jerusalem (18:21-22).

Paul's third missionary journey (18:23–21:17) begins with his ministry of edification to the churches he had already planted in Galatia and Phrygia (18:23). Because Luke's understanding of missionary work involves not only winning people to Christ but also building them up in the faith, he includes Paul's ministry of edification as a further example of the church's progress. Luke also

⁵⁵ Paul had no problem conforming to the Mosaic Law for purposes of avoiding an unnecessary offense (1 Cor 9:20). However, he rejected conformity to the Law for purposes of justification, sanctification, and Ecclesiology.

includes Apollos being more accurately taught the way of the Lord by Priscilla and Aquila (18:24-28) as a further example of the church's progress. Apparently, the church's progress also involved bringing Old Testament saints⁵⁶ into the full realization of Christ. Luke also focuses upon Apollos because of the ministry of edification that he will perform at Corinth (1 Cor 3:6). As previously explained, in Luke's mind, evangelism and edification are equally considered examples of progress. Luke also seems interested in mentioning Apollos because of the ministry that he will perform in refuting the Jews in public debate. The fact that it was the Jews opposing Apollos in Corinth furnishes further validation of God's decision to raise up the new church in the midst of Israel's unbelief.

The preceding discussion of Priscilla and Aquila's ministry to the Old Testament saint Apollos logically leads Luke to mention Paul's ministry to some other Old Testament saints in Ephesus (19:1-6).⁵⁷ Because Paul also was able to lead them into the full realization of Christ, this event constitutes yet another example of the church's progress. Paul's Ephesian ministry begins with the Jewish unwillingness to believe the gospel in spite of Paul seeking to persuade them for three months in the Synagogue (19:8-9a). Luke again includes the hardness of Israel as a justification for God's decision to raise up the church.

Jewish unbelief forced Paul to take up residence in the School of Tyrannus where he enjoyed an effective two-year ministry among the Gentiles (19:9b-10a).⁵⁸ Luke records the details of this ministry since it epitomized the church's progress in many ways. During this time the church

⁵⁶ An Old Testament saint refers to someone who was waiting for the messiah to come not realizing that He had already come in the person of Jesus Christ. His spiritual knowledge was true yet incomplete. He had heard the message but not the complete message.

⁵⁷ The fact that these disciples identified themselves as disciples of John and had not yet heard of the Holy Spirit indicates that they were Old Testament saints.

⁵⁸ Acts 19:10 mentions a two year ministry while Acts 20:31 mentions a three year ministry. However, there is no contradiction here. The first figure refers to the duration of Paul's ministry in the School of Tyrannus while the second figure refers to the total duration of his ministry in Ephesus. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 249.

progressed in evangelistic outreach (19:10b),⁵⁹ the performance of non-reproducible miracles (19:10-17), and victory over the demonic realm (19:18-19). Thus, Luke includes one of his clearest progress reports in his discussion of Paul's Ephesian ministry (19:20). The power of Paul's Ephesian ministry is also seen in his decision to stay in that city a while longer in spite of his calling to go to Rome (19:21-22). In fact, Paul's Ephesian ministry was so potent that idolaters came to Christ in great numbers even threatening to dethrone Artemis as the city's leading deity. This mass exodus from idolatry also threatened the silversmiths industry since they were in the business of manufacturing idols of Artemis. However, the silversmith's riot was actually a blessing in disguise since it forced Paul to leave Ephesus thus allowing the church's influence to be felt in other areas (19:23-41).

After departing from Ephesus, Paul engaged in an edification ministry to the churches that he had established during his second missionary journey in Macedonia and Greece. Because Luke sees the importance of not only evangelism but also edification, he includes this edification ministry as part of his discussion of the church's progress. Paul was forced to return through the same route because of a plot hatched against him by the unbelieving Jews. Luke includes this information to again show how the hardness of Israel justifies God's decision to raise up the church in her place in the present age (20:1-5).⁶⁰

Because Paul's raising of Eutychus from the dead in Troas (20:6-12) stands in a parallel literary arrangement to Peter's raising of Dorcas from the dead (9:36-41), Luke again shows that Paul has replaced Peter as the book's central character. While Peter's ministry focused mostly on the Jews, Paul's ministry focused mostly upon the Gentiles. Thus, the church was progressing

⁵⁹ The seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev 2-3) may owe their origin to Paul's effective ministry in Ephesus. Interestingly, Ephesus was the most strategically located city in Asia.

⁶⁰ Because Luke includes himself among those who accompanied Paul, this section begins the book's second "we section" (20:5-21:18).

ethnically. No longer was it a mere extension of Judaism. Rather, it was now comprised primarily of Gentiles.

Upon landing in Miletus (20:13-16), Paul gave a sermon to the Ephesian elders. Paul's point in this message was that these elders must follow his own sacrificial example in shepherding God's flock in Ephesus (20:17-35). Because these elders would undoubtedly take the principles enumerated in this sermon and use them to edify the church, Luke includes it as yet another contribution to the church's progress. After a tearful farewell (20:36-38), Paul traveled to Tyre (21:1-6) and Caesarea (21:7-14). In both places, the Spirit warned Paul of the suffering that awaited him if he journeyed to Jerusalem. However, Paul completed his third missionary journey by traveling to Jerusalem anyway (21:15-17).⁶¹ Paul did not avoid Jerusalem because he knew it was a necessary step in his inevitable journey to Rome (19:21-22). Paul understood that his journey to Rome could not be avoided since it was necessary for the church to progress through the extension of its influence to the remotest part of the earth (1:8).

The rest of the book (21:18–28:31) pertains to how Paul providentially ended up in Rome. Luke carefully records the details of the journey since he is interested in tracing the church's geographical development to the remote parts of the earth (1:8). Paul's arrest in Jerusalem (21:18-40) sets the stage for the journey to Rome. Luke again draws a contrast between the Gentile receptivity to the Gospel and the hardness of Israel in order to validate God's decision to raise up the church in lieu of Israel in the present age. Gentile receptivity is seen in the way Paul recounts the details of his third missionary journey to the church (21:19). Israel's hardness is seen through the slanderous charges instigated by the Jews that Paul had brought the Gentile Trophimus into the

⁶¹ Did Paul disobey the Spirit in journeying to Jerusalem (20:22-23; 21:4, 10-12)? There was never a clear command not to go. All these texts say is that the Spirit warned Paul of the things he would suffer if he did go to Jerusalem. The Spirit never rebukes Paul for going to Jerusalem. His subsequent imprisonment is never referred to as a consequence for disobedience. Paul later testified as to his clean conscience (23:1). Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 249.

temple. Such charges were even brought in spite of Paul's adherence to some aspects of the Mosaic Law so as not to offend the Jews.⁶²

This contrast is further heightened in Paul's defense before the Jewish multitude (22:1-30).⁶³ This crowd only reacted against Paul after learning that he had been commissioned to preach to the Gentiles (22:21-22). However, this reaction was all part of the divine plan since it led to the commander's intervention on Paul's behalf in order to protect Paul from the Jewish crowd. Paul avoided scourging by reminding the commander of his Roman citizenship. This practice foreshadows a tactic that Paul would later use. While in prison Paul would use his rights as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar thus necessitating his journey to Rome.

Given Paul's Roman citizenship, the commander was curious as to the nature of the charges that the Jews had brought against him. Thus, the commander presented Paul before the religious leadership for interrogation. When Paul's testimony before the Jewish leadership intentionally provoked a controversy between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, Paul was again taken into Roman custody when it appeared as if this dissension was going to jeopardize his safety (23:1-10). The existence of such a sharp division within the ranks of Israel's religious leaders furnishes Luke with yet another opportunity to emphasize the nation's hopeless spiritual condition. However, God reminded Paul that these events were all providentially arranged since they would necessitate his journey to Rome (23:11).

Luke also notes a Jewish conspiracy to kill Paul (23:12-22). Luke includes this event for two reasons. First, it furnishes yet another example of Israel's hardness in comparison to Gentile

⁶² Paul had no problem conforming to the Mosaic Law for purposes of avoiding an unnecessary offense (1 Cor 9:20). However, he rejected conformity to the Law for purposes of justification, sanctification, and Ecclesiology.

⁶³ Some see a contradiction between Paul's testimony that those around him heard God's voice (9:7) and his later testimony that his companions did not understand God's voice (22:9). However, the Greek text makes a distinction between hearing and understanding. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 250.

receptivity to truth. Second, in order to protect Paul, it forced the Romans to transfer Paul to Caesarea (23:23-35). This move was another necessary link in Paul's journey to Rome.

In Caesarea before Felix, Paul ably defended himself against the Jewish charges brought against him. Paul proves his innocence and shows the baselessness of these Jewish charges. However, his case was still delayed for two years because of Felix's desire to receive bribery money and please the Jews (24:1-27). All of this again shows the hopeless spiritual condition of national Israel and why God had to raise up the church in her place. Festus then offered Paul an opportunity to be tried in Jerusalem. Paul refused and instead exercised his right as a Roman citizen to be tried before Caesar in Rome. Thus, Luke shows how God's plan for Paul to testify about Him in Rome (19:21; 23:11) was being fulfilled (25:1-27). This information all contributes to Luke's argument since he is interested in tracing how the church's influence geographically progressed all the way to the remotest parts of the earth (1:8).

The visit of Herod Agrippa II to Caesarea gave Paul an opportunity to voice his defense before both Agrippa and Festus (26:1-32). Although at the conclusion of Paul's defense Agrippa thought that what Paul was saying might be true and Festus thought that Paul was insane, both men agreed to two things. First, both agreed to Paul's innocence. This first point of agreement gives Luke another opportunity to reiterate the guilt of Israel as a justification for God raising up the church in Israel's place. Along these same lines, Paul's emphasis upon Gentile receptivity to the gospel throughout his defense (26:17, 20) furnishes yet another contrast between Gentile spirituality and Israel's hardness. Second, both men agreed that Paul would have been set free by now had he not appealed to Caesar (26:32). Through this second point Luke wants his audience to understand that Rome is Paul's ultimate destination. This destination is necessary so that the apostle can extend the reaches of the church to the remotest part of the earth (1:8).

During Paul's journey from Caesarea to Rome (27:1–28:15),⁶⁴ Luke records how wind difficulty brought the ship to Crete (27:1-8). Because Crete represented un-evangelized territory, Luke includes the brief stop in Crete as another example of the church's further geographical progression. Titus would later become overseer of the work in Crete. It is possible that the Cretans were first exposed to the gospel during Paul's brief sojourn there.

During the journey from Crete to Malta (27:9-44), Luke includes several details demonstrating that it was Paul's destiny to arrive in Rome. First, the centurion, unpersuaded by Paul's warning of danger, decided to set sail anyway and leave Crete (27:10-11). Second, Paul encouraged his shipmates in the midst of the storm by telling them that they would survive. The reason he gave is that God had revealed to him in a dream that he would testify in Rome (27:21-26, 34). Third, the centurion disrupted the soldiers' plan to kill all the prisoners so that Paul could arrive safely at his destination (27:42-43). Luke includes all of these details because they fit with his purpose of tracing the church's supernatural, geographical progression all the way to Rome (1:8).

Luke also records the details of the storm to show why the ship landed on Malta. Because Malta, like Crete, represented un-evangelized territory, Paul's ministry on Malta (28:1-10) is significant to the argument of Acts. Luke is interested in tracing the geographical progress of the church even to remote places like Malta and Crete (1:8). Thus, Luke notes how Paul's healing of Publius' father spread the church's influence throughout the island (28:7-9). Because it was Paul's predestined purpose to extend the church's geographical influence all the way to Rome (1:8), Luke also records how Paul miraculously survived the snakebite (28:1-6) and was bountifully supplied by the inhabitants of Malta for his journey to Rome (28:10).

⁶⁴ These final two chapters contain the book's third "we section" (27:1–28:16).

Luke carefully records Paul's journey from Malta to Rome (28:11-15) since it represents the first penetration of the gospel into Italy. Because Rome was the key city in the entire Roman Empire, the gospel would enjoy universal influence to the rest of the known world after it took root in this strategic location. Thus, Luke observes that Paul enjoyed lax house arrest in Rome for two years, which allowed him unhindered ability to preach the gospel to all who came to him (28:16, 30-31). The church had finally made geographical progress to the remotest part of the earth (1:8).

Luke also records Paul's interaction with the leading Roman Jews during his house arrest (28:16-29). Here, Paul recounts for them his own innocence as well as Israel's guilt in his arrest and imprisonment (28:17-20). Luke also notes the Jewish leaders' hardness to Paul's message (28:21-29; Isa 6:9-10). Such willful blindness among the Jews gave Paul an incentive to reach out to the Gentiles instead (28:28). Luke includes these final thoughts since they once again validate God's decision to raise up the church in the present age in the place of apostate Israel. Thus, not only has the church progressed numerically and geographically to the ends of the earth (1:8) but it has also progressed ethnically. Rather than being merely an extension of Judaism, it has now become a predominantly Gentile institution.

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⁶⁵ Haenchen is an example of a critical commentary. Rackham is an example of a literary commentary. Marshall is an example of an exegetical commentary. Longenecker is an example of an expositional commentary. Wiersbe is an example of a devotional commentary.

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